'TO EXPLAIN THE OTHER TO MYSELF': FANON, RAMASAMY AND IDENTITY POLITICS

Karthick Ram Manoharan

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Government

University of Essex

July 2015

Abstract

This thesis compares the identity politics of Frantz Fanon and 'Periyar' EV Ramasamy. After framing an interpretative paradigm through which the core ideas of Fanon could be deciphered, an interpretation of Fanon as a rigorous critic of identity politics is arrived at. Exploring Fanon's strained relation with the particularist Black identity politics of Negritude and his own imperative for the need to transcend from particularist identity politics to a genuine, universal humanism, I seek to prove that while Fanon rejected the false universalism of European humanism, he did not support rigidly identitarian movements either. Fanon's universalism was based on a reciprocal and respectful recognition between cultures and peoples, working towards a universal humanism. After a brief introduction to the socio-historical context of Ramasamy's politics, I then use this Fanonist lens to critique the anti-caste political discourse of Ramasamy, especially how he articulated his concerns towards the Brahmin Other and the non-Brahmin Self, and his approach towards the untouchable Dalit castes. I argue that his fixation with the Brahmin identity as the ultimate Other responsible for the inferiorization of the non-Brahmin castes, and his consideration of this identity as immutable and irredeemable, made a lasting universality impossible. Yet, Ramasamy's penetrating insights on the myriad ways in which native culture in the colony oppresses minorities and marginalized groups challenges Fanon's beliefs in the redemptive power of Third World anti-colonial universality. In the conclusion, based on the dialogue between Ramasamy and Fanon, I explore the limits of particularism and the needs of universalism, making a case for a constitutive, but conditional, pluralism.

Contents

Introduction

"What is your caste?" – This is a question that almost every Indian encounters at some point in their life. While liberal Indian and postcolonial scholarship tends to downplay the importance and centrality of caste in shaping modern Indian political discourse, belonging to a caste has practical implications in the everyday lives of a billion Indians. Most political parties, including Communist parties, field their candidates based on caste constituencies. Caste violence, especially against untouchable Dalit castes, is prevalent across India. Modernity and urbanism has done little to the erasure of casteism, though it has modified the manner in which caste operates, and caste has found its own ways of adapting to and entrenching itself within modern institutions.[1] It is a veritable social capital[2] which determines access to power circles, who gets included and who gets excluded. The brilliance of caste as a form of discrimination lies in its ability to be invisible, obvious, subtle, explicit, brutal, sophisticated, naive, insidious, religious, secular, primordial and modern, all at the same time. But the most crucial feature of caste politics is its particularism; intra-caste political solidarities and mobilizations are built on the premise that only the members of that caste can share particular experiences and hence, worthy of exclusive identification. This is true for castes at all levels of the hierarchy. To paraphrase Frantz Fanon, each identity is sealed in its peculiarity,[3] with no possibility of complete transcendence. This too was a point of great consternation for 'Periyar' EV Ramasamy, a radical anti-caste activist in South India.

I have been involved with caste based social justice movements, which have been inspired by the thoughts of Ramasamy, both as a participant and as an observer. What has piqued my academic interest is the construction of the Self and the Other in these movements. The main thrust of these movements is that Indian society is structured in such a way that the minority Brahmin castes are privileged at the expense of the majority non-Brahmin castes. Some of the actors advocate political secession of the Tamil Nadu state as a solution, while others argue for greater social reform within India and proportional representations for non-Brahmin castes in education and employment. But all political activists and intellectuals

[1] See Surinder Jodhka, *Caste,* New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012, pp. 161-169
[2] Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital", in John G. Richardson ed., *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, New York: Greenwood, 1986, pp. 241-258
[3] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks,* trans. Charles Lam Markmann, London: Pluto Press, 2008, p. 31

following Ramasamy's tradition are united in their consideration of the Brahmin as the enemy Other. This binary has been criticized by several others, but the most compelling critiques come from those intellectuals and activists who argue that the universalizing tendencies of this discourse silences the particular concerns of Dalit politics.

Identity politics as such is fraught with the contradiction between universality and particularity. Fanon, as a theorist who dealt with race, humanism, and decolonization, has produced a body of work that attempts to make sense of this contradiction, in an effort towards reconciliation. The core focus of my thesis is to build a critique of identity politics based on Fanonism, and bring it to a dialogue with the identity politics of Ramasamy. This thesis addresses critical methodological questions when dealing with a controversial and contested intellectual legacy as that of Fanon and attempting to use it for political critique in a different social climate. Examining among others, Quentin Skinner's thesis on the 'mythology of doctrines' and Umberto Eco's theory of the 'Model Reader', and critiquing the method deployed by Dominick LaCapra in his approach to intellectual history, the paper attempts to establish why the venture to find coherence within the corpus of the author is important. Arguing that the concern over the transition from particularity to universality informed Fanon's reading of identity politics throughout his work, I trace out the paradigms of Fanon's identity politics. I use this Fanonism to critique Ramasamy's political discourse, his construction of the non-Brahmin Self and the Brahmin Other, and his position on Dalit particularity. Finally, I use Ramasamy's context specific political insights to critique Fanon's abstract universalism and his insistence on anti-colonialism being an unconditional requirement for any emancipatory politics. Besides being an intervention in Fanon studies and the debate on caste politics in modern Tamil political history, the thesis also attempts to address a crucial question of identity politics, namely the challenge posed by particularities to a Universalist political project.

The First Protagonist

Frantz Fanon (1925-1961) is generally understood as a theorist of decolonization. His magnum opus *The Wretched of the Earth* (WOTE) and the preceding *Black Skin, White Masks* (BSWM) are considered excellent critiques of colonialism and often are prescribed as guidebooks by many radical identitarian movements. Fanon delves deep in his analysis of colonialism and despite frequent deployment of Marxian terms, he does not fall under the trap of conventional

Marxism and the class binaries it works with. Fanon gives more attention to the superstructure of colonialism, explaining how the process of colonialism creates a strong sense of the Self and the Other. Throughout his writings, he treats identity as a site of resistance and also provides certain essential frameworks for understanding identity and identity based resistance movements.

The research seeks to trace out certain primary problems to address to expand the scope of Fanon studies. Pointing out to the various interpretations of Fanon, Henry Louis Gates remarked that the thinker is "a Rorschach blot on legs."[4] Indeed, Fanon has been interpreted as an anti-colonialist, postcolonialist, pan-Africanist, humanist, a Black nationalist, a Marxist-Leninist. Often, these interpretations seek to place Fanon in a relationship with colonialism and/or postcolonialism. An influential interpretation in Fanon studies is that of philosopher Nigel Gibson. Criticizing the 'postcolonial sensibility' of reducing Fanon into "a relic from a previous age rather than a living thinker, revered and important but somewhat naive"[5], he takes postcolonialists like Homi Bhabha to task for presenting Fanon "as if Fanon's voice is 'relatively opaque' and can no longer really be heard or understood today."[6] Gibson contends that many of Fanon's analyses in the chapters of the *WOTE* are useful for understanding developments in the postcolony like the rural-urban divide, rise of the lumpenproletariat, emergence of the neo-colonial bourgeoisie. But even his studies of Fanon are limited to cases that could be broadly categorized under postcolonial studies and Black identity politics, for instance, his utilization of Fanon to analyse post-apartheid South Africa.[7]

If Fanon is to be relevant for the study of identity politics *beyond* colonialism and postcolonialism, and *beyond* a critique of Black identity politics, what interpretation of this 'Rorschach blot on legs' would be most apt? Sartre argues in *The Problem of Method* that "The idea is the man himself externalizing himself in the materiality of language" and that it must be studied in all its developments, to discover its intentionality in order to grasp its deviations and to pass at last to its objective realization.[8] While Sartre's book on method provides some useful

---

[4] Henry Louis Gates Jr, "Critical Fanonism", *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (Spring, 1991), p 457-470. The analogy is interesting, considering the nature of the Rorschach blot.

[5] Nigel C. Gibson, "Relative Opacity: A New Translation of Fanon's Wretched of the Earth-Mission Betrayed or fulfilled?", *Social Identities*, Vol. 13, No. 1, January 2007, p73

[6] Ibid, p79

[7] Nigel C. Gibson, *Fanonian Practices in South Africa: From Steve Biko to Abahlali baseMjondolo*, Scotsville: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011

[8] Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Problem of Method,* London: Metheun, 1963, p113

insights to the task at hand, that of an analysis of Fanon's articulation of his ideas, I would also like to use the theoretical framework of the Cambridge School in the study of political thought, specifically that elucidated by Quentin Skinner. Since the vital part of the research is concerned with what Fanon meant by what he says in his works, it would be essential, as Skinner argues, to decipher the writer's intentions in order to decipher the meaning in the text – "to know what a writer meant by a particular work is to know what his primary intentions were in writing it."[9] Along with Skinner's contention that the writer's intentions are "inside" his works, his further argument that to understand what the writer may have been doing in using some particular concept "we need to first of all grasp the nature and range of things that could recognizably have been done by using that particular concept, in the treatment of that particular theme, at that particular time"[10] is of relevance to this research that seeks to retrieve the meaning(s) behind concepts and themes addressed by Fanon *at that particular time* and trace its relevance for a different period, different context.

Taking Umberto Eco's appeal for creative interpretation while maintaining fidelity to the essence of an author's text as an interpretative strategy and cautiously avoiding Quentin Skinner's 'mythology of doctrines' (both of which are discussed in Chapter 1), this research attempts to find an essence in Fanon's writings and a coherence of themes in his corpus. In Eco's words, "To decide how a text works means to decide which one of its various aspects is or can become relevant or pertinent for a coherent interpretation of it, and which ones remain marginal and unable to support a coherent reading."[11]

While Fanon has generally been confined to Black politics and critiques of colonialism, I seek to extend Fanonism to a study of identity politics in any society marked by social hierarchies. Fanon did after all ask "Is there in truth any difference between one racism and another? Do not all of them show the same collapse, the same bankruptcy of man?"[12] My Fanon is someone who is grappling with the particularities of anti-colonial identity politics and yet, attempts to arrive at transcendence towards a universal humanism. The Fanon I seek to present is a theorist of identity politics, who seeks to move from the particular to the universal through the process of 'reciprocal recognition'. Core to my argument is the hypothesis that Fanon's

---

[9] Quentin Skinner, "Motives, Intentions and the Interpretation of Texts" *New Literary History*, Vol. 3, No. 2, On Interpretation: I (Winter, 1972), p404

[10] ibid, p406

[11] Umberto Eco, "Reply" *Interpretation and Overinterpretation* ed. Stefan Collini, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, p146

[12] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks,* p86

humanism provides a framework for understanding identity politics and the necessity of drawing sharp binaries with identities *as* politics. An identity, in itself, can be a source of meaning, or attachment to an individual, which identifies them to a collective and differentiates them from others. William Connolly argues that "Identity requires difference in order to be, and it converts difference into otherness in order to assure its own self-certainty."[13] But for this identity to become political, as *identity politics,* it requires an Other, an 'enemy' in the Schmittian sense, with whom there is a possibility of confrontation. Fanon, as we shall see, is very Hegelian in his belief that post-confrontation, there is a possibility of recognition and reconciliation.

This thesis, however, does not delve extensively on the theme of violence in Fanonism. While Fanon has become a name that has been associated with violence, thanks largely to the interventions of influential liberal thinkers like Hannah Arendt and the manner in which he was appropriated by supporters of the Black Power movement in the USA, Fanon himself had a guarded position as regards the potential of violence. It must be noted that his consideration of the emancipatory possibilities of violence occupies only one chapter in his entire works. On the other hand, the last chapter of the *WOTE* is explicitly concerned with the pernicious psychological effects that random retaliatory violence can have on those participating in it. Fanon views violence in an instrumental manner, his approach to violence is more descriptive than prescriptive. This nuance is sadly missed by both Fanon's liberal critics and his overenthusiastic supporters. Likewise, philosophers like Sartre and Walter Benjamin have produced more intensive works on violence; it does indicate some prejudice that their names do not provoke a spontaneous association with violence while that of Fanon's does. My reading looks at Fanon as considering violence a necessary step in the dialectic of decolonization, which is instrumental in the native asserting his identity and self-worth. But Fanon's theoretical concern remained with arriving at a genuine universalism in which both the ex-colonized and the ex-colonizer would be transformed, and reconciled. This is explored further in Chapter 3.

All secondary literature on Fanon shows his strained relationship with the Negritude movement. In Chapter 2, I explore Fanon's perspective on Negritude, arguing that he had no faith in its prospects. Differing from several scholars who tend to pit Fanon against Sartre on the question of Negritude, I argue that Fanon was very much Sartrean in his rejection of the

[13] William Connolly, *Identity|Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox (Expanded edition),* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002, p64

particularist identity politics of Negritude and its essentialization of the Negro identity. This leads us to Fanon's concern, the movement from particularity to universality. I discuss this in Chapter 3, where after an initial consideration of general ideas in the study of identity politics, I engage with the Hegelian (to put it more accurately, Kojevean) influence on Fanon. I show how Fanon, skeptical of cultural, racial or national particularism, believed that through reciprocal recognition, shared solidarity and struggle against oppression and by replacing the false universality of the oppressor with a genuine universality of the oppressed, a new humanism would be born. This Fanon provides a framework for understanding Ramasamy's caste politics in Tamil Nadu.

The Second Protagonist

I shall explore whether Dravidian identity politics in the state of Tamil Nadu in India can be understood through the reading of Fanon arrived at before. As an ideology, Dravidianism, or the belief that the people of South India in general and Tamil Nadu in particular belong to a Dravidian civilization that has been suppressed by brahminical hegemony has dominated intellectual and political circles in the state ever since the 1920's – ever since 1967, the parties that have been in power in the state are offsprings of the movement and lay claim to its intellectual and political legacy. The Dravidian Self-Respect Movement which began in the colonial period and whose politics continue to have great resonance in the region even now drew extensively from the ideas of 'Periyar' EV Ramasamy, a leading ideologue of Dravidianism.

'Periyar' EV Ramasamy (1879-1973), growing up under the British colonial power in South India, differs from Fanon in that he viewed the spaces opened up by colonialism as enabling spaces for identity based assertion for his target group, the non-Brahmin castes. He used identity, the non-Brahmin identity, to critique the dominant discourses of mainstream Indian nationalism and brahminical Hinduism. While for Fanon, owing to the particularity of his situation, "race becomes the lens through which social relations and theories of time are judged,"[14] for EV Ramasamy it was caste.[15] While both claimed to speak for the 'natives', a

[14] Nigel C. Gibson, *Fanon: The Postcolonial Imagination,* Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2003, p16

[15] Attempts were made to categorize casteism as racism in Durban conference 2001. The Indian government's relentless campaign against the proposal made it a failure. This spawned intense debates in the academic circles. Incidentally, EV Ramasamy referred to Brahmins as 'Aryans' and 'non-Brahmins' as 'Dravidians' in loose racial terms. But his 'Dravidian' was an open-ended category that could

sharp contrast between the two thinkers, it would appear, is in their identification of the 'Other'. While for Fanon it was the colonizer who degraded the native and himself in that process, for EV Ramasamy it was the Brahmin who, he claimed, did the same to the non-Brahmin while maintaining a 'pure' status for himself. In Chapter 4, I introduce Ramasamy, caste in Tamil Nadu, the social and political context in which Ramasamy operated, and the core thrust of his discourse. After a discussion of caste and its social structure in Tamil Nadu, I introduce the ideological precursors to Ramasamy. Explaining how the intellectual climate was fertile for the emergence of Ramasamy's discourse, I provide the contours of Ramasamy's identity politics. Caste, as an identity, was central to Ramasamy and his political efforts were directed towards the destruction of the caste system. To Ramasamy, the Brahmin was the Other who was the core beneficiary of this system and thus, he directed his polemic against the Brahmin as a symbol that contained religious, social and political power. Critics of Ramasamy have alleged that in his focus on the Brahmin as an enemy and in his invocation of the non-Brahmin identity, he was insensitive to the interests of the Dalit castes. I consider the accusations against Ramasamy's non-Brahmin politics, which I explore in detail through a Fanonist lens in the succeeding chapter.

The popular assertion of a stigmatized identity in EV Ramasamy and his Dravidian movement can be compared, at a general level, to the Negritude movement. This is covered in Chapter 5, where I show how much like the Negritude thinkers, Ramasamy used an inferiorized identity of "Shudra" (the lowest caste category in the Hindu system) to incriminate the valorized Brahmin Other identity. However, unlike the Negritude thinkers, Ramasamy did not celebrate a pristine past of the identity of the Self. Instead, he was willing to look at the Self in a nuanced manner, recognizing that non-Brahmin identity itself was fractured. While Ramasamy was flexible with regards to the non-Brahmin identity, he nevertheless was insistent on two particularities – one, the Brahmin identity, which was to be an absolute enemy Other, incapable of reform, and to be subject to ridicule; two, the Dalit identity, which was unique owing to its experience of untouchability, which needed to be respected. Using Fanon's assessment of identity politics, I evaluate these articulations of Ramasamy.

---

accommodate almost anyone in the subcontinent who was considered ritually lower in the Brahminical conceptualization of society.

Yet, Fanon's theoretical underpinnings also carry their own pitfalls. According to Fanon, while anti-colonial nationalism might suffer from drawbacks, the anti-colonial nation as such was a legitimate entity. Ramasamy on the other hand problematized the idea of a nation that was sought to be created by the discourse of anti-colonial nationalism. Likewise, Fanon's perspective of women only conceived them as sexualized objects in a racial or an anti-colonial conflict. Ramasamy in his discourse encouraged the creation of autonomous social and political spaces for women, never failing to underscore that the narratives of oppressed castes themselves might privilege the men over women. While Fanon never assumes that the native's anti-colonial discourse might itself be a process of privileging certain identities over others, Ramasamy was keen on challenging the internal and native forms of oppression as he considered them far more insidious and persistent than colonialism. I discuss these and other related issues in Chapter 6.

In my conclusion, I probe whether there is a possibility of reconciling what appears to be two divergent viewpoints on identity. Syncretizing the two, I argue that a democratic politics of identity will have to involve solidarity and struggle based on an inclusive identification, that would compel both the Self and the Other to radically evaluate fixedness of their identities. The real success of such a political discourse would be in its inherent potential to enable, without superficially suturing differences, discrete social groups to transcend their particularities to something larger, universal.

A Comment on Sources

Since the thesis involves my interpretation of Fanon and the utilization of that interpretation to interpret Ramasamy's discourse, I have relied mostly on primary sources of the two thinkers, though secondary sources figure where necessary. The second chapter generously uses Negritude poetry and excerpts from essays so as to give the reader a comprehensive account of the problem that intrigued Fanon. As for Fanon himself, I have made reference to his four published works. His doctoral thesis (unpublished), which deals with clinical psychology, has nothing to contribute to the aims of this research. Likewise, the correspondence with his family too shed no light to assist the interpretative strategy that I have adopted (discussed in Chapter 1).

In the course of a long and eventful political career, Ramasamy produced a voluminous amount of writings which were mostly published in three papers (*Kudiarasu, Puratchi* and *Viduthalai),* besides a journal (*Paguthariv*u) and an English weekly (*Revolt*) which were published for a brief period. His speeches were also published in the aforementioned papers and journals. Selected articles from *Revolt* have been published as a book recently. Likewise, subject-wise selections of his articles and speeches have also been published in the volumes of *Periyar Kalanjiyam* and *Thoughts of Periyar EVR (Speeches and Writings of Periyar EV Ramsamy).* The primary sources that I refer cover the period of his active political life, from 1925 till 1973.

A Comment on the Comparison

Fanon's published works cover roughly a decade, from his *BSWM* (1952) to *WOTE* (1961). His last work, considered to be a manifesto for Third World liberation, was compiled in a hurry, dying as he was from leukaemia. Throughout his political life, Fanon was an outsider. A Black Martinician in France, a French citizen in Africa, and one from a Christian background among Arab Muslims. Though he was fully committed to the Algerian anti-colonial struggle, he was never fully Algerian, and his influence on the course of the Algerian struggle was thin, save for his functioning as a useful intellectual face at solidarity conferences. His grasp of pre-colonial Algerian history was hazy at best. Fanon's writings clearly show that his understanding of Islam as a socio-political factor in Algeria was superficial and he viewed it only in instrumental terms, vis a vis French colonialism. Anti-Black racism among Arabs, Arab role in slavery, anti-Semitism in the Arab colonies, and Islamic patriarchy were subjects he scooted over. While he was well versed in existential philosophy and deserves to be categorized as an important existential thinker, he was prone to making gross generalizations and predictions about the colony, many of which may now seem naïve and romantic. He remains a marginal figure in the intellectual imagination of both France and Algeria. However, he has had a rebirth in Anglo-Saxon world, mostly in the departments of postcolonialism and race studies, where he is mostly read as a 'Black' thinker, an identitarian, a postcolonialist, or as an advocate/analyst of anti-colonial violence.

On the other hand, Ramasamy's works cover almost five decades. Ramasamy was an insider to Tamil Nadu's culture, society and politics. Though never possessing a formal

education, Ramasamy was well versed in Tamil Nadu's history, its literature, the Hindu religious texts, and his discourse addressed the intricacies of the caste system, its intersection with colonialism, class and native patriarchy. An iconoclast, he believed in the power of reason and rational deconstruction of religious myths and traditional social mores. The spearhead of a militant social reform movement that would significantly transform the political discourse of Tamil Nadu's politics, Ramasamy is a household name among Tamils, associated with atheism, anti-Brahminism and social justice. He is almost never referred to by name, but only by his epithet, 'Periyar' – the Great One. No political party can expect to gain a foothold in Tamil Nadu without acknowledging their debt to the Periyar.

Fanon's independent Algeria was wracked by civil war between the government and Islamists killing more people than French colonialism, anguishing over which, his wife Josie Fanon committed suicide in 1989. Tamil Nadu is one of the most stable and economically successful states in India, and Ramasamy's political successors, even if they have diluted many of his radical ideals, have delivered good governance with their politics of competitive populism.[16]

In a sense, this research does some mild injustice to both individuals. I use the prism of Fanon, a highly educated person who also had the privilege of familiarity with the theories of intellectual giants like Sartre, Hegel and Freud to analyse the political discourse of an uneducated autodidact and problematize it. Likewise, using Ramasamy's insights which were derived from his long political career and extensive hands-on knowledge of the contradictions within the native society, I critique the thoughts of a man who might have revised his theories had he but been alive to witness the fratricidal civil war in postcolonial Algeria. Nevertheless, as mentioned before, this research is an attempt to expand the scope of Fanon studies. Never has Fanon been brought to engage with a social dynamic as complex as caste. I hold that Fanonism's critique of identity politics, its assessment of particularism and universalism, has a potential to serve as theoretical tool to analyse the caste identity politics of Ramasamy. Likewise, this research is also an attempt to point out and fill the gaps in the Fanonian critique through Ramasamy's criticism of nationalism, religion and native forms of oppression.

---

[16] See for instance A. Kalaiyarasan, "A Comparison of Developmental Outcomes in Gujarat and Tamil Nadu", *Economic and Political Weekly,* April 12, 2014, vol. xlix no. 15, pp. 55-63. For a more detailed account of how the populist schemes of the Dravidian parties helped in efficient delivery mechanisms of government services and also to increase participation of marginalized communities in decision making processes see Vivek Srinivasan, *Delivering Public Services Effectively: Tamil Nadu and Beyond,* New Delhi: OUP, 2014.

In what is a rather tedious novel, American writer John Wideman makes one interesting point – "To leave his island Fanon must risk the sea."[17] This research attempts to take Fanon from the island of race and postcolonial politics, across the Arabian Sea, and introduce him to the world of caste and the ideas of a radical social reformer who just might be the person with whom Fanonism needs a critical dialogue.

[17] John Edgar Wideman, *Fanon,* New York: Mariner Books, 2010, p. 146

How to interpret a 'Rorschach blot on legs'

"The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose."

-William Shakespeare, The Merchant of Venice

Introduction

Depending on whether one is a liberation theologist in Brazil, a White Republican in Southern America, or a Pentecost evangelist preacher in India, the Scripture of the Bible can mean entirely different things. For a person who is called an apostle of violence and a messiah for colonized peoples,[18] a prophet of liberation,[19] a 'Marx of the Third World',[20] whose *magnum opus* was considered a Bible by movements world over,[21] and who was notoriously labelled a "Rorschach blot on legs"[22] it is but inevitable that Frantz Fanon's works would be subject to numerous interpretations and that his 'scriptures' will be cited by several for several purposes. But even if we were to agree that the bard was correct in noting that a 'Scripture' can be interpreted to suit one's purpose, how do we conclude that the interpreter is the 'devil' – that is, that the interpretation was a misinterpretation? Or how do we arrive at a 'good' interpretation?

At the Marxism 2009 conference in London, Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Zizek, citing Adorno, says that when dealing with a great philosopher, the question to be raised is not "what

[18] Robyn Dane, "When Mirror Turns Lamp: Frantz Fanon as Cultural Visionary", *Africa Today*, Vol. 41, No. 2, Arts and Politics in Africa (2nd Qtr., 1994), p70

[19] Cameron Duodu, "Frantz Fanon: Prophet of African liberation", available from http://pambazuka.org/en/category/features/78486, 2011, [Last accessed on 20-05-2013]. Also see Peter Geismar's work in similar sentiment, *Fanon: The Revolutionary as Prophet; a Biography*, New York: Dial Press, 1971

[20] Dennis Forsythe, "Frantz Fanon - The Marx of the Third World", *Phylon* (1960-), Vol. 34, No. 2 (2nd Qtr., 1973), pp. 160-170

[21] Immanuel Wallerstein, "Reading Fanon in the 21st Century", *New Left Review,* 57, (May – June 2009), p118

[22] Henry Louis Gates Jr., "Critical Fanonism", *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (Spring, 1991), p 457-470.

can this philosopher tell us", but rather "what is our situation in his eyes."[23] When Fanon rather explicitly proclaimed in *BSWM* that "I do not come with timeless truths" and that "I belong irreducibly to my time", how can we legitimately and truthfully see our situation in his eyes? Conceding to Fanon, I argue that the *original absolute truth* in Fanon's texts is irrevocably lost. Everything on Fanon *post-mortem* has only been interpretations for particular political/ social/ academic projects and my research is an addition to that. But I also argue that it is possible to have *fidelity* to the Scripture, the original texts of Fanon through an attempt to arrive at *truthful* reading*s* by relying on the concepts and formulae used by Fanon in his texts and deciphering the essence of his works, and by a scrupulous avoiding of inserting ideas into his mouth that he had never wrote about. The last is a sin that quite some readers of Fanon are guilty of.

I set out to erect three methodological paradigms within which I shall conduct my research.

1. The Scripture is the ultimate authority and there is nothing outside it.
2. There is no *one* truthful reading of the Scripture, but *readings* which attempt to be honest to its essence.
3. Anyone can interpret the Scripture, but not all interpretations are valid and a wanton misinterpretation is to be avoided.

The Scripture is the ultimate authority and there is nothing outside it

For a Tamil male living in South India attempting to use Fanonism to grapple with Dravidian politics that has dominated his region of residence for well over half a century, of what consequence is a letter written by Fanon to his mother in 40s or the 'historical context' that he was on his deathbed while writing the *WOTE*? Indeed, these facts could and should be the objects of interest were one writing a biography of Fanon. But for a researcher interested in contributing to what Lewis Gordon et al. term the fifth stage of Fanon studies, or the work *with* and *through* Fanonism "for the development of original work across the entire sphere of human

[23] Slavoj Zizek, 'What does it mean to be a revolutionary today?' at Marxism 2009, London, available from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_GD69Cc20rw [Last accessed on 25-05-2013]

studies"[24] in order to explore the ways in which he is a useful thinker for our times and for different cultural and political contexts, what Fanon did for a living, who he interacted with, what was his physical or mental condition at the time of writing his texts, what were his *motives* etc. are irrelevant.

I take from Skinner that the motives of an author in writing stand "outside" his works and their meaning is not so relevant in arriving at the meaning of his works and that a writer's intentions are "inside" his works and therefore, no special effort need be taken in their recovery.[25] From this, it can be legitimately argued that knowledge of a writer's intentions in writing is equivalent to knowledge of what the writer means by what he says in his work.

Operating from a pro-Derridean framework, American intellectual historian Dominick LaCapra in his "Rethinking Intellectual History and Reading Texts" criticizes specifically the Skinnerian view for tending to "assume a proprietary relation between the author and the text as well as a unitary meaning for an utterance."[26] Accusing this view for permitting "an overly simple idea of divisions or opposing tendencies in a text and of the relationships between texts and analytic classifications of them", he contends that "It is significant that an intention is often formulated retrospectively when the utterance or text has been subjected to interpretation with which the author does not agree."[27] I can understand the validity of this argument with respect to certain cases, say for example, Edward Said who in his essay "Orientalism Reconsidered" responded to interpretations of his work *Orientalism.* But how does this work in the case of a Fanon, the overwhelming majority of interpretations of whose works have been *post mortem,* and considering that the only major interpretation of his work that he encountered in his time and approved of was Sartre's preface to *WOTE*? In the event of an author leaving little or no clues on how he *should* or *should not* be interpreted, the question, or even the threat, of how he *can* be interpreted looms large. In such a scenario, while not calling for a singular dominant interpretation when attempting to construct an *ism* out of the corpus of the author's works, an appeal can be made for a *fidelity* to the author by deciphering an

[24] Lewis R. Gordon et al, "Introduction: Five Stages of Fanon Studies" in Gordon, Lewis R. et al eds. *Fanon: A Critical Reader,* Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996, p6
[25] Quentin Skinner, "Motives, Intentions and the Interpretation of Texts" *New Literary History*, Vol. 3, No. 2, On Interpretation: I (Winter, 1972), p402
[26] Dominick LaCapra, "Rethinking Intellectual History and Reading Texts", History and Theory, Vol. 19, No. 3 (Oct., 1980), p254
[27] ibid, p255

essence, a standard that he adopts in his works through the concepts he intentionally[28] uses in his texts and by not seeing woods or trees where the author is describing an ocean.

Further criticizing Skinner, LaCapra argues that that to believe that authorial intentions fully control the meaning or functioning of texts "is to sacrifice more dialogical approaches and to obscure the role of argument in matters of interpretation, including the interpretation of intentions themselves."[29] I can see the partial credibility of this argument considering the quite some interpretations of the intentions of Fanon that see approval where there is sarcasm, condemnation where there critical appraisal and so on. But I fail to see how this can be a credible criticism of the Skinnerian position. In a reply to his critics, including Dominick LaCapra, Skinner states "any text of any complexity will always contain far more meaning – what Ricoeur has called surplus meaning – than even the most vigilant and imaginative author could possibly have intended to put into it. So I am far from supposing that the meanings of texts are to be identified with the intentions of their authors; what must be identified with such intentions is only what their authors meant by them."[30]

To LaCapra, several other factors are also required to be taken into consideration when dealing with an author's text, namely the relation between the author's life and the text, the relation of society to the text, the relation of culture to texts, the relation of the text to the corpus of a writer, and the relation between modes of discourse and the text.[31] Likewise, Italian semiotician Umberto Eco, in his debate on 'Interpretations and Overinterpretations' with Richard Rorty, Jonathan Culler and Christine Brooke-Rose, draws a distinction between using a text and interpreting a text, claiming that those engaging in the latter respect the cultural and linguistic background of the author.[32]

An argument that *WOTE* was written in such and such a manner owing to the 'historical fact' of his physical condition is as useful to a Fanonian analysis of social phenomena as is the equally possible claim that *BSWM* was written so because, let us say, of the 'historical fact' that

---

[28] I can see a counter-argument emerging. 'What about unintentional or unconscious usage of concepts?' If the author has not clarified in later works about the same, even the 'unintentional' in the text will have to be dealt as intentional in all seriousness. Also, for a parody on the relevance of the unconscious/unintentional to the interpretation of texts, see Umberto Eco, "Between Author and Text" in ed. Stefan Collini *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, p85-86

[29] LaCapra, p256

[30] Quentin Skinner, "A reply to my critics", in ed. James Tully, *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and his Critics,* Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988, p272

[31] LaCapra, p256-269

[32] Umberto Eco, "Between Author and Text", 1992, p69

Fanon was in a relationship with a White French woman at the time of its composition. Every such extra-textual historical fact cited to support a particular line of argument/interpretation of Fanon can and will be complemented, contradicted, contradistinguished by another set of known, not so well known, or recently unearthed historical facts around Fanon's life. To build an argument for a political theory or a Fanonian mode of analysis that can be universally applicable on the basis of these facts, as with cultural or linguistic background of the author, is mostly self-defeating. At the risk of sounding audacious, I would even say that even Fanon's skin colour is irrelevant to a universal Fanonian analysis of social phenomena, if it were not for his deconstruction of the same *within his texts* and the manner in which it is done. But more on that in later chapters.

Now, there is also the suggestion that Fanon must be studied along with his contemporaries in order to grasp the full weight of his thought. Fanon indeed has been studied along with Richard Wright, W.E.B du Bois, Aime Cesaire, Amilcar Cabral, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Memmi etc and this greatly enriches the debate on the intellectual history of Fanonism.[33] However, for Fanonism *by itself* to be a model for social and political analysis, a study of his contemporaries is rather irrelevant *unless* they find mention in his texts.

On this note, I refer to Sartre who, commenting about Gustave Flaubert, writes that it is not the simple abstract decision to write that gives Flaubert a peculiar quality but "the decision to write in a certain manner in order to manifest himself in the world in a particular way; in a word, it is the particular signification – within the framework of the contemporary ideology – which he gives to literature as the negation of his original condition and as the objective solution to his contradictions."[34] In a not so dissimilar vein, Quentin Skinner argues that to understand what a writer may have been doing in using some particular concept, "we need first of all to grasp the nature and range of things that could recognizably have been done by using that particular concept, in the treatment of that particular theme, at that particular time."[35]

I am in agreement insofar that Fanon did write his texts in order to manifest himself, his thoughts, in a particular way, as a totalizing expression of his condition and as a solution to the contradictions that he faced as a *being-in-the-world* – the rigorous study of which is imperative

---

[33] Africana philosopher and Fanon scholar Reiland Rabaka for instance in his 2010 book *Forms of Fanonism* squarely places Cabral within the Fanonist tradition, though it is worthy of speculation what Cabral himself would have thought of such a move.

[34] Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Problem of Method,* translated with an introduction by Hazel E. Barnes, London: Metheun, 1963, p146

[35] Quentin Skinner, "Motives, Intentions and the Interpretation of Texts", p406

to a Fanonian analysis of our worlds. But I depart from Sartre – and likewise with Skinner - in their belief that it is necessary to take into consideration "the framework of the contemporary ideology" of Fanon's "particular time". Take a different case. An intellectual history of Marxism may require a study of the study of intellectual environment of Marx's period, of what Marx's contemporaries were writing about in that context. But for a Marxist study of a phenomenon, or for laying the foundations for a Marxist study of phenomena, it is quite irrelevant to read what a Proudhon or a Bakunin were writing in Marx's time. What could be relevant for a contemporary Marxist analysis, or for an attempt to broaden Marxism as field of study, though is Marx's mention of Proudhon or Bakunin *in* his texts, the manner in which he engages with them, and the final intellectual product. Contradicting Sartre and Skinner, I assert that it is unnecessary to study the contemporary ideology of a thinker or the treatment of a particular concept by that thinker in a particular time in order to grasp the usefulness of the thinker for our contemporary times.[36]

As a comment on a Fanonist method, Rabaka differentiates 'revolutionary Fanonism' from 'critical Fanonism' – an explicit reference to Henry Louis Gates Jr. and his supporters - in that the former is based on a return to Fanon's original texts (for the purposes of revolutionary decolonization and revolutionary re-Africanization) while the latter is based on the interpretations of others' interpretation of Fanon. He accuses the critical Fanonists, labelling them "hermeneutic Fanonists" of "the most turgid type of (inter)textualism" and for distracting their readers from the "radical political" and "revolutionary aspects" of Fanon's original texts.[37] I am in general agreement with Rabaka, though my purpose is neither revolutionary decolonization nor revolutionary re-Africanization, and while other dominant interpretations of Fanon and Fanonism will be considered when required, the thrust of the research would be draw a framework for understanding identity politics from the "radical political" within Fanon's texts.

---

[36] To be fair to Sartre, his humongous work on Flaubert *The Family Idiot* (an unfinished business, like many of his projects) was but an attempt at a complete intellectual biography of the famed 19th Century French novelist. Sartre was not attempting to lay the foundations for a Flaubertism.

[37] Reiland Rabaka, *Forms of Fanonism: Frantz Fanon's Critical Theory and the Dialectics of Decolonization,* Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2010*,* p193

There is no *one* truthful reading of the Scripture, but truthful *readings* which attempt to be honest to its essence

I revert to LaCapra's plea for the consideration of the relation of the text to the corpus of a writer. He says that usually a corpus is seen in one of the three ways "continuity among texts ("linear development"); discontinuity among texts (change or even "epistemological break" between stages or periods); and dialectical synthesis (the later stage raises the earlier one to a higher level of insight). The corpus is thus unified in one way or another (developmental unity, two discrete unities, higher unity)."[38] He further questions whether these categories are too simple for the interpretation of a corpus of complex texts. Fanon's corpus of four texts began with the publication of *BSWM* in 1952 and concluded with *WOTE* in 1961. Between these, Fanon shows instances of continuity in some themes, discontinuity in some others, and a dialectical synthesis in others. The interpretations of these, again, depend on the project of the interpreter. For instance, Jock McCulloh finds a dialectical synthesis as regards Sartrean influence, Homi Bhabha observes a discontinuity between the psychoanalyst Fanon in *BSWM* and the existential humanist Fanon in *WOTE*, while Reiland Rabaka finds continuity in Fanon's attitude towards Cesaire's negritude. If the objective is to arrive at Fanonism as a method of social and political critique, it would be necessary to trace a general thematic coherence in his corpus, while remaining open to possibility of there being continuity, discontinuity or dialectical synthesis – or even all of them.

A criticism of this approach has been made by Skinner. In an attack on the "mythology of doctrines" in the study of history of ideas, Skinner says that the attempt to arrive at the fundamental thought or a coherent view of an author's system gives the thoughts of the author "an air generally of a closed system, which they may have never aspired to attain."[39] But the study and the application of an *ism* for study is necessarily systematized. While it is necessary to avoid rigidity (a fundamental thought *alone* matters in author's corpus), it is equally important is to avoid excessive fluidity (the author's corpus has no fundamental thought in it). The former, of course, is totalitarianism. The latter, for the lack of a better word, is nihilism. The quest, then, is for coherence in an author's corpus, through the study of the concepts he uses in his texts, the themes he addresses, and the pattern of his concerns. In my defence, I cite Umberto

[38] LaCapra, p268
[39] Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p68

Eco who asserts the need to find a coherence in the texts of an author to avoid overinterpretation in that "any interpretation given of a certain portion of a text can be accepted if it is confirmed by, and must be rejected if it is challenged by, another portion of the same text. In this sense the internal textual coherence controls the otherwise uncontrollable drives of the reader."[40] Likewise, I can assuage Skinner that I have not taken it on myself to give Fanon a coherence that he lacks. There are adequate arguments in his corpus to push for the same.

The attempt to trace coherence, a fundamental thought, or an essence in an author's corpus, will have to meet yet another important counter-argument. Can there be *essences* or *fundamental thoughts* in a writer's corpus? I can see scholars reading through Fanon's texts a fundamental essence of humanism, anti-humanism, Marxism, anti-racism, Black racism, anti-colonialism, violence, and so on. I can also see scholars reading other *essences* through the subtext in Fanon's texts; let us say, for instance, a Feminist reading of the subtext of Fanon's work could argue, not without some legitimacy, that there is an essential male-centric narrative that dominates Fanon's texts. I have to disagree with the idea that there could be multiple essences or fundamental thoughts in Fanon's corpus, especially since the author himself has given no indication that he has made an 'epistemological break' between one work and another. Likewise, other readings that see in Fanon Marxism, anti-colonialism, machismo, violence, Black racism etc.- some with legitimacy, some without – would be dishonest readings if they fail to see that these ideas are aspects subservient to a dominant theme in Fanon's corpus or if they substitute these aspects for the dominant theme in Fanon's corpus.

This brings us to the third paradigm**.**

Anyone can interpret the Scripture, but not all interpretations are valid and a wanton misinterpretation is to be avoided

In an evocative essay, French philosopher Alain Badiou writes, "Anyone can be a philosopher, or the interlocutor of a philosopher. But it is not true that any opinion is worth as much as any

[40] Umberto Eco, "Overinterpreting texts", *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, p65. However, American pragmatist philosopher Richard Rorty, differing with Eco on this subject claims, "But opposition to the idea that texts are really about something in particular is also opposition to the idea that one particular interpretation might, presumably because of its respect for 'the internal coherence of the text', hit upon what that something is." See "The Pragmatist's Project" in *Interpretation and Overinterpretation,* p103.

other opinion."[41] Fanon, the Rorschach blot, invites not only a variety of interlocutors but a bizarre assortment of opinions that *use* him. It can be said Fanon attracts interpretations and misinterpretations. It is easy to imagine why and how the furious passages in the chapter "On Violence" in *WOTE* can be used by insurgents world over, the arguments in "Algeria Unveiled" used by the Taliban to justify its cultural policy towards women, or his invectives against primitivism used by the national bourgeoisie in India to validate their repression of indigenous tribes in central India.

If God the author is dead, it is not that everything is permissible, rather everything is possible *but also,* as Beauvoir would have said it, nothing is expiable.[42] The interpreter must take full responsibility for his interpretations and misinterpretations, uses and abuses. Considering the volatile nature of the God and his Scriptures that the research is concerned with, it is possible to misinterpret or even miserably interpret – but it is not permissible. My effort is to avoid misinterpretation and misuse as much as possible. This includes scrupulously avoiding that 'mythology of doctrine' attacked by Skinner, that of "converting some scattered or incidental remarks by a classic theorist into their 'doctrine' on one of the expected themes" and also taking into critical consideration Skinner's warning of the possibility of crediting the author with a meaning that he did not intend to convey or finding a preferred doctrine in the author's texts.[43] Sadly, this is a sin quite some followers, users and interpreters of Fanon are guilty of. Now, I disagree with LaCapra that a 'good' reading of an author is possible. I tend to side with Eco that it is the 'bad' reading that is to be avoided and what remains will be the attempt at the best possible reading of the author. Needless to say, this is impossible without tracing coherence in Fanon's thoughts.

