

CHAPTER XV

Fanon and the Psychology of Violence

Introduction

It is customary in works on Fanon to make some comment on the question of violence and this work is no exception. The defence of violence as the only means to a just end, or in self-defence, is controversial but it is an accepted part of political discourse. The real controversy arises in Fanon's work not because he argues that violence is pragmatically necessary but that it is, in a sense, therapeutic. This chapter elaborates the basis of his argument. At an individual level any situation of oppression provokes a Manichean psychology.¹ Whilst wary of psychologising the struggle it is, nevertheless, the case that the issue of consciousness and agency is a crucial one and finding ways to elaborate this has proved daunting for political activists and left-leaning psychologists and sociologists. The long-standing debates between Marxism and psychoanalysis are a good example.

While Fanon over-emphasises violence as the fundamental form of revolutionary praxis this is undoubtedly an effect of the context in which he was writing. It is important to read not just the first chapter 'On Violence' but the first three chapters of Wretched of the Earth, which together make the argument about spontaneity and national consciousness. Also the final chapter of Wretched of the Earth Fanon looks at psychological damage that occurs as a result of violence. These cases include the effects not just on the tortured but also the effect on the torturer. Revolutionary violence may be an act of emancipation, an answer to acts of coercion perpetrated by the coloniser, but the goal of such violence must be the establishing of new relations not based on force if it is to be revolutionary. While there is an initial stage of spontaneous reaction, there is a difference between grasping the need for violence intuitively and devising a strategy for liberation. As Wolf (1969: 246) points out while violence was a means of uniting resistance, it is an effect of a certain social order, not a psychological act. Fanon's interest in the subjective dynamics of struggle means that he is always in danger of forgetting this. In order to generalise this analysis it will be necessary to explore its premises before relating it to the structure and agency question in the next chapter.

Before looking specifically at this, and following on from liberal feminism's dismissal of Fanon's revolutionary and class-based politics in the previous chapter, the first section examines some of the early liberal responses to Fanon's work, which centre on the question of violence. The second section elaborates Fanon's views on violence in the light of his work as a whole, especially his clinical work. Finally, it explores the effect of violence on the other side of the Manichean divide, namely on the coloniser. Of particular importance is the way in which Fanon's methodology allows him to move between the level of structure and the level of agency without psychologising the struggle.

¹ In another context Pinderhughes (1972) has developed the Manichean idea in the context of domestic violence.

The Liberals' Response

One of the earliest sets of responses to Fanon's work stem largely from Fanon's supposed advocacy of violence. This section will examine the response of three liberal commentators: Lewis Coser, Aristide Zolberg and Hannah Arendt, the last of these writing in the context of Black Power struggles. First we turn to Coser (1965).

The closing paragraph of Coser's review gives the overall flavour:

One must never forget that while reading Fanon's book that is was written in anguish and heartbreak, even though one might recognise in it elements of a 'paranoid style' with which we have become familiar in many a sinister context. The vision which informs the book may be profoundly repellent, but we must not forget that the violence and hatred it breathes on every page is a reactive violence, a testimony to the havoc the white man has loosed upon Africa. Finally, one might hope that the myth Fanon has wrought may move some Western men to that compassion and that sense of fraternity with the downtrodden of Africa which Fanon - who expected only white hatred and, at best, condescension - plainly believed impossible (1965: 128).

While acknowledging that Wretched of the Earth is one of the influential works of the period, Coser describes it as 'badly written, badly organised, and chaotic' and the author's reasoning as 'often shoddy and obviously defective'. This is because Fanon is not interested in analysis but in creating what Coser thinks is probably a 'regressive fantasy' that has given rise to an 'evil myth' (p. 120). This latter phrase is strategic because it allows Coser to link Fanon to the quasi-fascist thinker, Sorel. This connection is often implied since there is no evidence that Fanon relied on Sorel.

Sorel used the notion of myth as a form of mystification that was directed to the masses who required myths to give them conviction to act. Such myths could not be refuted. Coser argues that it is in this sense that Fanon has created a myth of violence as liberating. Nevertheless, Coser does make some attempt at refutation. He argues that Fanon is worse than Sorel because Sorel's vision is largely an idyll while Fanon, the alienated black professional, intends to create a real bloodbath.²

Coser approvingly cites Fanon's characterisation of the colonial working class as 'pampered'. Though the routine swipe 'so much for the traditional proletarian vanguard of the Marxist textbooks' is the extent of the analysis (p. 123). In contrast, Fanon's critique of the national bourgeoisie as 'good for nothing' racketeers is seen by Coser as an example of Fanon's 'withering contempt' for them and for the Westernised intelligentsia. Coser describes Fanon's conclusion in Wretched of the Earth as a 'violent diatribe against European civilisation'. Fanon's analysis that the cynical humanism of Europe is exposed by their behaviour in the colonies, that Europeans talk about 'humanity' and 'civilisation' whilst enslaving or killing people in the Third World is described by Coser as 'rejecting the whole heritage of Europe'. This suggests that it is Coser's view of Europe that is one-sided. Fanon even 'declines to accept guidance from the West's revolutionaries' (p. 125). Coser is referring here to Fanon's critique of the French Communist Party whose position was that Algerians should seek a peaceful settlement with France and who voted for emergency powers to be used in Algeria. Hardly surprising then that their 'guidance' would be treated by Fanon with some scepticism.

