



On the Dialectics of Domestic Colonialism & the Role of Violence in Liberation **From Fratricide to Suicide**

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Abstract: In the development of imperialism unique circumstances occur when colonial-like, structural relationships occur with domestic populations. These circumstances produce internal tensions which become manifest in various forms. Among them are mis-education, crime, and violence. This essay will explore the particular characteristics of these manifestations as they developed within the United States. It will discuss the unique role racism plays in enhancing the contradictions in this society. It will also discuss conceptions of violence in these relationships, how they developed and their implications for twenty first century America.

Unlike the colonialism of Africa, where Africans were the majority population, enslaved Africans began populating the U.S. colonies of North America along with English settlers and emerging as a domestic colony. While in the early stages, Africans in the U.S. colonies were classified as indentured servants, the distinction as slaves began to sharpen in 1640 “when three runaway servants, two white and one black were recaptured, [and] the court ordered the white servants to serve their master one additional year. The black servant, however, was ordered ‘to serve his said master or his

assigns for the time of his natural life here or elsewhere.”¹

The Africans were a very significant part of the development of the United States. “Slaves supplied the foundation of the American economy in three ways: as a basic commodity in the New England-West Indian trade, as workers producing agricultural commodities for the market, and as property.”² While they were considered

¹ John Hope Franklin & Alfred A. Moss, Jr., From *Slavery to Freedom, A History of African Americans*, pg 57

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non-persons, they were “personal (or ‘chat-tel’) property that could be bought sold, moved about, inherited, given away, insured, and used as collateral for all kinds of business transactions. As items of trade, producers of agricultural commodities, and capital, slaves fed the American and British economies and made possible the industrial revolution of both countries.”³

DIALECTICS OF RACISM AND RESISTANCE

The clearly delineated categorization based on color intensified the development of structural violence against African people enslaved in the colonies. Basic rights weren’t granted to the slaves and educating them was made illegal. Unlike contract labor whose basic human rights were guaranteed under law, slaves were given no such protection. The violent exploitation and forced labor of Africans enslaved in the U.S. produced “two decisive political options...*resistance and accommodation*.”⁴

Racism ensued from racial prejudice towards a particular socio-political category (called the Negro or Black race) which was coupled with the power of the states to institute laws limiting the behavior of this group. Color connotations further reinforced the sense of social purity of whites versus the negative, evil connotation of blackness. Racism, as it has developed over the centuries, unveiled its dialectical character. It has imbued a sense of superiority within whites while dialectically causing blacks to internalize a sense of their own inferiority. The depersonalization of the society says to the blacks, “I don’t see you.”

² Nell Irvin Painter, *Creating Black Americans, African-American History and its Meanings, 1619 to the Present*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2007, page 92.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Manning Marable, *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America*, South End Press, Boston, 1982, page 26.

The master’s conversation about freedom and liberty in the presence of the slave says, “You don’t exist.” However, the master’s very privilege and position are inextricably tied to the existence of the slave. Once the slave resists or refuses to accept his condition the relationship is forever transformed. No matter whether in a direct colonial or domestic context, the basis of the superior/inferior relationship existed. The master/slave relationship carried with it very similar socio-political dynamics as those implied in the colonizer/colonized relationship.

The post reconstruction status of the population of African descent in the U. S. has effectively been a domestic colonial relationship to the white settler colonial population. This continues to carry with it the dialectical contradictions of racism discussed above.

The internalized oppression and rage retained among the colonized (or domestic colonial) has been expressed in a range of different forms which Fanon has addressed. “The black man among his own in the twentieth century does not know at what moment his inferiority comes into being through the other.”⁵

The racism and violence of the developing economy of the United States did not go unanswered. “Many slaves responded to the daily exploitation of the work place by resisting—running away, destroying machinery, burning crops, killing the master and his family. Others protested in more subtle ways, such as work slowdowns. But all faced the inevitable wall of reality from which there was no real escape. Rape, murder and the terrorization of the communities would continue as a logical and necessary part of capitalist society.”⁶

The resistance of enslaved Africans was

⁵ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Mask*, Grove Press, New York, 1967, page 110.