In his debate with Eco, Rorty, who is against finding coherence or a fundamental essence in an author texts, is also opposed to the differentiation between use and interpretation of a text. To him, all interpretations are use by the reader. In that spirit, he makes an impassioned appeal for an 'unmethodical criticism'. I am obliged to quote Rorty at large, both for the eloquent nature of his plea, and for my disagreements with it.

---

[41] Alain Badiou, *Philosophy for Militants,* Translated with a foreword by Bruno Bosteels, London: Verso, 2012, p27

[42] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity,* New York: Citadel Press, 1948, p16

[43] Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics,* p60-61

> Unmethodical criticism of the sort which one occasionally wants to call 'inspired' is the result of an encounter with an author, character, plot, stanza, line or archaic torso which has made a difference to the critic's conception of who she is, what she is good for, what she wants to do with herself: an encounter which has rearranged her priorities and purposes. Such criticism uses the author or text not as a specimen reiterating a type but as an occasion for changing a previously accepted taxonomy, or for putting a new twist on a previously told story. Its respect for the author or the text is not a matter of respect for an intention or for an internal structure. Indeed, 'respect' is the wrong word. 'Love' or 'hate' would be better. For a great love or a great loathing is the sort of thing that changes us by changing our purposes, changing the uses to which we shall put people and things and texts we encounter later.[44]

All this is nice. Let us forget for a moment, while reading this emotive and evocative call for the use of a text for self-seeking, the Nietzschean injunction that "there is the greatest suspicion against 'truth' when pleasurable sensations are invoked to answer the question 'What is true?'"[45] Encountering Fanon for the first time through *WOTE*, I had no idea of his skin colour. For a long time, I presumed that he was Algerian. I had some difficulty finding both Algeria and France on a map. The characters mentioned in his book, but for some prominent ones like Marx, Engels, Sartre and Freud, were alien to me. It wasn't a random stanza or line that made a difference to me or rearranged my priorities and purposes. Rather, it was the essence, the fundamental thought that lies in *WOTE*, and in other texts of Fanon – which will be explored in detail in the coming chapters – and its possible universal applicability that made a difference to me, that made me consider the ways in which Fanon could be useful thinker in analysing politics of a different personality, in a different time zone, in a different socio-political context.

I concur with Eco who, in his reply to Rorty and other critics, asserts that "To decide how a text works means to decide which one of its various aspects is or can become relevant or pertinent for a coherent interpretation of it, and which ones remain marginal and unable to support a coherent reading."[46] Fanon's dissection of the cultural politics of Tarzan and Mickey

---

[44] Rorty, "The Pragmatist's Progress", *Interpretation and Overinterpretation,* p107

[45] Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Anti-Christ" in eds. Aaron Ridley and Judith Norman, *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings,* translated by Judith Norman, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, p49

[46] Umberto Eco, "Reply", *Interpretation and Overinterpretation,* p146

Mouse are fascinating passages in *BSWM.* But they are not *the* aspect of *BSWM* that facilitate a coherent interpretation of it. A great love or a great hate indeed changes our purposes, but they also require a great understanding, or at least the attempt at a great understanding, even while accepting that a complete understanding may never be possible. I would, of course, be interested to know if there was someone who had a great love or loathing for Fanon thinking that he was an analyst of comic-strips.

In his *Assorted Opinions and Maxims,* Nietzsche said "The worst readers are those who behave like plundering troops: they take away a few things they can use, dirty and confound the remainder, and revile the whole."[47]

This research shall, to its best, try and avoid this crime.

[47] Friedrich Nietzsche, ed. and translated by R.J. Hollingdale, *A Nietzsche Reader,* London: Penguin, 2003, p15-16

A Survey of Literature on Fanon

"It has never been more difficult to read Fanon than it is today."

Philosopher Achille Mbembe expressed the above opinion in a lecture on 'Reading Fanon in the 21st Century'[48] at the Colgate University a few years back. Using Fanon to analyze contemporary South African politics and issues of social justice, Mbembe made a plea to read and apply Fanon to contexts, further arguing that "we need to extricate his work from the historical time-frame within which it has been locked in order to make it speak anew." Likewise, Mbembe has also applied Fanonian thought, 'thought with it and against it' in quite some of his works, most notably in his critical work *On the Postcolony*.[49]

Mbembe's lecture was inspired by Immanuel Wallerstein's essay with the same title. Criticising those who appropriated Fanon for postmodernist studies and for identity politics, Wallerstein proclaimed "Whatever Fanon was, he was not a postmodernist. He might rather be characterized as one part Marxist Freudian, one part Freudian Marxist, and most part totally committed to revolutionary liberation movements. If he belonged to his time, however, his work still has much to offer ours."[50] Given that Fanon usually elicits such quite extreme and vocal responses from his readers, interpreters and reviewers, the task of arriving at an appropriate survey of literature for the research at hand seems tougher than the research itself.

This literature review intends to cover existing works on Frantz Fanon in order to get an understanding of the current dominant trends in the study of Fanon's humanism pertaining to Fanon's conceptualization of identity politics. The research is focussed on Fanon's understanding and articulation of identity *as* politics and his perception of violence influencing the same. As sub-themes, the research also seeks to explore how this Fanonian understanding of identity politics fits in the framework of pluralist imaginations and also to use Fanon's conceptualization of identity politics to understand the Dravidian political discourse of 'Periyar'

---

[48] Achille Mbembe, "Reading Fanon in the 21st Century", Colgate University, 2010, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VYXlHRez9Ao [last accessed on 04-04-2013]

[49] In a reply to his critics, Achille Mbembe posits his "politics of life" as expounded in *On the Postcolony* against Fanon's "circulation of death", concerned specifically with the latter's theorization of violence. See "On the Postcolony: A Brief Response to Critics", *Qui Parle,* Vol. 15, No. 2, 2005, p17-20.

[50] Immanuel Wallerstein, "Reading Fanon in the 21st Century", *New Left Review,* 57, (May – June 2009), p119

EV Ramasamy, a prominent social reformer in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu who was active in both colonial and post-colonial periods.

Since a substantial part of the research is devoted to arriving at a way of reading Fanon's texts so as to arrive at him as a theorist who provides a framework to study identity politics in general, taking Fanonism beyond the analysis of colonialism, postcolonialism and Black politics alone, the literature review does not seek to include the primary works of Fanon but to give greater focus on how Fanon has been read, and on whether Fanon has been read in the manner in which the research seeks to study his works.

'Stages' in Fanon Studies

Fortunately, the task of arriving at a survey of literature on Fanon has been relatively eased by the intervention of Lewis R. Gordon, T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting and Renee T. White. The academics working on/with Fanonism identify five stages in Fanon studies.[51] The first three stages involve applications of Fanons works and reactions to it, biographical works on Fanon, and intensive research on Fanon's significance in political theory, in that order. The fourth stage "linked to the ascent of postmodern cultural and postcolonial studies in the academy"[52] includes, among others, the works of postcolonialists like Benita Parry, Edward Said and Homi Bhabha using Fanon.

It is the "final" fifth stage that is of chief concern to my research. A critical difference between this stage and the preceding ones is that while earlier Fanon was studied, here, he is used as a tool, a method, a framework to study a variety of themes and issues. This stage works with and through Fanonism "for the development of original work across the entire sphere of human studies. Its purpose is neither to glorify nor denigrate Fanon but instead to explore ways in which he is a useful thinker."[53] It can be said that this stage was formally inaugurated in the academia with the publication of *Fanon: A Critical Reader* in 1996 edited by Gordon, Sharpley-Whiting and White – though the academics credit the origins of this stage to the publication of

[51]Lewis R. Gordon et al, "Introduction: Five Stages of Fanon Studies" in Gordon, Lewis R. et al eds. *Fanon: A Critical Reader,* Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996, p5-6
[52] Ibid, p6
[53] Lewis R. Gordon et al., 1996, p6-7

Hussein Bulhan's *Fanon and the Psychology of Oppression* in 1986.[54] After this 'break', Fanon has been used as a point of departure by many scholars to probe into several psychological, social and political themes.

First Stage

However, a minor criticism to this 'stages' approach can be made. Gordon et al. classify the 'stages' in Fanon studies in a linear, almost teleological manner. But we can see that these stages often overlap and extend beyond their supposed time frames. For instance, for the first stage, i.e. the 'practical' applications of and reactions to Fanon's thought, Gordon et al. list Castro, Che Guevara, Paulo Freire, Hannah Arendt etc. To this list, from around that same time period, we can safely add Amilcar Cabral, Steve Biko, Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael, theorists of the Iranian revolution and so. But the applications of Fanon's thoughts still continue as can be observed by the energetic citation of Fanon by activists involved in national liberation struggles like that of the Kashmiris, Palestinians or the Eelam Tamils, those from the First Nations in Canada, the indigenous communities of Latin America, Maoist radicals in India, or even, rather poignantly, Black activists critiquing the dominant culture industry in the West.[55] Though I would personally prefer the term 'approaches' to 'stages', as regards Fanon studies, I will go with the latter term, largely with the meaning of the former.

It is worthy of observation that the strongest political and philosophical criticisms of Fanon appeared in the first stage – related solely to *WOTE*. Apart from hostile reactions from the French left, right and centre, Fanon's final work elicited strong responses both from Vietnamese Marxist-Leninist Nguyen Nghe and from the liberal political theorist Hannah Arendt. While Nghe's criticism in his article in the journal *La Pensee* was largely based on Fanon's analysis of class and Fanon's humanist "idealism" in his perspective of violence, Arendt took on Fanon's articulation of violence placing it in the philosophical tradition of, interestingly, Sorel.[56]

---

[54] A strong claim can be made that Jock McCulloch's *Black Soul, White Artifact: Fanon's Clinical Psychology and Social Theory* published in 1983 also belongs to this stage.

[55] A Google search of "Fanon" along with "Django Unchained" churns out a rather interesting assortment of articles, written mostly by Black activists, using Fanon to critique, criticize or condemn Quentin Tarantino's controversial 'alternate history' movie.

[56] The attempt to find the roots of Fanon's conceptualization of violence has divided thinkers then as it does now. CLR James, for instance, in his presentation at the conference on "International Tribute to Frantz Fanon" organized by the UN committee against racism claims that Fanon was in the tradition of

In her remarkable work *On Violence* where she attempts to address the subject and debates around it in the 20th Century, Arendt is deeply concerned about the manner in which violence is addressed by Fanon, though she finds the Sartrean perspective even more disturbing. While it can be criticized that Arendt refers only to *WOTE* she clarifies in her book that this is so owing to *WOTE's* "great influence on the present student generation."[57] She immediately adds that "Fanon himself, however, is much more doubtful about violence than his admirers." While arguing that Sartre's preface was on par with Fanon's "worst rhetorical excesses" and making a general condemnation of Sorel, Sartre and Fanon for "irresponsible grandiose statements" Arendt also notes that Fanon was to closer reality than other theorists.[58]

Second Stage

For the second stage, comprising of "biographical writings", Gordon et al. cite David Caute, Peter Geismar and Irene Gendzier.[59] British author David Caute's short biography *Frantz Fanon*, published in 1970, is the first biography of Fanon. Meant to be a concise profile of Fanon, Caute implicitly places Fanon in the Enlightenment tradition, making reference to the Jacobinism in his writings. Likewise to Caute, to whom Fanon was an "intransigent revolutionary idealist", there are three successive Fanons "the de-alienated man (*Black Skin, White Masks*), the free citizen of Algeria (*Studies in a Dying Colonialism*), and the socialist revolutionary (*The Wretched of the Earth*)."[60] Caute also identifies a dialectical synthesis between the Fanon of *BSWM* and the Fanon of *WOTE* in that "The young Fanon was a professional psychiatrist with strong political

---

Hegel and Marx with respect to his philosophical conception of violence, completely omitting Sartre. Likewise, in a more recent article in the *Human Architecture* special issue on Fanon, George Ciccareiello-Maher builds an intellectual dialogue between Fanon and Sorel. See "To Lose Oneself in the Absolute: Revolutionary Subjectivity in Sorel and Fanon", *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge, V, Special Double-Issue*, summer 2007, p101-112. It would be an interesting study, since none to my knowledge has been made on the same, to attempt a dialogue between Fanon and Sartre's articulation of violence and Slavoj Zizek's controversial thesis in *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections.*

[57] Hannah Arendt, *On Violence,* New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1969, p14

[58] Ibid, p20. However, to Cesaire who was writing soon after Fanon's death, Fanon's violence was that of a non-violent man "it was the violence of justice, purity, of intransigence." Cited in David Caute, *Frantz Fanon,* New York: Viking Press, 1970, p85

[59] For an intense first-hand account of Fanon's temperament and his Rome meeting with Sartre, see Simone de Beauvoir's *Force of Circumstance,* translated from French by Richard Howard, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1968, p605-611. In Beauvoir's opinion, Sartre was in complete agreement with Fanon's *WOTE* which was "an extreme, total, incendiary, but at the same time complex and subtle manifesto of the 'Rest of the World'."

[60] Caute, *Frantz Fanon,* p31

and racial conviction; the mature Fanon was a revolutionary whose perception of the human consequences of collective violence was enriched by his knowledge of psychiatry."[61] Caute, rather correctly observing that Fanon's influence and reputation were largely built on *WOTE*, criticizes that work for its "sweeping generalization" especially as regards topics like violence, the peasantry, the lumpen-proletariat etc. However, Caute's conclusion on Fanon based on his reading of the latter is poignantly relevant to how the thinker can be seen and how he can be interpreted, and worth quoting at large.

> Fanon was a socialist; an enemy of capitalism, colonialism and neo-colonialism; a revolutionary; an anti-racist who believed in the efficacy and humanist value of violent counter-assertion; an opponent of authoritarian and elitist government, whatever its nominal label; and a champion of the poorest men on earth, the peasants of the Third World. He was not a racist. Although his experiences, the agonies and humiliations of his own life, undoubtedly 'belong' to the black people, his social philosophy is available to black and white people alike. He denounced Europe's record and Europe's applied values in the period of capitalist imperialism, but he did so in terms of concepts of the European revolutionary tradition. There are no total hiatuses in ideological development, each new movement has roots in the old. Fanon added to that tradition and enriched it.[62]

Geismar's *Fanon: the Revolutionary as Prophet; a Biography*, published the very next year, as the title would suggest, is a eulogy to Fanon at best. Incidentally, Geismar died within a year of the publication of what would be his life's work on Fanon. While providing some interesting information around Fanon's life, including about the level of his interest and involvement with revolutionary movements in Africa (terming Fanon a 'Pan-Africanist'), his interactions with other leaders, his work as a psychiatrist, the CIA's interest in Fanon etc., Geismar's account sadly has many things wanting with respect to the intellectual profile he creates of Fanon. Besides some obvious errors like reading a strong Jungian influence in Fanon's thoughts, he also seems to draw a binary between an earlier non-violent Fanon of *BSWM* and the later violent Fanon of *WOTE*. According to Geismar, Fanon "was by no means an apostle of

[61] ibid, p39
[62] ibid, p106-107

violence when he left for North Africa in 1953; it was the violence of the French in Algeria that pushed him into this pattern of thought."[63]

Biographical interest in Fanon has not subsided even after the blossoming of the fifth stage of Fanon studies.[64] The dawn of the millennium saw three biographies on Fanon. David Macey's *Frantz Fanon: A Life* published in 2000, the most extensive biography on Fanon produced till date, Alice Cherki's *Frantz Fanon: A Portrait*, originally published in French in 2000, in my opinion the most intensive biography on Fanon produced, and Patrick Ehlen's *Frantz Fanon: A Spiritual Biography* published in the same year.

Not much can be commented about Ehlen's work, which, much like Geismar, is largely concerned with Fanon's life than his thoughts. In a rare passage commenting on Fanon's intellectual foundations, Ehlen remarks that Nietzsche topped Fanon's list of favourite philosophers in that "Nietzsche's description of the transcendent potential of the human will fit perfectly with Fanon's ideas about the vital importance of his own will."[65] Further, Nietzsche's model of free spirit was "desperately needed" by Fanon "who suffered from feelings of weakness and helplessness in the face of a system of society he could not change, an outward commitment to and display of strength and purpose was his only viable means to rise above defeat and regain confidence in his own spiritual nature." Though Fanon did have an eclectic taste in his study of philosophy and literature, I fail to understand through which reading of any of Fanon's texts Ehlen arrived at such a conclusion. Rather ironically, the blurb in the back-cover of Ehlen's work on Fanon, claims that "Patrick Ehlen offers a Fanon of exceptional depth and dimension" in the supposedly "groundbreaking debut biography." If anything, Ehlen's and Geismar's works on Fanon are interesting coffee-time reads for those interested in exotic hitherto unknown aspects of the thinker's life.[66] But as far as the appraisal of Fanon's theoretical contributions are concerned, they inform us much less than the 116 page biography by David Caute.

---

[63] Peter Geismar, *Fanon: The Revolutionary as Prophet; a Biography*, New York: Dial Press, 1971, p190

[64] There are also several short biographical sketches of Fanon published as articles, but they are largely irrelevant for the purpose of critical examination.

[65] Patrick Ehlen, *Frantz Fanon: A Spiritual Biography,* New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2000, p94

[66] To be fair to both Geismar and Ehlen, it probably was not their intention to provide a critical introspection into Fanon's thought but only to shed light on Fanon's life. Being interested in the life of the subject of my research, I am, of course, delighted to read about the pranks Fanon played on others in his childhood, his friendships, and his demeanor towards associates. It is however annoying to read attempts at explanations that his theory was formulated in such and such a manner because of these facts.

As far as biographies on Fanon go, it would be wise to place the works of Alice Cherki and David Macey in the same category as Irene Gendzier's rigorous work *Frantz Fanon: A Critical Study*. The three books, besides being critically acclaimed biographies of Fanon, are also attempts at studying the intellectual history of their subject, with Gendzier's Frantz Fanon of 1973 being the first of its kind. Gendzier, tracing the development of Fanon's intellectual development through both an extensive reading of Fanon's corpus and first hand interactions with those who were closely associated with Fanon, differs with the earlier mentioned views of Caute and Geismar on the rupture between *BSWM* and *WOTE*, pleading instead to take note of a fundamental humanist continuity throughout Fanon's works. For instance, her argument that Fanon was consistent on the subject of national culture from *BSWM* to *WOTE* and that, "the material added at the end of The Wretched of the Earth was an elaboration of those earlier discussions."[67]

Claiming to offer "an interpretative study of Fanon's writings" while seeking to "go beyond Fanon to an investigation of selected themes raised in his work", Gendzier makes a daring claim that Fanon was "far more critical in his assessment of the identity of the oppressed than some of those who claim to speak in his name."[68] It is this observation, and this critical reading of Fanon's texts, that brings her to conclude that differing from Cesaire, Damas and Senghor, who, despite their differences in approaches to Negritude, stood together as to its function and potential, "Fanon recognized the historic importance of negritude and admitted its powerful personal effect, but he eventually took a strong position against it."[69] Gendzier, credits this to both the Sartrean influence on Fanon as well as the latter's desire to choose a universalism as opposed to narrow particularisms. Sadly, this is a point ignored by a legion of Fanon scholars.

Gendzier observes both a Hegelian as well as a Sartrean influence on Fanon. Besides her observation that Fanon's texts reveal a dose of Hegelian and Sartrean language and concepts, she also argues with great merit that Fanon's analysis of the existential condition of Blacks and the colonized have in turn contributed to enriching of Hegelian and Sartrean thought. Her take on Fanon's conceptualization of violence, contrasting his theory with that of Sorel and defending it against 'practical accusations' by the Vietnamese communist Nguyen Nghe, is

---

[67] Irene L. Gendzier, *Frantz Fanon: A Critical Study,* New York: Pantheon Books, 1973, p224

[68] ibid, pxiv-xv

[69] ibid, p44. Later in her study, Gendzier also draws a distinction between Fanon's attitude towards national identity/national culture and Negritude.

interesting for the claim that Fanon placed violence in the ambit of "work" by the colonized. That is, anti-colonialist violence, an "absolute praxis", was work by itself.[70]

In the same spirit as Gendzier, David Macey calls for a more nuanced understanding not just of Fanon's engagement with identity politics, but of Fanon's identity as such. "Over seventy years after his death, Fanon remains a surprisingly enigmatic and elusive figure. Whether he should be regarded as a 'Martinican', 'Algerian' 'French' or simply 'Black' is not a question that can be decided easily."[71] He criticizes, and quite legitimately, the 'Third Worldist' appropriations of Fanon that take only the explosive exhortations in *WOTE* but ignore the arguments in *BSWM* and the post-colonialist readings that focus largely on the latter text, while scrupulously avoiding the question of violence critically expounded in the former. "The Third Worldist Fanon was an apocalyptic creature; the post-colonial Fanon worries about identity politics, and often about his own sexual identity, but he is no longer angry. And yet, if there is a truly Fanonian emotion, it is anger. His anger was a response to his experience of a black man in a world defined as white, but not to the 'fact' of his blackness. It was a response to the condition and situation of those he called the wretched of the earth," Macey states, lamenting the various inversions and perversions of Fanon.[72] In the tones of Gendzier's understanding of Fanon's understanding of Negritude, Macey interprets the conclusion of *BSWM* not as a plea for racial equality but rather "a Sartrean bid for total freedom as a radicalized consciousness leaps into a future and escapes all ethnic determinations."[73]

Macey's Fanon emerges most strongly as a political theorist aiming to construct a philosophy of universal solidarity with the 'Wretched of the Earth' and the author argues against reading a Negritude supporter, a phenomenologist, or a psychoanalyst in Fanon. David Macey, along with Caute who preceded him, and several Fanon scholars like Reiland Rabaka or Nigel Gibson who followed him, arrives at the conclusion that Fanon was trying to arrive at a sociogenic explanation of phenomena. While placing Fanon's corpus in the context of his life, his social activities and his commitments, the political atmosphere, Macey is careful not to

---

[70] ibid, p205

[71] David Macey, *Frantz Fanon: A Life,* London: Granta Books, 2000, p7. In similar spirit, this researcher would like to make a plea in the course of the research to refer to Fanon as a humanist, at least during a study of and application of Fanonism instead of attaching various identity labels to him, especially when there is enough evidence in his primary works that he transcended labels. An application of Freudian psychoanalysis, after all, does not involve calling it a 'Jewish' or 'Austrian' psychoanalysis.

[72] ibid, p28

[73] Ibid, p42

provide a reductionist or determinist reading of Fanon's texts. While the details of the Algerian war for independence provided would appeal to students of Algerian history, Macey's penetrating criticism of Fanon's understanding of women's liberation would greatly interest a feminist reading of Fanon.

Among other subjects, Alice Cherki's *A Portrait* of Frantz Fanon calls not just for a greater moderation in interpreting Fanon's erudite exposition of violence, but also to recognize the thinker's contributions to psychiatry, psychoanalysis, cultural anthropology and culture studies, and linguistics. The fact that Cherki, an Algerian psychiatrist politically involved in the Algerian liberation struggle, knew Fanon personally and, by her own admission, worked closely with him from 1955 to 1961, gives her account of Fanon an intensity that surpasses other biographical accounts of the man. Cherki quotes Fanon from a conversation that he had with a friend – "One should not relate one's past, but stand as a testimony to it".[74] Her account of Fanon tries to remain faithful to that sentiment.

An interesting fact that Cherki provides her readers is about a book proposal of Fanon that never took off owing to his demise. Fanon had apparently created an outline of the book project, and the last chapter was to be "Negritude and Black-African Civilization, an Illusion."[75] While Cherki takes into account Fanon's criticism of Negritude and his intellectual interactions with Sartre, she is also quick to criticize the latter for the foreword to *WOTE* arguing that he had "distorted Fanon's tone and intention" through his justification of violence while Fanon had only considered it a necessary phase.[76] Commenting about the period succeeding Fanon's death, Cherki laments the misuse of 'Fanonism'.

> The term "Fanonism" that was increasingly being bandied about was, if anything, a mislabelling of his work; his writings were increasingly associated with the importance of spontaneous movements, the idealization of rural, peasant masses and their assimilation of a Maoist model, and subverted as an apology for violence. The label was also a kind of shorthand for humanist idealism, an ideology whose time had passed.[77]

---

[74] Alice Cherki, *Frantz Fanon: A Portrait,* translated from the French by Nadia Benabid, New York: Cornell University Press, 2006, p1
[75] ibid, p150
[76] Ibid, p181
[77] Ibid, p192

Indeed, a reader can observe that the theme of violence in Fanon's works is the theme that Cherki takes great effort to re-address in her biography.

Fanon's biographers mentioned above, different though their choice of historical facts from Fanon's life and interpretations of the same may be, have a few things in common. All recognize an underlying essence of universalist humanism in Fanon. All identify Fanon's critical engagement with and criticism of Negritude. And all (maybe with the sole exception of Ehlen who seems to find the source of Fanon's 'spirituality' elsewhere), without fail, take into account the deep impact of Sartrean philosophy on Fanon.

Third Stage

The third stage in Fanon studies involves theoretical assessments of Fanon's works and considerations of his contributions to theory as such. The first in this would be Renate Zahar's *Frantz Fanon: Colonialism and Alienation* originally published in 1974. Approaching Fanon from a Marxist-sociological perspective, Zahar's primary object of inquiry in Fanon's thoughts is his evaluation of alienation *within* a system of colonialism. Thereby, while being a decent study of the topic in itself, she leaves little clues on how this evaluation could be applied to a context beyond colonialism. She seeks to find a theory of alienation and emancipation based on Marxist premises in Fanon, comparing and contrasting him with the movements in Cuba and China, and failing to find it, criticizes Fanon for his 'fault'. This, of course, is that sin of 'mythology of doctrines' that Skinner warned against – that of seizing on "some doctrine that a given theorist ought to have mentioned, although they failed to do so, and then to criticise them for their incompetence."[78] While Zahar, similar to Arendt, traces Fanon's conceptualization of violence to Sorel rather than Sartre, she is however correct to observe that Fanon's engagement with Negritude was mediated by a Sartrean understanding and that "Fanon's approach in analysing the mechanisms of racial discrimination and its ideological function in the process of colonial exploitation is similar to Sartre's."[79]

Following on her heels, Emmanuel Hansen's *Frantz Fanon: Social and Political Thought* claims to provide "clear understanding of Fanon's thought, based on a study of the totality of his

[78] Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p65
[79] Renate Zahar, *Frantz Fanon: Colonialism and Alienation,* Delhi: Aakar, 2010, p29

ideas, using the entire corpus of his writings."[80] Ironically, while lamenting the abstractness or simplicity of some aspects of Fanon's thoughts, Hansen himself places abstract concepts in Fanon's mouth. For instance, Hansen argues that "Fanon regards freedom as man's supreme goal. And the whole purpose of man's existence is to realize this goal", without clarifying what was Fanon's idea of freedom or what was the intellectual tradition that Fanon derived from in arriving at this idea. Hansen finally concludes that Fanon's ideal society was a blend of Rousseauian and Marxist utopia.[81]

Hansen in general notes that Fanon's decisions in life were not determined by his skin colour or by a fixed identity but rather on the basis of political understanding. Echoing such a sentiment, Richard C. Onwuanibe's Fanon comes out as the protagonist of a "genuinely universalist humanism", who places a dialectical tension between humanism and instrumental violence. Onwuanibe further identifies as features of Fanon's humanism human dignity or recognition, freedom, a search for justice, love and peace, a universalist character, the emergence of a new man, and a dialectical character, concluding using a Hegelian paradigm that the final stage of Fanon's revolutionary humanism "attempts to resolve the contradictions of the colonial or oppressive system."[82]

We can notice another error of the 'mythology of doctrines' being made by authors who have sought to analyse Fanon from different theoretical perspectives, namely "converting some scattered or incidental remarks by a classic theorist into their 'doctrine' on one of the expected themes."[83] Marie Perinbam's work is an apt example of this error. Her work, *Holy Violence: The Revolutionary Thought of Frantz Fanon,* which for some reason has not been cited or critiqued by many authors after her, is probably the only work that deals exclusively with Fanon's conceptualization of violence – and ends up as a gross misinterpretation. While correctly noting that Fanon grappled with the subject of violence even in *BSWM,* she argues, without any concrete evidence or argument, that Fanon drew heavily from Marx and Sartre "for the philosophical script for holy violence."[84] Reading a Sorelian "myth" of violence in Fanon, she

---

[80] Emmanuel Hansen, *Frantz Fanon: Social and Political Thought,* Columbus: Ohio State University, 1977, p10
[81] Ibid, p203
[82] Richard C. Onwuanibe, *A Critique of Revolutionary Humanism: Frantz Fanon*, Warren H. Green: Missouri, 1983, p33
[83] Skinner, *Visions of Politics,* p60
[84] B. Marie Perinbam, *Holy Violence: The Revolutionary Thought of Frantz Fanon; An Intellectual Biography,* Washington: Three Continents Press, 1982, p92

paints a picture of him as the perfect ideologue of the jihadist, with a bizarre conclusion that Fanon's theory of holy violence became "a metaphor for the unbeatable combination of scientific law and religious faith."[85] All this when Fanon has not mentioned the term 'holy violence' anywhere in his works.

Of similar error is political scientist L. Adele Jinadu, who configures Fanon as a Marxist-Leninist, an unorthodox one albeit. To Jinadu, "What Fanon has done is to adopt Marxist-Leninist conceptions of society, state and revolution to the concrete historical reality of Algeria and, by extension, the rest of Africa and the colonized world."[86] While placing and analyzing Fanon's concept of violence in a Marxist-Leninist paradigm, Jinadu notes that the topic of violence was the main point of convergence between Fanon and Sartre,[87] qualifying his argument by adding that Sartre endorsed *WOTE* to the point of distortion. Likewise, to Jinadu there is an uneasy combination of ethical relativism and ethical universalism in Fanon, owing largely to the "methodological individualism" he adopts and his belief in "certain universal norms".[88]

The newest addition in the third stage would be Routledge Critical Thinkers Series book *Frantz Fanon* authored by Indian academic Pramod K. Nayar. The author terms Fanon a "postcolonial humanist", arguing that despite dealing with violence, decolonization and race, Fanon had an overriding concern of humanism, that his arguments are not restricted to the colonial context alone, and that Fanon moves beyond the native and the national towards universals.[89] Asserting that Fanon was imagining and forging a new humanism, Nayar argues that Fanon's existential emphasis on radical freedom taken from Sartre makes him ideologically depart from Negritude and Cesaire. While Nayar mostly places Fanon in the postcolonial intellectual tradition, his observations on the relations between Fanon, identity and violence are worthy of consideration.

According to Nayar "*violence in Fanon is always the route to self-determination and identity formation"*[90] further arguing that in the Fanonian schema, while instrumental violence sought to re-establish the cultural identity of the colonized which the colonial system had erased, absolute violence sought the retrieval of a Self that had been buried by the political

---

[85] Ibid, p117
[86] L. Adele Jinade, *Fanon: In Search of the African Revolution,* London: KPI, 1986, p98-99
[87] Ibid, p94-95
[88] Ibid, p149-151
[89] Pramod K. Nayar, *Frantz Fanon,* New York: Routledge, 2013 p4
[90] Ibid, p84. Italics in original text.

agents of the same system. Defending Fanon from critics who sought to portray him as an apologist of violence, Nayar argues that Fanon doesn't stress violence for itself but that "He treats violence as restitution, a response and a liberatory force through which the oppressed colonized can express himself."[91] Nayar's Fanon was a universalist who was not into the particularisms of identity but called for an ethical recognition of identity, respecting difference without homogenizing it, and whose fundamental politics was "Building solidarities on the basis of a shared history of suffering – no matter what your racial-ethnic-national identity might be."[92]

Though Gordon et al have not done so, I think it is apt to place feminist assessments of Fanon in the third stage. In one of the most scathing attacks on Fanon, Sri Lankan academic Qadri Ismail argues that a gendered critique of Fanon is imperative because of the influence of his texts "in some killing fields of the third world."[93] In an obvious case of the Skinnerian error of 'mythology of doctrines', Ismail, drawing an comparison between the gender perspectives of Fanon and the Tamil Tigers' insurgency in the island of Sri Lanka, claims that the essential militarism and perspective of violence in Fanon makes him link "nationalism, patriarchy and (revolutionary) violence" and that the commonality between Fanon and the LTTE was that for both "the native with agency is male and violent."[94]

In similar spirit, but crediting Fanon for being "exemplary" in recognizing the importance of the gender dimension in nationalism, Anne McClintock argues that for Fanon, women's agency is agency by designation. "It makes its appearance not as a direct political relation to the revolution but as a mediated, domestic relation to a man".[95] Likewise, focusing solely on *BSWM,* Gwen Bergner accuses Fanon of heteronormativity, for overlooking female subjectivity and for rendering women in general as "subjects almost exclusively in terms of their sexual relationships with men."[96]

---

[91] Ibid, p84
[92] Ibid, p128
[93] Qadri Ismail, "'Boys Will Be Boys': Gender and National Agency in Frantz Fanon and LTTE", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 27, No. 31/32 (Aug. 1-8, 1992), p1677. Ismail refers exclusively to *WOTE* and the essay "Algeria Unveiled" in *ADC.*
[94] Ibid, p1678
[95] Anne McClintock, "Fanon and Gender Agency", ed. Nigel Gibson, *Rethinking Fanon: The Continuing Dialogue,* New York: Humanity Books, 1999, p291. In the same collection of essays, Diana Fuss accuses Fanon of homophobia. See "Interior Colonies: Frantz Fanon and the Politics of Identification", p294-328
[96] Gwen Bergner, "Who Is That Masked Woman? Or, the Role of Gender in Fanon's Black Skin, White Masks", *PMLA*, Vol. 110, No. 1, Special Topic: Colonialism and the Postcolonial Condition (Jan.1995), p77

Rita Faulkner, comparing and contrasting Fanon with Algerian activist Assia Djebar, offers a more nuanced gendered reading of Fanon. Taking Fanon's essay "Algeria Unveiled" as her point of departure, Faulkner argues that Fanon's prioritization of the revolutionary decolonization of Algeria led him to give secondary importance to addressing native patriarchal structures and viewing the veil of Algerian women as "instrumental" in the struggle, adding that this gap is filled by Djebar who builds on Fanon to depenetrate, decolonize and depatriachalize the Algerian female mind and body.[97]

It is worthy here to consider Denean Sharpley-Whiting's work *Frantz Fanon: Conflicts and Feminisms* which is both a feminist appraisal of Fanon's works, which places it in the third stage, as well as the utilization of Fanonism for feminist study, which places it in the fifth stage too. She argues that rather than speak of Fanon as a feminist - implicitly also arguing that rather than criticize Fanon for not living up to particular feminist standards - it is more appropriate "to speak of Fanon's radically humanist profeminist consciousness. This consciousness is guided by Fanon's envisioning of women's liberation from the confines of repressive patriarchal traditions, and his advocacy of women's movement from objects to subjects of history... however, it transcends, as does the bulk of his writings, the specificities of the Algerian, sub-Saharan, and Martiniquan experiences."[98]

Apart from the major works mentioned above, Fanon has been studied under Hegelian, Marxian, Deleuzian, humanist, Sartrean, Africana, and other theoretical frameworks in a wide range of academic articles. But Fanon's legacy became a bone of contention following his appropriation by the postcolonial studies scholars.

Fourth Stage

A general summary of the different ways in which Fanon has been used by postcolonialists has been provided in Henry Louis Gates' popular essay "Critical Fanonism". Terming Fanon a 'Rashomon-like' character and a 'Rorschach blot on legs', Gates outlines the appropriations of

---

[97] Rita A. Faulkner, "Assia Djebar, Frantz Fanon, Women, Veils, and Land", *World Literature Today*, Vol. 70, No. 4, (Autumn, 1996), p849. A critical comparative inquiry on Fanon's gender politics with that of 'Periyar' EV Ramasamy will be done later in the research. In stark contrast to Fanon, Ramasamy called on women to shed their traditional attire and to embrace Western clothing so as to break free from native patriarchal and casteist oppressive structures.

[98] Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *Frantz Fanon: Conflicts and Feminisms,* Lanham MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997, p23-24

Fanon by Homi Bhabha, Edward Said, Benita Parry, Gayatri Spivak, Abdul JanMohammed and so on. Disagreeing with Said and Bhabha, whom Gates accuses of the attempt to frame Fanon as a global theorist, Gates concludes that reading Fanon requires an acknowledgement of his historical particularity and to not "elevate him above his localities of discourse as a transcultural, transhistorical Global Theorist, nor simply to cast him into battle, but to recognize him as a battlefield in himself."[99]

Gates is particularly irked by Edward Said to whom both Fanon and Cesaire, "jab directly at the question of identity and of identitarian thought, that secret sharer of present anthropological reflection on "otherness" and "difference.""[100] According to Said, both Fanon and Cesaire required a rejection of fixed ideas of settled identity and culturally authorized definition.[101] Benita Parry also takes issue with this contention, albeit from a different angle. To Parry, the task of postcolonial theory is "to address the empowering effects of constructing a coherent identity or of cherishing and defending against calumniation altered and mutable indigenous forms, which is not the same as the hopeless attempt to locate and revive pristine pre-colonial culture", citing Cesaire and Fanon as examples.[102] Parry further suggests, in an implicit dig at Said, that "the appointment of Fanon as exemplar of anticolonial theory liberated from identitarian thinking should be qualified" since his voyages into Negritude cannot be avoided.[103]

It is interesting to note that quite some of those who have inferred a support for nativism in Fanon's writings have fallen back on Spivak's idea of "strategic essentialism", or the postulation of a theoretical *essence* as a manoeuvre to bring out a sharp contrast between two or more points-of-view, to support themselves – while Spivak herself has claimed in the recent past that she has thoroughly repudiated that idea.[104] Likewise, as a sort of a rejoinder to both

---

[99] Henry Louis Gates Jr., "Critical Fanonism", *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (Spring, 1991), p470

[100] Edward W. Said, "Representing the Colonized: Anthropology's Interlocutors", *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 15, No. 2. (Winter, 1989), p225. It is also worthy of consideration that Said, in general, considers Fanon a universal theorist of decolonization.

[101] It can be legitimately questioned how and why Said includes Cesaire with Fanon especially considering that Cesaire did not explicitly disown the idea of a beautiful Black past ever.

[102] Benita Parry, "Resistance theory/theorising resistance or two cheers for nativism", in eds. Francis Barker et al, *Colonial Dicourse/Postcolonial Theory,* New York: Manchester University Press, 1994, p179

[103] Parry is also compelled to clarify that as regards the relation between Fanon and Negritude, "Fanon's writings function at a point of tension between cultural nationalism and transnationality, without 'resolving' the contradiction and without yielding an attachment to the one or the aspiration to the other." Ibid, p187.

[104] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Other Asias,* Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008, p260

Gates and Parry, Neil Lazarus, invoking Fanon, argues that "From the standpoint of postcolonialism, it is today impossible to think about politics without invoking the category of universality. For in the postcolonial world-system, experience is multiply overdetermined, and not least by imperialism itself. Social identity has become world-historical in its constitution."[105]

Fanon has been used by a variety of Indian postcolonial theorists and subaltern studies scholars, including Spivak, Dipesh Chakravarti, Partha Chatterjee, Gyan Prakash, Ranjana Khanna etc. largely in the analysis of 'colonial discourse' and Indian anti-colonial movements. But from among all these names, there is none to rival Homi Bhabha considering the passion with which he uses Fanon and considering the extent to which he has pushed Fanon in the broader postcolonial school.

Homi Bhabha, is well known for his usage of the concept of "mimicry" in understanding identity formation processes under colonialism. Sourcing his arguments chiefly to Lacan and (a Lacanian version of) Fanon, he argues "colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference."[106] Here Fanon is a tool to understand psychological (primarily) and political (secondarily) processes under colonialism.

Bhabha asks "Why invoke Frantz Fanon today, quite out of historical context?"[107] in a paper presented at a conference in 1995, providing some insights on Fanonian understanding of identity in the context of colonialism and colonialism oriented racism. But he fails to answer his original question apart from a suggestion that Fanon offers "the possibility of thinking our way towards a national-internationalism".[108] With respect to Fanon studies, Bhabha is also known for his prefaces to *BSWM* and *WOTE* which also provide some idea of how Fanon was taken in the postcolonial school. The Fanon presented is an explorer of psycho-affective effects of

---

[105] Neil Lazarus, "National consciousness and the specificity of (post) colonial intellectualism", in eds. Francis Barker et al, *Colonial Dicourse/Postcolonial Theory,* New York: Manchester University Press, 1994, p219

[106] Homi Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse" in *October*, Vol. 28, Discipleship: A Special Issue on Psychoanalysis (Spring, 1984), p126

[107] Homi Bhabha, "Day by Day… with Frantz Fanon" in Alan Read ed. *The Fact of Blackness: Frantz Fanon and Visual Representation,* London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, p188. Interestingly, in the same conference a member of the audience accused Bhabha of changing Fanon "from politically committed to some sort of trendy postmodern bullshitter", because Bhabha assumed a discontinuity between the Fanon of *BSWM* and *WOTE*. p41

[108] Ibid, p190

colonialism. The presence of a master narrative or a totalizing theme in Fanon's works is questioned, challenged or denied. In his foreword to the 1986 English edition of *BSWM*, Bhabha writes "Fanon is not principally posing the question of political oppression as the violation of a human essence, although he lapses into such a lament in his more existential moment."[109]

Similar sentiments echo in his foreword to the 2004 English translation of *WOTE* where he argues that Fanonian violence "is part of a struggle for psycho-affective survival and a search for human agency in the midst of the agony of oppression."[110] Bhabha, who is ambivalent, to use his own term, on Fanon's articulation of violence, gives a too general overview of the appropriation of Fanon's arguments on violence by activists in identitarian movements across the world. What he fails to do, however, is to identify whether Fanonism can be a tool for viewing and analysing such movements.