² What really separates Fanon from Sorel is that for the latter, violence expresses the 'spirit' of the people, while, for the former, it a mechanism of overthrowing colonialism (Caute 1970: 86)

Coser is aware that Fanon's particular concern was the post-revolutionary society and of the dangers of a comprador bourgeoisie. Instead of focusing on his class analysis, Coser describes this as Fanon's concern that the city will corrupt the new elites: 'The city, to Fanon, is always corruption. He hates it with the traditional hatred of the peasant; it is to him the true whore of Babylon' (p. 124). Coser goes on:

The Algeria of Boumédiène bears but little resemblance to the peasant democracy of which Fanon dreamed. The tough military men who now run independent Algeria presumably look at men like Fanon as ideologists whose usefulness to the regime has long been exhausted. African rulers have grown fat on resources pumped out of the countryside, and they have flocked to the central cities where they build skyscrapers and airports, slavishly imitating Western models. The peasants have fallen back into the immemorial routines of traditional lifestyles; sometimes they are prodded into the world of modernity by tax collectors, recruiting sergeants, or party organisers (p. 126).

Coser ignores Ben Bella's progressive regime in favour of Boumédiène who overthrew him. All of this is not a critique of Fanon but exactly what Fanon predicted and feared - that a new exploiting class would only replace the old colonialists. Coser somehow construes this as an example of how Fanon was wrong. Coser implies that Africans can only 'slavishly imitate' the West, apart from the racist undertones it would seem that Coser is implying that Africa should do more than imitate Europe and yet he characterises Fanon's conclusions to the same effect as 'anti-western masochism' (p. 127).

The second critique is that of Zolberg (1971) who outlines Fanon's life and work and is, in general, less hostile than Coser. He locates in the African liberation struggles and observes his 'brilliant knack for turning clinical insights into political poetry' though he qualifies this by saying there is no evidence that he had many cures to his credit (p. 121). This remark reflects Zolberg's ignorance (at best) given that Fanon was a qualified psychiatrist in the largest psychiatric institution in Algeria. Like Coser he says that Fanon's work is 'inconceivable without Sorel' (p. 125).

He describes Fanon as being interested in the therapeutic effects of the revolutionary process and sees Fanon's analysis of the veil as 'extraordinary' because it locates the European attempts to remove the veil as disguised aggression and the Arab women's desire to keep it as resistance. Zolberg summarises the article as saying that by engaging in violence Algerian women become human. He seems at a loss to understand this dynamic and thus the force of Fanon's argument is lost on him. Likewise Fanon's analysis of the radio and medicine are caricatured as the idea that shedding blood creates a spiritual unity that forges the nation. Unable to grasp such social dynamics it is not surprising that Zolberg's assessment of the class analysis in Wretched of the Earth is similar to Coser's:

In Fanon's hallucinatory imagery, which links him with Rimbaud and Jean Genet, the damned are the rat pack, the *lumpenproletariat* the prostitutes and pimps, the brutal peasants, who invade the city through the sewers. The city goes up in flames. The damned are purified in its fire; they are beautiful and holy (p. 129).

Zolberg argues that Fanon combines Marxism and psychoanalysis to encompass the colonial situation. He notes that Fanon sees the imposition of colonialism as violent and also as provoking the violence of the colonised initially directed internally to the self or at other natives in the form of crime. Salvation lies in directing this violence at the oppressor and the group most likely to do so is the peasantry if the violence can be properly directed by the vanguard party. However, Fanon's critique of intellectuals is characterised not in class terms but as an analysis of the character flaws of natives. Zolberg states that this reflects a 'self-hatred' common to left-wing intellectuals. He notes

that this is especially true of Sorel (though it is debatable whether Sorel can really be classified as left wing). Nevertheless, he thinks Fanon's critique of the national bourgeoisie is prophetic (pp. 130-1).

Zolberg notes that Fanon does ground his concept of violence in a great deal of ambiguity and points out that Fanon saw non-violence as a means of accommodating to imperialism and 'violence' is used by him to cover the entire range of anti-imperialist tactics. Zolberg goes on, however, that such utopian schemes only illustrate that Fanon still wears a white mask, that is, Fanon believes that blacks are less than men and need to resort to terrorism to destroy the corrupting European institutions. He notes that Fanon has become extremely influential and as disillusion grows with the post-independence states it can be seen that Fanon's diagnoses of the weakness of these regimes was accurate. Nevertheless, Zolberg notes that schemes to renovate such regimes have failed and the present regimes are ill equipped to cope with modernisation (pp. 133-6).