⁶ Manning Marable, *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America*, South End Press, Boston, 1982, page 27.

not a new phenomenon. It manifested on the coast of Africa as well as during the horrible journey during the middle passage. As the enslaved Africans developed into a new nationality, their national oppression within the U.S. colonies and resistance began to form into a national freedom struggle. "Some twenty-five conspiracies and insurrections took place in British North America before the American Revolution."⁷

The African resistance to enslavement and colonization was always met with violence. As Fanon phrased it, "National liberation, national renaissance, the restoration of nationhood to the people, commonwealth: whatever may be the headings used of the new formulas introduced, decolonization is always a violent phenomenon."⁸

The relationship between the British government and the US colonies began to sour with the colonies issuing a Declaration of Independence proclaiming that: "*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.*" At the very same time as this document was declared, the founding fathers "were themselves denying equal liberty to 697,000 human beings, or one-sixth of the population."⁹

The contradiction of the denial of the full humanity of the African has led to continued strife within America. While asked to nurture its families, produce its wealth and fight its wars, those of African descent have simultaneously been denied the equality claimed for all. The alienation this created has caused a form of double-consciousness to emerge. As W.E.B. Du Bois

noted, "[T]he Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world....It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder."¹⁰

STRUCTURAL OPPRESSION AND VIOLENCE

The systemic violence and exploitation of African people in the United States produced a violent response against the oppressor as well as against itself. The systemic violence has been manifest in a wide variety of forms. From lynching to intimidation to cross and church burnings to genocidal imprisonment rates, the government has sanctioned state and para-state activity against those of African descent. However, social violence has been almost as destructive in the form of inadequate housing, poor education, poorer health care and double digit unemployment. The consequence of these forms of violence has been to reinforce the internalized sense of superiority among whites and acerbate the internalized feelings of failure and inferiority among Blacks. This internalized oppression has led Black people to see themselves as ugly, evil, valueless and immoral. As Fanon points out,

It is not enough for the settler to delimit physically, that is to say with the help of the army and the police force, the place of the native. As if to show the totalitarian character of

⁷ Nell Irvin Painter, *Creating Black Americans, African-American History and its Meanings, 1619 to the Present*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2007, page 103.

⁸ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Grove Press, New York, 1963, page 35.

⁹ William Lee Miller, *Arguing About Slavery, The Great Battle in the United States Congress*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1996, page 16.

¹⁰ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Penguin Classics, New York, 1989, page 2.

colonial exploitation the settler paints the native as a sort of quintessence of evil. Native society is not simply described as a society lacking in values, It is not enough for the colonist to affirm that those values have disappeared from, or still better never existed in, the colonial world. The native is declared insensible to ethnics; he represents not only the absence of values, but also the negation of values. He is, let us dare to admit, the enemy of values, and in the sense he is the absolute evil. He is the corrosive element. Destroying all that comes near him, he is the deforming element, disfiguring all that has to do with beauty or morality; he is the depository of maleficent powers, the unconscious and irretrievable instrument of blind forces.¹¹

Education, reading and writing were outlawed for enslaved Africans. Whippings, chopping off fingers and death were some of the consequences for enslaved Africans who dared to engage in this process of learning. Dared, they did. Phyllis Wheatley, Benjamin Banneker, David Walker and Fredrick Douglass are some of the well known Africans who have made a literary mark and whose quest and knowledge of self via education superseded the boundaries prescribed for them.