Fifth Stage

Nigel Gibson, while lauding Bhabha and his invention of a 'new Fanon' for having "re-vamped the status of Frantz Fanon in the academy and opened up whole new areas of study", he also contends that Bhabha's privileging of the Lacanian Fanon has lead to "clever readings which privilege psychoanalytical moves and points of ambivalence, but which have in the main produced a very one-sided Fanon."[111] Gibson who takes Bhabha to task for ignoring and obfuscating the concrete political aspects of Fanon, criticizes "This postcolonial sensibility which names Fanon's work a "classic" also has a price. For Fanon is now situated as a "founding father" of academic postcolonial theory, a relic from a previous age rather than a living thinker, revered and important but somewhat naïve."[112]

Starkly differing from Bhabha, Gibson presents a humanist analysis and version of Fanon. Along with his influential work *Fanon: The Postcolonial Imagination* published in 2003

---

[109] Homi Bhabha, "Remembering Fanon: Self, Psyche and the Colonial Condition" foreword to Frantz Fanon *Black Skin White Masks,* translated by Charles Lam Markmann, London: Pluto Press, 2008, pxxv

[110] Homi Bhabha, "Framing Fanon" foreword to Frantz Fanon *The Wretched of the Earth,* translated by Richard Philcox, New York: Grove Press, 2004, pxxxvi

[111] Nigel C. Gibson, "Thoughts about doing Fanonism in the 1990s", in *College Literature,* 26.2 (Spring 1999), p98

[112] Nigel C. Gibson, "Is Fanon Relevant? Toward an alternative foreword to "The Damned of the Earth"", *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self Knowledge*, V, Special Double-Issue, Summer 2007, p36

and numerous academic articles on Fanonism, he edited *Rethinking Fanon: The Continuing Dialogue* in 1999 and *Living Fanon: Global Perspectives* in 2011, both compiling diverse views on Fanon and his application to the social sciences. Likewise, he has also used Fanonism as a theoretical framework to analyse developments in post-apartheid South Africa in *Fanonian Practices in South Africa: from Steve Biko to Abahlali baseMjondolo* published in 2011.[113] In Gibson's works in general, Fanon is not just studied, but he is studied with.

Positively referring to the engagement with Fanon's idea of 'lived experience' by scholars like Lewis Gordon and Ato Sekyi-Otu, he also recognizes the shortcomings in *The Postcolonial Imagination*. "For Fanon, the issue was not simply to describe the world of experience. What needed to be overturned was the situation itself, and in doing so the protagonist could become self-determining."[114] Further elaborating on Fanonist understanding of the construction of Black identity, Gibson also analyses Fanon's utilization of violence. Criticizing critics who consider Fanon an 'apostle of violence', Gibson makes strong arguments in favour of the Fanonist problematization of the role that violence plays in national liberation and identity formation. Terming the Fanonist project a "new humanism",[115] this work of Gibson is an important contribution in the fifth stage on Fanon studies.

Of the literature in the 5th stage that has been produced on Fanonist idea of violence, most have been generally sympathetic to his framing of the argument that violence is emancipatory in the colonial context and pleading for a deeper study into Fanon's nuanced arguments on violence. Gibson, for instance, argues that Fanon does not take violence as an absolute, as an end in itself, but rather is aware that "While violence is necessary for the destruction of colonialism and inferiority complexes, it is not a sufficient condition for the development of a new humanity."[116] Providing his interpretation of the possible intentions Fanon might have had in writing violence the way he did, Gibson very briefly problematizes Fanon's arguments on the forging of a common identity through violence.

The inauguration of the fifth stage in the academia opened up several fields in which Fanonian methods of enquiry were applied. Jock McCulloch's *Black Soul, White Artifact: Fanon's Clinical Psychology and Social Theory* and Hussein Abdilahi Bulhan's *Fanon and the Psychology*

---

[113] The arguments of this work are presented in a concise manner in Nigel Gibson's essay "Fanonian Presences in South Africa: From Theory and From Practice", in eds. Elizabeth A. Hoppe & Tracey Nicholls, *Fanon and the Decolonization of Philosophy,* Maryland: Lexington Books, p211-246

[114] Nigel C. Gibson, *Fanon: The Postcolonial Imagination,* Cambridge: Polity, 2003, p3

[115] Ibid, p174

[116] Nigel C. Gibson, 2003, p120

of Oppression both study ethnopsychiatry and psychological trauma in the context of colonialism, critically deploying Fanonist framework. McCulloch's simplistic claims, for instance, that negritude, ethnopsychiatry and African socialism constituted the three main paradigms of Fanon's thoughts, or that Fanon grew increasingly sympathetic to Negritude owing to the influence of Sartre, or his conclusive statement right at the beginning of the book that *WOTE* was not a guide to revolutionary action but rather "a panegyric to the inevitable failure of the African revolution",[117] is probably the reason why his work was left out of the fifth stage. However, McCulloch's presentation of some rare professional psychiatric papers of Fanon would interest those keen on studying Fanon's contributions to clinical psychiatry. On the other hand, Bulhan provides a virile and nuanced account of Fanon's contributions to the deconstruction of the psychological malaise under the colonial system.

Lewis Gordon and Reiland Rabaka, leading proponents of Africana philosophy, place Fanon's ideology in that tradition. According to Gordon, Africana thought "refers to an area of thought that focuses on theoretical questions raised by struggles over ideas in African cultures and their hybrid and creolized forms in Europe, North America, Central and South America, and the Caribbean. Africana thought also refers to the set of questions raised by the historical project of conquest and colonization that has emerged since 1492 and the subsequent struggles for emancipation that continue to this day."[118] Rabaka, putting Fanon in the midst of the conceptual and methodological framework of Africana critical theory, argues that its preoccupation is "synthesizing classical and contemporary black radical theory with black revolutionary praxis"[119] and that its primary focus revolves around "the search for solutions to the most pressing social and political problems in continental and diasporan African life-worlds and lived-experiences in the present age."[120] Other major works on the subject include Gordon's *An Introduction to Africana Philosophy,* Charles F. Peterson's *DuBois, Fanon, Cabral: The Margins of Elite Anti-Colonial Leadership*, and Rabaka's *Africana Critical Theory: Reconstructing The Black Radical Tradition, From W. E. B. Du Bois and C. L. R. James to Frantz*

---

[117] Jock McCulloch, *Black Soul, White Artifact: Fanon's Clinical Psychology and Social Theory,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, p4

[118] Lewis R. Gordon, *Existentia Africana: Understanding Africana Existential Thought,* New York: Routledge, 2000, p1

[119] Reiland Rabaka, *Forms of Fanonism: Frantz Fanon's Critical Theory and the Dialectics of Decolonization,* Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2010,p11-12

[120] Ibid, p19. One who has thoroughly read Fanon's works and understood its essence cannot help but lament that Rabaka is fervently trying accomplish what the French failed to do – confine Fanon to a 'black skin'.

Fanon and Amilcar Cabral. Gordon's *Fanon and the Crisis of European Man: An Essay on Philosophy and the Human Science,* is an excellent attempt at a critique of continental philosophy, especially the existentialist and phenomenological variant, through an engagement with Fanon.

It should be noted here that the philosophers in the Africana School in general view Sartre's appraisal of Negritude in *BO* with hostility and interpret Fanon to be having the same approach. It can however be questioned with what legitimacy do the Africana philosophers position Fanon in their paradigm given that Fanon never himself did so, nor ever gave a clue of doing so. Given the broad mapping of interests of Africana thought that Gordon and Rabaka lay out, they could easily argue that Fanon's location(s) and culture(s) place him in the ambit of their philosophy. I argue that this cardinal error of placing an original thinker inside a philosophical tradition that was devised by others, just because it shares some commonalities of interests, given the fact that the thinker gave no indication in his essential thoughts that he was clearly moving in that direction, distorts the full potential of that thinker's thoughts. Mao was a Marxist. Marx was not a Maoist. Fanon's thoughts may definitely be used to strengthen Africana philosophy. But Fanon was not an Africana philosopher concerned with strengthening a broad 'black radical theory'. That runs against the very *essence* of his thoughts.

An interesting perspective on the theme of Fanon's articulation of violence as the political is provided by Vivaldi Jean-Marie in *Fanon: Collective Ethics and Humanism.* Comparing *WOTE* with Carl Schmitt's *The Concept of the Political*, the author notes how violence and the presence/imagination of an enemy other creates a sense of collective ethics. Likewise, while the sketching out of similarities in Fanon and Schmitt is novel, the author restricts his case study to Fanon's identification of the 'internal other', that is, the urban elite national bourgeoisie, and not the colonial Other. In Jean-Marie's analysis of Fanon, "The realization that the enemy of national freedom and the revival traditional culture is not necessarily the European has both a political and existential impact", arguing that this realization breaks the Manichean classifications of black and white. [121] This observation will be of much use in the case study of EV Ramasamy, where again, the Other was an 'internal other', the brahmin castes, and not the colonial Other.

While Fanon has been used by scholars to study identitarian movements in particular, almost all in the context of colonialism and anti-Black racism, Sonia Kruks attempts to bring out

[121] Vivaldi Jean-Marie, *Fanon: Collective Ethics and Humanism,* New York: Peter Lang, 2007, p117

Fanon – taken along with Sartre – as a general theorist/critic of identity politics. With an understanding of identity politics that it demands for recognition "on the basis of the very grounds on which it has previously been denied"[122], she presents Fanon as a part-defender part-critic of identity. She brings out Fanon's observation that to affirm, express, or celebrate one's identity can be psychologically empowering but affirmation of identity alone is not to change the world.[123] Wallerstein too argues from a similar premise. According to him, "Fanon is very critical of any attempt to assert cultural identity that is independent of, not located within, the political struggle for national liberation."[124] In similar vein, Richard Pithouse, who considers Fanon "a revolutionary humanist primarily drawing on and taking forward Sartrean existentialism and Marxism", portrays him as a humanist thinker concerned with immanence over transcendental idealism, who took no identity category as fixed.[125]

The fifth stage saw the blossoming of quite some interesting compilations of interdisciplinary essays that took Fanonian thought as the framework for critical analysis. Besides the works of Gordon et al and Nigel Gibson mentioned above, *Frantz Fanon: Critical Perspectives* edited by Anthony C. Alessandrini, *Frantz Fanon's Black Skin White Masks: New Interdisciplinary Essays* edited by Max Silverman, *Fanon and the Decolonization of Philosophy* edited by Elizabeth A. Hoppe and Tracey Nicholls, *Fanon and Education: Thinking Through Pedagogical Possibilities* edited by George J. Sefa Dei and Marlon Simmons, have used Fanonism to analyze identity (almost always the Black-White binary or the colonizer-colonized one), racism, anti-Semitism, gender and sexuality, love, violence, intellectual commitment, diaspora studies, critical pedagogy and so on.

The *Human Architecture* Journal's special double issue on Frantz Fanon in 2007 also covers a wide range of topics involving the usage of Fanonism to investigate, besides several of the above mentioned topics, academic trends, literary, cultural and historical issues, and contemporary political events. These include the Iraq War, American 'neo-colonialism', the human rights abuses in Guantanamo Bay, politics in Haiti, migration, tourism etc.

Fanon has entered academic dialogue with Hegel, Derrida, Biko, Foucault, Du Bois, Richard Wright, Arendt, Luxembourg, Cabral, Sartre, Cesaire, Machiavelli, Bourdieu and others.

---

[122] Sonia Kruks, "Fanon, Sartre and Identity Politics" in Gordon, Lewis R. et al eds. *Fanon: A Critical Reader,* Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996, p123

[123] Ibid, 133

[124] Wallerstein, "Reading Fanon in the 21st Century", p122

[125] Richard Pithouse "'That the tool never possess the man': taking Fanon's humanism seriously", *Politikon: South African Journal of Political Studies*, 30:1, 2003, 107-131

To my knowledge, the only Indian to have the privilege of such a dialogue with Fanon is Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi.[126] Lewis Gordon, incidentally, begins his 'Histories of Violence' video presentation on Fanon with a caution against an abstract comparison of Fanon with Gandhi.[127]

Introducing Caste to Fanon

Given the continuation of such diverse interests in Fanon, the question 'Is Fanon relevant' seems rather redundant. The more challenging question to ask now will be 'Where else can Fanon be made relevant'. The literature survey gives an idea of the different ways in which Fanon's texts have elicited responses, have been worked upon, and have been put to use. The interests in Fanonism's use can be collapsed into four broad themes.[128]

- Critique of (mostly Black and White) identity
- Critique of violence
- Critique of colonialism, decolonization, postcolonialism
- Gender critique

A variety of topics are covered under these broad themes. Conspicuous by its absence is any study of caste in India. Of course, one cannot accuse the Indian postcolonial academics who use Fanonism that they should have covered caste too, even after considering the continuing prevalence of caste based oppression and discrimination in the country – a scholar should have that much freedom to ignore the topics that are of no concern to his/her academic project. Besides, this research is not about debating why caste was not covered in the existing trends but rather about finding a way to make Fanon, a revolutionary humanist by many accounts, enter into a dialectical conversation with one of the leading social reformers from India whose

[126] Hira Singh, "Confronting Colonialism and Racism: Fanon and Gandhi", *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self Knowledge*, V, Special Double-Issue, Summer 2007, p341-352. In the rather poorly crafted analogy, Singh asks why the Fanonian model of a revolution by landless labourers and poor peasants did not work in India as it did in Vietnam and China, wondering whether there was anything historically specific to India. Replying to his own question that he is not sure of what it was, he quickly adds that he is sure that it had nothing to do with the Indian caste system. In fact, the only time he mentions 'caste' in his essay is to dismiss it. p351.

[127] Lewis Gordon, "Fanon", http://historiesofviolence.com/thinkers/fanon/ [last accessed on 04-06-2013]

[128] Pramod K. Nayar also evolves a similar scheme in his work *Frantz Fanon* from a different perspective though.

politics was focused on caste eradication. As a result, my research shall largely rely upon the original thoughts in Fanon's corpus, with minimal references to sources from the fifth stage and maybe the third stage. I do not find the literature in the fourth, first or the second stage particularly helpful for my project.

I am tempted, however, to quote Dharmeratnam Sivaram, a Tamil political analyst and journalist, who had the following to say on the postcolonial academics from the subcontinent. "You know, in our hatred of the West we fail to see a lot of rubbish that comes from our own tradition. That's why I think the subaltern studies people's writings have become *pathological*."[129]

I believe that Fanon would agree to the spirit of this statement.

[129] Dharmeratnam Sivaram, quoted in Mark P. Whitaker, *Learning Politics from Sivaram: The Life and Death of a Revolutionary Tamil Journalist in Sri Lanka,* London: Pluto Press, 2007, p93

Fanon and Negritude

Introduction

This part of the research, which attempts to trace the intellectual influences that shaped Frantz Fanon's framing of identity politics, is broadly divided into two sections. The first shall deal with Negritude, touching on its portrayal by its chief protagonists Aime Cesaire and Leopold Senghor, Sartre's engagement with the concept through his *Black Orpheus (BO),* and Fanon's critique of the concept and of Sartre's understanding of the same through his utilization of ideas espoused in *BO* and Sartre's *Anti-Semite and Jew (ASJ).* Fanon's engagement with Negritude as a political idea is important, as the chapter shall seek to show, to understand the *why* of his identity politics and what he seeks to conceptualize as a revolutionary humanist political ideal.

The overwhelming majority of Fanon scholars tend to trace an explicit contradiction between Fanon and Sartre over the subject of Negritude. However, as I seek to prove, Fanon's engagement with Negritude was not one of simple positive appraisal and correspondingly, his critique of Sartre's view on Negritude was not one of point-blank condemnation. Fanon's perspective of Negritude, and his dialogue with Sartre over the latter's perspective on Negritude, shall lead us into, as we shall see later, Fanonist visions on the idea of lived experience and shared solidarity, and on the subject of universalism vs. particularism.

I start with a discussion of Negritude, and how the main proponents of the idea, namely Leopold Senghor and Aime Cesaire, conceived it. The two thinkers were themselves not united in their vision of Negritude, except for the fact that they felt that a Negro identity deserved better recognition than what existed in Francophone societies. Sartre's controversial introduction to an anthology of Negritude poetry, *Black Orpheus,* was and continues to be a subject of much debate. I seek to show how Fanon, contrary to the reading of many scholars, was more in line with Sartre's critique of Negritude. It is this interpretation of Fanon that will inform my next chapter on the Fanonian vision of identity politics.

Negritude: The idea

Negritude the word was used for the first time by the Antillean intellectual and poet Aime Cesaire in a polemical essay against assimilation published in the March 1935 issue of *L'etudiant noir,* a Paris based publication he had co-edited along with the Senegalese Leopold Sedar Senghor and the French Guyanese Leon Damas. The word found its first poetic usage in Cesaire's *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land (NR),* published in 1939. According to Cesaire, it was in Haiti "where Negritude rose for the first time and stated that it believed in its humanity and the funny little tail of Florida where the strangulation of a nigger is being completed, and Africa gigantically caterpillaring up to the Hispanic foot of Europe, its nakedness where death scythes widely."[130] The Negro experience, Cesaire appears to argue, is a universally similar response of Blacks to a condition of alienation and "measured by the compass of suffering".[131]

Senghor had a similar perspective on Negritude as a sort of a universal human condition of Blacks. To him, Negritude was "the sum total of black cultural values", and his preferred English equivalent of the expression was "black personality".[132] But for all its claims to a Black universalism, Negritude was in essence a response to the French policy of assimilation during the colonial period, championed by Francophone black intellectuals who were responding to a situation created by the French. Spleth is right when she points out that "The phenomenon of rediscovering one's African past occurred almost exclusively among the Francophone African students and it has been theorized that the reaction came in part as a response to certain defects in French colonial policy such as the failure of the French to educate in their local languages or the erroneous assumptions of assimilation, an objective not adopted by the British."[133]

---

[130]Aime Cesaire, *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land,* trans. Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith, with introduction by Andre Breton, Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2001, p15

[131] ibid, p43. The notes to the 2001 English edition state that according to Cesaire, Negritude "signified a response to the centuries-old problem of the alienated position of the blacks in history, and implicitly called upon blacks to reject assimilation and cultivate consciousness of their own racial qualities and heritage. For Cesaire, identity in suffering, not genetic material, determined the bond among black people of different origins." ibid, p60

[132] Janice Spleth, *Leopold Sedar Senghor*, Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1985, p27

[133] ibid, p23. Spleth is not alone in this. The Fanon scholar Nigel C. Gibson states as a fact that the champions of negritude based in Paris had three things in common - "the color of their skin, their language (French), and their colonial background." See Nigel C. Gibson *Fanon: The Postcolonial*

Negritude's general thrust was in poetry. "Negritude adorns itself with a tragic beauty that finds expression only in poetry"[134] states Sartre in *BO,* claiming that Black poetry is the most authentic and revolutionary poetry of that age. Poetry was a means for the alienated Black to affirm his[135] presence as a historical subject through an assertion of his identity from a suffering that the Other's perception of his skin colour has put him in, a way to reclaim his human essence. Besides being a negation of White values, it was also a forceful call to the White Other to recognize the Black. "Put up with me. I won't put up with you."[136]

Negritude was also a memory of the Promised Land, the pristine land, the colonized land of ancestors, a beautiful Black Africa.

> Naked woman. Black woman
> robed in the color of life, the shape of beauty,
> I bloomed in your shade, and your soft hands
> veiled my eyes.
> Now in the heart of a summer noon, I come upon you,
> Land of Promise,
> high on a sun hill and your beauty
> stops my heart, like the eagle's flash.
>
> Naked woman, fathomless woman
> flesh of ripe fruit, dark ecstasy of dark wines,
> mouth making lyric my mouth,
> savannah of peerless horizons, savannah quaking

Imagination, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003, p62. Spleth further adds that some Negritude's fiercest critics, like Wole Soyinka or Ezekiel Mphahlele, were born in former British colonies.

[134] Jean-Paul Sartre, "Black Orpheus"*,* trans. John MacCombie *The Massachusetts Review*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (Autumn, 1964 - Winter, 1965), p51

[135] It almost always is 'his'. As some have pointed out, many studies and commentaries on Negritude, including those of Fanon, have omitted the contributions of Black women writers to the movement. The feminist scholar Sharpley-Whiting argues in her introduction to *Negritude Women* that "The masculinist genealogy constructed by the founding poets and shored up by literary historians, critics, and Africanist philosophers continues to elide and minimize the presence and contributions of French speaking black women to Negritude's evolution." For a more elaborate treatment of the subject see T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *Negritude Women,* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002.

[136] Cesaire, *Notebook,* p23

in the fervent caress of the East Wind,
sculptured tom-tom
taut tom-tom
moaning under the conqueror's fingers
your full contralto is the sacred chant of the Beloved.[137]

While Africa was animalized as the 'dark continent' in the literature of the colonizers, the poets of Negritude humanized the 'dark continent' through a positive affirmation of a Black civilization, Black values, Black beauty, and Black past.[138] According to Nigerian scholar Abiola Irele, to whom the themes of Negritude were a counter-movement to the state of dependence on the west, "The quest for new values thus leads the black writer to self-definition in terms that are non-western, and the association between the black race and Africa acquires a new meaning: instead of being a source of shame, it becomes a source of pride. This is the ultimate end of negritude, and much of the literature is dedicated to a rehabilitation of Africa, a way of refurbishing the image of the black man. The psychological function of this, as well as being a counter to the Negro's inferiority complex, is to permit an open and unashamed identification with the continent, a poetic sublimation of those associations in the Negro's mind which constitute for him a source of mental conflict in his relationship with western culture: a process of self-avowal and self-recognition."[139] It can be further inferred from Irele's arguments that Negritude's racial exaltation of Black Africa is but a defence against the colonial apparatus that sought to socially and psychologically inferioritize the Black and that the use of an African myth

[137] Leopold Sedar Senghor, "Black Woman" trans. Lucille Clifton in *The Massachusetts Review*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (Summer, 1974), p506

[138] This view has elicited severe criticism from other Black activists. The South African Ezekiel Mphahlele contests Negritude's eulogy of Africa. "Who is so stupid as to deny the historical fact of Negritude as both a protest and a positive assertion of African cultural values? All this is valid. What I do not accept is the way in which too much of the poetry by it romanticizes Africa – as a symbol of innocence, purity and artless primitiveness." See his "Negritude – A Reply" in ed. Janice Spleth *Critical Perspectives on Leopold Sedar Senghor,* Colorado: Three Continents Press, 1993, pp 31-35. However, in defence of Senghor's portrayal of a pristine Africa, Spleth writes "The equation of Africa with the innocent paradise of Eden, the image of peoples living in perfect harmony with nature and with each other, a world inhabited by noble warriors and pure maidens, where music and magic are always present – such a vision has had an undeniable appeal for diverse cultures throughout history beginning with the legend of the Golden Age and has a long and respected literary heritage." Spleth, *Senghor,* 1985, p32

[139] 0 p508

was “an attempt to recreate an emotional as well as an original bond beneath the contingencies of a particularly difficult historical experience.”[140]

Negritude’s poetry was essentialist, a sort of essentialism in reverse. Senghor, for instance, opines that analytical reason is European while intuitive reason is African, at times pushing the argument to say that *reason* itself is European while *emotion* is African. According to Senghor, the European mind is essentially “static, objective, and dichotomic. It is dualistic in that it makes an absolute distinction between body and soul, matter and spirit. It is founded on separation and opposition: on analysis and conflict. The African, on the other hand, conceives the world, beyond the diversity of its forms, as a fundamentally mobile, yet unique, reality that seeks synthesis”.[141]

Cesaire too appears to follow this path, questioning European modernity from a ‘Black’ perspective.

> those who invented neither powder nor compass
> Those who could harness neither steam nor electricity
> Those who explored neither the seas nor the sky
> But those without whom the earth would not be earth[142]

and

> Eia for those who never invented anything
> for those who never explored anything
> for those who never conquered anything
> but yield, captivated, to the essence of things
> ignorant to surfaces but captivated by the motion of all things
> indifferent to conquering, but playing the games of the world[143]

---

[140] ibid, p511

[141] Leopold Sedar Senghor, “Negritude: A Humanism of the Twentieth Century” in ed. Fred Lee Hord and Jonathan Scott Lee *I am because We are: Readings in Black Philosophy,* Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995, p48

[142] Cesaire, *Notebook,* p34

[143] Ibid, p35

Black innocence is contrasted with the maliciousness of White colonial conquest, Black affinity to nature with White domination of culture, and a virgin Black premodernity with the penetrative and corrupting White modernity. To reject the colonial Other's discourse, the poet of Negritude uses stereotypes created by the Other to define the self. As Cesaire clarifies in an interview in 1967 to Rene Depestre, 'Negritude' was an act of defiance and the words *negre* and *negritude* were a violent affirmation of the self in a White world that chose to assimilate the Blacks or ignore their contributions in toto.[144]

Negritude subverted the French language to bring out as a positive affirmation those attributes of the Blacks that were given a negative image by the colonizers, attempting to negate the all-consuming White discourse of colonialism. But its excessive reliance on the discourse framed by the White Other as a reference point for the Black Self became the subject of severe criticism. Renate Zahar argues that "this negative, revolutionary response to colonialism is deeply marked by what it rejects: it bears itself racist features... The relativity of negritude stems from the fact that it has to rely on the methods of colonial ideology to react against it; even in the act of negating colonialism it reproduces its features."[145] The criticism laid on Negritude intellectuals also is that they were confining themselves to a narrow particularism.

However, in the defence of the proponents of Negritude, Irele writes "In their search for identity, the adherents of negritude have had to accept and explore to the full their particular situation. But, although preoccupied with a sectional and limited interest, they were inspired by a universal human need for fulfilment. In this, they have never strayed from the central, enduring problem of the human condition."[146] In order for them to embrace universalism humanism, the Blacks had to first embrace the particular situation of their racial condition.

Consider Cesaire's passionate appeal:

> But if someone asks me what my conception of Negritude is, I answer that above all it is a concrete rather than an abstract coming to consciousness. What I have been telling you about-the atmosphere in which we lived, an atmosphere of assimilation in which Negro people were ashamed of themselves-has great importance. We lived in an atmosphere of rejection, and we developed an inferiority complex. I have always

[144] Aime Cesaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* trans. John Pinkham, New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000, p89.
[145] Renate Zahar, *Frantz Fanon: Colonialism and Alienation,* New Delhi: Aakar, 2010, p67
[146] Abiola Irele, "Negritude-Literature and Ideology", p523

> thought that the black man was searching for his identity. And it has seemed to me that if what we want is to establish this identity, then we must have a concrete consciousness of what we are-that is, of the first fact of our lives: that we are black; that we were black and have a history, a history that contains certain cultural elements of great value; and that Negroes were not, as you put it, born yesterday, because there have been beautiful and important black civilizations. At the time we began to write, people could write a history of world civilization without devoting a single chapter to Africa, as if Africa had made no contributions to the world. Therefore we affirmed that we were Negroes and that we were proud of it, and that we thought that Africa was not some sort of blank page in the history of humanity; in sum, we asserted that our Negro heritage was worthy of respect, and that this heritage was not relegated to the past, that its values were values that could still make an important contribution to the world.[147]

Cesaire's Negritude appears a 'politics of recognition' in the Taylorian sense, framed for a Black as a being-in-the-world who has been denied his due in society and in history. The Black seeks, then, not an abstract particularism but a universalism that will recognize his concrete particular condition.

Hear Cesaire:

> for entrenched as I am in this unique race
> you still know my tyrannical love
> you know that it is not from hatred of other races
> that I demand of myself to become a hoer for this unique race
> that what I want
> is for universal hunger
> for universal thirst[148]

Cesaire is thirsty for, is hungry for, he *demands* a universalism that will recognize the Black as a unique being-in-the-world. The politics, like the poetics, of Negritude is a demand for

---

[147] Aime Cesaire, *Discourse,* p91-92
[148] Cesaire, *Notebooks,* p38

a multicultural society where Black as a distinct identity, an identity born out of the shared experience of suffering, its history, its culture and its values would be respected.

What would this multicultural society of the future be like and what would be the role of the Black in it? In his famous tract *Discourse on Colonialism,* a work that had a profound influence on Fanon, published in 1950, he argues that the Negritude's ideal political future would be a society which was inclusively modern, where the Black, as a Black, still maintained his roots to a pristine past.[149]

> Once again, I systematically defend our old Negro civilizations: they were courteous civilizations.
>
> So the real problem, you say, is to return to them. No, I repeat. We are not men for whom it is a question of "either-or." For us, the problem is not to make a utopian and sterile attempt to repeat the past, but to go beyond. It is not a dead society that we want to revive. We leave that to those who go in for exoticism. Nor is it the present colonial society that we wish to prolong, the most putrid carrion that ever rotted under the sun. It is a new society that we must create, with the help of all our brother slaves, a society rich with all the productive power of modern times, warm with all the fraternity of olden days.[150]

It is probably such a sentiment in Cesaire that brings the postcolonial critic Benita Parry to support him in her famous essay 'Resistance theory/ Theorising resistance' that "Negritude is not a recovery of a pre-existent state, but a textually invented history, an identity effected through figurative operations and a tropological construction of blackness as a sign of the colonised condition and its refusal."[151]

Cesairean Negritude is seen to be more political, while Senghor's is perceived to be cultural. In Africana philosopher Reiland Rabaka's eyes, Senghor's culturalism was "a comprador

---

[149] As an example worthy of emulation, Cesaire gave the Soviet Union. Cesaire was a member of the French Communist Party till 1956.

[150] Cesaire, *Discourse,* p51-52

[151] Benita Parry, "Resistance theory/ theorising resistance, or two cheers for nativism", in ed. Francis Barker et al, *Colonial Discourse/ Postcolonial Theory,* New York: Manchester University Press, 1994, p182

for racial colonial policy, racial colonial anthropology, and racial colonial ethnology."[152] Senghor's Negritude has elicited sharp response from scholars who posit a 'good political' Negritude to the 'blank cultural' Negritude.[153] The point where quite some Cesaire supporters reached a fix was Sartre's handling of Negritude and Fanon's handling of Sartre's handling of Negritude.

Orphic tragedy or a 'Great Black Mirage'?

Jean-Paul Sartre lent his support to the Negritude movement as it developed in the hands of Senghor, Cesaire and Damas. His *Black Orpheus,* the preface to an anthology of Negro poetry of West Indian and African poets compiled by Senghor, published in 1948 remains the most influential, and probably the most controversial, statement on Negritude written by a supporter.

Sartre opens his preface by saying that the Black writers in the volume are fixing their gaze on the white man, who has thus far enjoyed "the privilege of seeing without being seen."[154] The whiteness of the White's skin was a further aspect of vision, a claim to "the secret white essence of things", like virtue, like truth, it consolidates the white man's claim to universality: the mythic idea that white represents the very essence of existence. One of the primary functions of Negritude is to challenge this claim. The "wild and free looks", the "quiet and corrosive looks" of the Negritude poets 'ate away' the White claims to universalism by their contestation that the human essence was not White.

Sartre recognizes the need for Negritude's particularism. "These black men are addressing themselves to black men about black men; their poetry is neither satiric nor imprecatory: it is an awakening to consciousness."[155] Yet, he also concedes that Negritude is an appeal to a universalism, albeit of a different kind, one that would recognize the Black. "I should

---

[152] Reiland Rabaka, *Forms of Fanonism: Frantz Fanon's Critical Theory and the Dialectics of Decolonization,* Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2010, p174

[153] For instance, Paulin Hountondji argues "for Cesaire the exaltation of black cultures functions merely as a supporting argument in favor of political liberation, in Senghor it works as an alibi for evading the political problem of national liberation. Hypertrophy of cultural nationalism generally serves to compensate for the hypertrophy of political nationalism." See *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality,* Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996, p159-160

[154] Sartre, *Black Orpheus,* p13

[155] ibid, p16

like to show that this poetry which seems racial at first is actually a hymn by everyone for everyone."[156] A substantial part of the essay that follows is dedicated to show how the Black, through a necessary consciousness of his situation as a Black being-in-the-world, eventually reclaims a humanity denied to him. The Black is a victim of the situation created by the White capitalist enterprise not owing to his position as a class but "*because he is a black man* and insofar as he is a colonized native or a deported African. And since he is oppressed within the confines of his race and because of it, he must first of all become conscious of his race. He must oblige those who have vainly tried throughout the centuries to reduce him to the status of a beast, to recognize that he is a man."[157]

This observation led Sartre to coining his controversial definition of Negritude – anti-racist racism.[158]

> The negro cannot deny that he is negro, nor can he claim that he is part of some abstract colorless humanity: he is black. Thus he has his back up against the wall of authenticity: having been insulted and formerly enslaved, he picks up the word "nigger" which was thrown at him like a stone, he draws himself erect and proudly proclaims himself a black man, face to face with white men. The unity which will come eventually, bringing all oppressed peoples together in the same struggle, must be preceded in the colonies by what I shall call the moment of separation or negativity: this anti-racist racism is the only road that will lead to the abolition of racial differences.[159]

Negritude, thus, is manifested as an 'anti-racist racism', but it is the only avenue open to the Negro for an authentic freedom and would ideally lead to the abolition of racial differences. Appropriating a Hegelian dialectic, Sartre posits White supremacy as the thesis and Negritude as the antithesis, the synthesis being a classless society without racism. Sartre

---

[156] Ibid, p16

[157] Ibid, p18

[158] This elicited polarized responses from scholars dealing with Negritude. Mikela Lundahl claims that this was a misconception of Sartre was owing to an ignorance of his own identity as a privileged White, whereas Abiola Irele completely agrees to Sartre's terminology in that he infers that Sartre was only referring to a racial consciousness and not a feeling of racial superiority. See Mikela Lundahl, "Negritude – An Anti-racist Racism? (Or who is the racist?)", in ed. Isabelle Constant and Kahiudi C. Mabana *Negritude,* UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009, pp83-96 and Abiola Irele, "A Defence of Negritude" in *Transition*, No. 13 (Mar. - Apr., 1964), pp. 9-11

[159] Sartre, *Black Orpheus,* p18

perceives negritude as a 'weak moment' in the progression of dialectics, which leads to the transcendence of racism and ultimately leading to a pluralist society. Negritude is a means and cannot be an end in itself.

Hence the title to the preface to the anthology of Negritude poetry, '*Black Orpheus'*. Like the tragic Greek poet Orpheus, who descended into hell to retrieve his beloved but loses her on reaching ground, the Black poet descends into his existential hell to retrieve Blackness only to lose it later once he hits the surface of humanity. "Thus Negritude is for destroying itself, it is a "crossing to" and not an "arrival at," a means and not an end."[160]

He concludes

> It is when negritude renounces itself that it finds itself; it is when it accepts losing that it has won: the colored man - and he alone - can be asked to renounce the pride of his color. He is the one who is walking on this ridge between past particularism - which he has just climbed - and future universalism, which will be the twilight of his negritude; he is the one who looks to the end of particularism in order to find the dawn of the universal.[161]

Much like in *Anti-Semite and Jew,* Sartre opines that it is the socialist revolution, in which the Black will play an authentic role, and the establishment of a classless society that will put an end to racism and herald a genuine pluralism. Till then, the anti-racism racism of Negritude is but a passing phase in the dialectic.

Fanon's engagement with Sartre on these contentious passages in *BO* has been a subject of considerable debate among Fanon scholars. In fact, it wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that Fanon's engagement with Negritude is mediated by his dialogue with Sartre on the subject. Fanon had an uneasy relationship with Negritude. Sympathetic, empathetic, ambivalent, acerbic, hostile are all words that can be used to describe Fanon's reaction to Negritude in his works. As later parts of the chapter shall show, it is this response to Negritude that would be an important factor in shaping Fanon's concept of identity politics.

The very first mention of Negritude in *BSWM* is as a reaction to Sartre's categorization of the same as a "minor term of a dialectical progression". Fanon appears to express his

---

[160] Ibid, p49

[161] Ibid, p51

discontent with Sartre when he says "When I read that page, I felt that I had been robbed of my last chance. I said to my friends, "The generation of the younger black poets has just suffered a blow that can never be forgiven." Help had been sought from a friend of the colored peoples, and that friend had found no better response than to point out the relativity of what they were doing."[162]

Arguing that *BO* was an intellectualization of Black experience, Fanon proclaims that Sartre had destroyed 'black zeal' – Fanon needed, as a 'Black' himself, to lose himself completely in Negritude.[163] "Without a Negro past, without a Negro future, it was impossible for me to live my Negrohood. Not yet white, no longer wholly black, I was damned. Jean-Paul Sartre had forgotten that the Negro suffers in his body quite differently from the white man."[164] Fanon here seems to allude to the uniqueness of the lived experience of the Black in a racist society, where without the intervention of Negritude, an authentic way forward was not possible.

But then

> In no way should I dedicate myself to the revival of an unjustly unrecognized Negro civilization. I will not make myself the man of any past. I do not want to exalt the past at the expense of my present and of my future.[165]

Fanon comes full circle to Sartre's understanding that Negritude and its exaltation of race specific culture cannot be an end in itself. In fact, his attack on Negritude's generalizations is caustic, claiming to have no wish "to be the victim of the *Fraud* of a black world."[166] Disagreeing with John McCulloch's contention that Fanon became more sympathetic to negritude with the passing of time – ironically, as the author argues, owing to Sartre's influence[167] - I tend to agree with Azzedine Haddour's argument that while Fanon grappled with

---

[162] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks,* trans. Charles Lam Markmann, London: Pluto Press, 2008, p141
[163] Ibid, p103
[164] Ibid, p106
[165] Ibid, p176
[166] Ibid, p179
[167] Jock McCulloch, *Black Soul, White Artifact: Fanon's Psychology and Social Theory,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983, p53. However, McCulloch's argument that "in contradistinction to Sartre, Fanon's third term in his dialectic is revolutionary nationalism, not a socialist society devoid of racism," deserves further exploration.

the issue of blackness in all his works, it is erroneous to suggest that "this continued critical engagement with negritude demonstrates Fanon's endorsement of its ideology."[168]

Parry also concurs that Fanon's engagement with Negritude was not unproblematic. She writes, "Fanon's writings function at a point of tension between cultural nationalism and transnationality, without 'resolving' the contradiction and without yielding an attachment to the one or the aspiration of the other."[169] She further claims that Fanon's "wavering empathy" with the concept became an "ambiguous critique" in 'Racism and Culture' and his later writings.[170]

While *BSWM* is generally considered a text sympathetic to Negritude, Fanon's sarcastic remarks on Negritude's glorification of a great Black past give a different account.

> Let us be clearly understood. I am convinced that it would be of the greatest interest to be able to have contact with a Negro literature or architecture of the third century before Christ. I should be very happy to know that a correspondence had flourished between some Negro philosopher and Plato. But I can absolutely not see how this fact would change anything in the lives of the eight-year-old children who labor in the cane fields of Martinique or Guadeloupe.[171]

Fanon, here, reflects a sentiment reflected in Sartre's *What is Literature?* that to write for one's age was to want to go beyond it to the future.[172] Fanon concludes *BSWM* thus, "The body of history does not determine a single one of my actions. I am my own foundation. And it is by going beyond the historical, instrumental hypothesis that I will initiate the cycle of my freedom."[173] So the Fanon scholar Nigel Gibson is wrong here when he interprets that "For Sartre, negritude represents the free existentialist choice of immediacy, but for Fanon there never was a choice."[174]

---

[168] Azzedine Haddour, "Sartre and Fanon: On Negritude and Political Participation" in eds. Adrian van den Hoven and Andrew Leak *Sartre Today: A Centenary Celebration,* New York: Berghahn Books, 2005, p292
[169] Parry, 'Resistance theory/ theorising resistance', p187
[170] ibid, p190
[171] Fanon, *Black Skin,* p180
[172] Jean-Paul Sartre, *What is Literature? t*rans. Bernard Frechtman, Oxon: Routledge, 2010, p248
[173] Fanon, *Black Skin,* p180
[174] Nigel Gibson, *Fanon,* p75

Indeed, Fanon's engagement with Sartre on Negritude has been the object of interest of several academics dealing with Fanonism. The Fanon scholar Reiland Rabaka spends 46 pages in a chapter called 'Antiracist Fanonism' in his work *Forms of Fanonism* to prove that Sartre suffered from a racist paternalism and that Fanon was well aware of this when he criticized Sartre's Hegelian analysis of Negritude.[175] In similar vein, Robert Bernasconi asserts that Fanon's arguments 'against' Sartre in *BSWM* might be today understood as "a version of standpoint theory or the epistemology of provenance", but which were developed by Fanon in his time as existential phenomenology.[176] Bernasconi further claims that in Fanon's criticism of Sartre, Fanon "insists that Sartre should acknowledge his limitations as a white man",[177] giving the image of Fanon as a philosopher of lived experience.

The Africana existentialist philosopher Lewis Gordon, while critiquing Sartre's alleged patronizing slips in *BO* that privileges the (White) proletariat as the ideal to which the Blacks must be raised, is also keen to note that Fanon's criticism of Sartre is not on the level of pure lived experience of identity, i.e., the argument that Sartre as a White man has essential limitations in understanding Negritude, but on the level of an existentialist politico-philosophical outlook. Gordon's contestation that according to Fanon "one's standpoint and identity are helpful, but not total. One can place oneself in another's place", shall in the later chapters assist our understanding of Fanonian identity politics. Likewise, philosopher Ato Sekyi-Otu's argument that Fanon was deeply concerned about a "truer version of human universals", while maintaining that Fanon "cast a suspecting look at the coercive objectification of Sartre's account of Negritude – its manifest objectivism, but also its covert and informing ethnocentrism"[178] will also be taken up in the later chapters dealing with Fanonian tensions over the contradictions between the ideas of universalism and particularism.[179]

---

[175] Reiland Rabaka, *Forms of Fanonism*, p49-96. I would also like to add that Rabaka grotesquely misinterprets Fanon and Sartre, and the former's observations on the latter, throughout this section. A sample of this "Part of Sartre's misunderstanding of blackness, Fanon suggested, had to do with his unwillingness, at the time that he wrote "Black Orpheus" in 1948, to critically engage whiteness and white supremacy, especially amongst would-be white antiracist allies, white liberals, white workers, white Marxists, and other white leftists." ibid, p87. Fanon suggests no such thing anywhere.