One final commentator worth mentioning is the well-known Hannah Arendt. Arendt's (1970) book On Violence comments on Fanon and his influence on the Black power movement, which was examined in Chapter Nine. She asserts again the connection with Sorel and goes on:

Not many authors of rank glorified violence for violence sake; but these few- Sorel, Pareto, Fanon - were motivated by a much deeper hatred of bourgeois society - than the Conventional Left, which were inspired by compassion and a burning desire for justice (p. 65).

Again, Fanon is more culpable than Sorel because he had a closer acquaintance with the effects of violence and advocated it nonetheless. According to Arendt the campus violence of the Sixties can be traced to Fanon's influence on Black students, prior to this the student movement was principled and non-violent.

For Arendt:

Serious violence entered the scene only with the appearance of the Black power movement on the campus. Negro students, the majority of them admitted without academic qualifications, regarded and organised themselves as an interest group, the representatives of the Black community (p. 65).

According to Arendt not only were white students non-violent their communities never condoned violence on campus unlike Black communities, who stood behind the violence of the black students. She is incensed at the academic establishment's 'curious tendency to yield to Negro demands even if they are clearly *silly* and *outrageous*, than to *disinterested* and usually high moral claims of white rebels...' (p. 96). She claims, further that Black students were not interested in justice but were really only interested in lowering academic standards. The racist undertones are clear.

Fanon and Violence

In order to develop a clearer picture of the role violence plays in Fanon's thought it is necessary to explore what Fanon means by violence. Though he uses the word in a number of ways it is necessary to see it in context. Firstly in the context of Africa, Fanon was engaged in a debate with those in independence struggles who argued that the road to freedom lay through non-violent struggle. Fanon, in contrast, was prepared to argue for violence, by which he meant *armed* struggle. However, what distinguishes Fanon from the liberal and Marxist traditions is his advocacy of violence as a matter of principle. This section explores his argument and the assumptions on which it is based as a prelude to a more detailed discussion of a Fanonist psychology in the next chapter.

The previous section outlined the liberal responses to the idea of an armed struggle, which are on the whole negative. Nevertheless it is well established within the liberal tradition that the resort to violence may become necessary, either in self-defence or when all other means are exhausted. For example, while the ANC for most of its history had pursued a policy of non-violent action, at Nelson Mandela's trial in the 1960s he admitted to being part of setting up the armed wing of the ANC. He argued that there were two reasons why this was necessary. First that violence by the African people was inevitable and that it was better that there was a 'responsible leadership' in place that could channel these feelings away from terrorism, which would only produce further racial hatred. Secondly, that without violence there was no means to end white supremacy as all legal avenues been closed off and the government met any protest with violence. This left the ANC, with its tradition of non-violence, no other option but violence (or abject surrender). Such violence was to be under the political control of the ANC and was seen as part of the need to prepare for a full-scale civil war if necessary. The leadership elected to focus on acts of sabotage (rather than terror or guerilla warfare) with a view to scaring away foreign capital from the country. Sabotage of economic targets was combined with attacks on the symbols of apartheid (for example, government buildings) as a means of inspiring the population while avoiding any loss of life (Mandela 1964).

In the Marxist tradition violence is regarded as a pragmatic necessity. In situations of oppression challenging the class enemy, who control the repressive apparatus of the state will, almost inevitably involve a resort to arms. This is seen as the means to a just end. Marxists see the reluctance on the part of liberals to engage in armed struggle as a product of their class position. Since they seek in the colonial situation, not to destroy the state but to take it over for themselves they have no interest in arming the population unless it becomes absolutely necessary, since an armed population could decide to take the state into its own hands. Chapter Eight looked at Cabral's argument about the necessity of armed struggle, which was based not on the fact that it was liberating per se but that it was a structural necessity imposed on a colonising power whose capacity for neo-imperialism was limited. For Fanon the issue of class is not raised directly but he sees violence as liberating both in the structural but more uniquely in the psychological sense.

The liberal rejection of violence is focused on the damage such violence does to individuals both as perpetrators and victims. Most mainstream psychology follows a similar direction. Violence is understood as more or less physical or even personal, as overt *acts* of violence carried out by one individual or group on another individual or group. While there is always that element, Fanon's concern is not with violence understood as inter-personal but as structural. Fanon saw the colonial relationship as one of violence based on military conquest, forced labour and taxation, appropriation of land and the destruction of traditional structures. The act of colonising others is a form of violence and maintaining such relations is also, whether physical coercion is evident or not. Zahar (1974: 75) points out that there are different stages:

The period of mercantilism entailed a policy of government sponsored pillage whilst industrialisation and the increasing need for raw materials during the phase of competitive capitalism brought about a more rational organisation and systematic approach to colonial exploitation. Finally, the colonial policy of monopoly capitalism is characterised by the export of capital on the one hand and the increasing political nature of economic relations between metropolitan countries and their poverty stricken dependencies on the other.