After the Civil War the Freedmen's Bureau was the major government agency that helped to address the education of those formerly enslaved Africans. By establishing more than 3,000 schools attended by more than 150,000 students, the Freedmen's Bureau had a short but significant impact. The agency also assisted in the founding of several Black colleges, including Hampton, Fisk and Tougaloo.¹²

W.E.B. Du Bois states that "The greatest

¹¹ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Grove Press, New York, 1963, page 41.

success of the Freedmen's Bureau lay in the planting of the free school among Negroes, and the idea of elementary education among all classes in the south."¹³ The process of actualizing the education mission of the Freedmen's Bureau was tainted by violence. Dubois points out that, "The opposition to Negro education in the South was at first bitter, and showed itself in ashes, insult, and blood; for the South believed an educated Negro to be a dangerous Negro. And the South was not wholly wrong; for education among all kinds of men always has had, and always will have, an element of danger and revolution, of dissatisfaction and discontent."¹⁴

The modern Black accommodationist resistance to oppression is also symptomatic of internalized racial oppression. One of the major counterinsurgencies of black liberation in the United States has been the development of the reactionary middle class forces (intellectuals, elected officials, religions leaders, professional athletes and entertainers). This counterinsurgent force has become the face that positions oppression and racism as no serious barrier and that failure is contributed to the lack of personal responsibility. This neocolonial development is reflective of the dialectics of imperialism's response to the mass civil rights and Black Power movements of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s.

This neocolonial counterinsurgency is what James and Grace Lee Boggs point out in their chapter, "*Dialectics and Revolution*,"

...that the laws of dialectics which govern the development of the revolutionary social forces also govern the development of the capitalist counter-revolutionary forces. If the

¹² New York Public Library, *American History Desk Reference*, Macmillan, New York, 1997, page 317.

¹³ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Penguin Classics, New York, 1989, page 28.

¹⁴ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, Penguin Classics, New York, 1989, page 28.

revolutionary social forces antagonized by capitalism do not develop the revolutionary power to overthrow capitalism, capitalism will continue to develop dialectically to a new stage or new stages, and thereby acquire the means to incorporate sections of the revolutionary social forces within itself.¹⁵

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., touched on this class question as well when he stated

many middle-class Negroes have forgotten their roots and are more concerned about "conspicuous consumption" than about the cause of justice. Instead, they seek to sit in some serene and passionless realm of isolation, untouched and unmoved by the agonies and struggles of their underprivileged brothers. This kind of selfish detachment has caused the masses of Negroes to feel alienated not only from white society but also from the Negro middle class. They feel that the average middle-class Negro has no concern for their plight.¹⁶

Fanon also points out that this class accommodation

...brought into being a kind of class of enfranchised slaves, or slaves who are individually free."¹⁷ He points out that The workers, primary schoolteachers, artisans, and small shopkeepers who have begun to profit – at a discount, to be sure – from the colonial setup, have spe-

¹⁵ James and Grace Lee Boggs, *Revolution and Evolution in the Twentieth Century*, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1975, page 137.

¹⁶ Martin Luther King, Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos of Community*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1968, page 131-132.

¹⁷ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Grove Press, New York, 1963, page 60.

cial interests at heart...¹⁸

and that

...the native intellectual has clothed his aggressiveness in his barely veiled desire to assimilate himself to the colonial world. He has used his aggressiveness to serve his own interests.¹⁹

FROM FRATRICIDE TO SUICIDE

The response of the masses, while frequently spontaneous, is often far less self-serving. The pent up anger from the oppressive situation is often channeled in ways which diminish its revolutionary potential. Physical violence may be turned on another community member or become domestic violence before actually striking out at "the master." Social ceremonies or institutions can also be vehicles to dissipate these emotions. Fanon suggests this when he says,

We have seen that this same violence, though kept very much on the surface all through the colonial period, yet turns in the void. We have also seen that it is canalized by the emotional outlets of dance and possession by spirits; we have seen how it is exhausted in fratricidal combats. Now the problem is to lay hold of this violence which is changing direction. When formerly it was appeased by myths and exercised its talents in finding fresh ways of committing mass suicide, now new conditions will make possible a completely new line of action.²⁰

¹⁸ F. Fanon, *ibid.*, page 60.

¹⁹ F. Fanon, *ibid.*, page 60.