[176] Robert Bernasconi, "The European Knows and does not Know: Fanon's Response to Sartre", in ed. Max Silverman, *Frantz Fanon's Black Skin White Masks: New Interdisciplinary Essays,* New York: Manchester University Press, 2005, p101

[177] ibid, p103

[178] Ato Sekyi-Otu, *Fanon's Dialectic of Experience* USA: Harvard University Press, 1996, p17

[179] The argument that Fanon condemns Sartre on the basis of lived experience is not limited to Fanon scholars alone. Taking a Deleuzian perspective of the 'anti-humanism' in Negritude, Valentine Moulard-

Fanon's criticism of negritude progressively intensifies from *BSWM* to *WOTE.* Taking this into account, Sonia Kruks is right in identifying that "Fanon's objection is not that Sartre is in error in asserting that *negritude* is a transitional movement. Sartre's mistake, in fact, is to have told the truth!"[180] She further asserts that in the concluding arguments of *BSWM* Fanon draws on the most radical transcendental conception of freedom that Sartre had developed in *Being and Nothingness,* going against the essentialist rhetoric in negritude.

The problem for Fanon is that the followers of negritude advocated a return to a cultural past while they were politically removed from ground realities that were unfolding.[181] He describes this return to a mythic past as an ahistorical movement and dubs negritude as a "great black mirage" in which the cultural, historical and national differences of the blacks were lost. Considering the search for a "Negro people" as a source of conflict, he explicitly states his intention to understand and destroy this source.[182] Consider the scathing critique of negritude in 'Racism and Culture':

> Rediscovering tradition, living it as a defense mechanism, as a symbol of purity, of salvation, the decultured individual leaves the impression that the mediation takes vengeance by substantializing itself. This falling back on archaic positions having no relation to technical development is paradoxical. The institutions thus valorized no longer correspond to the elaborate methods of action already mastered.

Leonard writes "Fanon's issue with Sartre's characterization of Negritude as "a minor moment" is at least twofold. First, by some kind of process of appropriation characteristic of dialectic, Sartre-the-White-man is thereby assuming that he knows what Black subjectivity is. Second, Sartre is assigning his own specific end to the dialectic of liberation, thereby disowning the Black Man or Woman from their own struggle for liberation - that is, from their own singular becoming - and more: from their own singular becomings, as there are at least as many series of becomings as there are individuals." See Valentine Moulard-Leonard, "Revolutionary Becomings: Negritude's anti-humanist Humanism" in *Human Studies,* Vol. 28, No. 3, (Nov 2005), p245.

[180] Sonia Kruks, "Fanon, Sartre, and Identity Politics" in eds. Lewis R. Gordon et al. *Fanon: A Critical Reader,* Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996, p131

[181] Negritude has also been accused of elitism by others. Abiola Irele writes "if a certain political awareness was an implicit part of the cultural offensive of the French-speaking black intellectual, which placed negritude in close relationship with African nationalism and Pan- Africanism, it is none the less quite clear that negritude remained essentially a cultural and intellectual movement, albeit with political implications. The French-speaking Negro elite tended more towards an elaboration of ideas concerning the black man's place in the world than towards the actual mobilisation of the masses for an immediate and definite political goal. Negritude was thus at the most an ideological movement with remote political purposes." See Abiola Irele, "Negritude-Literature and Ideology", p516

[182] Frantz Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution: Political Essays,* trans. Haakon Chevalier, New York: Grove Press, 1988, p18

> The culture put into capsules, which has vegetated since the foreign domination, is revalorized. It is not reconceived, grasped anew, dynamized from within. It is shouted. And this headlong, unstructured, verbal revalorization conceals paradoxical attitudes.[183]

Fanon finds no revolutionary praxis for a genuine decolonization in such a purely 'culturalist' approach.[184] One could say along with the Black Marxist scholar Adele Jinadu that while Fanon was not opposed to cultural nationalism per se, Fanon's quarrel with Negritude was that "it tended to become a form of mystification, elitist in orientation and direction; above all, it lacked a populist vision; it did not constitute a radical ideological program; rather, it became an ideology of collaboration with the West."[185]

In *WOTE* he adds to this critique of negritude. The argument he presents, that negritude is not revolutionary enough, complements Sartre's views in *BO,* albeit in a much stronger and direct fashion. Fanon identifies two reactions of elites among the colonized to culture. Initially, when forced to choose between the culture of the colonizer and the native tradition, this elite goes with the former. Later, some members of these elite, during the period of decolonization, abandon the culture of the colonizer in which they were hitherto assimilated and seek anchorage in their native culture. To Fanon, however, the attempt of the native elite to rehabilitate the native culture is nothing but "a banal search for exoticism".[186] By the time of writing *WOTE,* Fanon came about to irrevocably dismissing Negritude along with its essentialist rhetoric as a backward looking ideology, an abstraction. McCulloch is right to point out that Fanon was opposed to this because "This abstraction appears in the practice of lumping all Negro people under a single category, thereby denying the heterogeneity of Negro experience.

---

[183] Ibid, p42

[184] Fanon was also probably the only Black contemporary of the founders of Negritude to place a class based criticism of the concept. Consider the following polemic from the essay 'West Indian and Africans'. "Relations are not modified by epidermal accentuations. Despite the greater or lesser amount of melanin that the skin may contain, there is a tacit agreement enabling all and sundry to recognize one another as doctors, tradesmen, workers. A Negro worker will be on the side of the mulatto worker against the middle-class Negro. Here we have proof that the question of race are but a superstructure, a mantle, an obscure ideological emanation concealing an economic reality." ibid, p18

[185] L. Adele Jinadu, *Fanon: In Search of the African Revolution,* London: Kegan Paul, 1986, p220

[186] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth,* trans. Richard Philcox*,* New York: Grove Press, 2004, p221

Like the colonial racists, the poets of negritude presume race to be the determinant of the individual's social identity."[187] Anti-racist racism was not enough.

Sartre to blame?

Albert Memmi, Tunisian writer, Fanon's contemporary and author of *The Colonizer and the Colonized,* writes in 'The Impossible Life of Fanon' "Yet it was Fanon's particular tragedy that, while henceforth he hated his former colonizer, he never again returned to Negritude and the West Indies."[188] He credits this to the influence of Sartre's *Black Orpheus* and *Anti-Semite and Jew.*

Sartre's account of non-recognition as oppression, together with his strongest call for the oppressed authentically to affirm their identity, is found in *Anti-Semite and Jew.* To Sartre, it is the Anti-Semite who creates the Jew[189] and that the situation in which the Jew finds himself, "an ensemble of limits and restrictions", is created by the Anti-Semite, and it is as a being-in-a-situation that the Jew makes his choices.

The most common response that the Jew makes is that of "flight", either into assimilation or into a universalist rationalism where the particularities of the Jewish condition can be avoided. Sartre dubs both as inauthentic choices. In contrast to the inauthentic Jew, Sartre describes the authentic as the one who demands recognition for what he is. And follows an important passage for understanding the Sartrean influence on Fanonian politics

> If it is agreed that man may be defined as a being having freedom within the limits of a situation, then it is easy to see that the exercise of this freedom may be considered as *authentic* or *inauthentic* according to the choices made in the situation. Authenticity, it is almost needless to say, consists in having a true and lucid consciousness of the situation, in assuming the responsibilities and risks that it involves, in accepting it in pride or humiliation, sometimes in horror and hate.[190]

---

[187] John McCulloch, *Black Soul,* p46

[188] Albert Memmi, "The Impossible Life of Frantz Fanon" trans. Thomas Cassirer, G. Michael Twomey in *The Massachusetts Review*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Winter, 1973), p16

[189] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew: An Exploration of the Etiology of Hate,* trans. George J. Becker, with preface by Michael Walzer, New York: Schocken Books, 1995, p69

[190] Ibid, p90

Anticipating later critiques of universalism, Sartre argues that the old style abstract humanism of the liberal democrat is not merely inadequate, but itself oppressive. Liberal universal humanism puts the Jews in a handicap, not only does it seek to suppress the particularities of concrete groups, it also obscures the dynamics of oppression behind the screen of a universal human essence. While he warns against the democrat's assimilationist rhetoric which converges with that of the Anti-Semite in denying the Jew his place in society, in Sartre's eyes, assimilation proper does not pertain to the liberal democrat's schema which puts difference under erasure. It does not exact from the Jew conformity and submission in the name of universalism. Rather, Sartre insists that this assimilation must be based on an ethics that respects the difference of the Jew. He thus rails against the twin danger to the authentic Jew:

> For a Jew, conscious and proud of being Jewish, asserting his claim to be a member of the Jewish community without ignoring on that account the bonds which unite him to the national community, there may be not so much difference between the anti-Semite and the democrat. The former wishes to destroy him as a man and leave nothing in him but the Jew, the pariah, the untouchable; the latter wishes to destroy him as a Jew and leave nothing in him but the man, the abstract and universal subject of the rights of man and the rights of the citizen.[191]

Taking on from Sartre, Fanon is explicit on the question of recognition – "He who is reluctant to recognize me opposes me." Consequently, his starting point in *BSWM* is the problem of authenticity. To Fanon, the colonized black is a product of a socially produced but real situation of inferiority which they have internalized. They thus suffer from a "psycho-existentialist complex" that prevents them from authentic self and social transformations. The social origin of the Black's neurosis lies in the attitude of the white, colonial society to blackness. Appropriating Sartre's notion of the overdetermined otherness of the Jew, Fanon writes "I am overdetermined from the outside. I am not the slave of the 'idea' that others have of me but of my appearance."[192] But while the Jew can attempt at assimilation through

[191] Ibid, p57
[192] Fanon, *Black Skin,* p87

invisibility, the fact of blackness prevents the Black from doing the same. Like Sartre's Jew, Fanon's Black too engages in flight.

> The young black in the Antilles... identifies himself with the explorer, the bringer of civilization, the white man who carries truth to savages—an all-white truth. There is identification—that is, the young Negro subjectively adopts a white man's attitude.[193]

Another response is the escape into the universal, much like the Jew, much more specifically for Black intellectuals who try to evade their racialized situation by an appeal to reason or other transcendental universals.

The strategy of authenticity deployed by the Blacks, then, might appear to be negritude, wherein the affirmation of Blackness, a Black culture, a Black past is seen as an end in itself. But as mentioned above, Fanon's attitude towards this is ambivalent in *BSWM* and hostile in *WOTE.* The reason I argue – and here I agree with Sonia Kruks who identifies Fanon's political position that "the affirmation of identity can be liberating *only* in the context of a struggle also to transform wider material and institutional forms of oppression"[194] – is Fanon's conceptualization of identity politics was one shaped not by affiliations and recognitions of cultural pasts, but a call for a reciprocal recognition within the present with the intention of transcending *all* particularist identities towards a new universalist humanism.

Certain other critical questions emerge while dealing with Fanon's engagement with Negritude. It is clear that Fanon's engagement with Negritude mediated by his dialogue with Sartre, especially in *BSWM,* is a contentious issue for several scholars dealing with Fanonism. Since Fanon's appropriation of the Sartrean framework throughout his works will be dealt with in the later chapters in more detail, it is necessary to set out here the *intention* behind Fanon's theses in *BSWM.* In a Skinnerian sense, to speak of intentions of a writer may either refer to his plan to create a certain type of work or to describe an actual work in a certain way.[195] Further, considering that a writer's intentions are inside his works, "to know what a writer meant by a particular work is to know what his primary intentions were in writing it."[196]

---

[193] Ibid, p114

[194] Sonia Kruks, 1996, p133

[195] Quentin Skinner, "Motives, Intentions and the Interpretation of Texts", in *New Literary History,* Vol. 3, No. 2, On Interpretation : I, Winter:1972, p401

[196] Ibid, p404

I would argue that *BSWM* is much more prone to various misinterpretations, like the anomaly of Rabaka, than the acidic *WOTE,* largely owing to the complex nature of the subjects addressed and the ambiguous manner in which they are addressed by the author. Scholars White, Black and Brown have misinterpreted Fanon's engagement with Sartre, some arriving at ludicrous conclusions. Among others, *BSWM* is a work of social satire executed with ironical wit. The object of satire, the comic subject as Aristotle would have it, "the laughable is a species of what is disgraceful. The laughable is an error or disgrace that does not involve pain or destruction; for example, a comic mask is ugly and distorted, but does not involve pain."[197] Doesn't the white mask worn by the black skin involve the question of ugliness and distortion? And isn't this mimicry itself a matter of satire?

Fanon says

> Why write this book? No one has asked me for it.
>
> Especially those to whom it is directed.
>
> Well? Well, I reply quite calmly that there are too many idiots in this world. And having said it, I have the burden of proving it.[198]
>
> To whom is it directed? Who are the objects of Fanon's satire?
>
> The problem is important. I propose nothing short of the liberation of the man of color from himself. We shall go very slowly, for there are two camps: the white and the black.
>
> Stubbornly we shall investigate both metaphysics and we shall find that they are often quite fluid.
>
> We shall have no mercy for the former governors, the former missionaries. To us, the man who adores the Negro is as "sick" as the man who abominates him.
>
> Conversely, the black man who wants to turn his race white is as miserable as he who preaches hatred for the whites.
>
> In the absolute, the black is no more to be loved than the Czech, and truly what is to be done is to set man free.[199]

Fanon further adds:

---

[197] Aristotle, *Poetics,* Translated with an introduction and notes by Malcolm Heath, London: Penguin, 1996, p9

[198] Fanon, Black Skin, p1

[199] Ibid, p2

> Concern with the elimination of a vicious circle has been the only guide-line for my efforts.
>
> There is a fact: White men consider themselves superior to black men.
>
> There is another fact: Black men want to prove to white men, at all costs, the richness of their thought, the equal value of their intellect.[200]

The above passages should make it clear that Fanon was not just intending to satirize the fallacies of White racism and the phenomenon of Blacks wearing white masks, but equally the attempts of the Negritude thinkers to prove the distinctiveness of being Black. It is not in the scope of the research to analyze the intentions behind the several scholars dealing with Fanonism who have overlooked this 'fact' and have interpreted Fanon accordingly, but a general observation can be made. A tendency among such scholars is to project Fanon as a sort of a Black messiah relevant in the contexts of studying (mostly anti-Black) White racism, colonialism and postcolonialism. At the risk of sounding polemical, I would like to state that this is as fallacious as the argument that Marx was the messiah of White workers. Fanon was a revolutionary humanist and a Universalist, and it is those universalising tendencies in his philosophy alone that can enable him to be appropriated in the study of radical identity politics at large.

This brings us to other connected questions. If, as William Connolly would have it, "every identity is particular, constructed, and relational"[201], what role does the kind of humanism espoused by Fanon play in its study? Does Fanon's universalism create a metanarrative that erases differences, as has been alleged by the likes of Christopher Miller, or does it herald a sort of pluralism that recognizes difference under an universalising category? If so, what is this category and what shapes it?

Likewise, does Fanon see identity as a fixed category in politics? Is he a philosopher of 'lived experience' as has been stated by many? Is this 'lived experience' the same as the one described in standpoint theory, or is it, as Nayar argues, the 'commonality of suffering' among

---

[200] Ibid, p3

[201] William Connolly, *Identity|Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox (Expanded Edition),* London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002, p46

Third World peoples?[202] Or is it a question of shared solidarity in struggle? I discuss these questions in the next chapter.

[202] Pramod K. Nayar, *Frantz Fanon,* New York: Routledge, 2013, p101

'To explain the other to myself': Fanon's Articulation of Identity Politics

But in the very world, which is the world
Of all of us,—the place where in the end
We find our happiness, or not at all!
-Wordsworth

It is very easy to consider Fanon as an exponent of Black identity politics. Several ambiguous passages from *Black Skin, White Masks,* when read in isolation, might confirm that. Some have read Fanon as an advocate of anti-colonial nationalism while others prefer the term nationalitarian. Fanon has also been projected as a philosopher of African existentialism.[203] All of these approaches are partly true. True, because Fanon does address these questions intensely in his works; partly, because the essence of his works indicates a continuity of concern with a broader question, the question of moving from particularity to universality. In this chapter, exploring Fanon's critique of identity politics and by tracing out its core aspects, I seek to present how a transcendence of particularist identity to a universalist identity informed Fanon's theory on the subject. I start with a discussion of identity and identity politics, briefly touching upon poststructuralist, postmarxist and liberal accounts of identity politics. Then, I delve into Fanonian discussions of identity and identity politics. I begin with a discussion of the Master-Slave dialectic of Fanon, which was inspired by his reading of Alexandre Kojeve's reading of Hegel. Following this, I talk about the Fanon's handling of universality and particularity in identity politics, and I show how Fanon was interested in moving from particularism to humanism. I argue that Fanon's project identity was becoming human, which was in line with his philosophy of Sartrean humanism. Sceptical of cultural nationalism and racial and national particularism, Fanon placed his bet on a reciprocal recognition, which would lead to a mutual

[203] See Lewis R. Gordon, *An Introduction to Africana Philosophy,* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008

enriching of all cultures and peoples. Through shared solidarity and struggle against oppression and by replacing the false universality of the oppressor with a genuine universality of the oppressed, a new humanism would be born.

Identity, Identification, Identity Politics

According to Alexandre Kojeve, man is self-conscious the moment he says "I".[204] What is *I*? *I* is a person's sense of self at a particular time, in particular circumstances, which they share in common with one set of people, and do not share with others. In short, *I* is the starting point of *Identity.* Aristotle famously observed that to be aloof from society, one must be an animal or a god. One can make a similar observation about 'Identity'. Identity is always social. It is not possible for an individual to have an identity that is exclusive to them, that is uniquely personal and above society. When *I* claims an identity, it is always in relation to someone else. Or, *I* becomes an identity only when it has a sense of *we.* This is what William Connolly means when he says that "Identity is *relational and collective."*[205]

Bhikku Parekh, however, elucidates three types of identities – the personal, the social and the human. According to Parekh, personal identity defines individuals as "unique human beings, distinct, as this person rather than some other", social identity "pertains to their membership of different organizations, communities and structures of relationships [...] and leads to different forms and levels of social belonging" and human identity, "the widest and also the shallowest, defines them simply as human beings."[206] While Parekh's definition of social identity is largely acceptable, his idea of personal identity is a bit too simplistic. As sociologist Richard Jenkins aptly notes "Individual identity – embodied in selfhood – is not a meaningful proposition in isolation from the human world of other people. Individuals are unique and variable, but selfhood is thoroughly socially constructed."[207]

---

[204] Alexandre Kojeve, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit,* trans. James H. Nichols Jr., New York: Basic Books, 1969, p. 3
[205] William E. Connolly, *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox* (expanded edition)*,* Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1991, p. xiv
[206] Bhikku Parekh, *A New Politics of Identity,* New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2008, p. 28
[207] Richard Jenkins, *Social Identity* (Second Edition), London: Routledge, 2004, p.18

For instance, take 'Frantz Fanon'. As an individual who was born in the French Antilles in 1925 and who died in a hospital in Washington DC in 1961, Frantz Fanon was a unique individual, just like the author of this paper, and the reader of this paper. And unless one believes in parallel universe, there was and will be only one Frantz Fanon. However, 'Frantz Fanon' is not an identity. Fanon possesses an identity by virtue of belonging to the Fanon family, a particular class, a particular nation, a particular gender, a particular sexual orientation, a particular political orientation, a particular literary preference and so on. That is, Frantz Fanon has an identity, or as Parekh would have it, a social identity, only by virtue of belonging to a social group. Frantz Fanon, by himself, is not a Black, a French Martinician, or even a man or a human – all of these are identities conferred on to him by discursive practices, which he accepts, or rejects, or refashions according to his agency.

In his account of identity and agency, cultural theorist Stuart Hall, taking from Michel Foucault, argues that what is to be considered is not a theory of subjectivity but rather that of discursive practices. He qualifies that this is an attempt "to rearticulate the relationship between subjects and discursive practices that the question of identity recurs - or rather, if one prefers to stress the process of subjectification to discursive practices, and the politics of exclusion which all such subjectification appears to entail, the question of *identification*."[208] What is to be noted here that Hall relatively privileges discursive practices in the construction of identity over the subjectivity of the actor. As I will be arguing later, to Fanon, it is ultimately agency that counts. To Hall, identification is never complete, never a totality or a subsumption, but rather a suturing.[209]

David Howarth also lays emphasis on a shift from identity to identification.[210] In the process of identification, political frontiers are produced "by complicated hegemonic practices which divide social spaces and confer identity by creating antagonistic relations between forces, and by linking together different demands and subjectivities into common projects."[211] Here, we see a marked progression from identity to identity politics. Or, we can say that identity politics begins for the individual when the *I* begins a process of identification with an identity *as different from and as opposed to* another identity/identities. *I* enters the realm of the political

---

[208] Stuart Hall, "Introduction: Who needs Identity?" in ed. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay, *Questions of Cultural Identity,* London: Sage, 2003, p. 2
[209] Ibid, p. 3
[210] David R. Howarth, *Poststructuralism and After: Structure, Power and Agency,* New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013, p. 227
[211] Ibid, p. 243

when it is part of a *we* and recognizes an oppositional *they.* Opposition and conflict are central to the Fanonist conception of identity politics as we shall see.

However, the liberal camp is likely to take offense at this position. For instance, to Amartya Sen, plurality of identities at any given point in time must be acknowledged and respected and he opposes the "singular affiliation" to any particular identity. He argues "The incitement to ignore all affiliation and loyalties other than those emanating from one restrictive identity can be deeply delusive and also contribute to social tension and violence."[212] In Sen's perspective, an individual's identity as a football fan is as important as her identity as a woman from some particular social, ethnic, or national group. What Sen, in essence, is advocating is a liberal politics of *apolitical* recognition where individuals recognize the plurality of identities of their self and of others without identification with any particular identity and avoiding social antagonisms – thus avoiding politics itself. This is fine under conditions of absolute peace, which of course, does not exist. In situations where the existing system has thrust an identity upon a group against its consent, an inferiorized identity like that of the Blacks or the colonized or the non-Brahmins in Tamil Nadu, the political act is to not just recognize pluralities, but to suture a unity from these pluralities, an identification, a hegemonic process, to bring together "different demands and subjectivities into common projects."

Besides, Sen misses a difference between roles and identities. According to sociologist Manuel Castells, roles "are defined by norms structured by the institutions and organizations of society" whereas identities are "people's source of meaning and experience" and provide a stronger source of meaning than roles "because of the process of self-construction and individuation that they involve."[213] Castells also introduces three types of identity namely legitimizing identity "introduced by the dominant institutions of society to extend and rationalize their domination *vis a vis* social actors", resistance identity "generated by those actors who are in positions/conditions devalued and/or stigmatized by the logic of domination, thus building trenches of resistance and survival on the basis of principles different from, or opposed to, those permeating the institutions of society", and project identity "when social actors, on the basis of whatever cultural materials are available to them, build a new identity that redefines their position in society and, by so doing, seek the transformation of overall

[212] Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny,* London: Allen Lane, 2006, p. 21
[213] Manuel Castells, *The Power of Identity* (Second Edition), Wiley-Blackwell, 2010, p. 7

social structure".[214] These three types will be of use to understand Fanon's conceptualization of identity politics.

In general, identity politics has been a subject of scorn by leftists for reducing politics to narrow particularities which make any form of larger emancipatory movements impossible. Likewise, it has been defended by postmodernists for being a celebration of diversity, multiculturalism and so on. This paper, though the author is carefully sympathetic to the former position, seeks to avoid taking both extremes. Instead, I seek to show, with Fanon, how an emancipatory politics of identity necessarily entails identification with an identity which also has the potential to transcend itself into something larger. This takes from Laclau that "There is no politics of pure particularity. Even the most particularistic of demands will be made in terms of something transcending it."[215]

Following are the questions that I seek to address: What is the Fanonist conception of identity politics? What are the normative contours it is shaped by? How are the tensions between the particular and the universal resolved? And finally, is the "human identity" of Parekh a viable political project according to Fanon?

Identity and the Master and Slave Dialectic in Fanon

Fanon explicitly addresses the Hegelian theme of recognition, that is, the dialectic of the Master and Slave, in his *Black Skin, White Masks.* Fanon scholar Hussein Bulhan notes that Fanon, like Jean-Paul Sartre, was influenced by Kojeve's interpretations of Hegel.[216] According to Kojeve, to recognize the Other without being recognized by him is the basis of Hegelian schemata of the Master-Slave dialectic.[217] In the beginning of the dialectical process, the Master is in a privileged status, because by virtue of force and violence, he has been recognized by the Slave. The Master's humanity is recognized as universal and absolute. Likewise, the Master's humanity

---

[214] Ibid, p. 8
[215] Ernesto Laclau, "Constructing Universality" in Judith Butler et al. *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left,* London: Verso, 2000, p. 305
[216] Hussein Abdilahi Bulhan, *Frantz Fanon and the Psychology of Oppression,* New York: Plenum Press, 1985, p. 102
[217] Kojeve, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel,* p. 8

necessarily rests on a progressive dehumanization of the Slave. That is, "the Master is Master only by the fact of having a Slave who recognizes him as Master."[218]

The Slave works for the Master without being recognized. Yet, it is through this work that the seeds of self-consciousness are sown. And if at all the Slave needs recognition, he needs to risk his life and overcome the fear of death through a fight with the Master. Since the Master has laid claim to universality by virtue of domination, the Slave through the fight seeks the recognition of his particularity *in* an abstract universality. That is to say, "He is not content with attributing a value to himself. He wants this particular value, *his own,* to be recognized by *all* men, *universally*."[219]

Fanon echoes this when he says "He who is reluctant to recognize me opposes me. In a savage struggle I am willing to accept convulsions of death, invincible dissolution, but also the possibility of the impossible."[220] But what complicates Fanon's perspective is that he takes Hegel a step further, contextualizes Hegel with respect to the Blacks, by adding the dimension of the coloured Slave. With a Sartrean analysis, Fanon notes that the Black is created by the gaze of the White. The White person, who possessed material superiority, also possessed epistemological superiority which gave him power not just to make the Slave work for the Master's interests, but also to define the Slave as 'Black', to determine the paradigms of discourse under which the Slave's identity was structured. That is, epistemological superiority was a precursor to create discursive practices that constructed an epidermal superiority.

Thus, the White identity, Whiteness, is the standard towards which the Black aspires to. In this 'world of becoming' in a society characterized by unequal relationships between racially marked social groups, becoming White means becoming more human for the Black. While the White is recognized without recognizing in return, it is the Black who needs recognition from the White, and this is why, Fanon claims, that Black undergoes a process of 'lactification'. The desire of the woman of colour for the White man and the desire of the man of colour for the White woman are but manifestations of the desire to be more human in a world where Whiteness is the norm. The White identity is the legitimizing identity which the Master wields by virtue of his material and epistemological power. Even when the White colonial Master talks about man or humanity, he is referring only to his own image. Even when the White Master

---

[218] Ibid, p. 17
[219] Ibid, p. 58
[220] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks,* trans. Charles Lam Markmann, London: Pluto Press, 2008, p. 170

frees the coloured Slave and abolishes the material conditions of slavery, the unequal relationship persists because, to Fanon, the 'Negro Slave' is one who has *not* fought or risked his life for freedom.

> Historically, the Negro steeped in the inessentiality of servitude was set free by his master. He did not fight for his freedom.
>
> Out of slavery the Negro burst into the lists where his masters stood. Like those servants who are allowed once every year to dance in the drawing room, the Negro is looking for a prop.[221]

The Black was given 'freedom' as a gift by the White master and it mutilated the process of reciprocal recognition. Since there was no fight proper, he seeks to either further mutilate himself by imitating the White master, or enter into the particularist solipsism of Negritude. Without an ethical recognition, the Black is torn between the myth of a superior White humanity and the myth of a pristine and pure Black past. The politics of Black experience, for all its claims to separatism, was still functioning in the discursive paradigms set by the Whites. As Jenkins observes, "The capacity of authoritatively applied identification to constitute or influence individual experience affects whether or not individuals internalise the label(s) concerned."[222]

However, to Fanon, both are just attempts at reform of the system. The man who does not/has not experienced the fear of death and waged a fight to the death for recognition is bound to the existing world and at best, only attempts to reform it "to change its details, to make particular transformations without modifying its essential characteristics" – but considering that the given world is the world of the Master and the Master's version of humanity or universality, "it is not reform, but the "dialectical", or better, revolutionary overcoming of the World that can free him and – consequently – satisfy him."[223] In Fanon's view, both assimilating into the White culture and romanticizing a Black past were mere reformist attempts and not a radical rupture with the status quo.

---

[221] Ibid, p. 171
[222] Jenkins, *Social Identity,* p. 20
[223] Kojeve, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel,* p. 29

Negritude and Fanon's criticism of the same were discussed extensively in the chapter before. To some extent, Negritude could be called a politics of resistance identity because it contests the inferior status conferred on to the Blacks by the Whites in power and calls on the Blacks to take pride in their selves. Its 'anti-racist racism' and belief in the uniqueness of Black particularity could be explained as "*the exclusion of the excluders by the excluded.*"[224] However to Fanon, it still was, to take from Sartre, a passing phase in the dialectic and not an end in itself. A pitfall of Negritude was that in their attempts to reject White racist definitions, it overidentified with an imagined Negro authenticity and Negro pasts, leading Fanon to comment that "Negro" was only a cultural term that had no historical or sociological basis.[225] Further,

> When one says "Negro people," one systematically assumes that all Negroes agree on certain things, that they share a principle of communion. The truth is that there is nothing, *a priori,* to warrant the assumption that such a thing as a Negro people exists.[226]

An identity, to Fanon, cannot conjure up mythical and pristine pasts but must be historicized. Likewise, a politics that emanates from it must not be based on unique communal experiences of the past but with a vision for the future. This is why Fanon begins the conclusion of *Black Skin, White Masks* with a quote from Karl Marx's *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* "The social revolution . . . cannot draw its poetry from the past, but only from the future. It cannot begin with itself before it has stripped itself of all its superstitions concerning the past." To overcome the Master-Slave dialectic that existed between the White-Black relationships, the whole of the past had to be set aside for the interests of a common future where man would be recognized as man. "Both must turn their backs on the inhuman voices which were those of their respective ancestors in order that authentic communication be possible."[227]

Fanon's consternation with Negritude is owing to its excessive emphasis on the uniqueness of the Black identity and experience which only assists compartmentalization of

---

[224] Castells, *The Power of Identity,* p. 9
[225] Frantz Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution: Political Essays,* trans. Haakon Chevalier, New York: Grove Press, 1988, p. 17
[226] Ibid, p. 18
[227] Fanon, *Black Skin,* p. 180

peoples and not a resolution of the conflict. The Slave does resist the Master's values but without providing a value that would overcome the dialectic. The prejudice of the Black towards his own race was not a path to universal political liberation but only an abstract cultural dialogue that only his own hear. Whereas, Fanon argues "A people that undertakes a struggle for liberation rarely legitimizes race prejudice."[228] In a sense, Fanon anticipates the contemporary debates around "reverse racism" and empathetically states his opposition to any sort of racial essentialism.[229] In his very first book, Fanon places his lot on the side of a universalist humanism that he uses as an evaluating standard in his assessment of identity politics. Sonia Kruks is thus right to argue that while Fanon believed that to affirm, express, or celebrate one's identity can be psychologically empowering, he ultimately was of the opinion that affirmation of identity alone is not enough to change the world.[230] Fanon's identity politics needed more than a relic of the past, 'a black mirage', to validate itself. This leads to the question of identification. Now, we can see that Fanon was strongly sceptical of identification with an essentialized, valorised racial identity that claimed validation only through particularity and lived experience. It is in positing an alternative to this – as well as to the White-colonial racism that marks itself as the universal face of humanity – that the Fanonian tensions between universality and particularity emerge. It is necessary to understand Fanon's critical assessment of this problem in order to arrive at a clear picture of the norms that guided his identity politics.

Fanon, Universality and Particularity

Commenting on Fanon's relationship towards Negritude, Benita Parry writes "Fanon's writings function at a point of tension between cultural nationalism and transnationality, without 'resolving' the contradiction and without yielding an attachment to the one or the aspiration to the other."[231] Though Parry is in general favour of the resistance identity of Negritude, she concedes that Fanon, in opposing both the nativism of Negritude and the idealism of European

---

[228] Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution,* p. 43

[229] It should be noted here that Fanon, however, did resort to a strategic essentialism with the idea of nationhood in the context of decolonization. I will come to that shortly.

[230] Sonia Kruks "Fanon, Sartre and Identity Politics" in Gordon, Lewis R. et al eds. *Fanon: A Critical Reader,* Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996, p. 133

[231] Benita Parry, "Resistance theory/theorising resistance or two cheers for nativism" in ed. Francid Barker et al. *Colonial Discourse/Postcolonial Theory,* New York: Manchester University Press, 1994, p. 187

humanism, was "projecting the radical hope of an oppositional humanism."[232] This 'oppositional humanism' of Fanon, which reveals the fallacies of the narrow particularities of Negritude and the hypocrisies of European humanism, constitutes Fanon's project identity.

We can see that throughout his works Fanon operates with a Sartrean understanding that "*Particularism* can and must claim the status of *universality* in the absence of a comprehensive frame of reference, since to be in perspective necessarily transforms particularism itself into its *own perspective,* and thus into the measure of everything else."[233] In his *Black Skin, White Masks,* the essays on "West Indians and Africans" and "Racism and Culture" in *Toward the African Revolution* and his chapter on "The Pitfalls of National Consciousness" in *The Wretched of the Earth,* Fanon deploys mock sarcasm against those among the Blacks and the colonized who focus only on racial and/or national particularities without taking the next step towards universality. Likewise, he also targets the humanism of Europe for it being a facade for imperialism and suggests a new humanism in place. How does Fanon make the transition from particularity to universality?

It is necessary to have a grasp of the essence of the whole corpus of Fanon's works in order to understand how he negotiates the tensions between universality and particularity. In his very first work *Black Skin, White Masks* Fanon addresses the problem of Black identity in a Francophone scenario, mainly in the Antilles and in France. He states his goal clearly at the outset – "Toward a new humanism."[234] This new humanism is necessary because "The white man is sealed in his whiteness" and "The black man in his blackness".[235] According to Robert Bernasconi,

> Fanon never lost sight of the fact that historically the discussion of race has always been under the sway of racism and that, if we continue to talk about race, it should only be because the struggle against racism is far from over and that the concept of race, employed properly, was a vital tool in combating racism [...] He insisted that the

[232] Ibid, p. 193
[233] Istvan Meszaros, *The Work of Sartre. Volume One: Search for Freedom,* Sussex: Harvester Press, 1979, p. 13
[234] Fanon, *Black Skin,* p. 1
[235] Ibid, p. 3

> struggle should be conducted under the auspices of an attempt to create a new way of thinking and a new humanity.[236]

That is, the discussions of the particularity of race must always give way to a synthesis of a common humanity where colour would cease to be a factor in assessing an individual's worth. Fanon was compelled to discuss the pathology of White racism and the Black reaction to it, the "anti-racist racism" of Negritude so as to arrive at a common and new humanism. The first book of Fanon is not so much about the colonial encounter as his later works were, though the scenario of colonialism looms in the background. In a society that is racist, that racially privileges one group over the other, "The feeling of inferiority of the colonized is the correlative to the European's feeling of superiority [...] *It is the racist who creates his inferior*."[237] While he takes inspiration from Sartre's thesis that the anti-Semite invents the Jew,[238] Fanon places greater focus on the agency of the 'inferior' to create his own identification in a situation of oppression. Or, the Black person, though "overdetermined from without" by a racist society and who is a slave of his own appearance[239] is nevertheless free to choose who he identifies with and how he frames his politics.

The subject, though identified by others as a 'Negro', still has the choice of choosing his own identification. However, Fanon's humanism, which he derives greatly from Sartre, is not a liberal concept of individual choice, because in the cogito one not only discovers one's own Self (as say, a Black or a White) but of others as well – man cannot be anything unless the others recognize him as such.[240] On this, Sartre elaborates

> I cannot obtain any truth whatsoever about myself, except through the mediation of another. The other is indispensible to my existence, and equally so to any knowledge I can have of myself. Under these conditions, the intimate discovery of myself is at the

---

[236] Robert Bernasconi, "The Great White Error and the Great Black Mirage: Frantz Fanon's Critical Philosophy of Race" in ed. Nigel Gibson *Living Fanon: Global Perspectives,* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, pp. 85-86
[237] Fanon, *Black Skin,* p. 69
[238] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Anti-Semite and Jew: An Exploration of the Etiology of Hate,* trans. George J. Becker, New York: Schocken Books, 1976, p. 13
[239] Fanon, *Black Skin,* p. 87
[240] Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism,* trans. Philip Mairet, London: Metheun, 1948, p. 45

> same time the revelation of the other as freedom which confronts mine, and which cannot think or will without doing so either for or against me.[241]

The Black person's discovery of Self confronts the agency of the White, privileged by the system, who refuses an ethical recognition of the former. The White who does not recognize the Black opposes the Black, and the Black must wage a fight to attain this recognition. But recognition as what? To Fanon, the person neither "has the right to be a Negro" nor "the duty to be this or that", but if the White man challenges his humanity, the racialized subject must impose his "whole weight as a man" on the White and check the oppressor's prejudices.[242] To Fanon, thus, the subject has one right "That of demanding human behavior from the other" and one duty "That of not renouncing my freedom through my choices."[243] And this radically free subject cannot search for his destiny in history but rather in a common future. This is the essence of the Hegelian idea of recognition: "If recognition occurs, it must occur through the mutual and joint action of both, through which the "I's" become a "We.""[244]

This is why Fanon is deeply sceptical about projects that focus more on particularist pasts than on a common future. He says "The discovery of the existence of a Negro civilization in the fifteenth century confers no patent of humanity on me. Like it or not, the past can in no way guide me in the present moment."[245] The Black man should not be locked up into his particularist identity and must make a movement towards something larger. When Fanon claims in the last chapter of *Black Skin, White Masks* that it is not the particular history of 'Negro civilization' but the entire history of human civilization interests him, he also adds that "The body of history does not determine a single one of my actions."[246] Fanon places the onus on the subject's agency in deciding what his identity is, what his identification is, and what his identity politics will be. Here, he echoes the Sartrean humanist thought of radical subjectivity that "Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself."[247]

---

[241] Ibid, p. 45
[242] Fanon, *Black Skin,* p. 178
[243] Ibid, p. 179
[244] Robert R. Williams, *Recognition: Fichte and Hegel on the Other,* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992, p. 157
[245] Fanon, *Black Skin,* p. 176
[246] Ibid, p. 180
[247] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism,* p. 28

Fanon speaks more of this in his later writings. “It is the white man who creates the Negro. But it is the Negro who creates negritude.”[248] That is, though the particular identity of the Negro might have been created by the White-colonial-Other, it is the subjectivity of the colonized that creates identification with Negritude. After criticizing the particularist politics of Negritude for depriving the Blacks of “any possibility of individual expression”[249], he makes explicit what to him constitutes a genuine universalist humanism:

> universality resides in this decision to recognize and accept the reciprocal relativism of different cultures once the colonial status is irreversibly excluded.[250]

Two things need to be noted here. Firstly, the ending of colonialism as a system is an unconditional and preliminary step to an ethical recognition among peoples. In all his works, Fanon is uncompromising in his belief that colonialism is an absolute evil and that the colonized is psychologically conditioned to rejecting the values of the occupier “even if these values objectively be worth choosing”.[251] The humanity of the colonized “can only materialize from the rotting cadaver of the colonist.”[252] He qualifies that “At the individual level, violence is a cleansing force. It rids the colonized of their inferiority complex, of their passive and despairing attitude. It emboldens them, and restores their self-confidence.”[253] Violence is an act of self-affirmation in the quest for ethical recognition where that recognition has been denied to the colonized. Colonialism as a parasitic system deprives the colonized, as well as the colonizer, of their self-worth. The culture of the natives is devalued, mutilated, and criminalized while that of the colonizer is elevated as a model for emulation, and imposed on the natives. To Fanon, in the colonial apparatus, the colonialist projects himself as the image of humanity while concurrently denying the humanity of the colonized. So, “authentic decolonization is irreconcilable with anything that colonialism stands for, because colonialism is essentially a negation of the identity

---

[248] Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism,* trans. Haakon Chevalier, New York: Grove Press, 1965, p. 47
[249] Frantz Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution: Political Essays,* trans. Haakon Chevalier, New York: Grove Press, 1988, p. 17
[250] Ibid, p. 44
[251] Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism,* p. 63. We will see how Fanon’s claims are contested in the case of Tamil Nadu in Chapter 6.
[252] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth,* trans. Richard Philcox, New York: Grove Press, 2004, p. 50
[253] Ibid, p. 51

of the colonized."[254] It is only through the ending of this system and the physical ejection of the colonizer that the humanity of the colonized could be realized and the transition to universalism could be made. Real universal humanism for Fanon begins after the elimination of the colonial Other, the Enemy.

Secondly, reciprocal recognition and acceptance of relativism of cultures provides an ethical premise for universalism. According to Adele Jinadu, Fanon's ethical relativism is a form of cultural relativism, which rejects the universality of the colonizing country.[255] Likewise, Pramod Nayar argues that Fanon's ethical recognition requires recognizing the identity of all Others, a mutuality of recognition, respecting difference without erasing or homogenizing it.[256] However, it must be added that Fanon is careful about unqualified cultural relativism as he makes clear in his discussions about Negritude or about the "Trials and Tribulations of National Consciousness", wherein he prefers a switch from national consciousness to a social and political consciousness[257] and for nationalism to be "explained, enriched and deepened" and to be elevated into humanism.[258] Anti-colonialism was not an end in itself. It was a means to an end, an absolutely necessary means albeit.