Ultimately economic restructuring relies on force or violence. Colonialism after a chaotic period of 'disorganised' violence by settlers moves to rationally organise the exploitation of 'natives'. Any lack of resistance is evidence not of a lack of colonial violence but of its success in cowing the population. This idea has broader application outside the colonial one. Robert Brenner has done

work on structural violence in the United States. He found that a one percent increase in unemployment in the USA lead to an extra 36 887 deaths (mostly from heart disease), 920 suicides, 684 homicides, 495 alcohol related diseases, 4227 admissions to public hospitals. In the early eighties he correlated a one percent increase in unemployment with a two percent increase in death, an almost six percent increase in the prison population, a five percent increase in infant mortality and a four percent increase in admissions to mental hospitals (Bulhan 1985: 156).

All these are effects of structural violence that operate in the context of a system that benefits the few. The overt acts of violence that do arise such as the Black Panthers taking up arms, or the rise of criminal violence are more visible but would be seen by Fanon (and others) as a response to the structural violence of the broader society. The structural sort of violence in the form of the premature death remains invisible. Violence in these forms is invisible to mainstream psychology, which focuses almost solely on violence as overt actions.³ As Bulhan (1985: 177) puts it, it is: 'one of the tragic ironies in situations of oppression is that the oppressed submit to subjection for fear of physical death, yet they die more frequently and at an earlier age than their oppressors.'

The Algerian war was an early testing ground for imperialist forces fighting guerilla wars. The French defeat in Vietnam gave rise to a new arsenal of organisational and psychological techniques designed to deny guerillas support. The program of 'resettlement' of the Muslim population as well as torture and 'social' or 'development' programs were designed to compel the population into denying the guerillas access to food and intelligence supplied by the people. Eric Wolf (1969: 242-6) makes the interesting suggestion that Fanon's thesis on violence is a response to such psychological tactics, an inversion of the French approach. Where the latter thinks that reorganising the population and terror will isolate resistance, Fanon preaches violence as the basis of a liberating psychology to overcome the French and achieve both personal and political independence. While this is true enough, it is important to remember that Fanon's thesis starts with Manichean psychology – that is a response to the French and then develops as part of the process of liberation.

To understand the dynamics of a Fanonist Manichean psychology it is necessary to read not just the first chapter of Wretched of the Earth, which deals specifically with violence, but to see this as part of the process of liberation that he describes in the first three chapters, which deal with spontaneity and the limits of national consciousness. There are also clues in his other books as well as in his clinical work. It is Fanon's focus on the subjective element that is the cause of much controversy. The key to understanding Fanon's approach lies in the subject-object dialectic of Hegel's master/slave metaphor. Sorelian myths or psychoanalytic ideas of catharsis are not the basis of the argument as it often assumed.⁴

For Hegel self consciousness rested on a life and death struggle for recognition by the other. In this process one subdues the other, securing their status as a human subject and reducing the slave to an object. Fanon showed the limits of Hegel's master/slave paradigm in Black Skin Whites Masks arguing that, in the colonial situation, there is no reciprocity and no recognition of the slave as a human. Colonisation was more than domination, it was objectifying and dehumanising.

³ See Bulhan (1985) for a detailed critique of mainstream psychology.

⁴ Here a psychoanalytic reading would see violence against the colonial power as patricide. Ironically this is how the Isaac Julien's film *Frantz Fanon: Black Skin White Masks* explores Fanon's relation to the Algerian struggle.

The Germans may have defeated the French in the war but this did not destroy the latter's humanity, however:

In Algeria there is not simply the domination but the decision to the letter not to occupy anything more than the sum total of the land. The Algerians, the veiled women, the palm-trees and the camels make up the landscape, the natural background to the human presence of the French (Fanon 1965b: 204).

Fanon spells out in detail the Manichean colonial situation evident in the geography of Algeria. It is a place of borders and guards and tension.

In Hegel the master reduces the slave/native to the status of an object. Ironically the master/coloniser is in a sense dependent as they relate to the world of objects only via the slave/native. The slave lives in a world of overt inequality based on force about which they have no illusion and thus has a clearer insight into the real situation. The freedom of the slave comes about in Hegel via labour in the world of objects.⁵ For Fanon emancipation by violence takes the place of objectification by work in Hegel (Zahar 1974: 80). Fanon's slave recovers their humanity by moving from the status of an object to that of a subject by asserting themselves in practical labour.

However, in the Algerian context, Fanon narrows the conception of labour to that of violence. In this way the object re-enters human being (Fanon 1965a: 29-30). Sartre put it more bluntly in the preface to Wretched of the Earth saying that in every situation of oppression since one person is a subject and the other an object, if the oppressed takes up a rifle and kills the oppressor then in either case 'there remains one dead man and one free man' (Fanon 1965a: 19).

Fanon emphasises the subjective element of 'freedom in and through violence' and identifies two stages. The first involving spontaneous violence that breaks the psychological barrier of one's inferiority. The second stage requires the raising of consciousness and the organisation of violence. In relation to stage one, Fanon describes the sense of 'crushing objecthood' in Black Skin White Masks. The native experiences this as a deep-seated sense of their own inferiority or helplessness. For Fanon, for the oppressed to overcome their dehumanised status - violence is the key because it is detoxifying⁶.