²⁰ F. Fanon, *ibid.* page 58

The transformation of this raw emotional response into an organized, sustainable movement is key to future success. Committed leadership is an essential ingredient in this transformation. Frequently, this emerges from the pre-revolutionary elements of the petty bourgeoisie. Their ability to transcend historical antagonisms, often manipulated by outside sources, to coalesce in a unified form is important. As Fanon begins to discuss the potential revolutionary role of the petty bourgeoisie, it is essential to understand that “we” are the “they” to whom he is referring. The petty bourgeoisie are the teachers, intellectuals, clerks and students. They are in a very paradoxical position. Being a creation of the colonial administration they were educated by and formed to serve the interests of those agents. However, they are frequently from the masses.

This paradoxical position is described by Amílcar Cabral, the leader of the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and the Cape Verde Islands (PAIGC). As one of Africa’s foremost revolutionary leaders, he addresses this issue from a framework of praxis. He states,

[T]he petite bourgeoisie in fulfilling its role is made to live alongside both the foreign dominating class and the masses. On one side the petite bourgeoisie is the victim of frequent if not daily humiliation by the foreigner, and on the other side it is aware of the injustice to which the masses are subjected and of their resistance and spirit of rebellion. Hence, arises the apparent paradox of colonial domination; it is from within the indigenous petite bourgeoisie, a social class which grows from colonialism itself, that arise the first important steps towards mobilizing and organizing the masses for the struggle against the colonial power.²¹

Cabral suggests indeed that the fratricide stimulated by the colonizers needs to be replaced by “class suicide” committed by the petty bourgeoisie aligning its interests with the masses. The resolution of the paradoxical contradiction is the full commitment by the petite bourgeoisie to support the legitimate claims of the masses for access to land, resources and human dignity. Cabral goes on to discuss their quest,

[T]he ‘return to the source’ is not and cannot in itself be an *act of struggle* against foreign domination (colonialist and racist) and it no longer necessarily means a return to traditions. It is the denial, by the petite bourgeoisie, of the pretended supremacy of the culture of the dominant power over that of the dominated people with which it must identify itself. The ‘return to the source’ is therefore not a voluntary step, but the only possible reply to the demand of concrete need, historically determined, and enforced by the inescapable contradiction between the colonized society and the colonial power, the masses of the people exploited and the foreign exploitative class, a contradiction in the light of which each social stratum or indigenous class must define its position.

When the ‘return to the source’ goes beyond the individual and is expressed through ‘groups’ or ‘movements,’ the contradiction is transformed into struggle (secret or overt), and is a prelude to the pre-independence movement or of the struggle for liberation from the foreign yoke. So, the ‘return to the source’ is of no historical impor-

²¹ Amílcar Cabral, *Return to the Source*, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1973, page 69.

tance unless it brings not only real involvement in the struggle for independence, but also complete and absolute identification with the hopes of the mass of the people, who contest not only the foreign culture but also the foreign domination as a whole. Otherwise, the 'return to the source' is nothing more than an attempt to find short-term benefits-knowingly or unknowingly a kind of political opportunism.²²

QUEST FOR DECOLONIZATION

This contradictory position haunts the petty bourgeoisie. How, on the one hand, to provide leadership to the movement with the masses, and yet, not reproduce the structures of exploitation, becoming the vehicle of one's own underdevelopment. With the advances of technology and the rapid agglomeration of capital, multinational corporations are increasingly becoming the barons of twenty first century global leadership. The difficulty of states much less local communities in dealing with development issues is exacerbated when dealing with corporations which have a global vision of their investment potential and little commitment to local human needs. Their motive force is the maximization of profit without moral or personal consideration. This has led to a fundamental contradiction which Fanon identified some time ago. He suggests that, "The fundamental duel which seemed to be that between colonialism and anti-colonialism, and indeed between capitalism and socialism, is already losing some of its importance. What counts today, the question looming on the horizon, is the need for a redistribution of wealth. Humanity must reply to this question, or be shaken to pieces by it."²³

But how could a decolonized society be

structured? What would decolonized institutions look like? Would the social science disciplines (as we know them) be necessary or even useful in analyzing the world from the perspective of the colonized? If a central struggle of the twenty first century is around ideas, how do we construct a "decolonizing methodology" so as not to become the tools of our own oppression?