Fanon believes in what Slavoj Zizek calls 'universality-for-itself'. According to Zizek "The universality-for-itself is not simply external to or above its particular context: it is inscribed within it. It perturbs and affects it from within, so that the identity of the particular is split into its particular and universal aspects."[259] Fanon's universalism emerges from his deep commitment to anti-colonial resistance and decolonization. But while postcolonialists in general valorise the anti-colonial particular aspects of Fanon's writings, they tend to mostly overlook that Fanon's concern is also about how the former colony fares after decolonization in its humanizing project. Which is why in "This Africa to Come", Fanon states explicitly that

> Colonialism and its derivatives do not, as a matter of fact, constitute the present enemies of Africa. In a short time this continent will be liberated. For my part, the

---

[254] Richard C. Onwuanibe, *A Critique of Revolutionary Humanism: Frantz Fanon,* Missouri: Warren H. Green, 1983, p. 109
[255] L. Adele Jinadu, *Fanon: In Search of the African Revolution,* London: KPI, 1986, p. 149
[256] Pramod K. Nayar, *Frantz Fanon,* New York: Routledge, 2013, p. 123
[257] Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth,* p. 142
[258] Ibid, p. 144
[259] Slavoj Zizek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections,* London: Profile Books, 2009, p. 129

> deeper I enter into the cultures and the political circles the surer I am that the great danger that threatens Africa is the absence of ideology.[260]

While the moment of colonial encounter is crucially important in shaping the identity of the colonized and his identification with a national project of decolonization, it alone does not justify a politics of the future. To Fanon, such a politics would have to transform not just the identity of the oppressed, but also that of the oppressor. Given that the ideology of the European colonialist, despite its claims to universal humanism, functions in practice as "nothing but a dishonest ideology, an exquisite justification for plundering"[261], it was necessary for the colonized to take up this mission – "For Europe, for ourselves and for humanity, comrades, we must make a new start, develop a new way of thinking, and endeavor to create a new man."[262]

Becoming Human: Fanon's Project Identity

It is instructive here to consider what Laclau would term a discursive strategy of hegemonic articulation

> there is hegemony only if the dichotomy universality/particularity is superseded; universality exists only incarnated in – and subverting – some particularity but, conversely, no particularity can become political without becoming the locus of universalizing effects.[263]

Fanon deals with this paradox throughout his writings. His concerns with race, colonialism, anti-colonial nationalism are the particularities in which the possibility of a universalist humanism is incarnated and likewise, these particularities are transcended to arrive at this universalism. Fanon, in arriving at his project identity, is neither taking a vulgar Marxist approach that reduces the subject to structures, nor does he take the liberal approach of

---

[260] Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution,* p. 186
[261] Jean-Paul Sartre, "Preface" in Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth,* p. lviii
[262] Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth,* p. 239
[263] Ernesto Laclau, "Identity and Hegemony: The Role of Universality in the Constitution of Political Logics", in Judith Butler et al. *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left,* London: Verso, 2000, p. 56

Amartya Sen which ignores structures and focuses purely on choice. Fanon's project identity of becoming human evolves from a Sartrean understanding of dialectic that

> Man undergoes the dialectic, in so far as he makes it, and makes it, in so far as he undergoes it. He is not subject to it non-dialectically, like a divine law, or a metaphysical fatality: and it does not emanate from himself non-dialectically, as though he were its unconditioned creator.[264]

Or, man has the capacity to make something out of himself from within the limits set by circumstances, recognizing these limits and pushing towards a transcendence of these limits. To Fanon, the object of all societies based on oppression, be they of racism, or class, or colonialism, is to dehumanize one set of people for the benefit of others. The oppressed subject reacts to the oppressive system through broadly three ways – acceptance and assimilation, *overidentification* with an inferiorized identity (Negritude) and a consequent valorisation of the same, creation of an emancipatory ideology of resistance that would transform both oppressor and oppressed and replace the oppressive system with one that is universally just.

So to Fanon, violence of the oppressed subject is mere instrumental in ending the system of structural violence. Liberal critics of Fanon like Arendt who allege that he "glorified violence for violence's sake"[265] are thus missing this crucial point. The criticism[266] that Slavoj Zizek lays at those whom he sarcastically terms 'liberal communists' can also be laid at such critics of Fanon – while they condemn the subjective violence that Fanon (allegedly) eulogizes, they overlook the fact that this subjective violence is a product of, and is intended to end, a structural violence. Fanon, while he was deeply aware of the negative psychological implications of subjective violence on the colonized as is evident in his chapter on "Colonial War and Mental Disorders" in *Wretched of the Earth,* his primary concern was to end to what was to him the far more insidious structural violence of colonialism.

Fanon anticipates Johan Galtung who in his widely cited essay on violence argues that "Personal violence represents change and dynamism - not only ripples on waves, but waves on otherwise tranquil waters. Structural violence is silent, it does not show - it is essentially static,

---

[264] RD Laing and DG Cooper, *Reason and Violence: A Decade of Sartre's Philosophy 1950-1960,* London: Tavistock Publications, 1964, p. 100

[265] Hannah Arendt, *On Violence,* New York: HBJ, 1970, p. 65

[266] Slavoj Zizek, *Violence,* p. 31

it *is* the tranquil waters."[267] To Fanon, anti-colonial violence was a dynamic force that would sharpen the political resolve of their natives and violate the tranquillity of not just the colonial power, but also that of the native elite. This violence was necessary insofar as it conferred dignity to the natives who would realize their humanity in a common struggle against the colonizer, while simultaneously forcing the colonizers to recognize how they have dehumanized the natives and themselves within the system of colonialism. This again stems from Fanon's reading of (Kojeve's reading of) Hegel. The Slave, through struggle, a labour of his work, gains recognition from the Master and ends the Master-Slave relationship. I agree with Christopher Lee's reading in his latest book on Fanon that violence was only a strategic choice for him, "though he argued for its tactical necessity and cathartic potential, Fanon recognized its traumatic impact from firsthand experience."[268] Fanon was aware that merely resentful anti-colonial violence would be taken over by the native elites and turned against the masses in the postcolony. Hence, he warns against national chauvinism that may take over the anti-colonial project.

Thus, "Anticolonialism is not the end; it must be filled out and developed into a practice and awareness of political and social inclusion of the most marginal, and only then will it have developed into a true humanism."[269] Fanon considers anti-colonialism, an empty signifier, as a tool of a strategic essentialism to move towards his project identity. Once the 'primary contradiction', to use a Maoist term, of colonizer-colonized is resolved, the erstwhile colonized comes to face the native elite or the comprador class which prevents him from fully achieving his humanity. This class uses the narrative of a narrow nationalism to legitimize its own privilege to the detriment of the impoverished, often aiding neo-colonialism in the process. In the postcolony, this elite is becomes the new enemy of the people and the "manicheist classification of black and white" disappears and the masses recognize that "One is deprived or privileged in virtue of one's economic and social association."[270]

Fanon notes how the landowners and the urban bourgeoisie in an underdeveloped newly decolonized country ensure that "development" that happens favours only their

---

[267] Johan Galtung, "Violence, Peace and Peace Research" *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (1969), p. 173

[268] Christopher J. Lee, *Frantz Fanon: Toward a Revolutionary Humanism,* Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2015, p. 32

[269] Nigel C. Gibson, "Living Fanon?" in ed. Nigel C. Gibson, *Living Fanon: Global Perspectives,* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, p. 9

[270] Vivaldi Jean-Marie *Fanon: Collective Ethics and Humanism,* New York: Peter Lang, 2007, p. 117

sectarian interests – under this bourgeoisie that is both selfish and incompetent, anti-colonialism quickly gives way to racism and chauvinism.[271] While the racism of the European colonial is fuelled by contempt, the racism of the young urban bourgeoisie is fuelled by fear.[272] With neither the extensive resources nor the expertise of the erstwhile master, the new bourgeoisie resorts to crude methods of force simultaneously with justifications of its own status through appeals to a mythical past and narrow nationalism. This is why Fanon places his lot among the peasantry, whom he considers the most affected by colonial political economy, and is deeply suspicious of both the urban bourgeoisie and the proletariat. To him, both were privileged by the colonial apparatus and must be checked by a vigilant activism of the peasantry if at all there is to be an equitable distribution of resources in the postcolony. In such countries, "the combined efforts of the masses, regimented by a party and of keenly conscious intellectuals, armed with revolutionary principles, should bar the way to this useless and harmful bourgeoisie."[273]

These intellectuals, who are in an organic relation with the masses, will *with the masses* create a national culture. But this is a culture that is not purely based on customs, traditions and artefacts of the past but "the values that inspired the struggle for freedom."[274] The activist-intellectual uses selectively the resources of the past through the evaluating standard of the anti-colonial struggle and projects them onto the future of the nation as a national culture. But this national culture, rather than emphasising on differences among people, attempts to foster a spirit of shared solidarity. Scholars have called this outlook of Fanon as "nationalitarian" as a concept that stood different from and opposed to bourgeois nationalism.[275] This was a resistance identity he preferred to racial categories of Negritude. Fanon calls for dismantling "*not only the racial binaries of colonialism but also the xenophobic cultural nationalism of postcolonial nations.*"[276] In his vision, bourgeois cultural nationalism in decolonized countries was not just undesirable but it was also dangerous because of its inability to maintain hegemony over the new country. This would inevitably lead to the appearance of factions and

[271] Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth,* p. 103
[272] Ibid. p. 110
[273] Ibid, p. 119
[274] Ibid, p. 179
[275] Neil Lazarus, "National Consciousness and the Specificity of (Post)Colonial Intellectualism" in ed. Francis Barker et al. *Colonial Discourse/Postcolonial Theory,* p. 199
[276] Nayar, *Frantz Fanon,* p. 128

feuds, and foster sectarian violence in the postcolony, only to benefit neo-colonial forces that would seek to keep their exploitative economic relations with their former colonies intact.

While one of Fanon's immediate goals was African unity, "a principle on the basis of which it is proposed to achieve the United States of Africa without passing through the middle-class chauvinistic national phase"[277] his eventual goal was a solidarity among the oppressed of the Third World which would enable them in a revolutionary restructuring of the society. Yet, Fanon is also concerned about the erstwhile oppressor. It must be realized that Fanon is not criticizing Europe for being Europe – he is criticizing it for not being Europe *enough.* "All the elements for a solution to the major problems of humanity existed at one time or another in European thought. But the Europeans did not act on the mission that was designated them"[278] is a lament, not a curse. So the Third World must transform itself *for itself* and also *for Europe* and *for a new humanism.* So Sartre's message to European readers in his preface to *Wretched of the Earth* that "Fanon has got nothing "in for you" at all"[279] must be treated as hyperbole. Fanon's idea of identity politics seeks to transform the identities of both oppressor and oppressed, encouraging them to transcend closures. His need to "to explain the other to myself"[280] is infused with a radical hope of the Self and the Other mitigating their particularities and eventually merging, maybe with the instrumental use of violence to alter the system that maintains these narrow particularities, into a We. That is Fanon's project identity – a human identity in a 'world of all of us'.

Conclusion

From the above study of Fanon's critique of identity politics, four key aspects of Fanon's identity politics can be traced.

One, the subject was fully free in identifying with an identity despite the limits that circumstances placed upon him. The oppressed has an agency and thereby responsibility in fashioning his identity politics of the future from the resources that he can avail of from his historical context.

---

[277] Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution,* p. 187
[278] Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth,* p. 237
[279] Sartre, "Preface" in Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth,* p. xlv
[280] Fanon, *Black Skin,* p. 181

Two, anti-colonialism was absolutely necessary for an emancipatory political project and identification of the colonized with the anti-colonial resistance was a necessary step. Since European humanism failed to have emancipatory potential and served instead as a mask for colonial domination, it had to be rejected and there could be nothing progressive for the oppressed from the colonial setup. The perpetuation of colonialism would only mutilate the identity of the colonized whereas resistance to it, and identification with the resistance to it, opens up egalitarian possibilities.

Three, while cultural differences should be recognized reciprocally in a spirit of conditional relativism, racial or national particularism always had pitfalls. After the ending of the colonial status, which is a non-negotiable condition for a politics of the future, the colonized nevertheless realize that the colonizer is not the only oppressor and that the oppressor within can be as brutal as the oppressor without and more, can also mobilize the empty signifier of anti-colonial nationalism to further his own benefits. Therefore, while anti-colonialism is absolutely necessary, there should also be a conscious ideological attempt to transcend nationalism.

Four, the transcendence of particular social identity of race and nation must arrive at a universal human identity. Shared solidarity and struggle against oppressions are necessary to arrive at this universalism. Fanon here could said of advocating what Judith Butler would have called 'competing universalism' wherein he rejects the universalism of the European to replace it with an universalism of the oppressed which alone would be the true universalism.

Sartre famously said in his play *No Exit* that "Hell is other people". Many years after its composition, he clarified that what he meant by that particular statement was "if relations with someone else are twisted, vitiated then that other person can only be hell."[281] It can be said that Fanon's concern with identity politics was an attempt at redemption from this hell.

[281] Jean-Paul Sartre cited by Ronald Aronson, *Jean-Paul Sartre: Philosophy in the World,* London: Verso, 1980, p. 185

Contextualizing EV Ramasamy

"When we meet a Brahmin we must greet him 'come on you Bastard!'"[282]

-Ramasamy

Introduction

In the last public speech that he delivered on 19 December 1973 at Chennai, EV Ramasamy, popularly known as 'Periyar', identified the Brahmin as the enemy of the non-Brahmin collective, urged for a war to be waged on Brahminism, and addressing the political categories of non-Brahmins and women, called on them to shed allegiance to the Hindu religion. The reasoning for his provocative statement above was that according to the Hindu religion, the s*hudras* (lower castes) were "sons of prostitutes".[283]

Much earlier in his political life, in a speech in June 1925 at a public meeting of the Congress Party in Karaikkudi, Tamil Nadu, he used a similar logic, accusing Hinduism for the ills of casteism in the region. Criticizing the s*hudras* for being in a state of "Brahminical illusion", he accused them of being complicit in the perpetuation of a social hierarchy that not only devalues them, but by providing them a sense of relative superiority, enables them to oppress those castes below them[284], the untouchable castes (hereafter referred to as 'Dalits'[285]). The

[282] EV Ramasami, *Declaration of War on Brahminism,* trans. A.S. Venu, Chennai: Dravidar Kazhagam Publication, 1998, p16

[283] Ibid, p16

[284] EV Ramasamy, "Theendaamai Ozhippil Ulla Matha Thathuvam", *Periyar Kalanjiyam: Jaathi-Theendaamai, Paagam (1),* Chennai: Periyar Suyamariyathai Prachaara Niruvanam, 2011, p4

[285] The word 'Dalit', in a crude translation, means 'broken people' and refers specifically to those castes that bear the social stigma of untouchability and concomitant ritual pollution. The word which entered public domain in 1930s, soon turned into an assertion of identity and resistance. While some have argued for using the term to include women, tribes and other marginalized groups in the subcontinent as well, John C.B. Webster, whose research expertise is in Dalit history, makes an emphatic argument for caste and social stigma to be the sole criteria for determining who is a Dalit. See his "Who is a Dalit?" in ed. S.M. Michael, *Dalits in Modern India: Visions and Values,* New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2007, pp. 76-88. Likewise, for a comprehensive empirical account of the socio-economic situation of the Dalits, see Sukhdeo Thorat, *Dalits in India: Search for a Common Destiny,* New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2009. The Dalits were termed as 'Harijan', or the 'children of god', 'Hari' being the name of a Hindu deity, by M.K.

movement that he spearheaded from 1925 onward was termed by him and his followers as the Self-Respect Movement whose chief aim was the abolition of castes, gender and race prejudices and the creation of a rational society.

In this chapter, I will be providing an introduction to EV Ramasamy, whose identity politics I will be critiquing in the later chapters through a Fanonist lens. After providing the readers with a general idea of caste and its specificity in Tamil Nadu, I place Ramasamy in his socio-historical context and trace the contours of EV Ramasamy political discourse. While Ramasamy has been regarded as a social revolutionary who opposed casteism, there have been criticisms from some intellectual quarters that he was not effective in challenging them or that he was only privileging the dominant castes at the expense of the lowest castes. This shall be the core problem that I will be critiquing through a Fanonist lens in Chapter 5.

Caste

Before proceeding further, it is necessary to have an overview of caste in general, caste dynamics in the state of Tamil Nadu in particular. Caste, derived from Portuguese *casta*, has been a term that has been used loosely to define a closely knit group on the basis of lineage and/or occupation. As a social phenomenon, it is specific to the Indian subcontinent and there is considerable academic debate on what the term signified when it first entered public discourse with the onset of colonialism and whether it is a useful category to understand the nature of social groups in India. While in common parlance caste has been associated with *varna,* sociologists have made strong arguments for it to be used to describe *jati* alone.

The *varna* classification system, derived from Sanskrit-Hindu texts, divides Hindu society into four categories – *brahmans* (priests), *kshatriyas* (warriors), *vaishyas* (traders) and the *shudras* (peasants, artisans), in this hierarchical order. Those falling outside these categories were the outcastes, the untouchables, who were defined by their ability to pollute by their very presence. The *varnas* comprise of several hundred *jatis,* endogamous groups that are peculiar to regions, who have been given a place in the *varna* system or try to create a place for themselves in the *varna* system. And it has been noted that in actual operation, "caste affiliations take not the vertical homogenous class and status form of *varna* but the horizontal

---

Gandhi. But the usage of this term finds strong opposition from Dalit activists for being patronizing and communal.

heterogeneous form of *jati*", with the *varna* model being a referent to evaluate the position of one's own caste, and also to devalue the position of others.[286] Quite some historians and sociologists agree that prior to the onset of colonialism, there was considerable mobility among castes that belonged to *kshatriya, vaishya* and *shudra varnas.* However, there is very little evidence of castes being upgraded to the *brahman* status.

Indian sociologist M.N. Srinivas, most known for his theory of 'Sanskritization'[287], argues that "The caste system of even a small region is extraordinarily complex and it does not fit into the *varna*-frame except at one or two points."[288] In the case of Tamil Nadu, the organization of castes in reality defies the *varna* system while in theory, certain castes have tried to uphold it or give themselves a place in it. The most obvious ones are the Brahmins belonging to the first *varna*, who comprised roughly 3% of the Tamil population, and who were distinct from the rest by their caste title, the sacred-thread worn by Brahmin males, extensive familiarity with Sanskrit texts, their Sanskrit laced Tamil dialect, and their exclusive role as the arbiters of god in temples that served as local centres of power.

Despite the historical existence of trading and warrior communities among the Tamils, the non-Brahmins were *en masse* categorized as *shudras.*[289] This categorization was largely a result of the intervention of the colonial power and the orientalist discourse that accompanied it to create convenient categories for data gathering and administration in the colony. Indeed, the way caste operated did change with the encounter with colonialism, but this cannot be led to conclude that the pre-existing caste elites and the concomitant power-knowledge relations did not shape the colonial rule in India as well. Dirks observes that "Brahmanic texts, both Vedic origin stories and the much later dharma texts of Hinduism's puranic period, provided

---

[286] Rajni Kothari, "Introduction: Caste in Indian Politics" in ed. Rajni Kothari *Caste in Indian Politics,* Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 1970, p.11.

[287] 'Sanskritization' is the idea that contends that lower castes gain social mobility through the imitation of the practices and rituals of the upper castes.

[288] M.N Srinivas, *Caste in Modern India and Other Essays,* New York: Asia Publishing House, 1962, p.9

[289] Even as the non-Brahmin movement arose in the early 20th Century, there were attempts by quite some non-Brahmin communities to identify themselves with the higher *varnas.* For instance, the Vanniyars and Nadars, numerically dominant castes in Northern and Southern Tamil Nadu respectively, wanted to be classified as *Kshatriyas.* Likewise, economically powerful castes like Vellalars and Chettiyars wanted to be classified as *Vaishyas.* This is an example of the phenomenon of Sanskritization mentioned earlier. What is interesting here is that though the Vellalars and Chettiyars are higher up in the Tamil social hierarchy than the Vanniyars or Nadars, they were willing to compete for a lower place in the *varna* hierarchy than what the other groups were competing for. It appears that escaping the stigma of being a *shudra* was more important to these castes than exercising ritual superiority over other non-Brahmin castes.

transregional and metahistorical modes of understanding Indian society that clearly appealed to British colonial interests and attitudes."[290] An aspect of orientalism valorised Brahminical castes and their way of life under the colonial rule and there was a "structural bonding of the Brahminical with the emergent institutions" of colonialism.[291] The Brahmin, one of the first to accept westernization, now had an additional role of being the voice of the native society, a voice that informed the British what the native society was, a voice that colluded with the British in the categorization of the native society, and a voice that later used those categorizations to inform the native society what its nature was.[292]

The Stage

The discourse of colonial-orientalism in Tamil Nadu had a certain ambivalent character to it. The state apparatus preferred to collaborate with the Brahmins for administrative purposes and influential Indophile intellectuals like Annie Besant valorised the Brahminical as the ideal worthy of emulation. On the other hand, Christian missionary-scholars like G.U. Pope (1820-1908), best known for his translation of secular and religious texts of ancient and medieval Tamil Nadu, and Bishop Robert Caldwell (1814-1891), philologist and linguist, who wrote extensively on the history of Dravidian languages besides also being interested in the problem of caste, provided an alternate approach to the understanding of the native society. And it was from these sources that the fledgling non-Brahmin movement derived its initial intellectual strength. In fact, if there could be a landmark event in the intellectual history of the non-Brahmin movement, it would be the publication of Caldwell's *A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South Indian Family of Languages* in 1856. While Caldwell notes the role the Brahmins had played in providing a 'higher civilization' to the Dravidians, he also brings out a contrast between the Aryan and the Dravidian. In a comment on the 'Pre-Aryan civilization of the Dravidians', he writes:

---

[290] Nicholas B. Dirks, "Castes of Mind", *Representations*, No. 37, Special Issue: Imperial Fantasies and Postcolonial Histories, p.62. A similar observation is made by Edward Said in *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003, pp.78-79) where he notes how representatives of the colonial power in India engaged in the translation of Sanskrit texts to assist the British to rule the natives using 'their own laws'. However, Said misses the human agency among the natives that works with the colonial power and shapes its discourse.

[291] G. Aloysius, *The Brahminical Inscribed in Body-Politic*, New Delhi: Critical Quest, 2010, pp.13-14

[292] A majority of the leaders of the Indian nationalist movement were Brahmins or from castes that belonged to the top three *varnas*. This was repeatedly pointed out by Ramasamy to assert that Indian anti-colonial nationalism was in effect a boon for the upper castes and a bane for the rest.

> Though the primitive Dravidians were probably unacquainted with the higher arts of life, they do not appear to have been by any means a barbarous and degraded people. Whatever may have been the condition of the forest tribes, it cannot be doubted that the Dravidians, properly so called, had acquired at least the elements of civilisation, prior to the arrival amongst them of the Brahmans.[293]

Caldwell, while appreciating the intellect of the Brahmin, identifies him as an outsider in the Dravidian society and as the agent responsible for introducing caste among the native Dravidians. Pandian notes that missionary narratives were informed by a dual consciousness as regards the Brahmin – "envy for his philosophically-inclined religious and literary culture, and contempt for his ritually-driven pantheistic religious beliefs and practices because these were said to have reproduced caste as a system of power and subordination."[294] It was the latter aspect of the narrative that became ammunition for the non-Brahmin movement, whose organic intellectuals strategically deployed the Brahmin-Dravidian differentiation in their political discourse. Caldwell speculated in his preface to the second edition of his book that "the interest taken in their language, literature, and antiquities by foreigners will not be without its effect in kindling amongst the natives of Southern India a little wholesome, friendly rivalry."[295] There was rivalry, but not of the friendly kind.

As the Brahmins made use of the colonial construction of a Sanskrit-oriented Hinduism to empower themselves within the colonial structure *and* to assist in the creation of an Indian/Hindu nationalism to oppose that structure, the stalwarts of the non-Brahmin movement appropriated social and linguistic histories from missionary narratives to challenge the claims of an Indian/Hindu nationalist narratives. The political writings of intellectuals like Iyothee Thaas (1845-1914) and Maraimalai Adigal (1876-1950), forerunners to the Dravidian movement, show how indebted they were to Caldwell. While both Thaas and Adigal extensively used anti-Brahmin rhetoric, they were unable to reach out to a wider public owing to their idealization of

---

[293]Rev. Robert Caldwell, *A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South Indian Family of Languages,* (Second Edition, London: Trubner and Co, 1875, p.117

[294] Pandian, *Brahmin and Non-Brahmin,* p.26

[295] Caldwell, *A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South Indian Family of Languages,* p.x

particular identities – to Thaas, the Buddhist Paraiyar[296] was the ideal and to Adigal, the vegetarian Saiva Vellalar[297] was the ideal. Yet, the discourse of such intellectuals spawned considerable debate in the Tamil society of the late 19th and the earlier 20th century, a period claimed by some scholars to be the beginning of the modern Tamil renaissance.[298]

While Brahmin scholars like UV Swaminatha Iyer (1855-1942) and the poet Subramaniya Bharati (1882-1921) had contributed extensively to Tamil language and literature, their loyalties were two fold "to the concept of one India, and to the idea of the Tamil language and the persistent and distinct culture that went with the language."[299] Bharati was also opposed to the non-brahmin movement as he felt that it would impede the Indian national struggle. Moreover, these few scholars apart most of the Brahmins had an aloofness from the non-brahmin Tamil masses and were hostile to Tamil nationalist sentiments. As Pandian puts it, "The zeal of the brahmin for Sanskrit had to exist in a complicated relationship with Tamil. While the brahmin's use of Tamil was heavily Sanskritized and was celebrated for its beauty despite its relative unintelligibility to most, the Tamil spoken by non-brahmins was treated as unworthy of any man's tongue."[300] The Brahmins as a community could not be completely integrated in the folds of the Tamil movement since the protagonists of Tamil suspected that the loyalty of the Brahmins lay with the Indian entity overstepping the aspirations of the Tamils, besides condemning their privileging of Sanskrit over Tamil. Thus, "The Tamil renaissance which coincided with the nationalist movement demanded that the non-brahmin, the Dravidian, become the custodian of his own culture."[301]

The non-Brahmin identity as an organized political movement began with the passing of the Non-Brahmin Manifesto – another landmark event in modern Tamil intellectual history – by a number of Non-Brahmin notables in Chennai, on December 1916 which demanded greater

---

[296] Paraiyars are a Dalit caste. Thaas had founded the Dravida Mahajana Sangam in 1891 and had appealed for an alliance between the *shudra* castes and the untouchable castes. V. Geetha and S.V. Rajadurai, recognize that Dalit consciousness in Tamil Nadu not only predates the non-Brahmin movement, but also contributed to the latter. See "Dalits and Non-Brahmin Consciousness in Colonial Tamil Nadu" in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 28, No. 39 (Sep. 25, 1993), pp.2091-2098

[297] Vellalars are a land-owning non-Brahmin elite caste. Maraimalai Adigal was also the chief proponent of the 'Pure Tamil Movement' that demanded the purge of all Sanskrit words from everyday Tamil usage.

[298] For an elaborate account, see K. Nambi Arooran, *Tamil Renaissance and Dravidian Nationalism: 1905-1944*, Madurai: Koodal, 1980.

[299] ibid, p.59

[300] Pandian, *Brahmin and Non-Brahmin: Genealogies of the Tamil Political Present,* Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2007*,* p.80

[301] Arooran, *Tamil Renaissance and Dravidian Nationalism,* p.69

representation for Non-Brahmins in politics, education and administrative services, besides swearing its loyalty to British rule on the premise that self-government for India without adequate social reform and checks and balances on the privileges of the Brahmins would only privilege the latter. The Manifesto called for "progressive political development", "no caste rule" and "self-government based on equal distribution of power".[302] The Manifesto concluded

> What is designated as "Nation building" is a laborious task, involving, and indeed necessitating, in the slow process of evolution, the due performance, in the proper time by each class and community, of the duty it owes to itself, first and foremost. It is our firm conviction that in India, for sometime to come at any rate, every community has primarily to put its own house in order, so that, when it has to cooperate with other communities, possible with higher social pretensions, it may do so, not as a dependent and helpless unit to be made a figure head or cats-paw of, but as a self-respecting and highly developed social organisation, offering its willing co-operation for the promotion of common objects on terms of perfect equality.

The Tamil non-Brahmin scepticism of Indian nationalism and the Indian nation-building project is evident here, and the non-Brahmin representatives who were party to the Manifesto were insistent on prioritizing social reform and the spread of Western Enlightenment values to political independence.

Also to be noted is the parallel formation of the South Indian Liberal Federation, or the Justice Party[303], which had its genesis in the cultural organization called the Madras Dravidian Association. The Justice Party, which was started in 1917 by the group of elite non-Brahmins who were signatories to the making of the Non-Brahmin Manifesto, strove to achieve political power and proportional representation in educational institutions and government services for the non-Brahmin Tamils. It was the first political outfit to oppose the imposition of Hindi as an official language in the Madras Presidency, as early as 1937. The focus of the non-Brahmin movement was urban, "appropriation of education was not only a means for the capture of new emerging power structures but also for emancipation from the rigidity of ascribed, occupational

---

[302] "The Non-Brahmin Manifesto", in ed. Varadarajulu Naidu, *The Justice Movement 1917,* Chennai: Dravidar Kazhagam, 2010, pp. 1-10

[303] It should be noted that the Justice Party was also criticized in the 1930s by organizations like the Backward Classes League for representing only the interests of elite non-Brahmin sections.

status – the basis of caste-feudal relations; a share in the political power of administration and legislation was the other issue."[304]

The Justice Party used the term 'Dravidian' to all non-brahmin castes in South India and sought to use the identity of the Dravidians, their cultural past and the vision of an egalitarian future under them as an assertion of the non-Brahmin castes against Brahminism. From an economic perspective, it was the assertion of the emerging regional bourgeoisie – comprising of elite sections of the non-Brahmin castes – who felt discontented by the political dominance of the brahmins despite the latter being a miniscule minority in the Tamil region. Being less than 3% of the population, Brahmin representation was dominant in the judiciary, administration, education, and even in political leadership. [305] As Wyatt succinctly puts it, "Advocates of the Non-Brahman cause introduced a compelling narrative of conflict into the politics of Tamilnad and constructed a rhetorical separation between a tiny Brahman elite and the majority of the population."[306] Though the membership of the Justice Party was open to all persons of South India from the Madras Presidency except the Brahmins, the Justice Party was confined to Tamil Nadu due to various factors, the primary one being that the antagonism between the Brahmin and the non-Brahmin had not developed in the other southern states to the extent it had developed in Tamil Nadu. But as far as Tamil Nadu was concerned, it could be concluded that the non-Brahmin movement succeeded "in creating a lasting impression that in virtually every political context it was important whether a person was a Brahmin or a non-Brahmin."[307]

However, the Justice Party with its elite composition was unable to attract mass appeal in the state. After its defeat in the Madras Presidency legislative elections of 1937, it aligned itself with the more radical Self-Respect Movement which was being steered by Ramasamy. While the Justice Party contested the Brahmin's power in excessive representation in public offices, Ramasamy challenged the Brahmin as a symbol of a hierarchical social order. To Ramasamy, the creation of an egalitarian society was impossible without the progressive disempowerment of this symbol, which again was contingent on a radical critique of the Hindu religion. Quite some of the liberal non-Brahmin elites in the Justice party and Saivite thinkers

---

[304] G. Aloysius, *Nationalism Without a Nation in India*, New Delhi: Oxford, 1997, p.59

[305] See Eugene F. Irschick, *Politics and Social Conflict in South India: the Non-Brahman Movement and Tamil Separatism, 1916–29*, Berkeley, 1969, pp. 12-19 for an empirical account of the same.

[306] Andrew Wyatt, *Party System Change in South India: Political Entrepreneurs, Patterns and Processes,* Oxon: Routledge, 2010, p. 23

[307] Andre Beteille, "Caste and Political Group Formation in Tamilnad" in ed. Rajni Kothari *Caste in Indian Politics,* Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 1970, p.253

like Adigal were perturbed by Ramasamy's uncompromising stance against the Hindu religion in its entirety.

Ramasamy's Discourse – Its Context and Content

If there was a central theme that ran coherently in Ramasamy's thoughts it is this – anti-Brahminism[308]. Ramasamy's political affiliations and activities have varied over time – he started off as a Congress activist, later called it an evil to be eradicated, supported Gandhi's campaigns for liquor prohibition and later called for a prohibition of Gandhism, flirted briefly with Communism and later criticized the Communist Party for being dominated by Brahmins, took the chairmanship of the Justice Party eventually criticizing the non-Brahmin elites within it and converting it to the more radical 'Dravidar Kazhagam' (Dravidian Federation) in 1944, burnt Hindu religious texts and broke idols of deities, advocated atheism while campaigning for rights of all castes to access temples, opposed the imposition of Hindi as the national language of India while satirizing the political rhetoric of Tamil nationalists and so. Through all this, Ramasamy's discourse remained consistently anti-Brahminical.

Born in 1879 in the town of Erode to an intermediate Naicker caste family which literally moved up in society from rags to riches, the better part of Ramasamy's childhood was spent in an atmosphere of opulence. By his own admission, he was a social rebel even before he reached teenage, questioning the restrictions placed by his family and their social circle on mingling with children from castes relatively lower to their own, often transgressing their diktats. His family's deeply religious nature only piqued the young Ramasamy's passion in questioning their beliefs. In his article "The Genesis of my Self-Respect Movement", he claims that even at the age of twelve, he showed interest in debates on the Hindu scriptures. "In those days Sanyasis (saints),

[308] Brahminism, in general, refers to the vision of the Hindu society in specific, wherein the Brahmin castes are recognized to be at the apex of a hierarchical society owing to religious sanction found in Sanskrit texts. In Ramasamy's discourse, Brahminism, Sanksrit and Hinduism were one and the same. It is necessary to add here that several other anti-caste thinkers like Jyotirao Phule of Maharashtra and the Dalit icon B. R. Ambedkar thought so too. Scholars have noted that the conflation of Brahminism with Hinduism occurred owing to colonial-orientalist practices, only to benefit the Brahmins to gain and maintain hegemony over the emerging Indian nation. Richard King argues that the colonial construction of Hinduism as a single community whose morality was guided by the Sanskrit religious texts greatly benefitted the Brahmins as "modern 'Hinduism' represents the triumph of universalized, Brahmanical forms of religion over the 'tribal' and the 'local'." *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and 'The Mystic East',* London: Routledge, 1999, p.104

Bhagavathars (religious singers), religious mendicants had great sway in our family. I disliked them. I used to pester them with questions and make them feel embarrassed."[309] Scholars of the history of the Dravidian movement and biographers of Ramasamy in general conclude that it was Ramasamy's two year trip to North India as a sceptical wandering saint at the age of twenty-five that strengthened his conviction that the Hindu religion was a social malaise, owing to his having witnessed corrupt practices in temples across the country. He returned to Tamil Nadu to participate in the freedom struggle with the local chapter of the Indian National Congress in 1919 – but with a decisive non-Brahmin orientation. After struggling within the Congress for six years to secure proportional representation for non-Brahmins, which was met by much hostility from the Indian nationalists, he left the organization in November 1925 and launched the Self-Respect Movement a month later.

In the course of his political career, Ramasamy produced a voluminous amount of writings which were mostly published in three papers (*Kudiarasu, Puratchi* and *Viduthalai),* besides a journal (*Paguthariv*u) and an English weekly (*Revolt*) which were published for a brief period. It is really hard to trace out which thinker or what particular thought influenced Ramasamy's crusade against caste, if his thoughts are indebted to any political or philosophical tradition. In the course of his political life, he has been known to cite Socrates, the Buddha, Rousseau, Marx, Russell, and has expressed admiration for Western rationalism and the Enlightenment. Yet, these have been only used as props to strengthen his argument and do not dominate the pattern of his argument as such. Ramasamy himself has not admitted to have been influenced by any particular thinker.

The political discourse and social criticism of Ramasamy, the Self-Respect Movement and the party that he steered from 1944 to 1973, the Dravidar Kazhagam (DK), was informed by a "hyper-literal reading of the religious."[310] Hinduism, which Ramasamy associated with the Brahmins[311], became the object of vitriolic criticism and ridicule. Caste hierarchy, which was considered an integral part of Hinduism, came under scathing attack and the Brahmins were accused of being the lynchpin of this social structure. Likewise, while the idea of who is a 'Dravidian' fluctuates in Ramasamy's thoughts – at different times, it has been all non-Brahmins

---

[309] EV Ramasamy, ed. K. Veeramani *Thoughts of Periyar,* Chennai: Dravidar Kazhagam Publications, 2011, p.279. Explanations in brackets are mine.

[310] MSS Pandian, *Brahmin and Non-Brahmin*, p.194

[311] For an elaborate account for the emergence of the Brahmin as a figure of political and cultural significance in Tamil Nadu and his interaction with, and in quite some cases, appropriation of aspects of Orientalist and Indophile discourse of the West, see Pandian, ibid, pp.17-101.

in the sub-continent, all non-Brahmins in South India, all non-Brahmins in Tamil Nadu alone – he has been consistent in his view that the 'Aryan' and 'Aryan values' are inimical to the interests of his people.[312] The Brahmin, irrespective of region, was considered 'Aryan'.[313]

It needs to be mentioned here that Aryan/Brahmin and the Dravidian/non-Brahmin divide that Ramasamy insists on relied on colonial-missionary epistemology. Retrospectively speaking, one could say no Caldwell, no Periyar. But what Ramasamy does here is a strategic manoeuvre – while his insistence on the pre-colonial Aryan domination of the Dravidian was taken from missionary sources, he also notes that the Brahmin Other has made optimal use of the colonial apparatus to legitimize the Hindu discourse. In this, he is quite critical of colonialism as a system that privileges the discourse of the native elite. The Brahmin subject's agency within the colonial hierarchy and the manner in which his narrative works against the interests of the Dravidian masses is recognized by Ramasamy. This is Ramasamy being radically political in the Schmittian sense; the creation of an enemy to justify the creation of a collective. We shall explore the strengths and pitfalls of this strategy in the next chapter. It should also be added that Ramasamy's uncompromising opposition to the political figure of the Aryan-Brahmin also flowed from his rationalist opposition to all theological authorities.

Ramasamy's reading of Hindu religious scriptures involved a 're-evaluation of all values', wherein what the scriptures claimed as 'good' was mocked for being bad for society, while what was said to be 'evil' was held up as a better ideal. For instance, Rama, the protagonist of the Hindu epic Ramayana (incidentally, the ideal figure of Man worthy of emulation and adulation

---

[312] Eminent historian specializing in ancient India, Romila Thapar, contends in her book *The Aryan: Recasting Constructs* (Gurgaon: Three Essays Collective, 2008) that 'Aryan' is a linguistic category and not a racial category. Colonial-orientalism in India did play a major role in developing the idea of 'Aryan' and 'Dravidian' as racial categories. This was appropriated by both the Hindu nationalists, who wanted to show that the Aryans were a superior race capable of governing themselves and others, and the anti-caste reformers, who wanted to show that the Dravidians were oppressed by the former and were willing to look beyond the colonial/anti-colonial binaries. For an account for the significance of the 'Dravidian' in Tamil Nadu's political imagination, see Jacob Pandian, "Re-Ethnogenesis. The Quest for a Dravidian Identity among the Tamils of India", *Anthropos,* Bd. 93, H. 4./6. (1998), pp. 545-552. Ramasamy's strategy of utilizing the Dravidian terminology will be discussed in later chapters.

[313] Jacob Pandian explains that even prior to the Dravidian movement, "In southern India, historically, Brahmins were associated with the Sanskritic literary and religious tradition rather than with the Tamil literary and religious tradition although the latter (Tamil) tradition had been enriched by many Brahmins who were frequently the custodians of both the traditions. Due to the fact that Sanskrit is a non-Dravidian language (despite its having many Dravidian words and structures), Sanskrit became a symbol of the "Aryan" identity of northern India, and non-Brahmins rejected their Aryan or Sanskritic heritage to forge a Dravidian or Tamil heritage, excluding the Brahmins from it." Jacob Pandian, "Re-Ethnogenesis. The Quest for a Dravidian Identity among the Tamils of India", p.546

in both the Gandhian and the Hindu nationalist imagination) was accused of being a patriarchal casteist who stood for the defence of Brahminical, Aryan-north Indian, male chauvinist views against the interests of the lower castes and women. On the other hand, Ravana, the chief antagonist of the Ramayana, and who is generally reviled by Hindu believers as the embodiment of evil, was praised as the paragon of Dravidian virtue and chivalry.[314]

Sartre had a rather perceptive take on M.K. Gandhi's strategy towards resolving the problem of caste in wake of the Indian anti-colonial struggle:

> In India, the caste system engendered insurmountable contradictions in all levels of society, but Gandhi judged it useless to take them all into consideration: it was necessary, he thought, to find the keystone of the building, and concentrate on that. As we know, he discovered it without difficulty: quite simply, it was the pariah caste.[315]

The exact inverse of this strategy was deployed by Ramasamy in his social reform movement. He identified the hegemony of the Brahmin as "the keystone of the building" of the caste system, locating the power of this hegemony in the realm of religion and culture. While Gandhi's stated mission was to eradicate untouchability and sanitize Hinduism by calling on the Dalits to give up their erstwhile 'unclean' habits, Ramasamy argued that untouchability and discrimination was part and parcel of Hinduism and it was impossible to reform this or that ills without a radical rupture of the system itself.

The title 'Periyar' – the great one – was conferred to Ramasamy not at an anti-caste conference, an atheist association, or at a Tamil nationalist convention. It was at the Chennai conference of the Progressive Women's Association in 1938 that he was given the title and it became his epithet in Tamil Nadu ever since. For a substantial period, Ramasamy's deep involvement with the women's movement in Tamil Nadu was neglected by academics, or only found a passing mention. However, since the 90s, there has been considerable interest in Ramasamy's contributions to the gender question, largely owing to the academic contributions of Tamil feminist social historians.

---

[314] Quite a few parallels can be seen in Ramasamy's approach to Hinduism and Russian anarchist Mikhail Bakunin's attack on religion in his *God and the State* where in he compares the Christian god to a slave-master and praises the devil as the first rebel besides outlining how religion has contributed to the systematic oppression of humanity. While this study might be interesting, there is little evidence to suggest that Ramasamy was familiar with the Russian's works.

[315] Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Spectre of Stalin,* trans. By Irene Clephane, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1969, p105

The very first Provincial Self-Respect Conference held at Chengalpet district on 17 February 1929 which saw the active involvement of Ramasamy passed a resolution calling for greater social, political and economic rights for women, including "the same rights to property and inheritance as men" and "free right to choose their partners irrespective of caste, creed and race."[316] While Ramasamy identified Hinduism to be an important reason for the degradation of women in society, he was also acutely aware of Tamil prejudices. Recognizing male chauvinism in classical Tamil texts he chided the Tamil language as 'barbaric', criticizing everyday parlance for gender bias.[317] Condemning the praise of chastity and virginity in Tamil literature and attacking marriage as an instrument of oppression of women, Ramasamy was instrumental in initiating the practice of 'Self-Respect marriages' – secular marriages conducted without an officiating Brahmin priest and religious rituals. He also exhorted women to learn from the progressive customs of the British and the West.