What does he mean by 'detoxifying'? Elsewhere he describes the anti-racism campaigns in France as detoxifying, in which case he means that education provides insight and change but not a cathartic outburst. Bulhan (1985: 147) draws the analogy with alcoholism, here people need to be detoxified before they can deal with the cause of their problems. Striking out at one's oppressor is the beginning of reclaiming one's sense of self. This sense is well captured in the following description by Frederick Douglass. Douglass was a slave in the United States who became an important part of the abolitionist movement.

⁵ This idea was developed by Marx in a materialist direction.

⁶ The usual English translation of this phrase is 'violence as a cleansing force' for the French phrase '*la violence desintoxique*'. This has only added to the idea that Fanon sees violence as cathartic in the psychoanalytic sense.

He describes his escape from slavery by killing his master as follows:

He can only understand the deep satisfaction which I experienced, who has himself repelled by force the bloody arm of slavery. I felt as I have never felt before. It was a glorious resurrection, from the tomb of slavery, to the heaven of freedom. My long-crushed spirit rose, cowardice departed, bold defiance took its place; and I now resolved that, however long I might remain a slave in form, the day had passed forever when I could be a slave in fact.

This is the type of feeling that Fanon is describing as part of detoxification.⁷ However, it is not enough to *feel* liberated. Peasants engaged in armed struggle may have felt liberated but after the revolution they found, in fact, that very little had changed. The current crisis in Algeria sees hundreds of people engaged in acts of violence, which may feel liberating, but in fact it will make little difference in their lives. When the appalling psychological damage that Fanon himself catalogues is included then Fanon's views on violence require some clarification. In particular it is important to note that objective and subjective liberation are very different and while feeling empowered is a prerequisite to political action it is not real liberation.

There are both psychological and structural prerequisites for liberation. A change in consciousness may provide an insight into one's situation but it is crucial that this gets beyond spontaneous violence and isolated individual action. Fanon is aware that there are 'limits to spontaneity'. The spontaneity of the masses must be channelled and developed. In China and Cuba the peasants proved themselves as a revolutionary force but revolutionary consciousness was not spontaneous. For Fanon violence (which due to the colonial situation was the main form of practice that he was concerned with) restructures the consciousness and gives rise to counter-violence and the end of alienation, when described at the level of individual this runs the risk of placing self-liberation outside of the analysis of social forces.

The problem of how to institutionalise the spontaneity and channel it into fundamental social change is minimised. Fanon assumed that the FLN was playing (or the *Algerian Armée de Libération Nationale (ALN)* would play) such a role - or if they did not there was no one else who would be able to. He is critical of them for their 'lack of ideology' though ultimately he relies on spontaneity as the driving force. Fanon's violence is a spontaneous reaction to coloniser/colonised situation and while aware of its limitations, the role of leadership and the program they might follow are not spelled out nor is the means by which the leadership, the group with higher level of consciousness, is to channel revolutionary actions and initiate radical structural change.

Aside from his contact with Césaire and Sartre, who were clearer on the class question than Fanon, there is in his clinical work a parallel for the role of violence and the role of the party. In relation to phobic patients who became agitated, we saw earlier that Fanon interpreted their violence not as a symptom of underlying pathology but as response to the hospital milieu. While analogies between the political and the therapeutic are difficult, it is odd that Fanon does not pursue the analogy more clearly. He sees the mental patient as having lost the sense of self and other in the social network. The role of the hospital is to provide a therapeutic milieu against which the patient can test the social network and rediscover their sense of self. If the patient is not given the means to do this they

⁷ This can also occur at the macro level aggression provides a temporary release. A minor provocation in the right context can call forth a show of emancipatory violence. In Algeria, the Setif Massacre or, more recently, in Black October.

will either retreat into fantasy or behave aggressively.⁸ To overcome this, the doctor has to recognise the violent action of the patient is the patient's means of testing social reality and then to find the means by which the patients can recover themselves.

In pursuing the analogy Fanon takes the spontaneous aggression of the peasant as a response to the colonial milieu. Aggression is a way of testing the social relations and can lead to clarity if suitably guided within an appropriate structure - a hospital or a political party - as the case may be. By striking out at the oppressor the native recognises that the coloniser is not a god or superman. To Fanon it is 'violence alone, violence committed by the people, *violence organised and educated by its leader*, that makes it possible for the masses to understand social truth and gives the key to them' (my emphasis). Like the socio-therapist in the hospital, violence must be directed and guided to be learned from, to gain insight not encouraged for its own sake. Like the phobic who needs to confront their fears the colonised have to consciously confront the oppressor in a life and death struggle for recognition. To avoid such a confrontation would reduce the colonised to begging for justice which is also dehumanising.⁹

Fanon points out that resentment is no basis for an ongoing struggle and that one needs to go beyond racial consciousness. One must, based on one's own actions, reclaim a sense of agency or praxis. This requires not mere action (or acts of violence) or theory (understood here as consciousness of the real sets of social relations) but a combination of theoretically informed practice (or self-conscious action) which Marxists label - *praxis*. Praxis is the key means of coming to know the world, that is it is only through acting in the world that one can change it. Fanon's equation of praxis with violence is a generalisation based on the Algerian experience. Fanon saw violence as necessary to head off those in Africa who sought peaceful accommodation as a means to a neo-colonial order. At an individual level equating violence with praxis is too narrow, though freedom was not to be won in Algeria apart from violence. Those like the liberals who criticise Fanon ignore the structural nature of violence and provide little in the way of alternatives, which serves in effect to legitimate the violence of the oppressor.