The struggle for answers to these questions lies in the essential work of local movements. Praxis is essential for ideological clarity. The continued quest for African American liberation and self-determination as part of a decolonization struggle makes the question of violence inevitable. Malcolm X suggested that all the U.S. government and its economic elite have to do to avoid violence is give Black people all that they are due (something that is highly improbable). As long as the U.S. government has power, there will be violence. As long as there is violence against Black people in the U.S. there will continue to be resistance. The question for African Americans who are trying to realign a fragmented movement is how do we prepare for the response of a violent, indebted government at war with Iraq, tempting Iran, and losing influence in its own hemisphere? Its criminal negligence both during and in the aftermath of hurricane Katrina in the U.S. gulf coast and especially New Orleans, has become a global metaphor for the gross neglect and lack of concern for those impoverished in the world's wealthiest country. Will the new generation of African Americans "out of relative obscurity discover its mission, fulfill it, or betray it"?

As we speak the fratricide rates are increasing across America. Within the festering ghettos youth cling to hopelessness and rap rhymes of bling and blame and shame.

The cultural warriors are lining the battlefield to engage the assault of mass media on the minds of our youth and children globally. There will be serious engage-

²² A. Cabral, *ibid.*, pages 62-63

²³ F. Fanon, *op. cit.*, page 98

ment by these front line troops, but will their resistance be sufficient? And if it makes counter attacks will its successes replicate the BET's of the world?

The challenge of building this new paradigm includes replacing our current system of schooling and mis-education with a process for developing youth prepared with basic reading, writing, mathematics, computer and language skills to be able to compete in an internationally competitive world. Aligning theory with practice in our pedagogy is essential for achieving these objectives.

Establishing an ethic where all individuals have a right to job training, health care and equitably priced housing, should be the basis for reframing our twenty first century society. Rehabilitation, of many of those thrown away in our twenty first century slave ships called prisons, is possible with another vision of our mission. For many their incarceration is due to improper displacement of their mental or physical rage. The human capacity for healing, redemption and restoration is enormous. When not driven by the profit motive many social objectives are achievable. Our misplaced priorities have produced a society predicated upon military and correctional institution spending. In the name of fighting terrorism we condone almost any expenditures. This "Boggy Man public policy" must be transformed into a human centered, developmental approach.

The social re-construction of race is already occurring in America. As the white majority sees itself losing power to a nation of people of color, new categories are being developed to transcend the binary construction of the American racial dialectic. Divisions are encouraged even among those who are perceived as being "Black," with the Jamaican divided against the Haitian who exclaims his distinction from the African American who wishes the Nigerian would go home. Many of the petty bourgeois "gatekeepers" who have entered into

the middle class now preciously guard their position or want to close the door. The post Katrina catastrophe should be a lesson for us all. Across classes communities were washed away by the ravages of nature. Across titles lives were destroyed and individuals humbled to the essence of interdependence for survival. Our reconstruction as a society is dependent upon our ability to revision our priorities and place human development at the center of our twenty first century world.

In her Forward to the anthology, *The State of the Race: Creating Our 21st Century*, the revolutionary activist Assata Shakur captured the spirit necessary to create and direct the twenty first century revolutionary person when she said,

Liberation is a conscious process which can only be carried out by conscious people. In the twenty first century, the most important struggle will be the battle of ideas. Race and national consciousness are never enough. Since the overwhelming majority of African people in the world belong to the working class, one of the obvious tasks of oppressed people is to develop a working class consciousness. Failure to develop a class analysis and to organize as workers results in betrayal and an endless parade of neo-colonialist puppets like Mobutu, Savimbi and Clarence Thomas... Let us go forward into a new era. Let us listen well to the echoes of the past, let the cries of the present scream out, and let the whispers of the future grow into songs of victory.²⁴

²⁴ Jemadari Kamara and Tony Van Der Meer, *State of the Race-Creating Our 21st Century: Where D We Go From Here?* Diaspora Press, Boston, 2004, pages xxv-xxvi.

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