It is hard to place Ramasamy under any 'ism' as he subscribed to no theory in particular nor did he claim to be involved in a theoretical practice. His criticism of the Hindu religion does not have the rigorous theoretical method that Ambedkar adopts. While Ambedkar attempted to bring about an alternate philosophy of emancipation for the backward castes, Ramasamy involved in an iconoclastic enterprise in the public sphere be it the breaking of Hindu religious idols or the debunking of myths, superstitions and repressive social norms. Ramasamy viewed nationalism in general with suspicion and exhibited contempt for eulogies of pristine pasts, even be it by Tamil nationalists. He argued that nationalism was the invention of lazy intellectuals in the service of the propertied class against the interests of the workers and that "Nationalism is something that induces haze and fanaticism to a human being."[318] Nationalism, anti-colonial variants included, was just another form of religion. His belief was that the solace of humanity was in rationalism and that anything that existed contrary to reason was to be criticized. The extensive volumes of Ramasamy's writings, if anything, show that he was not concerned with creating an ideological consensus towards a finite end but rather with challenging the Brahminical hegemony of the present through subversive discursive practices.

---

[316] "Resolutions passed at various self-respect conferences relating to women empowerment", in ed. K. Veeramani, *Periyar Feminism,* Thanjavur: Periyar Maniyammai University, 2010, pp.164-181

[317] Anandhi S. Bharadwaj, "Women's Question in the Dravidian Movement c. 1925-1948" in *Social Scientist*, Vol. 19, No. 5/6 (May - Jun., 1991), p.26

[318] EV Ramasamy, *Kudiarasu,* 20-11-1932

In a speech in 1970 outlining his vision of "The world to come", Ramasamy advocated the abolition of monarchy, monopoly, private property, the family, the state and its repressive apparatus and religion.[319] He called on women and men to enter into free sexual unions, and challenged the traditional Hindu idea that the primary purpose of sex was for procreation. He also emphasised on the emancipatory potential of reason and individual self-determination. One could argue that Ramasamy had anarchist/libertarian socialist leanings though he himself has not made any claims to the same.

Ramasamy had a cautious approach towards communism and class politics. He toured the Soviet Union for about three months, between February and May 1932. On his return, he began aggressively promoting socialist ideas, denouncing nationalism and hailing the virtues of internationalist socialism.[320] After consultation with local communists, the Self-Respecters passed a set of resolutions demanding radical land reforms, minimal wage and improving of living conditions for workers, public ownership of essential services, state control of religious bodies and prohibition of caste.[321] Apprehensive of the radicalization of the Self-Respect movement, the colonial government began a crackdown on its leaders and cadres and many, including Ramasamy, had to serve terms in prison. Fearing that the progress made by the Self-Respect movement would achieve sever setbacks under continued repression, Ramasamy made a break with his erstwhile communist allies, even though he would be attracted to socialist ideals for the rest of his life. However, he also had criticisms to make of the Indian brand of communism.

In an article written in 1944, noting that the Indian Communist Party was dominated by Brahmins, he argued that as long as caste exists, any form of communism would only benefit the Brahmins since a change in economic status would not necessarily bring a change in ritual hierarchy.[322] Contrasting with the Soviet Union, he said "Since the Western countries did not have caste, they had to wage a class war before communism could be reached. Here, owing to the presence of caste, it is necessary to wage a caste war before achieving communism."[323] He differentiates between caste and class in that class is determined by relation to labour whereas

---

[319] Ramasamy, *Thoughts of Periyar,* pp.290-301
[320] EV Ramasamy, *Kudiarasu,* 11-12-1932
[321] EV Ramasamy, *Kudiarasu,* 1-1-1933
[322] EV Ramasamy, *Thoughts of Periyar EVR (Speeches and Writings of Periyar EV Ramsamy),* First Series (Revised and Enlarged), [Volume 3, Politics Part-2], Chennai: Periyar EV Ramasamy-Nagammai Education and Research Trust, 2009, p. 1646
[323] Ibid, p. 1647

caste is a marker determined by birth in relation to a religiously sanctioned hierarchy. He asserts that "In a country where there are no common rights, communism would only strengthen those who have been enjoying greater rights," adding that abolishing the privilege of Brahmins and the upper castes would result in going half the way towards the communist ideal.[324] Ramasamy suspected that the universality that was guaranteed by communism, in the Tamil Nadu scenario, would be appropriated by the Brahmins to secure their own particular interests. In this, he is not rejecting the universality of communism – he is rather criticizing the Brahmins for being unable to transcend their particularity. He argues that since it is the Shudras who form the bulk of the working class and not the Brahmins, it is the Self-Respect Movement and the Dravidar Kazhagam that alone is the best representative of their interests.[325]

Ramasamy's politics was Schmittian in the sense that it had a very strong conception of the 'absolute enemy' in the Brahmin Other. As a person claiming the absence of rights in the Brahminical order, he sought 'justice in enmity'.[326] However, Ramasamy's idea of 'friend' was inconsistent. In Ramasamy's discourse, the term Dravidian was equated with the non-Brahmin, which collates discrete social groups and gives them a negative identity in that they are not Brahmins. So, anyone who was not a Brahmin was a 'friend' or at least a possible one. At a point, the Ramasamy's 'Dravidian' included every non-Brahmin in India – interestingly, even Japanese who identified with their politics could be called a Dravidian – "his notion of the Dravidian, which he used as an all-embracing trope for multiple forms of oppression, was inclusive enough to accommodate anyone from beyond the narrow parochial national territory, if he or she stood for the equality of all."[327] After Indian Independence however, the word became increasingly identified with the South Indian non-Brahmin, later narrowing down to the Tamil non-Brahmin. The political success of the DMK in capturing state power using a blend of Ramasamy's anti-Brahminism and Tamil nationalism could be credited for this.

---

[324] Ibid, p. 1647

[325] EV Ramasamy, *Kudiarasu,* 6-7-1946

[326] Carl Schmitt, *Theory of the Partisan: A Commentary/Remark on the Concept of the Political,* Trans. By A.C. Goodson, East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2004*,* p.65. It should be added here that despite the use of martial terminology in Ramasamy's speeches, calls for a war on Brahminism, and provocative statements like "If you see a snake and a Brahmin, leave the snake and kill the Brahmin", there were no major incidents of violence physical violence against the Brahmin as a person in the course of the Self-Respect Movement.

[327] MSS Pandian, "Nation Impossible", *Economic and Political Weekly,* Vol. 44, No. 10 (Mar. 7 - 13, 2009), p. 69

Political Legacy

In the 1967 elections, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (Dravidian Progressive Federation) strode into power in the then Madras Presidency, riding on the wave of the popular anti-Hindi agitations that rocked the state. The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) was an offshoot of the original DK from which it had split in 1949, since the former wanted to participate in elections within the Indian constitution while the latter under Ramasamy's leadership was convinced that the Indian independence of 1947 was but a cover for the Brahmins to exploit the rest. The DK had gained considerable notoriety for declaring August 15, the day of transfer of power from British to Indian hands, as a black day for the lower castes and for burning Indian national flags and copies of the constitution. And as long as Ramasamy was alive, the DK championed the idea of a separate state for the Dravidians. But it is also interesting to note that the political discourse of the DK defined the Dravidian nation "in terms of shared ideologies and convictions rather than in terms of language, ethnicity and geography."[328]

The DMK on the other hand took a more reformist line and preferred to work within the Indian political structure. C.N. Annadurai,[329] the founder of the DMK, was a disciple of Ramasamy and a powerful orator and playwright, played a prominent role in strategically appropriating the DK's political rhetoric and using it to catapult his party into power. The DMK's politics had stronger Tamil nationalist overtones, which was sharpened during the anti-Hindi agitations that shook the state during the 50s and the 60s.[330]

Though his reign was short owing to his demise in 1969, Annadurai was the key political figure in ending the rule of Congress party in Tamil Nadu and heralding in what is popularly called the 'Dravidian rule', which has alternated between the DMK and the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK). The latter, led by cinema icon M.G. Ramachandran, split from the DMK, which was taken over by Annadurai's protégé M. Karunanidhi, citing corruption within the party. Both political parties have pledged allegiance to the Periyarite ideal, with the DMK under Karunanidhi in particular passionately claiming to be the legitimate

---

[328] V. Geetha and S.V. Rajadurai, *Towards a Non-Brahmin Millennium: From Iyothee Thass to Periyar*, Kolkata: Samya, 1999, p.453

[329] For an authoritative biographical account of Annadurai and his debt to Ramasamy's political thoughts, see R. Kannan, *Anna: The Life and Times of C.N. Annadurai*, New Delhi, Penguin-Viking, 2010

[330] For a concise account of the reason for and the nature of the anti-Hindi agitations and the DMK's role in the same, see Duncan B. Forrester, "The Madras Anti-Hindi Agitation, 1965: Political Protest and its Effects on Language Policy in India", *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 39, No. 1/2 (Spring - Summer, 1966), pp. 19-36.

successor to Ramasamy's legacy. The current Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, J. Jayalalitha of the AIADMK, a Brahmin lady who has never attempted to hide her Hindu faith, also pays lip-service to the thoughts of Ramasamy on occasions. With the voter base of both parties being the non-Brahmin castes, both the DMK and AIADMK have remained firm to one political demand of Ramasamy even if they had compromised on his more radical principles – affirmative action for backward castes.[331] In their favour, Narendra Subramaniam argues "the Dravidian parties increased political participation, aided the representation of the emergent strata, enriched civic life, and thus strengthened pluralist democracy."[332]

Criticisms

Yet, the Dravidian rule has been criticized for violent acts against those occupying the lowest level in the caste hierarchy, the Dalits. From the infamous Kilvenmani massacre in December 1968 that saw the grotesque murder of 44 Dalit agricultural labourers by non-Brahmin landlords, to the November 2012 ransacking of Dalit hamlets by Vanniyars, a numerically dominant non-Brahmin caste, in Dharmapuri district following an inter-caste marriage between a Dalit boy and a Vanniyar girl, the ruling Dravidian parties have been witness to several caste based violence in the state, and have also been accused of abetting the same. While anti-Dalit violence is prevalent throughout India, anti-Dalit violence in Tamil Nadu has been cited as an indication of the failure of the political discourse of the Dravidian movement in general, Ramasamy's thoughts in particular.

Critics of Ramasamy have accused him of several things - for being anti-Indian, for promoting hatred towards the Brahmins, for separatism, for advocating a collapse of family values and traditional morality and so. Of this, one particular criticism stands out which is the supposed failure of Ramasamy to take Dalit concerns seriously. What is particularly interesting about this criticism is that intellectuals from the left, right and centre of the political spectrum are united in pointing it out. Cho Ramaswamy, a Hindu right-wing critic, says of Ramasamy that "in his crusade against the caste system, however, he did not concentrate on the liberation of

[331] For a contemporary account of the dynamics of party politics in Tamil Nadu, including the emergence of new political actors, see Wyatt *Party System Change in South India*

[332] Narendra Subramaniam, "Identity Politics and Social Pluralism: Political Sociology and Political Change in Tamil Nadu", *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics, 40:3,* 2002, p. 126

the Harijans, perhaps for fear of alienating his followers, mostly from the other castes."[333] Much earlier, M.N. Srinivas of liberal orientations commented that the Dravidian movement in Tamil Nadu resulted in the dominant non-Brahmin castes gaining power, arguing that these castes have a "vested interest" in keeping the Dalits poor socially and economically as the latter are their main sources of agricultural labour.[334] The Dalit Marxist activist Anand Teltumbde makes a grand claim that Ramasamy's DK by 1949 "transformed into a ruling-class lobby that ignored the caste question altogether"[335] while Ravikumar, a Dalit postmodernist writer, argues that "The propaganda against brahmin domination in government services and in the social sphere benefited only the non-brahmins (who were economically powerful) and excluded the dalits"[336] and urges the Dalits to not sacrifice their singularity by standing on a common political platform with the non-Brahmin castes.[337]

These writers, who otherwise would not see eye-to-eye on other social issues, have a commonality in their criticism that the Dravidian movement's political discourse focused solely on empowering the non-Brahmins at the cost of the Dalits. While indeed there have acts of violence and discrimination against Dalits in Tamil Nadu in the Dravidian rule[338] is the exclusion of Dalits an inherent component of Ramasamy's political discourse? Does the construction of the non-Brahmin identity and political mobilization on those lines blur the social injustices that the Dalits face? Does the projection of the Brahmin Other as essentially evil by Ramasamy provide little or no space for critical introspection of the non-Brahmin Self? Was there a failure of Ramasamy to appreciate "the constitutive ambiguity of identity" that could provide "the cultivation of respect between constituencies bound together in relations of interdependence and strife"?[339] Or was it an act of bad faith on part of Ramasamy to consider the Dravidian/non-Brahmin identity as an end in itself?

---

[333] Cho S. Ramaswamy, "EV Ramaswami Naicker and C.N. Annadurai" available from http://www.india-today.com/itoday/millennium/100people/durai.html, [Last accessed on 20-11-2013]

[334] M.N Srinivas, *Caste in Modern India and Other Essays,* New York: Asia Publishing House, 1962, p.91.

[335] Anand Teltumbde, *The Persistence of Caste: The Khairlanji Murders and India's Hidden Apartheid,* New Delhi: Navayana, 2010, p23.

[336] Ravikumar, *Venomous Touch: Notes on Caste, Culture and Politics,* Kolkata: Samya, 2009, p41.

[337] ibid, p.241

[338] Countering accusations that the Dravidian rule was a cover for non-Brahmin casteist ideology, V. Geetha and S.V. Rajadurai argue that the casteism of the non-Brahmin castes was a refracted ideology "whereas brahminism, the informing logic of the caste system and the Indian state, is the self-conscious expression of an exclusive group that is not only deeply committed to preserving that exclusivity but equally concerned that it do so in the name of mutually shared values." See "Neo-Brahminism: An Intentional Fallacy?" in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 28, No. 3/4 (Jan. 16-23, 1993), pp. 129-136.

[339] William E. Connolly, *Why I am Not a Secularist,* London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999, p.155.

Conclusion – and a Beginning of a Dialogue

A critical dialogue with Fanon could attempt to answer these questions, I would argue. While Fanon has generally been associated with the study of colonialism/anti-colonialism, Black/White identity politics and violence, Fanon's existential humanism provides tools to study identity politics in general. Now this is not an attempt to blindly transpose Fanon into a critique of caste – that would not just be foolhardy, but also dangerous. A lazy reading of Fanonist texts, especially the ones like "Algeria Unveiled" might lead one to argue that the Indian nationalists defence of the traditional Hindu wife, of regressive cultural practices like temple prostitution, and the Brahmin-centric worldview, were actually genuine resistance to colonialism. The task at hand is to rather to probe how better the Fanonian framework can work best for an understanding of Ramasamy's politics of an inferiorized caste identity, by engaging in a dialogue of the discourse of the two thinkers.

As mentioned earlier, Ramasamy's politics was more concerned with strategic actions for localized resistance and did not lay claim to producing a theory or to universality, even though many of the issues that were of his concern involved universalist considerations. Fanon's interventions on the other hand, while not materializing in reality as a successful political project, have produced an intensive theory of the dialectics of identity relations. So in theory, Fanon can be used to assess Ramasamy's discourse. Fanon's understanding of identity politics, which has a cautious cultural relativism to it, is based on a belief in anti-essentialism and the idea that identity is to be transcended for something more universal. This is particularly useful in engaging with Ramasamy's handling of the Dalit question, his consideration of the particular identity of the enemy Other, that is, the Brahmin, and of his attitude towards the Dravidian identity.

However, this study does not uncritically use a Fanonian lens to analyze Ramasamy. For just as Fanon used Sartre to understand better the dialectic of experience while having a critical view of the Sartrean understanding of the same, this study shall also use Ramasamy's perspective to judge the pitfalls in Fanonian discourse – in Fanon's take on gender, in his reliance on colonial binaries, and in his universality.

‘A Phase in the Dialectic’: A Fanonist Critique of Ramasamy’s Discourse on Caste

Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss Ramasamy’s discourse on caste and offer a Fanonist critique of the same. Ramasamy’s discussions on caste politics in Tamil Nadu involved discursive strategies directed towards three major groups – the intermediate castes, of which he was a member, whose social status as ‘Shudras’ he used as a weapon to incriminate the Brahmins; the Brahmins, who were the Other who, according to Ramasamy, by their very presence condemned the rest of the population to the status of Shudrahood and untouchability; the untouchable Dalit castes whose particularism he respected and who he considered allies in the struggle against Brahminism. Comparing and contrasting with Fanon’s identity politics, I explore what, in my opinion, are the pitfalls in Ramasamy’s discursive strategy. These include the upholding of an inferiorized identity of ‘Shudra’ that is based solely on the definition of the Brahmin Other, the consideration of the Brahmin Other as a fixed identity with no efforts made to unsettle it, and finally, an indulgence of Dalit particularity. I start with a discussion of the Shudra identity of the non-Brahmin and the ‘anti-casteist casteism’ of Ramasamy, comparing and contrasting it with the ideas of the Negritude movement, whose relationship with Fanon I have discussed in Chapter 2. While Ramasamy did not romanticize the Shudra or the non-Brahmin identity as the Negritude thinkers did with respect to the Negro/Black identity, there nevertheless was a discursive process of essentialization and Othering of the Brahmin. I then discuss the Brahmin Other and what it means in Ramasamy’s political discourse. Much like Fanon, Ramasamy was deeply suspicious of the role that a native elite would play in a

postcolonial society. But while to Fanon the native elite was a economic category of comprador bourgeoisie, Ramasamy argued that the native elites were the Brahmin caste, who would secure hegemonic privilege in independent India, to the detriment of the non-Brahmins. However, by taking the Brahmin identity as fixed, Ramasamy's political discourse inadvertently gives the Brahminical ideology the power to shape the identities of and conflicts between the Shudras and the Dalits. I then discuss the position of Dalits in Ramasamy's worldview and his respect for the Dalit particularity. In a Fanonist reading, I argue that Ramasamy's consideration of a fixed Brahmin particularity as an essentialized Other, and the Dalit particularity as an identity to be respected, fails to dismantle the knot of Brahminical caste ideology. Drawing from Fanon, I conclude that a transformative praxis in search of a post-casteist society must be a universalism that is cognizant of particulars, that unsettles both the identities of the oppressor and the oppressed.

To begin with

In November 2012, mobs belonging to the Vanniyar caste, an intermediate caste group numerically dominant in northern Tamil Nadu, went on a rampage in Dharmapuri district and burnt down hundreds of Dalits homes and vandalized properties of Dalits. The violence was instigated by inflammatory speeches of Vanniyar community leaders, many of whom who were affiliated to the Pattali Makkal Katchi (Toiling People's Party), who condemned an inter-caste marriage between a Dalit man and a Vanniyar girl and accused Dalit youngsters of luring girls from intermediate castes into such marriages. This was followed by violence by PMK cadres in May 2013, where they caused significant damage to public property condemning the detention of some of their leaders who had made communally provocative remarks, besides urging the state government to ensure the prevention of inter-caste marriages. The violence of the PMK was harshly condemned by intellectuals and activists belonging to several Periyarite groups while, interestingly, the PMK itself claims to be influenced by Periyarite ideals.

Commenting on these incidents and trying to explain the cause of the anti-Dalit violence in the state, social critic S. Anand, a Tamil Brahmin, argues that the non-Brahmin movement

was "misrepresented as an anti-caste movement, which it certainly was not."[340] On the other hand, MSS Pandian argues in a commentary that the Tamil Nadu state as a whole benefitted from the non-Brahmin movement and that the violence perpetrated against the Dalits was more owing to the intermediate castes' desire to symbolically compensate for their loss of erstwhile authority on the upwardly mobile Dalits through such acts of violence.[341]

As pointed out in an earlier chapter, anti-Dalit violence in Tamil Nadu has been highlighted as the failure of the Dravidian movement, with some attributing it to an inherent problem in the political discourse of EV Ramasamy. But it does seem evident from all accounts that a common platform, *a common identity,* for Dalits and intermediate castes was not forged. What was the problem in Ramasamy's political discourse that prevented a common identity or a common identification for Dalits and intermediate castes to emerge?

The 'Shudra' identity of the non-Brahmin and Anti-casteist Casteism

A key term that Ramasamy used as a device for self-description and as a challenge to the Brahminical ideology was 'Shudra', the Sanskrit word which denotes people belonging to the lowest order in the *Varna* system. To Ramasamy, the intermediate Tamil castes were Shudras, who, according to his hyper-literal reading of the Hindu texts, were "sons of prostitutes of the Brahmins, hereditary slaves, those who should not read, those who should not accumulate wealth."[342] The Shudras were different from the untouchable Dalit castes and Ramasamy, referring to this difference on several occasions, had chided the intermediate Tamil castes for their pride in their relative superiority over the Dalits.

It is here that a comparison with Negritude helps. Like the proponents of Negritude, Ramasamy's discourse appropriated a condescending term associated with an inferiorized identity and used it to unsettle the 'mainstream' discourse of Indian nationalism. In an article in 1938 titled "Nationalist milk for the Brahmin snake" he polemically argues that the Brahmins with the aid of Gandhi seized little liberties granted by the British for themselves and duped the

---

[340] S. Anand, "No Pink Chaddis for PMK", http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-opinion/no-pink-chaddis-for-pmk/article4910536.ece [last accessed on February 20, 2014]
[341] MSS Pandian, "Caste in Tamil Nadu – II: Slipping Hegemony of Intermediate Castes", *Economic and Political Weekly,* Vol – XLVIII No. 04, January 26, 2013, pp. 13-15
[342] EV Ramasamy, *Kudiarasu,* 08-12-1929

Shudras.[343] Like the Negritude thinkers who criticized the universalism of Western Enlightenment for being deeply entrenched in White superiority and racism, Ramasamy was opposed to Indian nationalism accusing it of being a cover for Brahmin dominance. However, unlike the Negritude thinkers, Ramasamy did not eulogise a pristine 'pre-contact with the Other' past or romanticize the 'noble savage' uncorrupted by modernity. To Ramasamy, the Shudra Tamils needed to "rise above a state of barbarism" and for that "it is not enough that one hates god, religion, the Vedas, the traditional puranas, temples, festivals and religious processions. One also must detest the Tamil language which upholds the puranas and religious epics. This is so because the Tamil language is structured so as to degrade the Tamil."[344] He criticizes the Tamil language and literature for their inherent sexism. Further, he calls on the Tamils to ignore the Tamil language and learn English, English customs, and English modernity.[345] According to Ramasamy, "English governance, English education, English customs and English civilization have over time have dented to some extent the caste system and caste hierarchies."[346] The Shudra Tamil needed to give up not just the Brahminical religious texts and scriptures but also an attachment to a native Tamil culture to be an individual of self-respect. But whatever he or she might do, the Shudra would remain a Shudra as long as a Brahmin remained a Brahmin. That is, the symbolic presence of the Brahmin rendered the intermediate Tamil castes as Shudras.

Yet another difference from Negritude is that Ramasamy, as Geetha notes, "did not grant epistemological privilege to experience" and was convinced that identity must be subject to "reason, dialogue and argument."[347] She also observes that to Ramasamy, the agent of history "was neither the shudra, nor an adi-dravida; nor was it a Tamil or a dravida. Instead, it was the non-brahmin historic bloc, in its entirety that was to undertake the tasks of creating a new social, economic and ethical order."[348] Geetha argues elsewhere that Ramasamy was particular on respecting the specificities of the Dalit identity, but I will come to that shortly. While it is true that Ramasamy's agent of history was an abstract and fluid non-Brahmin

---

[343] EV Ramasamy, *Kudiarasu,* 13-03-1938
[344] EV Ramasamy, *Periyar Kalanjiyam: Jaathi-Theendaamai, Paagam (11),* Chennai: Periyar Suyamariyathai Prachaara Niruvanam, 2011, pp. 138-139
[345] Ibid, pp. 140
[346] EV Ramasamy, *Kudiarasu,* 13-03-1938
[347] V. Geetha, "Who Is the Third That Walks behind You? Dalit Critique of Modernity", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (Jan. 13-19, 2001), p. 164
[348] Ibid, p. 163

category, Ramasamy's discourse around caste when addressed to the intermediate castes, addressed them as 'Shudras', the aspects of their Shudrahood which includes acerbic criticisms of their notions of superiority over the Dalits and patriarchy, and the dominance of the Brahmins over them. The casteist terminology of the Brahmin elite is reversed and is held up to them as proof of their complicity in the degraded social status of the rest of the population.

Ambedkar notes that "while making themselves into a caste, the Brahmans, by virtue of this, created Non-Brahman caste; or, to express it in my own way, while closing themselves in they closed others out."[349] The Brahminical ideology made the Shudra in history through various religious and mythological texts and the assertion of the Brahmin of his identity in the present had the effect of reiterating the Shudrahood of the intermediate Tamil castes. In rhetorical fashion, Ramasamy argues that even a Brahmin of a low class would identify the intermediate castes as Shudras and "sons of prostitutes" and himself as a higher Brahmin identity[350] and asserts that the only way out would be for Tamils to secede from the Indian union.[351] But he does this without a support for an alternate nationalism or national consciousness with his sole argument as regards state power being that Indian nation-state privileged Brahmins and thus condemned the Tamils to being in the state of Shudras and untouchability. To take from Fanon, the Brahmin might have made the Shudra, but it is the Shudra who fashions his politics of resistance. It was discussed in the earlier chapters how Fanon criticized the proponents of Negritude and their "anti-racist racism" for the limited scope of their politics. But this criticism cannot be blindly transposed into a criticism of Ramasamy's political discourse as his "anti-casteist casteism" as mentioned above did not seek legitimating in myriad pasts or through the valorisation of a pure identity. A Fanonist critique must take into consideration the nuances of Ramasamy's discourse and the social problem he was dealing with.

Fanon was quick to observe that Negritude's privileging of an inferiorized identity, its reification of the Black skin, would inevitably lead to a compromise with the system of oppression. Based on an identity shaped by the oppressor, it loses purpose without him. The Shudra who accuses the Brahmin for making him as such is already in the playing field of Brahminical discourse. If he cannot escape its grasp, he will try to make peace with it in inauthenticity and bad faith. Ramasamy's usage of the Shudra terminology does not divest it out

---

[349] B.R. Ambedkar, *Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development,* Jullundur: Patrika Publications, 1985, p. 29

[350] EV Ramasamy, *Periyar Kalanjiyam: Jaathi-Theendaamai, Paagam (11),* p. 149

[351] Ibid, p. 156

of its traditional negative meaning and ascribe it a positive value. He rather uses it to condemn those have condemned the rest of the lower castes to lower status. Even Ramasamy's non-Brahmin agent of history has his identity based only on not being a Brahmin.

To a point, the 'Shudra' as an identity may strategically serve as a negative reminder to the non-Brahmin castes of their need to reject and challenge Brahminism. Yet, its consistent deployment by Ramasamy inadvertently makes the symbol of the Brahmin as the permanent referent, the Other without whom the Self would collapse into vacuum, an ontological emptiness. Those from the Vanniyar caste who were involved in the violence against the Dalits in 2012 firmly resist being called Shudras – they fashion themselves as Kshatriyas, the warrior *Varna*. The term 'Shudra' is viewed by the Vanniyars, as it is by other intermediate castes, with aversion as it is a fixed signifier that can only refer to a low social standing, a painful reminder of one's inferiority vis-à-vis the Brahmin Other, a negative identity. And they would rather, within the system of social hierarchy, perpetrate violence on those lower to them than form a Shudra-Dalit alliance against Brahminism, embracing the negative connotations of their identity. Through a perspicuous reading of Sartre's *Anti-Semite and Jew,* Fanon observes that "In order to react against anti-Semitism, the Jew turns himself into an anti-Semite."[352] A similar process is in operation here – to escape Shudrahood, the Shudra seeks a higher place in the Brahminical system.

Fanon rejects a Negro identity politics that is based only on the lived experiences of Blacks and their histories of suffering in favour of a broader African politics. His endorsement of the Algerian identity is based on its affirmative potential to have an existence independent of the French. The past does not validate the politics of the present. The present has to create an affirmative politics of the future. "I do not have the right to allow myself to bog down. I do not have the right to allow the slightest fragment to remain in my existence. I do not have the right to allow myself to be mired in what the past has determined."[353] Ramasamy's Shudra, however, was determined purely by the past, or to be more specific, by a particular reading of the past. The Shudra of the present was in his inferior social state owing to a straight succession of events from the time when the Sanskrit scriptures were composed and the Brahmins, generation after generation, prevented any move to achieve social equality. His equating of the Dravidian and non-Brahmin intermediate caste with the Shudra and his contempt for a Tamil nationalist

[352] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks,* trans. Charles Lam Markmann, London: Pluto Press, 2008, p. 141

[353] Ibid, p. 179

identity created the lack of an alternative affirmative identification. The Periyarite radical was one who identified with an inferior identity and used it to deconstruct the discourse of the dominant system. But he was, for all practical purposes, dependent on the Other's categorization of his Self as a ritual inferior. There is little or no clue of what would happen to the Shudra identity in a post-Brahminical scenario. Is the Shudra identity, as Sartre commented on Negritude, a 'passing phase in the dialectic' or an end in itself?

In a Fanonist understanding, the implication of Ramasamy's political discourse is this - There is one destiny for the Shudra and it is the Brahmin.

The Brahmin Other

In 1926, the wife of the colonial governor of Chennai was taken on a tour of the famous Madurai Meenakshi Amman temple by a Brahmin priest. Commenting on this, Ramasamy in an editorial in the party paper of the Self-Respect movement *Kudiarasu* (Republic) said that while it was acceptable for a Brahmin to entertain the "colonizer", an "alien", someone who "shared no values with your native religion", it was unacceptable for the Brahmin to allow temple entry to those belonging to the Nadar caste[354] who were natives and technically belonged to the Hindu religion.[355] He further said

> Just as the Whites who divided us and prevented us from achieving unity and by this strategy, they ruled a country of 330 million, ruling with the aid of guns and cannons, looting our wealth, the Brahmins have divided us into several castes, instructing us that one was high and the other was low, facilitated a conflict between the high and low and with the aid of the weapons of Vedas, the scriptures, puranas, mores have inferiorized us and live off our blood.[356]

Though one school of Marxist critics claim that Ramasamy in his pursuit of social reform "drifted into shameful collaboration with British imperialism"[357] Ramasamy clearly understood

---

[354] Nadars, who belong to the intermediate caste group, were considered to be ritually unapproachable.
[355] EV Ramasamy, *Kudiarasu,* 17-01-1926
[356] Ibid.
[357] N. Ram, "Pre-History and History of the DMK: The Politics of Cultural Nationalism in South India by Marguerite Ross Barnett", *Social Scientist*, Vol. 6, No. 5 (Dec., 1977), p. 68

the pernicious effects of British rule. He was also, much like Fanon, aware that colonial system relied on native elite groups for administrative purposes. Fanon argues that in colonized underdeveloped countries, there is no genuine bourgeoisie "but rather an acquisitive, voracious, and ambitious petty caste, dominated by a small-time racketeer mentality, content with the dividends paid out by the former colonial power"[358] and was convinced that this group must be opposed by a genuine decolonization struggle. He devotes an entire chapter "The Trials and Tribulations of National Consciousness" in *WOTE* to discuss the malignant character of the native elites in the process of decolonization and in the postcolony "since this caste has done nothing else but prolong the heritage of the colonial economy, thinking and institutions"[359].

Interestingly, it is in this particular chapter in the entire Fanonist corpus where the word "caste" is used repeatedly. In Fanon's view, this caste is a rigid, mediocre, underdeveloped national bourgeoisie that, though on paper is "independent" of colonizer, in practice carries the baggage of the colonizer.[360] He argues that these elite ensure that development happens only to favour their sectarian interests, and that under their incompetent rule, the spirit of anti-Colonialism quickly gives way to racism and national chauvinism.[361]

Ramasamy shared a similar hostility towards the native elites who spearheaded the Indian nationalist struggle and who were its representatives in Tamil Nadu. He argues that while in the initial stages, "the poor, the peasantry, the working class" participated in the anti-Colonial movement, it was only the "Brahmins who emerged as the main representatives of Tamil Nadu."[362] In his introduction to "Puratchi" (Revolution), another paper of the Self-Respect movement launched in November 1933, Ramasamy wrote that

> "Puratchi" was not launched to destroy the White master and install the Black master. "Puratchi" was not launched to end White government and bring in Black government. Nor was "Puratchi" launched to abolish Hinduism and propagate Islam or Christianity.
> […]

[358] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth,* trans. Richard Philcox, New York: Grove Press, 2004, p. 119
[359] Ibid, p. 120
[360] Ibid, p. 98
[361] Ibid, p. 103
[362] EV Ramasamy, *Kudiarasu,* 03-01-1926

> "Puratchi" was born to make a revolution to end the rule of all capitalist classes and all religions, to ensure that all people live with self-respect and that there is universal equality between the male and female genders.[363]

This sits well with Fanon's appeal that "If we really want to safeguard our countries from regression, paralysis, or collapse, we must rapidly switch from a national consciousness to a social and political consciousness."[364]

In the chapter on national consciousness, Fanon also discusses the role that the national party, which once was the lead advocate of decolonization, plays in creation of the elite caste. He argues that in several newly liberated African countries the national party "operates on a tribal basis. It is a veritable ethnic group which has transformed into a party."[365] This party further results in "regionalist thinking and separatism." In similar tones, Ramasamy alleges that the national party in both colonial and postcolonial India is a party that comprises entirely of Brahmins and the slaves of Brahmins.[366] Further, in postcolonial India, the non-Brahmin Tamils were enslaved through "independence" and their oppression in multiple levels was facilitated by the domination of Brahmins in the national party, arguing that Brahmin domination was the consequence of Indian national unity.

The difference in Fanon's and Ramasamy's approach to the native elites is that to Fanon, the "caste" he refers to is a political and economic elite that took over the reins of colonialism whereas to Ramasamy, the Brahmin caste was an inflexible socio-cultural and political elite that predated colonialism, prospered during colonialism, and would dominate the non-Brahmins in the postcolonial condition by virtue of their ritual superiority. Where Fanon concerns are that decolonization is essentially good, but native elites will try to wrest control and suppress the masses, and they should be opposed for that reason, Ramasamy's concerns are that the native elites have oppressed the masses prior to the arrival of the colonizer, and while colonialism is essentially bad, Brahminism is worse and a temporary collaboration with the 'lesser evil' can be justified provided it creates awareness among the non-Brahmin castes about the nature of power relations in the country.

---

[363] EV Ramasamy, *Puratchi,* 26-11-1933
[364] Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth,* p. 142
[365] Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth,* p. 126
[366] EV Ramasamy, *Viduthalai,* 04-06-1968

Unlike Fanon, Ramasamy was reluctant to reduce his political discourse to a Manichean either/or argument, that it was either 'freedom' or 'colonialism', and he problematized what freedom meant, who it benefitted and who it excluded.[367] Ramasamy's conviction was that as bad as the British rule was, independent India, under what he believed would be Brahmin rule, would be worse if there were not adequate checks and balances to curtail the dominance of the Brahmin castes. In a speech in Dharmapuri district in 1967, he argues that the White man was opposed because he was an alien and so too, the Brahmin must be opposed since he also was an alien. He says:

> Though the White man ruled us, he gave us rights; he considered us as human beings; he ate in our homes; he wouldn't take a bath on touching us. The Brahmin is not like that. Doesn't he believe that he needs to take a bath for merely touching us? [...]
>
> We belong to this country. We do the labour that that is required for the sustenance of humanity, and then shouldn't we think why we should continue being sons of prostitutes and Shudras to the Brahmins? Why should our women be Shudra women and prostitutes to the Brahmins?[368]

Where Fanon believed that colonialism was fundamentally a dehumanization of man and that it was an effort in making "the colonized confess the inferiority of their culture"[369] Ramasamy insisted that, in the general case of India and in the specific case of Tamil Nadu, the colonized's culture had already condemned the vast majority to inferiority by ritual sanction and it was colonial modernity, to some extent, that provided a space in the public sphere for the participation of erstwhile lower castes. Given this condition, to Ramasamy, a limited "collaboration" with the British was justified insofar as it weakened the hegemony of the Brahmin Other.

It was mentioned in an earlier chapter that despite Ramasamy's varying alliances in his long career in politics, he was uncompromisingly opposed to Brahminism. To Ramasamy, the Brahmins were interested in political power "for their self-advancement, for the welfare of their

---

[367] I will explore more on this in the next chapter.
[368] EV Ramasamy, *Viduthalai,* 11-12-1967
[369] Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth,* p. 167

own caste".[370] In his speeches and writings, Ramasamy polemically attacks the ritual inaccessibility of the Brahmin Other, the privileges that the Hindu religion bestows upon him, his caste purity, his role in maintaining the caste hierarchy, his role in engendering patriarchy, and his monopoly over the 'ideological state apparatus' (ISA). I have specifically used the Althusserian term here because in Ramasamy's criticism of the Brahminical ideology, he explicitly observes its presence in all the institutions that Althusser regards as constituting the ISA, namely the religious, the educational, the family, the legal, the political, trade-unions, communications, and the cultural.[371] Brahminism as ideology was embodied in the agent of the Brahmin and an emancipatory politics was impossible without dislodging Brahmin overrepresentation in the public sphere. Concomitantly, the Brahmins were to be given no representation in the Dravidar Kazhagam.

A comparison may be drawn to the Black Power movement in America (many of whose leaders were inspired by Fanon) who, in the initial stages of the movement, opposed the participation of Whites in their struggle. They were apprehensive that the Whites, who were a majority privileged by the system, would dilute the radical potential of the movement of the Black minority, and impose a 'White version' of liberation on the Black militants.[372] Ramasamy's concern on the other hand, was that the Brahmin minority, who were ordained by religion to be superior to the rest of the population, who were privileged not just by the colonial administrative and education system where they constituted the bulk of native representation, but also by the nationalist parties where they were overrepresented, would use the instruments of the postcolonial nation-state to the advantage of their own while making the rest of populace subscribe to their ideology.

So why did Ramasamy single out the Brahmins? I have mentioned above that Ramasamy criticized the intermediate castes for their assumptions of relative superiority over the Dalits. He was also wary of certain friends of the Self-Respect movement who, while being to open to criticisms of the Brahmins, were unwilling to challenge their own positions of power and privilege. Commenting on this

---

[370] EV Ramasamy, *Kudiarasu,* 05-11-1933

[371] Louis Althusser, *On Ideology,* London: Verso, 2008, p. 17

[372] Malcolm X discusses this in a speech given in 1963. See "Message to the Grass Roots", ed. George Breitman *Malcolm X Speaks: Selected Speeches and Statements,* New York: Grove Press, 1965, pp. 3-17. It is necessary to add here that Fanon would have never approved of this 'reverse racism' of the Black Power movement leaders.

> I am aware of the criticism that while the non-brahmins are bitter about the superiority complex of the Brahmins, they themselves do not grant equality to those below them in the infamous caste hierarchy. There is much truth in this criticism. My only reply is that the Brahmins have to take the greatest blame, because their forebears have been the authors of caste and it is they who have meticulously striven to preserve the system;[373]

Ramasamy located the Brahmin agent at the centre of an ideological system that maintained social hierarchy. While other castes below the Brahmin might also be complicit in the preservation of this hierarchy, it was the discourse of Brahminism, which was manifested in the corporeal existence of the Brahmin, which needed to be challenged for any social revolution to be affected.

It was discussed in a chapter before how the idea of "reciprocal recognition" was central to Fanon's conception of identity politics. To Fanon, "without reciprocal recognition there could be no identity, no self-worth, no dignity."[374] The Other was an enemy to the extent that the Other failed to recognize the person of colour or the colonized. But once the colonial status was done away with, there would be a mutual enriching of cultures based on a universalism that would recognize and respect particularities. But to Ramasamy, the problem begins with the moment of recognition. When the Brahmin is recognized as a Brahmin, it automatically implies that the non-Brahmin Other who recognizes him is lower to him. The non-Brahmin is 'overdetermined from without' by the presence of the Brahmin. The Jew was the slave of the idea that others had of him and the Black was the slave of his own appearance,[375] but the non-Brahmin was the slave of the presence of the Brahmin. In the case of the Jew the anti-Semite was the problem, in the case of the Black the White racist was the problem, in the case of the non-Brahmin the Brahmin was the problem. In Ramasamy's discourse, the Brahmin was the Master-Signifier, his corporeal being and the rules and meanings that elevated him to a superior status were one and the same.

In an appreciative note, Nietzsche claims that the Brahmins maintained purity despite the "dirt of politics", and how they "felt removed and outside, a people of higher, over-kingly

---

[373] EV Ramasamy, *Social Reform or Social Revolution,* trans. AM Dharmalingam, Chennai: Dravidar Kazhagam, 1998, p. 16

[374] Hussein Abdilahi Bulhan, *Frantz Fanon and the Psychology of Oppression,* New York: Plenum Press, 1985, p. 114

[375] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks,* p. 87

tasks."[376] In Tamil Nadu, with the onset of the Dravidian movement, it was this purity and the exclusiveness of the Brahmin participant in the public sphere that became the focus of political criticism. It was this caste "purity" of the Brahmin castes and their ritual superiority that was, according to Ramasamy, responsible for the perpetuation of social hierarchy among the rest of the masses. The Brahmin was not just someone whom the non-Brahmin was not; the Brahmin was someone whom the non-Brahmin could never be. For while Dalits and intermediate castes could move up the social ladder through the process of Sankritization, the Brahmin status was closed once and for all. The Brahmin Other, by virtue of his caste purity, inaccessibility and fixed place in social hierarchy was beyond reform. So in Ramasamy's opinion, the secular Brahmin, the Indian nationalist Brahmin, the Communist Brahmin or the Hindu nationalist Brahmin were all products of, and by that virtue, representatives of Brahmin privilege. In the realm of the political, in a Schmittian sense, the Brahmin was the Absolute Enemy. But Ramasamy's idea of war on the enemy was not a war of physical annihilation or any form of violence against the person. If his conceptualization of political action to be taken against the enemy were to be summarized into a single sentence, it would be this - "When we meet a Brahmin we must greet him 'come on you Bastard!'"[377] The encounter of the non-Brahmin Self with the Brahmin Other was to be accompanied by a performance of ridicule at the latter, condemning him for inferiorizing the former.