Apart from his specific comments in Wretched of the Earth Fanon also spells out how he sees revolutionary praxis in the Algerian context in A Dying Colonialism. It is in struggle that the mechanisms concealing the workings of colonialism become clearer and lose their hold. Action resolves the inferiority complex and alienation. The veil becomes a cult of self-defence as the aggressive coloniser dreams of possessing the Algerian nation via assimilation of Algerian women to Western norms. In patriarchal Algeria women are marginalised but with the outbreak of war the veil takes on a new significance as a tool in struggle. Fanon explores phenomenologically the political effects on the mind and the body of the colonised. The veil loses its traditional significance, which opens up the possibility of change.

The problem that remains after one engages in action is converting the practice of the *moudjahidates* into a praxis, that is, to find ways to make the significance of the new practices understood more generally, thus raising consciousness and institutionalising the new norms. Violence may lead to a change in consciousness but this need not lead to structural changes or permanent changes in consciousness in the broader population. Violence is a necessary but not

⁸ Like the phobic patient Fanon sees colonised people as retreating into myths and spiritualised rituals or acting aggressively particularly towards each other (for example, intra-group crime).

⁹ In Black Skin White Masks (p. 142) Fanon describes as abnormal the one 'who demands, who appeals, who begs.'

sufficient condition in the post-colonial context: unemployment, lack of education and urban drift present real limits to emancipation, particularly without a means of institutionalising the new norms. Historical experience shows that peasants are difficult to mobilise, their majority status means their support is necessary but in liberated zones people must be educated in the struggle. Structures must be set up to enact the program so that people can experience the new set of social relations. The PAIGC serves as example of this approach.

Some of the limitations of Fanon's class analysis were discussed in Chapter Thirteen, one of the problems with his analysis is that while he paints convincing psychological portraits of class actors, at times, his class analysis is led astray by this. He uses the level of psychological integration and alienation as a basis for a group's revolutionary potential. The more alienated from the coloniser the more revolutionary. This is not necessarily the case. Fanon assumes that the degree of poverty is a criteria for political militancy. He assumes that the marginal existence of the peasant creates a psychological predisposition to 'violent' action since they have nothing to lose, no stake in the existing system, which he describes misleadingly as 'outside the class system'. This is the basis on which he looks to them as the 'only spontaneously revolutionary force.'

Fanon puts all urban dwellers - bourgeois and proletarian - in the group as urban collaborators, rather than attending to their economic position. This reflects the view of the section of the ALN that Fanon worked most closely with at the end of his life, who saw themselves as guardians of egalitarian peasant radicalism opposed to an urban elite. While it is true that urban dwellers have a different relation to metropolitan capitalism than peasants the analysis needs to be more concrete as we saw with Cabral. Violence is a form of praxis that must be subordinate to political goals based on concrete analysis not spontaneity. While Fanon is aware of the limits of spontaneity his reliance on an abstract psychology leads him to analyse the struggle in moral terms not material ones. Farber makes the key point here that, for Fanon, material self-interest is suspect as a motivation and thus Fanon advocates pursuit of ideological goals apart from material interest. He praises the altruism of the peasantry with no reference to their class interest and exhorts the working class to restrict wage demands and *instead* struggle for liberation (1981: 196).

In the earlier discussion we saw how Marxists, like Cabral, have argued that while revolutionary change relies on the majority of the population (that is, the peasantry) this does not negate the need for political education and organisation. Conscious elements bring new force to the struggle that is not contained in spontaneous resistance. Lenin, too, argues that spontaneity leads to a weakening of political consciousness not a strengthening of it. This requires some form of party organisation. The ambivalence about the role of the party is a product of Fanon's experience with the Stalinist PCF and the absence of a revolutionary party in Algeria. Fanon takes the practice of violence to be revolutionary praxis. In the context of Algeria for practice to be revolutionary it had to take the form of armed struggle. However, it is not just the form that makes practice revolutionary but the content. For it to be revolutionary praxis such struggle must be politically informed.

The final part of this chapter develops some other aspects of a Fanonian analysis. Fanon relates the collective struggles of the Algerian people to a self/other dynamic. His work reveals a strong awareness that relations of oppression are precisely that - relations. The Fanonian self/other dialectic allows one to cross to the other side of the Manichean divide and analyse from the perspective of the dominator. Fanon's ideas can be used to look at the effect on France of their collective oppressive practices. The first of these is an analysis of what was occurring in Paris during the Algerian struggle - the effect on the body of the French nation. The second is a brief

discussion of recent controversies surrounding the veil in France which show how issues like veiling are not simply an issue for the other but imply constructions of the self.