This is where the non-Brahmin identity emerges at its intersubjective best. The subjectivity of the non-Brahmin agent is locked in an eternal combat with the subjectivity of the Brahmin agent. The Brahmin not by look or by idea but by his 'pure', 'over-kingly' presence constitutes the non-Brahmin of Tamil Nadu, binding the latter as Shudras and Dalits. Sartre discusses this phenomenon of the externally above force creating the community of the oppressed:

> The "master," the "feudal lord," the "bourgeois," the "capitalist" all appear not only as powerful people who command but in addition and above all as *Thirds:* that is, as those

[376] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future,* eds. Rolf-Peter Hortsmann and Judith Norman, trans. Judith Norman, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 54. Comparing Nietzschean philosophy and Brahminism, B.R. Ambedkar said the Brahminical religion was "Superman's heaven and the common man's damnation." *Philosophy of Hinduism,* New Delhi: Critical Quest, 2010, p. 67

[377] EV Ramasami, *Declaration of War on Brahminism,* trans. A.S. Venu, Chennai: Dravidar Kazhagam Publication, 1998, p. 16

> who are outside the oppressed community and *for whom* this community exists. It is therefore for them and *in their freedom* that the reality of the oppressed class is going to exist. They cause it to be born by their look. It is to them and through them that there is revealed the identity of my condition and that of others who are oppressed; it is for them that I exist in a situation organized with others and that my possible are strictly equivalent with the possibilities of others;[378]

I shall expand more on Sartre's argument in the next section and discuss its implications for the intermediate castes and Dalits. But here, it can be seen how in Ramasamy's discourse the Brahmin is the 'Third' who creates the identity of the non-Brahmin condition, of that of the Shudras and the Dalits.

To take from a question of Aletta Norval posed in her letter to Ernesto Laclau, "what are the implications of recognizing that the identity of the other is constitutive of the self"[379] in a condition where the non-Brahmins are in political power where Brahmin hegemony over political discourse has become something of the past? In a compelling observation, Laclau writes "as the identity of the newly emancipated groups has been constituted through the rejection of the old dominant ones, the latter continue shaping the identity of the former. The operation of inversion takes place entirely within the old *formal* system of power."[380] This is plausible explanation of the reason of the fissures within the non-Brahmin castes, of why the intermediate castes turned on the Dalits once they had greater political power. Taking from the aforementioned case, the Vanniyar identity politics, the self-identification of Vanniyars as Kshatriyas, and their violent reactions against Dalits is shaped not by a Vanniyar ideology or an intermediate caste ideology, but by an implicit reference to a social hierarchy where the Brahmin is permanently fixed at the apex and the Vanniyars climb up in it by stepping on those below.

Though the original act of closure, as observed by Ambedkar, was done by the Brahmins, Ramasamy's discourse reaffirms this closure and does little to break it. In fact, the discursive trajectory of Ramasamy is dictated by an assumption that the Brahmin identity is

---

[378] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology,* trans. Hazel E. Barnes, Oxon: Routledge, 2003, p. 442

[379] Aletta J. Norval, "Letter to Ernesto", in Ernesto Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of our Time,* London: Verso, 1990, p. 157

[380] Ernesto Laclau, *Emancipation(s),* London: Verso, 2007, p. 31

immutable. The Brahmin who supposedly came into the region more than two millennia back along with the 'Aryan invasions' and the Tamil Brahmin of the present and the Brahmin of the future were the same and unalterable. It is to be noted that while there is no attempt at closure of the non-Brahmin identity, by Ramasamy's emphasis that it remains permanently closed to the Brahmin, it is also recognition of the closure of the Brahmin identity. By taking the Brahmin identity as fixed, Ramasamy's political discourse inadvertently gives Brahminism the power to shape the identities of the groups for whom he sought emancipation in a post-Brahminical scenario.

A consideration of Fanon's essay on "Algeria's European Minority"[381] helps here. To Fanon, the minority of Europeans and European Jews who inhabit the colony were subjects who were not just products of the colonial system, but also subjects who in turn conditioned the system. He recognizes the subjectivities of these privileged minorities and the choices that they make in being complicit with, neutral to, or opposed to the system of colonialism. Fanon attaches as an appendix the testimony of one 'Algerian European' who writes "For the Algerians I am no longer an ally. I am a brother, simply a brother, like the others."[382] The unconditional recognition of the European colonizer as an enemy by Fanon is complemented with the conditional recognition of the European as a friend, the condition being that he gives up identification with oppressor and identifies with the oppressed. The discursive strategy of this essay is that by invoking an Algerian identity that is accommodative to the European, it not only disturbs the notion that the Algerian nation is something primordial; it also dislocates the argument of the fixedness of the European identity. As Laclau expands from Norval's argument, "The reference to the other is also maintained here but, as the inversion takes place at the level of the universal reference and not of the concrete contents of an oppressive system, the identities of *both* oppressors and oppressed are radically changed."[383]

Commenting on Black identity politics in America, Zizek writes "it is not enough to find new terms with which to define oneself outside of the dominant white tradition - one should go a step further and deprive the whites of the monopoly on defining *their own* tradition."[384]

---

[381] This essay for some odd reason has scarcely been referred to by scholars discussing Fanonian identity politics.
[382] Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism,* trans. Haakon Chevalier, New York: Grove Press, 1965, p. 176
[383] Laclau, *Emancipation(s),* p. 31
[384] Slavoj Zizek, *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce,* London: Verso, 2009, p. 120

Fanon does more than this when he appropriates universal humanism from the Europeans and posits it against them as a moral checkmate. He says:

> All elements for a solution to the major problems of humanity existed at one time or another in European thought. But the Europeans did not act on the missions that was designated them and which consisted of virulently pondering these elements, modifying their configurations, their being, of changing them and finally taking the problem of man to an infinitely higher plane.[385]

Sartre is *both* right and wrong when he says that when he says that *WOTE* is *about* the Europeans but never *to* the Europeans.[386] *WOTE* is not towards the European, but it is towards the European who acknowledges Europe's failings and engages in the project of a new humanism – else, Fanon would not have given the task of writing the preface for his book to one of the most recognizable faces of Europe in the 20th Century. The oppressed of the Third World must "try and solve the problems this Europe was incapable of finding answers to" and must work towards the creation of a new man "For Europe, for ourselves and for humanity."[387] By ceasing to be exclusivist like Negritude, Fanon's humanism complicates the situation and identity of the individual belonging to the oppressor's group. Given its universally accommodating character of Fanon's humanism, one can only be inhumane if one chooses to oppose it or even if one remains neutral. The element of choice is left open to the oppressor and it was now the 'White man's burden' to prove his humanity as the onus was upon him.

In contrast, in Ramasamy's politics, the Brahmin is given no choice. But one has to concede to Ramasamy, and to other social reformers like Ambedkar, that they saw no ideal worthy of appropriation in Brahminism or from the Brahmins – to do so, would be to accept casteism. Fanon's frustration is that Europe betrayed its humanism. Ramasamy's frustration is that there was no humanism whatsoever in the Hindu-Brahminical religion. The Brahmin was not betraying an ideal he claimed to represent. He *was* that ideal and that ideal was a casteist social hierarchy. Ambedkar, who fought for adequate political representation for Dalits and constitutional safeguards for them, after several scholarly analyses of Hinduism, proposed conversion to Buddhism as a way out of the caste system. Ramasamy gave an extensive and

---

[385] Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth,* p. 237
[386] Jean-Paul Sartre, "Preface", *The Wretched of the Earth,* p. xlv
[387] Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth,* pp. 238-239

uncompromising criticism of Brahminism and its institutions, suggested as a possible solution the separation of Tamil Nadu, but without effectively articulating or endorsing a self-sustaining identity relying more on the inferiorized identity of 'Shudra' as a weapon for his critique. Apart from this, a Fanonist criticism of Ramasamy's discourse would be its failure to unsettle the Brahmin identity. By considering the Brahmin as fixed for all time, the Brahmin's closure of his identity gets validated. But if a choice was left open to the Brahmin of giving him a place within an emancipatory political project on condition that he give up his identity, that would have placed a greater moral pressure on the 'absolute enemy' of the Self-Respect movement. And if the Brahmin was fixed in his place, could not the Dalit critic argue that so was the intermediate caste too?

The Dalit Particularity

It was discussed above how the presence of the Brahmin creates the non-Brahmin identity. But the non-Brahmin identity is not a homogeneous one. The identity appears self-explanatory – anyone who is not a Brahmin is a non-Brahmin. Technically, it is something like a non-vegetarian identity. One can eat all meat, or only some types of meat, eat meat on all days, or only on some days, but all of these fall under the label of 'non-vegetarian' since they are not vegetarians. Similarly, a Vanniyar, a Dalit, a Nadar, a North Indian Kshatriya, an Englishman, a Sunni Muslim or a Protestant would all be non-Brahmins since they are not Brahmins. In Ramasamy's discourse, he uses the term loosely to refer to, though not restricting it to, the intermediate castes and the Dalits. These castes are given a common political platform as "Us non-Brahmins" by virtue of an external Third, the Brahmin, who is beyond reach, unrealizable. Sartre writes on the Third contributing to the becoming of the "Us":

> We are "Us" only in the eyes of Others, and it is in terms of the Others' look that we assume ourselves as "Us." But this implies that there can exist an abstract, unrealizable project of the for-itself toward an absolute totalization of itself and of *all* Others. This effort at recovering the human totality can not take place without positing the existence of a Third, who is on principle distinct from humanity and in whose eyes humanity is wholly object. This unrealizable Third, is simply the object of the limiting-concept of otherness. He is the one· who is Third in relation to all possible groups, the

> one who in no case can enter into community with any human group, the Third in relation to whom no other can constitute himself as a third.[388]

The Brahmin, as observed before, is in the position of the Third who gives political significance to the merging of the intermediate castes and the Dalits as a totality. In the politics of the Self-Respect movement, he is the external totalizer who creates the totalization of the non-Brahmin entity. Sartre writes that the concept of the Third is "one with the idea of God" but in the absence of God "the effort to realize humanity as *ours* is forever renewed and forever results in failure."[389] It was discussed in an earlier chapter how the Hindu religion and the Hindu Gods were denounced by Ramasamy for having been creations of Brahmins for the exploitation of the rest. His political discourse marked the Brahmin as the secular God, the Third who does can never enter the human community of the non-Brahmin by the virtue of his 'overman' status, a status secured by the Gods that the Brahmin created. But does the absence of this God result in the failure of the non-Brahmin project or does it fail owing to its own irreconcilable internal contradictions?

In article on the politics of Identity/Difference in the 'Black Consciousness' ideology in South Africa, David Howarth writes "the signifier 'black' makes possible the creation of black solidarity and unity, and engenders political struggle, based on a common identity actively denied by white domination. It thus functions as a nodal point unifying different subjectivities and interests against the various manifestations of white oppression."[390] The 'non-Brahmin' as signifier is intended to have the similar effect in Tamil society, to create solidarity among the intermediate castes and Dalits and to unite plural subjectivities against Brahminism *but* based on a identity that is affirmed by Brahmin domination. It is here that Ramasamy's approach towards the question of the Dalits requires critical examination.

Ramasamy was conscious of the unique position that the Dalit occupied in the social hierarchy. In a way, they were the reverse of everything the Brahmin stood for. While the Brahmins could not be ritually approached by the Shudra because they were too clean, the Dalits were to be avoided because ritually they were too unclean. Just like the Brahmin caste at the apex was permanently closed-off to the intermediate castes, the Dalits were also closed-off

---

[388] Sartre, *Being and Nothingness,* p. 444
[389] Ibid, p. 444
[390] David Howarth, "Complexities of identity/difference: Black Consciousness ideology in South Africa", *Journal of Political Ideologies* (1997), 2(1), p. 67

to the rest. While Brahminhood was a 'No Entry' zone, 'Untouchability' was generally a 'No Exit' zone.

Dalit history in Tamil Nadu has its own rich narratives and it is not in the scope of this paper to explore that. In colonial modernity, Geetha and Rajadurai claim that "expression of a distinctive dalit sensibility predated the political expression of nonbrahminism in the Tamil regions of the old Madras presidency and eventually came to constitute an important and decisive flank of the non-brahmin movement."[391] Several intellectuals from the Dalit castes like Iyothee Thaas, Rettamalai Srinivasan, Masilamani wrote about the oppression that the untouchables faced and the unjust social structure sanctioned by Brahminism. But it should be noted here that these intellectuals, who were either contemporaries of or immediate predecessors to Ramasamy, were in favour of an alliance between the intermediate castes and Dalits. The movement for Dalits as a separate entity gained momentum only in the 90s.[392] So what was it in Ramasamy's discourse that caused the failure of its emancipatory potential?

In an observation of the pitfalls in a secular political project, William Connolly notes that "The historical modus vivendi of secularism, while seeking to chasten religious dogmatism, embodies unacknowledged elements of immodesty in itself. The very intensity of the struggle it wages against religious intolerance may induce blind spots with respect to itself."[393] Now, it has explained before how Ramasamy was acutely aware of the problems within the secular project of non-Brahminism, how the non-Brahmin intermediate castes had a tendency to look down upon Dalits by being relatively superior in a society structured like a pyramid. Contrary to the accusations of those who claim that he was insensitive to Dalit particularities, he was in fact very keen to address the same, and in several cases, sided with the Dalits over the intermediate castes. For instance, in the 1957 Mudukalathur riots between the Thevars, a numerically dominant intermediate caste in South Tamil Nadu, and the Dalits, he sided firmly with the Dalits and called for the arrest of U. Muthuramalinga Thevar, a very influential leader of the Thevar caste. Thus, he does not provide the non-Brahmin identity as an easy suturing of the identities of intermediate castes and Dalits. Throughout his political discourse, he is consistent when referring to the non-Brahmin whole as "us non-Brahmins" or "Dravidians" or "Tamils" – but

---

[391] V. Geetha and S.V. Rajadurai, "Dalits and Non-Brahmin Consciousness in Colonial Tamil Nadu" in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 28, No. 39 (Sep. 25, 1993), p. 2091

[392] Hugo Gorringe argues that this was owing to "socio-political marginalization" of the Dalits over decades of rule by alternating Dravidian parties. See "Taming the Dalit Panthers: Dalit Politics in Tamil Nadu", *Journal of South Asian Development* 2:1 (2007), p. 54

[393] William E. Connolly, *Why I am Not a Secularist,* London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999, p. 4

when addressing specific cases of intermediate castes and Dalits, he uses "us Shudras" and "you Dalits". This might appear problematic. Geetha explains in Ramasamy's defence:

> Periyar was conscious of and sensitive to the specificities of dalit oppression and also of the crucial fact that the assumption of a distinctive identity by the SCs could secure much needed material succour. Besides he recognised the rights of dalits to define their political and social selves on their own terms and did not attempt to co-opt their emergent subjectivity into an undifferentiated and simplistic non-brahmin solidarity. At all times, Periyar was aware that this solidarity was not given but had to be constructed.[394]

While it is indeed intellectual dishonesty to accuse Ramasamy of being a patron of the intermediate caste and for displaying insensitivity to Dalit particularities, the defence of Ramasamy's support to Dalit specificity needs to be problematized. The Dalit identity is based purely on the social construct that the particular caste is untouchable. A Dalit particularist political project bases itself on the lived experience of untouchability and its Other is everyone else in the Brahminical social order who is not an untouchable. To draw from Fanonism, not only must a Dalit be an untouchable, he must be an untouchable in relation to everyone else. Relativity is not far from solipsism and thus, Dalit intellectuals and activists in the state (only from the 90s) either began particularist movements that started with promise but soon fizzled out, or wrote odes to pristine pre-civilizational pasts much like the Negritude poets.

Conclusion

Ramasamy's discursive strategy as regards caste politics works like this: 1) the Brahmin, who is permanently fixed, needs to be ridiculed 2) the Shudra, who is in thrall of Brahminism, must be enlightened 3) and the Dalit, who is oppressed by the rest, should have his particularity respected. The play of identity, difference and relativity can be observed here. Mouffe argues that it is possible to understand how identity-based antagonisms arise "When we accept that every identity is relational and that the condition of existence of every identity is the affirmation

[394] V. Geetha, "Neo-Brahminism: An Intentional Fallacy?" *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 28, No. 3/4 (Jan. 16-23, 1993), p. 133

of a difference, the determination of an 'other' that is going to play the role of a 'constitutive outside'".[395]

The Other who unites "Us" is never an *a priori* given but is the construction of discourse. As much as recognizing the Brahmin as an Other is part of Ramasamy's discourse, so is the recognition of the particularism of the Dalit identity. The latter opens up the possibility for a Dalit particularist to construct the intermediate castes as the Other who unites a "Us Dalits". Indeed, some Dalit intellectuals from Tamil Nadu have alleged, through their readings of history, that just as the Aryans invaded India to oppress the Dravidians, the forerunners of the contemporary Dravidians also collaborated with the invaders to oppress the original natives of the land, the Dalits.[396] The flaw in Ramasamy's discursive strategy is not obliviousness to Dalit specificity as some allege, nor is it the respect of the lived experience of untouchability. Rather, it is the lack of an affirmative Master identity, a universal, towards which the Shudras, the Dalits, and those among the Brahmins who are willing to give up their privileged status, can travel. Ramasamy's 'incredulity towards metanarratives' and his respect for particulars open up spaces for discursive antagonisms from within the groups for whom he was fighting for.

It is true that the rioting Vanniyar mob in Dharmapuri does not have an ideology of its own and is only following the cultural logic of Brahminism. It is true that the intellectuals interpreting such incidents of conflict between intermediate castes and Dalits to claim that Ramasamy's Self-Respect movement was intentionally in favour of empowerment of the intermediate castes at the cost of the Dalits are acting in 'fetishist disavowal' refusing to recognize the systemic nature of caste violence, that is, "not only direct physical violence, but also the more subtle forms of coercion that sustain relations of domination and exploitation."[397] But it is also true that Ramasamy's discourse does not create a common identity, an affirmative identity that would enable the intermediate castes and Dalits to identify in something beyond their immediate particularities. Fanon was aware that if a White were to be criticized only for the reason that he was White, then that discursive strategy also provided excuses for a Black to criticize an Arab, a Muslim to criticize a Christian purely on the basis of identity and notions, real or imagined, of the relatively privileged Other. Basing a politics on a history of oppression by the Other *alone* cannot produce a transformative praxis to create a more accommodating future

---

[395] Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political,* London: Verso, 1993, p. 2
[396] For an account of similar arguments, see MSS Pandian *Brahmin and Non-Brahmin,* pp. 238-240
[397] Slavoj Zizek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections,* London: Profile Books, 2009, p. 8

and a post-casteist society. The Other – all Others – must be unsettled by a universalism that is cognizant of particulars but still opens up spaces for transcending them.

Beyond Anti-Colonialism: Fanon, EV Ramasamy and a Democratic Politics of Identity

Introduction

In the previous chapters, we have discussed Frantz Fanon's conception of identity politics. Likewise, after introducing EV Ramasamy and his political discourse, a critique of the same through Fanonist lens has been made. In this chapter, continuing the dialogue between Ramasamy and Fanon, I shall use Ramasamy to point out the limitations in Fanon's model and probe how the logic of anti-colonialism needn't be viewed in a positive fashion by all political groups in a colony, i.e., it need not be the single most important empty signifier that creates *identification* of groups against the colonizing Other. I start with a discussion about Indian history, more specifically about how it was received and constructed by Indian nationalist and postcolonialist historiographers, and how it was interpreted by Ramasamy. Ramasamy rejected the idea of an Indian nation existing in history and considered it a construct of the British Empire. However, Fanon had very romanticized and non-problematized notions about Third World nations. While he was apprehensive about their future, he did not question their legitimacy. While to Fanon, anti-colonial nationalism was the manifestation of one socio-politico unit, Ramasamy deconstructed the idea of nation and nationalism from within. Likewise, this chapter also contrasts Fanon's and Ramasamy's respective positions on the question of women. While in the Fanonian corpus, women merely appear as sexual objects or political instruments, they rarely get mention as autonomous agents of political and social change. To Ramasamy, on the other hand, respecting the agency and autonomy of women's struggle was key to his Self-Respect movement.

We can see that Fanon never assumes that the native's anti-colonial discourse might itself be a process of privileging certain identities over others. This is crucial. Now, it has been

noted by Fanon scholars like Ato Sekyi-Otu that Fanon clearly recognized the irruptions of ethnic differences in the postcolony, how "Neocolonialism is an internal state of affairs, the unmasked recolonization of human existence by the blackest of black skins."[398] But it is important to point out here that Fanon's notion of the temporal begins from the colonial encounter, or more precisely, the anti-colonial struggle. He considers the anti-colonial identity as legitimate (Algerian, Indian, Ghanian etc.) While it cannot be simplistically accused of Fanon that he was not aware of faultlines within the colony, he does not offer strategies for addressing divisions that predate colonialism. Anti-colonialism is valid by itself, its pitfalls were however to be avoided.

To Ramasamy on the other hand, the pitfall was already there, and it was inscribed into the Indian anti-colonial project from the start. Ramasamy not only challenged the claims of Indian anti-colonialism to represent all Indians, he questioned the legitimacy of both the religious "Hindu" and the secular "Indian" as an identity. Ramasamy was keen on challenging the internal and native forms of oppression as he considered them far more insidious and persistent than colonialism, which he identified as a passing phase. The chapter concludes that a democratic identity politics, which I consider, taking from Mouffe, a "political process of hegemonic articulation,"[399] needs to lay a claim to universalism by finding a commonality, while simultaneously recognizing the particular claims of discrete social groups and pluralisms that exist in a society.

A Short Note From and About 'Indian History'

When 'subaltern studies' scholar Ranajit Guha took issue with Hegel's assertion that India did not have a history, he sought to counter it by giving an example of a Bengali (upper caste) writer who was commissioned by Christian missionaries in 1800 to write a historical tract, which is praised by Guha as an "exercise in modern, rationalist historiography".[400] Though the work in concern was only a history of monarchs in Bengal, to Guha it was an example of 'Indian historiography'. With a similar sense of outrage, noting the privileges which European historians

[398] Sekyi-Otu, Ato, *Fanon's Dialectic of Experience,* London: Harvard University Press, 1996, p. 150
[399] Chantal Mouffe, "Carl Schmitt and the Paradox of Liberal Democracy", in ed. Chantal Mouffe, *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt,* Verso: London, 1999, p. 52
[400] Ranajit Guha, *History at the Limit of World-History,* New York: Columbia University Press, 2002, pp. 9-11

enjoy in the writing of history, postcolonial scholar Dipesh Chakrabarty argues that "'They' produce their work in relative ignorance of non-Western societies, and this does not seem to affect the quality of their work."[401]

It is interesting how after about five decades of Indian independence Indian scholars who problematize European conception of Indian pasts are reluctant to problematize how Indians conceptualized their own past and who were excluded in these conceptualizations. This is not, however, an overarching allegation against the postcolonial project. Ranajit Guha, a key postcolonial thinker and founder of the Indian Subaltern Studies project, does agree that the inadequacy of Indian elitist historiography "follows directly from the narrow and partial view of politics to which it is committed by virtue of its class outlook" and that "what is clearly left out of this un-historical historiography is the *politics of the people."*[402] Tamil academic Ravi Vatheespara too acknowledges that the Subaltern Studies initiative has exposed "the elitist cultural construction of Indian nationalism" and also "has been enormously productive for historians and especially for those working on 'subaltern' histories or 'minority' nationalisms often occluded by the earlier narratives privileging the 'official' nation."[403] But what the Indian postcolonial project does not adequately capture or explain is the fact that caste reformers like Ramasamy were extremely appreciative of European modernity, more specifically, the project of the Enlightenment. In a sense, while Guha rejected Hegel's universalism of Reason for being Eurocentric, Ramasamy was an inadvertent Hegelian in colonial India!

In a text that is considered to be a seminal work of secular Indian nationalism, Congress leader and the first Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's *The Discovery of India,* Indian history is an unproblematic teleology, which moves from antiquity to modernity. Nehru did not have an intellectual problem in conceiving the people in the Indian territory, a subcontinent whose people are as diverse in languages and cultures as the people of Africa, Europe and the Middle-East taken together, as constituting one nation, with one common culture and with one civilizational continuity. In his words

---

[401] Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Postcoloniality and the artifice of history: who speaks for "Indian" pasts?" *Representations* (1992), p. 2

[402] Ranajit Guha, "On some aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India" in eds. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak *Selected Subaltern Studies,* New York: OUP, 1988, pp. 39-40

[403]Ravi Vaitheespara (2012) The Limits of Derivative Nationalism: Marxism, Postcolonial Theory, and the Question of Tamil Nationalism, Rethinking Marxism: A Journal of Economics, Culture & Society, 24:1, p. 102

> Some kind of dream of unity has occupied the mind of India since the dawn of civilization. That unity was not conceived as something imposed from outside, a standardization of externals or even of beliefs. It was something deeper and, within its fold, the widest tolerance of belief and custom was practised and every variety acknowledged and even encouraged.[404]

In Nehru's view, "we see in the past some inner urge towards synthesis" that this was "the dominant feature of Indian cultural, and even racial development" and this was brought about by the philosophical referent of the Sanskrit texts, mainly the Vedas.[405] Interestingly, his ideological nemesis, the Hindu nationalist demagogue VD Savarkar also based his claims for the Hindus being a nation with more or less the same premises.[406]

Mainstream Indian postcolonial historiography and debates about Indian history, whether secular in nature or not, has uncritically accepted the idea of India as a single socio-cultural entity. In a perceptive note, Perry Anderson remarks that such intellectuals share the rhetoric of the Indian state and uphold four central tropes from the official imaginary of India namely "antiquity-continuity; diversity-unity; massivity-democracy; multi-confessionality-secularity".[407] Further noting that there was never a singular politico-cultural entity called India prior to the arrival of colonialism, he argues

> The 'idea of India' was essentially a European, not a local invention, as the name itself makes clear. No such term, or equivalent, as India existed in any indigenous language. A Greek coinage, taken from the Indus river, it was so exogenous to the subcontinent that as late as the 16th century, Europeans could define Indians simply as 'all natives of an unknown country', and so call the inhabitants of the Americas.[408]

In direct contrast to the Indian nationalists, EV Ramasamy disputes the existence of an Indian nation in history.

---

[404] Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India,* Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1969, p. 65
[405] Ibid, p. 76
[406] Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, "Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?" in ed. Christopher Jaffrelot, *Hindu Nationalism: A Reader,* New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007, pp. 90-91
[407] Perry Anderson, *The Indian Ideology,* New Delhi: Three Essays Collective, 2012, p. 9
[408] Ibid, p. 11

> Can anyone say that the formation of the Indian union and the formation of the Indian law happened in an organic fashion without a great fraud?
>
> Can anyone say that India is not an artificial creation, and since when has a country called India existed?[409]

To Ramasamy, India, the idea of the Indian nation, Indian nationalism and its symbols, were part of a Brahminical ideological device to rule over the Dravidians. Questioning the concept of an "Indian nation", he argues that it was only under the period of colonialism that the Tamil region was brought together under an Indian entity and calls for the rejection of all Indian nationalist symbols.[410] In a controversial move in the mid 50s to oppose the central government's imposition of Hindi as a pan-Indian language, he called for the burning of Indian flags. His logic:

> We want our rule in our country. In our country, a language which is not our own should not be a language of the state, nation and education. To show the rulers that our country does not want a rule that forces Hindi upon us – we had to do this as an agitation strategy.[411]

In Ramasamy's perspective, colonialism and anti-colonialism were phases of history. His greater concern was with social institutions which have greater endurance in history. As early as 1925, he makes his priorities clear. Arguing that self-respect is more important than self-rule, he further emphasised that the demand for self-rule must be postponed till a self-respecting society was achieved.[412] Further, at a speech delivered at Trichy in 1943, he called on the youth to demand the separation of 'Dravidanadu'.

> We are today Shudras. We are degraded. We have no right to enter the temple or eating houses. We are considered low untouchables. In the government we are given

---

[409] EV Ramasamy, *Viduthalai,* 14-12-1967
[410] EV Ramasamy, *Viduthalai,* 20-7-1955
[411] EV Ramasamy, *Thoughts of Periyar EVR (Speeches and Writings of Periyar EV Ramasamy)* Volume 6. Agitations and Messages, Part -1, ed. V. Anaimuthu, Chennai: Periyar EV Ramasamy-Nagammai Education and Research Trust, 2009, p. 2893
[412] EV Ramasamy, *Kudiarasu,* 24-01-1925

> menial jobs. Those who betray us are cared by the government and Congress. We remain as downtrodden for ever. We are being exploited by the Brahmins and the bureaucracy.[413]

It is worthy to compare Ramasamy's views with that of other anti-caste activists in his time. For instance, in Dalit leader BR Ambedkar's view Indian nationalism was dominated by upper castes and further "it is beyond question that the Congress is a body of middle class Hindus supported by the Hindu capitalists whose object is not to make Indians free but to be independent of British control and to occupy places of power now occupied by the British."[414]

This is a crucial point that differentiated Ramasamy from other anti-caste activists like BR Ambedkar. This contrast is worth briefly considering here. Ambedkar also agrees that eradication of casteism should precede self-rule and independence. In his opinion "only when the Hindu society becomes a casteless society that it can hope to have strength enough to defend itself. Without such internal strength, Swaraj for Hindus may turn out to be only a step towards slavery."[415] However, while Ambedkar was critical of Indian nationalism, the domination of upper-castes in framing the nationalist imaginary, and the frequent exaltation of the Hindu way of life by the Indian nationalists, he nevertheless saw a modern Indian state and constitutional reforms as a possible means for pushing for social justice for the Dalits and the lower castes. To Ramasamy on the other hand, the very political entity called India represented the domination of Brahmins over the lower castes, especially the Dravidians and nothing sort of separation would be a step towards the annihilation of caste.

What could be Fanon's perspective on this?

Notions of Nations

In a passage in the inflammatory chapter on violence in *WOTE,* Fanon writes

---

[413] EV Ramasamy, *Dear Youths,* trans. AS Venu, Chennai: Periyar Self-Respect Propaganda Institution, 1998, p. 4

[414] BR Ambedkar, *Mr. Gandhi and the Emancipation of the Untouchables,* New Delhi: Critical Quest, 2006, pp. 6-7

[415] BR Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste,* New Delhi: Critical Quest, 2007, p. 50

> By its very structure, colonialism is separatist and regionalist. Colonialism does not simply state the existence of tribes; it also reinforces it and separates them. The colonial system encourages chieftaincies and keeps alive the old Marabout confraternities. Violence is in action all-inclusive and national. It follows that it is closely involved in the liquidation of regionalism and of tribalism. Thus the national parties show no pity at all toward the caids and the customary chiefs. Their destruction is the preliminary to the unification of the people.[416]

In the previous chapters, we explored how Fanon problematized the notion of an essentialized Black identity. However, with regards to decolonization, while Fanon is acutely aware of the problems that an elitist leadership might cause in a postcolonial society, he nevertheless takes anti-colonial nationalism to be positive in general and does not venture into critiquing the discourse of the group that presents itself as the "national group". To Fanon, the sovereignty of the decolonized nation was sacrosanct and "separatist" and "regionalist" demands were just colonial manoeuvres to destabilize the process of decolonization. The postcolonial society might have problems with various social groups but still, anti-colonial nationalism was a virtue to be defended. The very core of Fanon's politics of identity, recognition of particularities and universality depended on it:

> universality resides in this decision to recognize and accept the reciprocal relativism of different cultures once the colonial status is irreversibly reduced.[417]

In the essay "First Truths on the Colonial Problem", while placing Nehru, Nasser and Sukarno together as anti-imperialists, Fanon comments on India that "What no one sees is that the 350 million Hindus, who have known the hunger of British imperialism, are now demanding bread, peace, and well-being."[418] What Fanon did not see was that at the very time this essay was being composed, there were voices in India problematizing the idea of 'Hindus' as a community and 'India' as a nation.

---

[416] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth,* trans. Richard Philcox, New York: Grove Press, 2004, p.94
[417] Frantz Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution: Political Essays,* trans. Haakon Chevalier, New York: Grove Press, 1988, p. 44
[418] Ibid, p. 125

Decolonization was the precondition to the acceptance of the relativism of different cultures for Fanon, whereas for Ramasamy, the recognition of the existence of fundamentally different cultures was the precondition to the acceptance of decolonization. Ramasamy was extremely critical of essentialized notions of an Indian nation and instead, proposed a Dravidian identity based on reason, argument and shared solidarity against the native oppressive caste. Fanon, on the other hand, never critically examines the idea of 'nation' that opposes the colonial power, but is more opposed to 'separatist' and 'regionalist' tendencies within a broader anti-colonialism.

Fanon seems to be subscribing to "strategic use of essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest,"[419] in this case, decolonization. The argument in the favour of such a strategy would be that a critical situation, like that of colonialism, demands certain essentialized notions of 'we' if at all 'they' have to be countered. As elaborated in earlier chapters, Fanon's conception of identity is shaped largely by a violent encounter with colonialism. Though he makes a claim for an eventual transcendence into a larger humanism, the settling of the colonial encounter is a precondition to it. Fanon's perspective on colonialism is sharply Manichean – one is either for colonialism, which is 'evil', or one is against it, which is 'good'. The real political dilemma, as Sartre discovered in the late 60s, "of being 'for, but' or 'against, but'"[420] is never acutely addressed by Fanon in the context of colonialism.

Given the wake of the brutalities of French colonialism in Algeria, and given Fanon's own role as a partisan of the FLN, it might have been strategically necessary for him to invoke certain types of essentialism. However, when Fanonism is taken as a theory, this type of essentialism can be quite dangerous when taken in different contexts. As Spivak, who has a cautious support for the concept, notes "a strategy suits a situation; a strategy is not a theory."[421] When Fanonism is uncritically applied in a context like that of India, where the 'nation' as a project was itself a product of the colonial intervention, it can but have disastrous consequences for those social groups at the margins of the newly constructed nation. Of course, while Fanon himself can be excused for being ignorant of the specificities of the Indian, or more particularly, the Tamil condition, Fanonism needs to critiqued and critically expanded to include the plurality of political interests that existed in the colonial period.

---

[419] Gayatri Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*, New York: Methuen, 1987, p. 205

[420] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Between Existentialism and Marxism,* trans. John Matthews, London: Verso, 2008, p. 34

[421] Gayatri Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, London: Routledge, 1993, p. 4

Fanon's emphasis is more on political unity against the enemy of colonialism. Here, he is most Schmittian in his understanding that "Political unity can contain and comprehend different contents. But it always designates the most intensive degree of a unity, from which, consequently, the most intensive distinction – the grouping of friend and enemy – is determined."[422] To Fanon, anti-colonialism as an empty signifier serves as "means of representation that enable the building of alliances between different groups and identities by pointing an enemy to be opposed and proposing solutions to the problem facing groups."[423] Fanon believes that anti-colonial nationalism, or national consciousness, would create a sense of solidarity among different social groups in the colonized territory against the ultimate adversary, the colonial apparatus. Fanon is most influenced by Sartre's arguments about the 'dialectic of the group' from *Critique of Dialectical Reason* of how in a critical situation of violence or insurrection, "separate individuals overcome their seriality and combine under threat to form a fused group."[424] Fanon also takes the practico-inert concept to heart, that "We become dominated by the unintended features of our product, or by our own tools" especially when he discusses how the structural limitations of the newly decolonized society allows a comprador elite to take over. However, his complete non-consideration of pre-colonial history, as discussed briefly in Chapter 3, causes him not to explore why a fused group could be legitimately formed against a dominant social group within the colonized territory rather than against the colonizer.

Ramasamy, on the other hand, shared the Schmittian scepticism that "it is a dangerous deception when one single group pursues its special interests in the name of the whole, and unjustifiably identifies itself with the state."[425] Ramasamy, who, unlike Fanon, was acutely aware of the distinctiveness of the pre-colonial history of his region, was convinced that the Indian nation building project was designed to protect the interests of the Brahmin castes. It is not within the capacity of this project to provide extensive details on the pre-colonial historical distinctiveness of the Tamil region in the Indian subcontinent but the following observation of Indian social historian Gail Omvedt should give a fair picture:

---

[422] Carl Schmitt, "Ethic of State and Pluralistic State" in ed. Chantal Mouffe, *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt,* Verso: London, 1999, p. 203

[423] David R. Howarth, *Poststructuralism and After: Structure, Subjectivity and Power,* New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013, p. 251

[424] Ronald Aronson, *Jean-Paul Sartre – Philosophy in the World,* London: Verso, 1980, p. 251

[425] Schmitt, *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt,* p. 205

> Here was a strongly independent Dravidian linguistic identity and a long history of being the southern subcontinent, not only unconquered by northerners, but a centre of empires of its own, stretching somewhat overseas and oriented in many ways more towards south-east Asia in contrast to the northern west Asian linkages.[426]

EV Ramasamy understood that as far as Tamil Nadu was concerned, "The colonial public sphere was restricted in its scope and substance not merely because of the dynamics of colonialism, but also by the very character of the indigenous elite who participated in it. Without being informed by notions of substantive citizenship, it was an elite who were, by and large, unwilling to relinquish their traditional modes of semi-feudal authority, and hence failed to speak for a broader public."[427]

Hence, the central thrust of Ramasamy's political discourse, as discussed in Chapter 5, was to create an alternative public sphere which would exclude the native elites and provide spaces for voices silenced by the Indian nationalist discourse. The Dravidian identity he espoused was a 'resistance identity' as opposed to the 'legitimizing identity' of Indian nationalism. Given the threat he perceived from unmediated Brahmin hegemony in a postcolonial India, he argued that 'regionalism' – even if it had to be carried out to the extreme of separating from the Indian union – would be the only permanent safeguard against the domination of an elite.

In a critique of two influential historians of South India – David Washbrook and Christopher Baker – from the Cambridge School who restricted their discussion of caste to purely the confines of the colonialism/anti-colonialism binary, MSS Pandian writes:

> In short, the disavowal of caste identity as part of the political is complete in the writings of the Cambridge school. If fragmentation of different castes denies caste the status of caste-in-itself, the way in which caste identity was supposed to have been

---

[426] Gail Omvedt, "Hinduism as Delhi Rule: Periyar and the National Question" in ed. Bidyut Chakrabarty, *Communal Identity in India: Its Construction and Articulation in the Twentieth Century,* New Delhi: OUP, 2003, p. 257

[427] MSS Pandian, "Beyond Colonial Crumbs: Cambridge School, Identity Politics and Dravidian Movement(s)" in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 30, No. 7/8 (Feb. 18-25, 1995), p. 388

> invoked in colonial Tamil Nadu denies it the status of caste-for-itself. Caste identity is thus out in the cold with no political past or future.[428]

The metanarrative of Indian anti-colonialism in general displayed a gross insensitivity to historical and socio-political questions of caste and region. Motifs similar to Fanon's perspective on regionalism and separatism keep reoccurring in not just Indian nationalist discourse, but also in Indian historiography and sociology as well. For instance, GS Ghurye, a well known Indian sociologist, writes in 1950 that "Where it is a question of engendering a feeling of unity the people must be made to cooperate irrespective of caste."[429] To those like Ghurye, the British were responsible for introducing caste divisions in Indian society as a 'divide and rule' strategy and that the nationalist discourse led by the elite castes was justified in projecting a homogenous Indian nation.

Ramasamy's opinion stands in direct contrast in that he accuses the Brahmins of being the initiators of the divide and rule strategy, and further, he accuses the colonial powers of collaborating with the native elites for smooth functioning of the administrative apparatus. For instance, in a speech in 1957 in the wake of the Mudukalathur riots between Dalits and the intermediate castes where there were causalities on both sides, while placing his stand firmly on the side of the Dalits, Ramasamy also stated that "The Brahmin rejoices when clashes break within our people"[430] alleging that the Brahmin benefits from divisions within the non-Brahmins. Following this up in another speech, he accused the political legacy of the Indian nationalists, Gandhi and the Congress party of benefitting only the Brahmins. To Ramasamy

> We need a revolution to change this state of affairs. Revolutionary words are not enough. We may need to resort to the sword. Jinnah struggled in front of our eyes. He raised the sword! Why we (Muslims) should be trapped under the Hindus, he asked; after rivers of blood flowed, they gave him Pakistan. Today, it is a powerful country. Nehru is frightened of it.[431]

---

[428] ibid, p. 386

[429] GS Ghurye, *Caste and Class in India,* Bombay: Popular Book Depot, 1950, p. 290

[430] EV Ramasamy, *Periyar Kalanjiyam: Jaathi-Theendamai Paagam (4),* Chennai: Periyar Suyamariyathai Prachaara Niruvanam, 2011, p. 291-292

[431] ibid, p. 302. Muhammed Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, was initially a Congress leader who later became convinced that Muslims and Hindus were two nations and that the future of Muslims could be secured only by demanding a separate state of Pakistan. The so-called 'Partition of India' which happened

Ramasamy's discourse understood that the large narrative of anti-colonialism was a garb in which the interests of the Tamil region would be compromised and that in postcolonial India, the Brahmin secured his domination in administrative posts by virtue of an agreement with the erstwhile colonizer.[432] Further, according to him, in postcolonial India "Only those who betray our nation, only those who betray our society, can prosper in this state. Those who prioritize the Dravidian people or Tamil Nadu cannot. Either one lives under open slavery or, if one wants a respectful position in the administration, one has to live as a slave under the Brahmin."[433] To Ramasamy, there never was an Indian nation in history, and it was only owing to colonialism that the Tamil region was brought under the Indian entity.[434]

We discussed in Chapter 4 how English missionary Bishop Caldwell's *A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South Indian Family of Languages* was Evental in shaping the discourse of the Dravidian movement in Tamil Nadu, especially the idea that the Brahmin was an Aryan, an alien Other who was divorced from the community of Dravidians, often in terms that frequently overlapped race with caste. It is instructive to consider the persistence of this image in the Dravidian political imaginary in Tamil Nadu, where, according to Dirks

> the post-colonial picture is complicated by the double presence of the displaced colonial other, figured most directly and conspicuously in the Brahman (and by implication or association the north Indian and Aryan). In a history that begins with the language of Caldwell in casting the Aryan as a colonial figure, we confront a post-colonial condition with a difference. And thus both colonialism and post-colonialism move offstage, to be replaced by a colonial theatre of double mimesis, in which the Brahman plays the role – not quite, but well enough – of the British colonial ruler, and

---

in 1947 involved large scale communal pogroms where hundreds of thousands of Hindus and Muslims perished. The complexities of discourses around Partition is also covered in Perry Anderson's *The Indian Ideology.* Incidentally, Ramasamy had written to Jinnah in 1944 calling on the latter to support the demand for a separate Dravidian state. Jinnah's response to Ramasamy was lukewarm and he gave no concrete commitment of support.