The Colonialist Self

One of the advantages of Fanon's radical phenomenology is that by focusing on the colonial self/other as a relationship it becomes possible not just to study the effect of colonialism on the natives but to look at its effect on the coloniser. While Fanon describes the effects of the Manichean situation on the colonised it is important to recognise that one of the strengths of Fanon's method of analysis is that it is relational. The effects on the colonised are reflected in effects on the coloniser. In an interesting book written at the end of the Algerian war Pierre Vidal-Naquet (1963) explores the development of torture as a 'clandestine institution' (p. 15). He examines its development within the police force in Algeria and later the army. The particular theme that he explores is the effect of setting up the institutions for torture on the coloniser. In Chapter Five of Wretched of the Earth Fanon has noted the direct effects of torture on both sets of participants but Vidal-Naquet provides some interesting insights with which to develop Fanon's analysis in a more structural vein.

To prosecute the Algerian War the French government was forced to set up a 'state within a state'. This required not just an investment in repressive apparatus but in ideological terms represented institutionalised 'bad faith'. All French schoolchildren learned that 'Algeria is France' and that the settler society and Jews who lived there were an extension of French society. The presence of millions of Muslim Algerians was ignored. When the war started either there needed to be a political reassessment (and thus a questioning of France's role as coloniser) or a resort to force. The resort to force was justified on the grounds that the state had the duty to defend France from its *internal* enemies and could be relied on to do so in the interests of human rights. When reports of torture first emerged it was 'officially' condemned. The increasing repression was paralleled in the increasingly tortuous rationalisations that were put forward to both deny and justify the use of 'violent' interrogation.

The psychological 'double-think' required by the French state was manifested in the Law of March 16 [1956] which, with Communist support, brought in further emergency powers. The legislation was entitled 'Law authorising the Government to put into force in Algeria a program of economic expansion and giving the Government powers to take any exceptional measures necessary to re-establish order, to protect persons and goods, and to safeguard the territory' (Vidal-Naquet 1963: 65). This legislation went a long way to providing the framework for the routine use of torture. Increasingly though French policy in Algeria was justified by increasing self-deception and colossal lies.

When the Communist deputy of Oran, Madame Sportisse, raised allegations of torture in the National Assembly, the Interior Minister [sic] replied that:

Madame Sportisse should not assume that my silence yesterday in face of her long list of atrocious inaccuracies implies that they in any way accord with the facts which have been reported. All I can do here is to dispute the accuracy of the statements that have been made from this rostrum but at the same time assure her that each case will be or has been thoroughly investigated. What I can say is that according to the inquiries so far carried out, I have no knowledge if any act of torture bearing any resemblance to those which have been mentioned.

At this point he was already in possession of two reports that made clear that torture was routinely used by security forces in Algeria. This audacious lying and the self-censorship of the liberal press fostered the atmosphere that barred the populace from obtaining a true grasp of the situation (Vidal-Naquet 1963: 67-9). As the evidence mounted the government was forced to greater measures - the denials became minimisations and Commissions of Inquiry were set up, by May 1957 a Permanent Commission was set up of eminent persons to safeguard individual rights. This commission convinced itself that it worked in secrecy despite being housed and fed by the Governor General and being protected by an armed convoy when visiting inspection sites which they allowed the military to select for them. In general atrocities were blamed on rogue individuals.

Vidal-Naquet's book outlines the effect of the colonial situation in metropolitan France. Setting up a security state in Algeria had its most blatant effect when the generals in Algiers attempted in April 1961 to seize power in Paris itself. It had become clear that if Algeria was to remain part of France that it was going to mean that the totalitarian regime set up in Algeria was going to have to be extended to metropolitan France. Since the government in Paris realised that there were only two powers in Algeria the French army and the FLN it became necessary to negotiate with the FLN or risk a further confrontation with its own security forces.

There had been a long history of over-policing and generalised anti-Arab racism directed towards the thousands of Algerians living as an under-class in ghettos in France. Fanon commented on this in his early piece 'North African Syndrome'. Many metropolitan police served time in North Africa but more important was the fact that the repressive apparatus set up in Algeria was not limited to the French colony. The first incidents of torture on French soil dated from September 1957, when the FLN's policy was to avoid confrontation with police. In October 1958 there was a scandal when two Algerians were arrested and tortured in Lyons, their confessions implicating three local priests who did charity work. When two of them were arrested, the Archbishop said the confessions were false and were extracted by the 'gravest cruelties'. Eventually the scandal blew over with the police not pursuing the priests. The public prosecutor conceding that violence (but not torture) was used which the police continued to deny. The Cardinal made a speech emphasising respect for the police and refrained from publishing evidence he possessed showing that torture was routine (Vidal-Naquet 1963: 111).

In the ghettos there was an 'unofficial curfew', round-ups of 'darkies' and harassment. Algerians were arrested in Paris under 'confinement' laws that applied in the situation of martial law at home. By 1960 the *harki's* [Algerian troops loyal to France] were imported as special forces, armed and in uniform, to police ghettos. This deflected attention from French police and reinforced a generalised racism as Algerians were made to police each other. Hundreds were 'confined,' dozens were murdered. This provoked attacks on police that were met with the setting up of internment camps. When the FLN organised a peaceful demonstration of 30 000 in October 1961 it led to thousands of arrests and many deaths as anti-Arab racism neared pogrom status. In December an anti-*Organisation Armée Secrète* (OAS) rally was attacked by police who had become like in Algeria a 'law unto themselves', eight Parisians died. The funeral attracted half a million mourners (Vidal-Naquet 1963: 112-9).

All levels of government would eventually get drawn into the deceit. Magistrates accepted confessions made under duress, returning prisoners to police if they recanted. The independence of the judiciary disappeared as particular judges dealt with Algerian affairs, one going so far as to state that if any Algerian brought a charge against the police only the latter's evidence was admissible. Laws were made to fit cases; special military courts were set up to deal with FLN cases. The

repercussions on the French polity of repression in Algeria were shown most clearly in the first half of 1962 when the state was unable to prosecute two self-confessed torturers. In the first instance three officers admitted torturing a Muslim woman to death but were acquitted. In May the former general Raoul Salan, leader of the OAS, on whose orders hundreds of people had been murdered before and after the cease-fire stood trial. Salan admitted responsibility but instead of the death penalty was acquitted after an *in camera* trial (Vidal-Naquet 1963: 120f).

The effect of colonial history on the metropole is not just a thing of the past. As the colonial past continues to haunt Algeria its effects are still felt in France. In contemporary France there are numerous reminders of the colonial past and one of these is a large Muslim minority from the former colonies. Apart from the rise of right-wing groups like the National Front, led by Jean-Marie Le Pen, a former *colon*, who make political capital out of racism, there was recently in France a national controversy over the wearing of the veil by Muslim schoolgirls. Rachel Bloul's (1996) analysis of the controversy shows one of the ways in which (female) colonial otherness is still an issue in the metropole.¹⁰

Bloul looks at both Arab/Muslim woman and Black African woman living in France. She analyses the ways in which representations of these different groups of women are constructed around discourses of race and sex and how the respective sexualities are constructed around the issues of veiling and clitoridectomy. It is the issue of the veil in the avowedly secular French school system that is her focus. In October 1989 three girls of Maghrebi origin refused to remove their headscarves in class. This incident provoked a national controversy and was headline news through to December. Though the debate was dominated by men it, nevertheless, covered a range of issues about the integration of ethnic minorities, the role of Islam and secularity in France and French culture and identity. Commentators represented the girls as 'choosing' to wear the veil. The Right, ironically, took up the issue as one of women's 'right to choose' leaving the Left reluctant to discuss the gender issue at all, arguing in terms of universalism versus cultural relativism. The silencing of woman's voices continued as the debate degenerated by 1994 into a Manichean division. Increasingly the girl's action was interpreted as 'manipulated' by militant Islamists who seek special status for Muslims in France using the language of human rights to promote their own political objectives. This is seen by French commentators, more or less, as an international conspiracy to destabilise the West.

Paradoxically the women are presented as sincere but manipulated by political Islam. Once they give in to the seductive call of religious authenticity they become deaf to moderate Muslim voices. These 'dangerous victims' are ignorant since their religious fervour blinds them to the fact that political Islam is a threat to their interests as women. It is the republic that protects the rights of women and their 'freedom of choice'. This freedom, however, blinds them to the danger of totalitarianism of political Islam as shown by the *Front Islamique du Salut* (FIS) in Algeria. Here the veil renders girls visible and thus a threat as matters considered private invade the public space of the institutions that are supposed to be neutral (that is, secular). Again veiled women are 'sexy victims' to be 'protected' from their men (and themselves) and this upholds a very imperial form of French identity.

¹⁰ A similar controversy erupted with the opening of the Turkish parliament in May 1999 when a female member was prevented from taking the oath of office while wearing a headscarf (*New York Times* May 3, 1999).

Summary

This chapter examined the key issue of the role of violence in Fanon's thought for which he has become infamous. It began by outlining the liberal responses to Fanon which critique his advocacy of violence as a matter of principle.

In an attempt to begin understanding the role of violence in Fanon's thought it must be located in the political context in which it was written. It was part of his broader discussion about the limits of spontaneity and the difficulties of bringing about a raising of people's consciousness and developing their capacity to liberate their nation and build a better future. This discussion concluded that Fanon overemphasises violence as a specific form of practice and underestimates the importance of institutionalising the new norms. Finally it looked briefly about the ways constructions of self and other have ongoing effects on the colonialists themselves.

The discussion of violence, consciousness and practice also relies on a model of the human subject which is implicit in Fanon's writing so it is to this that the next chapter turns its attention.