[432] EV Ramasamy, *Viduthalai,* 04-11-1960

[433] Ibid.

[434] EV Ramasamy, *Viduthalai,* 20-7-1955

in which colonialism might be said to have ended not in 1947, but only in 1967, with the ascension to political power of the DMK.[435]

Thus, in the popular Dravidian political imaginary as articulated by Ramasamy, more than the colonial encounter, it was the pre-colonial encounter with the Aryan-Brahmin-alien-Other that determined the contours of the political discourse.[436] A Fanonist understanding, which considers anti-colonialism as the primary contradiction in a colonized society as a *universal* given, is bound to be problematic in a society like India largely because it is ignorant of the pre-colonial history which might have similar or greater influence in shaping *particular* political discourses like that which emerged in colonial Tamil Nadu.

This tension between the abstract universality of Fanon and the concrete particularity of Ramasamy can also be observed in the approach of both to the language of the colonizer and the colonized. To Fanon, even though he wrote only in French, the colonial language was by itself an act of aggression in the colony. He laments that under the colonial situation, "We witness the destruction of cultural values, of ways of life. Language, dress, techniques, are devalorized."[437] The oppressed, when confronted by the colonial power, develops a complex about his culture and language and begins to shy away from them and mimics the colonizer. "Having judged, condemned, abandoned his cultural forms, his language, his food habits, his sexual behavior, his way of sitting down, of resting, of laughing, of enjoying himself, the oppressed flings himself upon the imposed culture with the desperation of a drowning man."[438] To Fanon, language was yet another tool used by colonialism's ideology to enslave a nation and to inferiorize the native's sense of self-respect.

Ramasamy too had strong opinions on how imposition of alien languages inferiorized a native's sense of self-respect – but to him the native was the Tamil and the alien languages were Hindi and Sanskrit. In 1938, at a time when the local chapter of the Congress party was pushing for the propagation of Hindi as a national language, Ramasamy called on the youth and

---

[435] Nicholas B. Dirks, "Recasting Tamil Society: The Politics of Caste and Race in Contemporary South India", in ed. C.J. Fuller, *Caste Today,* New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 293

[436] It was mentioned in Chapter 4 how Ramasamy used missionary sources to understand the Aryan-Dravidian divide while also accusing the official orientalism of the colonial state for privileging the Brahmins. Fanon, however, makes no difference between official and missionary orientalism. Both were colonial products, and both were to be opposed.

[437] Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution,* p. 33

[438] Ibid, p. 39

women to oppose the imposition of the same as it would benefit the Aryans at the cost of the Dravidians. In polemic fashion, he writes "What is happening now is not British rule. It is the rule of the priests of the *varna* system. Its each living breath intends to enslave the Tamil people."[439] Following up with another essay titled "The Brahmin rule takes its revenge", he argues that the Brahminical castes were seeking to dominate the south through Hinduism and Hindi and that anti-colonialism was a garb through which "the Brahmins are trying to retrieve their rule, their religion, their language."[440] Therefore, if the social integrity of the Tamil people had to be preserved, Hindi as a language had to be opposed. Ramasamy and his organization were at the forefront of several anti-Hindi agitations from the 30s continuing to the mid-60s when his protégé, CN Annadurai, was elected as Tamil Nadu Chief Minister riding on the wave of the massive anti-Hindi imposition struggles that rocked the state in the 60s.

However, while Tamil nationalists countered the imposition of Hindi with claims of antiquity and superiority of the Tamil language, Ramasamy had no such romantic notions about the native language. Calling Tamil a 'barbaric language', he laments that there is no Tamil version of Kemal Ataturk who would substitute the classical Tamil script with the Latin alphabet.[441] Ramasamy indicated a marked preference for English in that he considered English to be a universal language, a language of modernity and enlightenment. As discussed in the preceding chapter, to Ramasamy, the Shudra Tamils needed to "rise above a state of barbarism" and for that "it is not enough that one hates god, religion, the Vedas, the traditional puranas, temples, festivals and religious processions. One also must detest the Tamil language which upholds the puranas and religious epics. This is so because the Tamil language is structured so as to degrade the Tamil."[442] Further, he calls on the Tamils to ignore the Tamil language and learn English, English customs, and English modernity.[443] According to Ramasamy, "English governance, English education, English customs and English civilization have over time have dented to some extent the caste system and caste hierarchies."[444]

---

[439] EV Ramasamy, *Kudiarasu,* 08-05-1938
[440] EV Ramasamy, *Kudiarasu,* 05-06-1938
[441] EV Ramasamy, *Tamizhum, Tamizhargalum,* Chennai: Periyar Suyamariyathai Prachara Niruvana Veliyeedu, 2011, p. 8
[442] EV Ramasamy, *Periyar Kalanjiyam: Jaathi-Theendaamai, Paagam (11),* Chennai: Periyar Suyamariyathai Prachaara Niruvanam, 2011, pp. 138-139
[443] Ibid, pp. 140
[444] EV Ramasamy, *Kudiarasu,* 13-03-1938

Besides, to Ramasamy, the Tamil language was also structurally sexist in the way in it described women.

This brings to another crucial point of divergence between the two thinkers.

White Men, Coloured Women

In 1927, American writer Katherine Mayo published *Mother India,* a controversial book on colonial India that justified the prolonging of British rule over the territory citing, among other things, the poor condition of the lower castes and women which, according to her, the Indians were incapable of justly handling by themselves. In the introduction to the abridged version, Indian scholar Mrinalini Sinha writes that the book "was celebrated and reviled by die-hard imperialists and outraged nationalists."[445] However, there was also a third opinion. EV Ramasamy welcomed the book,[446] and one of his disciples, Kovai A. Ayyamuthu had written a set of essays in *Kudiarasu,* the party paper of the Self-Respect movement, in the late 1920s defending Mayo against her critics. While recognizing that Mayo's motivations were not exactly benign, the writer nevertheless conceded to her that her charges against India were accurate and that peoples in the subcontinent could not achieve true freedom without social reform.[447]

In her most celebrated essay 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', Gayatri Spivak writes that "Imperialism's image as the establisher of the good society is marked by the espousal of the woman as object of protection from her own kind."[448] Spivak gives the example of *Sati* or the Hindu practice of burning widows on the pyre of their dead husbands, and explains how the colonial intervention into the banning of this practice was done with the intention of legitimizing the colonial rule and also silenced the voice of the 'victim' they were saving. The Fanonian influence here is impossible to miss. Ramasami, however, thanked the "White man" without whom, "in the name of religion and tradition, women would have been burnt along with their dead husbands. It was only the White man's law that changed this."[449] Ramasamy had

---

[445] Mrinalini Sinha, "Introduction", in Katherine Mayo, *Mother India,* ed. Mrinalini Sinha, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000, p.1

[446] EV Ramasamy, *Kudiarasu,* 29-12-1929

[447] Excerpts from the essay "Meyo Kutru Moyya Poyya" (Mayo's Charges: True or False?) are published as an appendix to the abridged version edited by Mrinalini Sinha.

[448] Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture,* Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988, p. 299

[449] EV Ramasamy, *Viduthalai,* 17-7-1970

no faith in the Indian anti-colonialist project to secure liberation for women. If anything, he viewed it as a politics that reinforced patriarchy and misogyny, which he argued, were inherent to Hindu society. Let us consider Fanon's perspectives on women vis a vis colonialism and anti-colonialism briefly.

In *Black Skin White Masks,* women, to Fanon are mere sexual objects.[450] His Black women are filled with an inferiority complex and desire to move up the social ladder by virtue of sexual relationships with the White colonizer. In his assessment of Martinician writer Mayotte Capecia, his argument is that women like her *desire* "lactification. For, in a word, the race must be whitened; every woman in Martinique knows this, says it, repeats it."[451] His White woman *fantasizes* about being raped by Black men. "If we go farther into the labyrinth, we discover that when a woman lives the fantasy of rape by a Negro, it is in some way the fulfilment of a private dream, of an inner wish. Accomplishing the phenomenon of turning against self, it is the woman who rapes herself."[452] In his critically acclaimed book about race and racism, a woman gets a place only by virtue of association with a man of this or that race, and that too only as objects of desire.

A similar approach can be noted in the essay 'Algeria Unveiled'. Here, Fanon defends a traditional cultural device like the veil with the argument that it served as a symbolic as well as a practical resistance to colonialism. His perspective of promotion of French liberal values to women in Algeria was wholly negative, as he considered it an integral part of the colonial strategy to separate the Algerian woman from the Algerian man, and making both feel ashamed of their national culture. "Convening the woman, winning her over to the foreign values, wrenching her free from her status, was at the same time achieving a real power over the man and attaining a practical, effective means of destructuring Algerian culture."[453] The colonial sought to unveil the Algerian woman and the authentic act of resistance against this was for the woman to be veiled. Though he asserts "The Algerian woman is at the heart of the combat.

---

[450] For more elaborate criticisms of Fanon's approach to women and sexual politics, see Lola Young "Missing Persons: Fantasising Black Women in Black Skin, White Masks" (pp. 86-101) and Kobena Mercer "Decolonisation and Disappointment: Reading Fanon's Sexual Politics" (pp. 114-131) in ed. Alan Read, *The Fact of Blackness: Frantz Fanon and Visual Representation,* London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1996. For a defense of Fanon's 'feminism', see bell hooks "Feminism as a Persistent Critique of History: What's Love got to do with it?" (pp. 76-85) in the same, as well as Seloua Luste Boulbina "Fanon and the Women of the Colonies Against the White Man's Burden" (pp. 139-148) in ed. Nigel C. Gibson, *Living Fanon: Global Perspectives,* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

[451] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks,* trans. Charles Lam Markmann, London: Pluto Press, 2008, p. 33

[452] Ibid, p. 138

[453] Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism,* trans. Haakon Chevalier, New York: Grove Press, 1965, p. 39

Arrested, tortured, raped, shot down, she testifies to the violence of the occupier and to his inhumanity. As a nurse, a liaison agent, a fighter, she bears witness to the depth and the density of the struggle,"[454] it is only the women as an instrument of the anti-colonial resistance struggle that is of interest to Fanon. The woman who confronts the internal oppressor, the home-grown patriarch is totally absent.

One could credit Fanon's comments on the veil and his utopian belief that its significance would fade away post-decolonization to his naivety as regards the role of Islam in the Arab world.[455] In fact, Fanon maintains ambivalence as regards his position on religion. While he himself was born in a practicing Christian family, he does not seem have to have much regard for Christianity as such. While it is likely that at a personal level he was an atheist, inspired by Sartrean existentialism, the writings his involvement in the Algerian decolonization movement saw extensive use of Islamic imagery. To Fanon, this upheaval, which had religious undertones, was a legitimate reaction to colonialism and any regressive social practices that may come up in its wake would and should be resolved once, and only once, the colonizer exited the land. Colonial interventions to set right any regressive native practices were done only with the intention of maintaining the colonial system and they were to be rejected outright.

Ramasamy on the other hand, welcomed the liberating effect some aspects of colonialism had on women in the Tamil society. In a comment on the role of the native national culture and its effects on women, he writes "To state it frankly, we are still living according to values established in barbaric times."[456] Arguing that the spread of English education contributed to the spread of modern egalitarian values with respect to the women's question, he asserts that the 'White man' banning Sati and providing women access to modern education was one of the reasons of the anti-colonial movement which wanted to preserve traditional, reactionary values. In Ramasamy's perspective, the Brahminical culture, the influence of religion, and Tamil patriarchy all contributed to the oppression of women and women were better off westernized than relying on native cultural-social values for liberation. Where Fanon considered native dress codes as an act of resistance against the colonizer, Ramasamy condemned them as regressive, and asked women to adopt western attire to attain greater

[454] Ibid, p. 66
[455] For a discussion on this, see Fouzi Slisi, "Islam: The Elephant in Fanon's The Wretched of the Earth" in *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies,* vol. 17, no. 1, Spring 2008, pp. 97-108
[456] EV Ramasamy, *Viduthalai,* 31-8-1963

mobility. The practical effects of Ramasamy's discourse could be seen in that "The women members of the Self Respect Movement not only participated in the non-agitational programmes of the movement like conferences, but also quite actively in mass agitations."[457] Not just that, women from the most marginalized sections, like that of the *devadasis* or the 'temple prostitute' communities, also became active participants in social reform movements in the state. These women took part in anti-caste struggles, the anti-Hindi agitations and protests demanding greater social and economic rights for women.

However, it is to be noted Ramasamy's radicalism as regards women's question was not taken up in good faith by many of those who claimed to be his followers. Many of the leaders of the Dravidian movement were not averse to using sexist and objectifying terms in political discourse. Terms like 'chastity' and projecting the Tamil language as a 'virgin goddess' were employed as rhetorical devices by many who participated in the anti-Hindi agitations, especially the leaders of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam under Annadurai. These led Ramasamy to be sceptical and critical of the uses and abuses of the Tamil language in imagining a Tamil national community by objectifying the body of women.

Ramasamy's discourse also involved a critique of terms that he considered patriarchal in the Tamil language. For instance, he launched a devastating attack on dominant notions of 'chastity' that existed in that period that placed several social restrictions on women. To Ramasamy, these notions of community that sought to exercise sexual control over the bodies of women were remnants of barbaric times.[458] He further lampooned Tamil scholars and poets for expecting women to be chaste, while placing no such demands on men.[459] Ramasamy was also not averse to attacking ancient Tamil poetry and classics – exalted by Tamil nationalists – for their sexism and misogyny. He was convinced that any ideology that places the past, any past, at a high pedestal was likely to be sexist.

Ramasamy starkly differs from Fanon in that neither did he define women in pure sexual relations to men, nor did he consider them as instruments of social struggle. Instead of speaking *for* them and limiting the spaces for women, he spoke *with* them and acted as an ally of the women's struggle. Echoing contemporary proponents of standpoint theory, he argued

---

[457] Anandhi S. Bharadwaj, "Women's Question in the Dravidian Movement c. 1925-1948", *Social Scientist*, Vol. 19, No. 5/6 (May - Jun., 1991), p. 32

[458] EV Ramasamy, *Thoughts of Periyar,* ed. K. Veeramani, Chennai: Dravidar Kazhagam Publications, 2011, p. 195-198

[459] EV Ramasamy, *Viduthalai,* 18-6-1970

that the pain of the 'lived experience' of being a woman in a patriarchal society was unique[460] and more spaces should be opened up for their voices to be heard. While with Fanon the woman who transgressed the boundaries of the family was praised only when she was part of the anti-colonial struggle, Ramasamy encouraged women to break traditional family norms for their own good as autonomous individuals exercising control over their sexual choices, irrespective of whether they sought to contribute to the Dravidian movement or not. Ironically, while Fanon was well acquainted with the works of feminist giants like Simone de Beauvoir, the idea of woman existing as an autonomous political subject never appears in his works. The iconoclastic social reformer who never had a formal education had more perceptiveness when it came to this subject.

Is Identity Politics and Universalism Reconcilable?

In Chapter 4, I have explained how Fanon's conception of identity politics is informed by a commitment to anti-racism and anti-colonialism, a consideration of identity as a passing stage in the dialectic, leading to a universal humanism that is based on an ethical reciprocal recognition of the Other. In the previous chapter we explored the gaps in the political discourse of EV Ramasamy through the prism of Fanonism. In this chapter, we explored the gaps in Fanon's insistence on anti-colonialism being the precondition for political engagement and its limitations by drawing a parallel with the manner in which Ramasamy encountered the colonial condition. We can see that Fanon's naivety as regards to the internal contradictions within the countries of the so-called 'Third World' led him to make sweeping generalizations, most of which could have dangerous implications. Fanon's generalizing approach towards colonialism and anti-colonialism, which makes political sense in the context of Algeria, sounds both lazy and ahistorical if transposed to India. His views on women leave much to be desired, and in comparison to Ramasamy, he appears an apologist for misogyny, where he expects women to sacrifice their interests for the sake of a revolution led and dominated by men.

Ramasamy, on the other hand, was acutely aware of the specificities of the Indian situation. He saw region, religion, caste, gender and language as deep faultlines within the Indian country, contradictions that existed before and would exist after colonialism. In the

[460] EV Ramasamy, *Viduthalai,* 11-8-1963

previous chapter we saw how Ramasamy created his political discourse around identity around the axis of caste and religion. In this chapter, we saw how he challenged the idea of the Indian nation and anti-colonial nationalism. Further we also discussed his commitment to the emancipation of women and his unconditional endorsement of the creation of political and social spaces for women and his support for women as autonomous agents.

I think we are at a stage to agree that, despite their differences, Fanon and Ramasamy were organic intellectuals by the virtue of them being individuals "engaged in the practice of articulation as the essential component in the construction of the hegemony of a group."[461] Both were partisans of what Castells would call a 'resistance identity' and while Fanon had a 'project identity' of a universal humanism, it was left ambiguous in Ramasamy's discourse.

We can understand identities as "contingent constructs, the products of social and political *identifications* with the roles and subject positions made available by historically produced discourses."[462] Identity politics requires not just an *identification* of the Self, but also an *identification* of the Other, and the relation of the Self to the Other. We saw in this chapter how very problematic Fanon's notion of Self was. We discussed in the preceding chapter and critiques through a Fanonist lens the problems with Ramasamy's identification of the Other and the relation of the non-Brahmin Self to the Brahmin Other.

Is it possible to work out a democratic and pluralist politics of identity from this dialogue? If we can arrive at a normative politics of identity from this chapter and the previous ones, it would have to be one that is cautiously sensitive to pluralism without encouraging sectarianism nor without imposing conditions for universalism that are not actually universally applicable. We saw in the previous chapter how Ramasamy's fixed perceptions of the identity of the Brahmin other, his stress on the inferiorized status of the non-brahmin identity, and his encouragement of Dalit particularity, failed to create an identity that would be accommodative of all these identities while transforming these identities into something common and larger. Likewise, with Fanon, we saw in this chapter on how his insistence on *identification* with anti-colonialism as being a compulsory requirement for a politics of the future need not be universally applicable. While Ramasamy could be accused of failing to create universality, Fanon could be accused of not being sensitive to particularities of groups within the colonized.

---

[461] Ernesto Laclau, "Constructing Universality" in Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Zizek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left,* London: Verso, 2000, p. 287

[462] Howarth, *Poststructuralism and After,* p. 250

However, despite its limitations, Fanon's humanism nevertheless offers a framework for assessment of identity politics. It can be complemented in this case by Ramasamy's sensitivities towards addressing the particular issues of caste, region, and gender so as to arrive at a society that is more accommodative to plural interests. The requirement of such an identity politics will need to find a commonality that would address the demands of discrete social groups under a larger identity, but nevertheless possesses what Mouffe would call "a constitutive pluralism" that is accommodative of difference.

Yet, further questions emerge here. What sort of difference can be tolerated and what cannot? To Fanon, the colonial has to be annihilated before any discussion of recognition can begin. To Ramasamy, the Brahmin, not as a human being, but as a symbol needs to be done away with before a rational, egalitarian society can emerge. One of the main arguments of Ramasamy against the Brahmin identity is that as long as there is a social category called the Brahmin, there will always be someone inferior to him. Likewise, if the Dalit is recognized in his particularity, it still is an identity that is based on the recognition that there is someone above him. So, the constitutive pluralism will have to be a conditional pluralism, that is, it is tolerant to difference based on certain conditions. Pragmatically speaking, it would be hard to convince the Brahmin, the most privileged group in the caste system, and the Dalit, the most exploited group in the caste system, to give up the uniqueness of their identity unless there is another identity that provides them the incentive to cease identification with their erstwhile identities. There has to be an empty signifier identity that enables suturing of the identities of all the groups involved, while also avoiding the either extremes of appearing aggressively assimilative or being tolerant to sectarianism.

The unconditional anti-colonialism of Fanon and the anti-Brahmin mobilization of Ramasamy fail to satisfy this requirement – the former is far too generalizing and the latter respects particulars too much. We have seen over the chapters that Ramasamy's fixation on the Brahmin Other and Fanon's creation of a unified colonized Self both come with their sets of problems, but also allow some glimpses into a solution. Is there a possibility of reconciliation of what appears to be two divergent viewpoints? It will have to be a discourse based on a different narrative that would have to serve the purpose. The real success of such a narrative would be in its inherent potential to enable, without superficially suturing differences, discrete social groups to transcend their particularities to something larger, universal.

Conclusion

The thesis began with Fanon's criticisms of Negritude. Rejecting the particularist race politics of the Negritude thinkers, Fanon agreed with Sartre's premise that such politics were but a passing phase in the dialectic of emancipation. A coherent reading of Fanon and the extraction of an essence from his works and a fidelity to the same, and a careful avoidance of misinterpretations and simplistic explanations of complex passages in his works leads us to such a conclusion. Based on such a reading, Fanon's critique of identity politics is explored. To Fanon, an anti-colonial political stance is absolutely necessary for any emancipatory identity politics. However, rejecting historical and cultural determinism, Fanon argued that the subject was fully free in identifying with an identity despite the limits that circumstances placed upon him, thereby investing both agency and responsibility on the subject's choice of identity politics. Recognizing the value of anti-colonial nationalism, Fanon was also deeply suspicious of racial and national particularism, and pleaded for a conscious attempt to transcend 'anti-racist racism' and narrow nationalism. Finally, rejecting the fake universalism of the colonialist, the oppressed must build a genuine universalism based on shared struggle and solidarity.

After establishing Fanon's assessment of identity politics, the research uses it as a theoretical framework to understand EV Ramasamy's discourse on caste politics in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. After introducing Ramasamy, the historical context in which he operated in, caste in Tamil Nadu, and general criticisms of Ramasamy's politics, Ramasamy's articulation of caste identity politics is placed under a Fanonist scanner. Arriving at a conclusion that Ramasamy's discourse does not create a common identity, an affirmative identity that would enable all castes, oppressor and oppressed alike, to identify in something beyond their immediate particularities, a Fanonist conclusion is drawn that basing a politics on a history of oppression by the Other *alone* cannot produce a transformative praxis. Fixed identities of the Other and the Self must be unsettled by a universalism that is cognizant of particulars but still opens up spaces for transcending them. Finally, the ahistorical approach of Fanon towards 'native' nations and nationalisms, his ignorance of deep pre-colonial faultlines, and his instrumentalization of women in his political discourse are critiqued by a comparison with the positions of Ramasamy on these issues. While Fanonism provides a robust theoretical framework for the critique of identity politics, Fanon's unconditional anti-colonialism and his

insistence that *identification* with anti-colonialism is a compulsory requirement for a politics of the future thus comes with its own pitfalls. As seen with Ramasamy's interventions, colonial modernity also opened the public sphere for the discursive narratives of the oppressed among the colonized oppressed. A further conclusion is drawn in the final chapter calling for a narrative that would enable discrete social groups, like castes, without an artificial suturing or reconciliation of identities, to transcend their particularities to something larger, universal. But is it possible to create such a radical universality which involves a constitutive and conditional pluralism? Let us return in this conclusion to Fanon's concern in *Black Skin, White Masks* "to explain the other to myself."[463]

Introducing My-Self

I am a graphic novel aficionado. I am a supporter of greater political autonomy for Tamil Nadu and the Kurdish struggle for democratic confederalism. I identify myself with the left, even while rejecting reductive analysis of several leftists, and while appreciating the insights that conservative wisdom has to offer. I am interested in the European Enlightenment tradition. I am a fan of Frank Sinatra and the 80s and early 90s Ilayaraja. I am pro-LGBT and pro-choice, an atheist opposed to religious bigotries. These are the multiple identities that I *identify* with by *choice*. However, when asked "What is your caste?" I politely decline to answer. Taylor argues "My own identity crucially depends on my dialogical relations with others."[464] Identity also crucially depends on dialogical relations imposed by others. This caste identity of mine, to take from Fanon, is overdetermined from without. If hell is other people, caste is the hell that the inquisitive Other confines me in. A reply like "I do not believe in caste" maybe accepted, but "I do not have a caste" is almost always looked on with cynicism much like colour-blindness in the West. Caste works, even if you do not believe in it. Irrespective of the choice of identity that I would like to make for my Self, I am located by the Other in a hierarchical network of social relationships. It is impossible to avoid encountering this question in India, but is it impossible to evade the caste identity? Both Fanon and Ramasamy would answer in the negative. Fanonism would argue that it is possible for the individual to go beyond his caste identity in a universalist

[463] Fanon, *BSWM,* p. 181
[464] Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition", in ed. David Theo Goldberg, *Multiculturalism: A Critical Reader,* Oxford: Blackwell, 1994, p. 80

struggle of the oppressed, while Periyarism would argue for the possibility of caste identity breaking down by struggling against the enemy located in the particularist identity of the Brahmin Other.

Is Ramasamy guilty of *ressentiment* in his discourse wherein "political identity emerges and obtains its unifying coherence through the politicization of *exclusion* from an ostensible universal, as a protest against exclusion"?[465] The Sudra identity is indeed articulated to highlight the exclusion from social and political power; however, the Periyarite accusation against the Brahmin is not that the Brahmin excludes the rest from universality, but rather that the Brahmin is incapable of universality. The Brahmin identity was fixed. But as long as the Brahmin was sealed in his Brahminhood, so would the other castes remain sealed in their particular identities. The Fanonian plea for subjects to exercise their agency to transcend their particularisms and work towards universal solidarity is appealing here. However, Fanon's universalist humanism, his innate faith in the redemptive power of the struggle of the oppressed, does appear "as banal as it is beatific."[466] Unlike Ramasamy, he does not deeply probe the question of who do the oppressed oppress or the faultlines within the native culture in the colony. If interpreted simplistically, as it has been sadly done so often, Fanonism can be a justification for dictators and despots running banana republics in the Third World. An authentic pluralism must strike a balance between Ramasamy's sensitivity to the particularities and the universalist concerns of Fanon.

The Other

I hold the view that all politics is a *politics of identification*, of the Self and the Other. There can be no politics without identification. "We know who we are only when we know who we are not and often only when we know whom we are against," Huntington observed.[467] It is crucial to note that the external Other forges who "we are" but not who "I am". A Hegelian would understand the resolution of the dialectic as a stage where the "We" becomes a part of the "I" and "I" becomes part of the "We". "We" in a political sense makes sense only with the arrival of

---

[465] Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity,* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995, p. 65

[466] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture,* London: Routledge, 1994, p. 61

[467] Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and The Remaking of World Order,* New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003, p. 21

"They", or the Other. Again, the Other as a political entity makes sense only when the Self is perceived as a part of a collective against the collective of the Other. In the political realm, the Other is always a terrible, threatening force who threatens to injure the political interests of the Self that identifies with a collective. In a Schmittian understanding, the individual has no political enemies, but the group cannot survive without a political enemy. The colonized against the colonizer, occupied against occupier, Soviets against Nazis. The enemy becomes a projected Otherness where the Self of different individuals unites under the banner of one identity, that is, the individual Self *identifies* with a collective fighting against another collective.

The conflict for universalism, the conflict against universalism, and conflict of universalisms emerges at the stage where the Other is identified as the political enemy. Marxism denounces the bourgeoisie for its fake universalism and announces the proletariat as the agent of and for genuine universalism. Nazism identifies the Jews as a sort of a particular-universal – confined to their Jewish identity, but nevertheless responsible for universalist conspiracies. Racist politics is always a conflict against universalism. Even when it is targeted against particular identities, like ethnic conflicts in Rwanda for instance, it involves a rejection of universality. A similar argument can be made for caste conflicts and politics that celebrate particularist identities, like that of Negritude. And we can see the conflict between neo-liberal regimes and Islamist terrorist groups, each seeking to impose their vision on the world, as an example of the conflict of universalisms. What is important to note is that the manner in which the Other is constructed determines the nature of the universality of the politics being espoused.

Let us say the Other is a White man, does the universalist politics allow him to transcend his identity and be a part? The politics of Fanon does – that of Malcolm X does not. This is vital to assess if a politics is emancipatory or not. If the politics ossifies the Other in an essentialized identity, it cannot avoid ossifying itself into an essentialized identity, "deeply invested in its own impotence".[468] A truly transformative praxis must unsettle the identity of both the Self and the Other so as to create a new paradigm of discourse where there can be a best reconciliation of interests of the actors involved.

Nonetheless, an abstract universalism is not possible. To speak of a "human identity" makes as much sense to politics as to speak of "God's children" – unless the human identity is mobilized to fight an inhuman Other or God's children are mobilized to fight godless children.

[468] Wendy Brown, *States of Injury*, p. 70

Given that the understanding of the enemy in the political is still anthropocentric, such a universal can be more harmful than good, and likely to cause as much, if not more, harm than the extremist nationalist ideologies of the previous century.

All universalisms must evolve or adapt to particular contexts. Ramasamy's promotion of Enlightenment rationalist values was made with the understanding of the particular context of Tamil Nadu, the native social and religious customs. Likewise, all particularisms have a potential for transcendence into a universal. Like Fanon's faith that both the Black person and the White person could give up their respective identities. But should an emphasis on transcendence be placed in the first place? According to Connolly, a noble response in a plural society would be

> to seek to transmute cultural antagonisms between transcendence and immanence into debates marked by agonistic respect between the partisans, with each set acknowledging that its highest and most entrenched faith is legitimately contestable by the others.[469]

A noble desire indeed. But this assumes that the Others too hold the same values of agonistic respect that one professes to uphold. What if the Others are insistent that their values, their cultural practices, and their objects of faith are not contestable by others? Better still, what if the Others are willing to use violence to contest such legitimate contestations? A tragic example from recent times can be given: The *Charlie Hebdo* massacre.

Charlie Hebdo, a satirical French magazine based in Paris that was known to mock political and religious figures, had a history of running into controversies owing to their caricatures of Christian, Jewish and Islamic religious symbols and authorities. Their offices had also been firebombed in 2011 by Islamists who took issue over the magazine cartooning the prophet Muhammed. However, the magazine continued to produce cartoons that provoked Islamists.[470] On the fateful morning of 7 January 2015, Islamists stormed the office of *Charlie Hebdo*, killing 8 employees, 2 police officers, and 2 others. This was immediately followed by an attack on a Jewish store, killing 4. Demonstrators took to the street in Paris and in cities across

[469] William E. Connolly, *Pluralism,* London: Duke University Press, 2005, p. 47

[470] While some liberals in the West have accused, in my opinion, quite unjustly, *Charlie Hebdo* of selectively targeting Muslims, only 8 out of more than 500 cover pages of the magazine have had anything to do with Islam.

the world by the millions under the slogan of "Je Suis Charlie", in defense of freedom of expression, including the right to offend, as a fundamental universal right.

Predictably enough, impassioned debates on Islamophobia, its dangers, the spectre of the 'clash of civilizations', the future of multiculturalism followed. Quite some in the Western liberal-left, together with Muslim liberals and 'soft' Islamists, reacted to the massacre with a token condemnation, but accusing the magazine of offending 'Muslim sentiments'.[471]

It is dark humor that for all their ire against Samuel Huntington's 'clash of civilizations' theses, in fact, it is precisely this multicultural liberal-left who are the true Huntingtonians of the modern times. Why? More than the right-wingers, it is they who believe that there is something called a 'Muslim world' with 'Muslim sentiments', as different from the other worlds, whose inhabitants prioritize the Islamic identity over all else, and it is a liberal duty to respect this identity. A critical interrogation of the ideology that structures this identity, or who it privileges is to be avoided because it would be Islamophobic. Here lies the fix of multiculturalist identity politics; in its reluctance to adopt universalism owing to fears of being assimilative, it embraces a logic similar to that of the racist, that the Other's identity is immutable, only that the multiculturalist believes that this identity must be tolerated, or even welcomed. "To us, the man who adores the Negro is as "sick" as the man who abominates him."[472]

The reason why Fanon was suspicious of the particularist Black identity politics of Negritude of his time was not only because its glorification of myriad pasts, but also because he believed that the simple binary mapping of Black and White obfuscated more than it revealed, often silencing other critical, more radical voices from the colonized. Isn't that what is happening now in the debates around Islamophobia? One can observe a monopolization of the discourse on Islam by Islamists and liberal Muslims, which is being actively or passively assisted by the Western multicultural liberal-left, at the cost of those within the so-called 'Muslim world' who really do not care about the Islamic religion and real or imagined offences against it, who instead are working towards radical political struggle and social reform within their communities. As Melinda Cooper rightly argues

---

[471] Slavoj Zizek criticizes such individuals for their "cheap relativisation of the crime". See "Slavoj Žižek on the Charlie Hebdo massacre: Are the worst really full of passionate intensity?", http://www.newstatesman.com/world-affairs/2015/01/slavoj-i-ek-charlie-hebdo-massacre-are-worst-really-full-passionate-intensity, [Last accessed on 29 June 2015]

[472] Fanon, *BSWM,* p. 2

> The kind of state multiculturalism promoted by the parliamentary Left and Right has in practice tended to corroborate the most vocal claims to cultural representativeness, repeatedly privileging the Hindu and Islamic Right as the authentic voices of cultural difference to the detriment of other, dissident tendencies on the "Asian" left. [473]

Here is a clear tension between universalism and (often ignorant) tolerance of non-Western particularisms. The legitimation and valorization of the 'Islamic' identity overlooks the manner in which Islamist discourse itself functions as a blind universalism that seeks to impose its identity over several secular movements in the so-called Muslim world. A parallel can be drawn to English liberals in colonial India, for example, Annie Besant and HS Olcott, who stood unconditionally – and uncritically – with Indian nationalism, going to the extent of valorising the upper-caste Hindu identity politics as a legitimate resistance, thus contributing to the silencing the voices of the leaders and intellectuals of the backward caste movements.[474] In their overzealous drive to defend native Hindu resistance and accusing the British colonials of violating indigenous traditions, they overlooked the fact that this resistance was spearheaded by an exclusivist class that was under criticism from backward caste reformers for exhibiting only a superficial political will to ensure that the postcolony would be a just society for the rest. Blinded by the simple binary of evil colonialism/good anti-colonialism, the English liberals muted the voice of the representatives of the backward castes.

Pluralism, for it to be functional, must defend the right to challenge and even offend fixed identities. A pluralism must also respect the right to be offended. For it to function in a democratic manner, it must be able to place caste, race, religious and sexual identities under critical scrutiny. What it cannot and must not tolerate is murder by those offended and the legitimation of such acts. But here is the paradox of such a pluralist ethos. Even to defend liberal values, pluralism needs to be illiberal. One can invoke Strauss' concern here "whether Tolerance can remain tolerant when confronted with unqualified intolerance."[475] Should French Republican values be compromised to tolerate the cultural sensibilities of certain Muslim groups who insist on asserting their "pure logic of difference", which, as Laclau warns, is the

---

[473] Melinda Cooper, "Part 1: Why I Am Not a Postsecularist", boundary 2 (2013) 40(1), p. 31
[474] V. Geetha and S.V. Rajadurai, "One Hundred Years of Brahminitude: Arrival of Annie Besant," Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 30, No. 28 (Jul. 15, 1995), pp. 1768-1773
[475] Leo Strauss, *Liberalism, Ancient and Modern,* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968, p. 28

logic of apartheid?[476] Or should the French Sovereign in Hobessian fashion be the manager of difference in so far as order is not threatened? This is a simplistic binary.

We discussed in the previous chapters through the dialogue between Fanon and Ramasamy that transcendence from fixed identities like caste to something universal was desirable in for an emancipatory political project. We also discussed how universalism has to be sensitive to particular social contexts if it is to be relevant and politically effective. A democratic emancipatory politics must begin from the assumption that societies are plural; but it should also recognize that the identities of individuals are plural. Nevertheless, the particularity of an identity "can only fully realize itself if it constantly keeps open, and constantly redefines, its relation to the universal."[477]

A Constitutive and Conditional Pluralism

There are no particular or universal identities. There are only particularist and universalist approaches to identification with identities. For instance, in a particularist approach, an anti-caste movement can target the Brahmin identity as the Other and consider an inferiorized Shudra identity as the rallying point of the political project. However, if it is purely particularist, such a political project can only lead to *ressentiment* where the rest recriminate the Brahmin for being superior. The crucial point to come back to here, as discussed above and in detail in the earlier chapters, is Ramasamy's understanding that the Brahmin identity by itself signifies that that the possessor is superior to the non-Brahmin. A critical universalist approach would, while targeting the Brahmin identity for its symbolic value, would nevertheless allow the Brahmin as an individual to transcend their identification with that particular identity, along with the non-Brahmin, to something different.

In the tension between universalism and particularism, in the words of Zerilli's reading of Laclau, "it is a matter not of choosing one over the other but of articulating, in a scrupulously political sense, the relation between the two."[478] A purely particularist approach to identification will take an identity as complete in-itself (He is a Brahmin, she is Black, they are Dalits and must be respected/hated for what they are) whereas a critical universalist approach

[476] Laclau, *Emancipation(s),* p. 49
[477] ibid, p. 65
[478] Linda M. G. Zerilli, "This Universalism Which Is Not One" in *Diacritics*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (Summer, 1998), p. 4

considers identification with an identity as metastable, "never purely stable, nor simply plastic"[479], as something incomplete, with the possibility of becoming for-others. This approach, to take from Mouffe, involves a constitutive pluralism, but also a conditional pluralism. Constitutive because it is accommodative of difference (LGBTQ, feminist, Mexican, Tamil, Sikh) and conditional because it is critically intolerant of bigoted tendencies among constituent groups (lets say, racism among white LGBT groups, homophobia in Black groups, anti-Semitism in Arab groups). Such an approach seeks neither the celebration of difference nor the erasure of difference, but involves the possibility of the transcendence of particularist differences into something truly *different*. Maybe this can be the prelude to a new humanism that Fanon talked about in the conclusion of the *Wretched of the Earth.*

The chapters of this thesis touched on the Hegelian understanding of recognition in the Master-Slave dialectic, as understood by Fanon, and concluded with reference to the Nietzschean idea of *ressentiment* and its implication for identity politics. An area of research interest in the immediate future would be to use the two concepts to understand the changes in the contemporary discourse of caste identity politics in Tamil Nadu's politics and society. The past few years have seen several political fissures within the non-Brahmin castes, especially violence between certain intermediate castes and Dalit castes. While everyday acts of violence against Dalits have been well documented, and sporadic anti-Dalit outbursts have been adequately covered by the media and criticized by public intellectuals and activists, little attention has been paid to the content of the Dalit discourse of resistance. What appears to be unfolding is the strengthening of a Dalit particularist identity politics, which looks at the intermediate castes as its Other. Whether the trajectory of this discourse is based on a demand for reciprocal recognition or is fuelled by *ressentiment* of the alleged dominance of the intermediate castes would be interesting to explore.

Separately, and eventually, I would also like to expand the findings of this thesis to make an intervention in theoretical discussions around multiculturalism in the West. With the immigration problems that several Western countries face and the rise of both majority and minority ethnic chauvinisms, the limits of multiculturalist tolerance are being repeatedly questioned. Should Western countries expand their tolerance to accommodate intolerant cultural practices of minorities or should there be an active attempt by the state to integrate minorities to 'Western values'? The more pressing question is not what is to be valued but

[479] Jean-Luc Nancy, *Identity: Fragments, Frankness,* New York: Fordham University Press, 2015, p. 11

rather to consider a re-evaluation of multicultural values, towards a new and more dynamic form of pluralism. This dialogue between Ramasamy and Fanon may contribute to that.

Bibliography

Aloysius, G. *Nationalism Without a Nation in India.* New Delhi: Oxford, 1997.

Aloysius, G. *The Brahminical Inscribed in Body-Politic*. New Delhi: Critical Quest, 2010.

Althusser, Louis. *On Ideology.* London: Verso, 2008.

Ambedkar, B.R. *Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development.* Jullundur: Patrika Publications, 1985.

Ambedkar, BR. *Mr. Gandhi and the Emancipation of the Untouchables.* New Delhi: Critical Quest, 2006.

Ambedkar, BR. *Annihilation of Caste.* New Delhi: Critical Quest, 2007.

Anderson, Perry. *The Indian Ideology.* New Delhi: Three Essays Collective, 2012.

Arendt, Hannah. *On Violence.* New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1969.

Aristotle. *Poetics.* Translated by Malcolm Heath. London: Penguin, 1996.

Aronson, Ronald. *Jean-Paul Sartre: Philosophy in the World.* London: Verso, 1980.

Arooran, K. Nambi. *Tamil Renaissance and Dravidian Nationalism: 1905-1944.* Madurai: Koodal, 1980.

Badiou, Alain. *Philosophy for Militants.* Translated with a foreword by Bruno Bosteels, London: Verso, 2012.

Bergner, Gwen. "Who Is That Masked Woman? Or, the Role of Gender in Fanon's Black Skin, White Masks." *PMLA*, Vol. 110, No. 1, (Jan.1995): 75-88.

Bernasconi, Robert. “The European Knows and does not Know: Fanon’s Response to Sartre.” in *Frantz Fanon’s Black Skin White Masks: New Interdisciplinary Essays,* edited by Max Silverman, 100-111. New York: Manchester University Press, 2005.

Bernasconi, Robert. “The Great White Error and the Great Black Mirage: Frantz Fanon’s Critical Philosophy of Race.” in *Living Fanon: Global Perspectives,* edited by Nigel Gibson, 85-92. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

Beteille, Andre. “Caste and Political Group Formation in Tamilnad.” in *Caste in Indian Politics,* edited by Rajni Kothari, 71-93. Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 1970.

Bhabha, Homi K. “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse.” *October*, Vol. 28, (Spring, 1984): 125-133.

Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture.* London: Routledge, 1994.

Bhabha, Homi K. “Day by Day… with Frantz Fanon.” in *The Fact of Blackness: Frantz Fanon and Visual Representation,* edited by Alan Read, 186-205. London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1996.

Bharadwaj, Anandhi S. “Women's Question in the Dravidian Movement c. 1925-1948.” in *Social Scientist*, Vol. 19, No. 5/6 (May - Jun., 1991).

Boulbina, Seloua Luste. “Fanon and the Women of the Colonies Against the White Man’s Burden.” in *Living Fanon: Global Perspectives,* edited by Nigel C. Gibson, 139-148. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

Bourdieu, Pierre. “The Forms of Capital.” in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, edited by John G. Richardson, 241-258. New York: Greenwood, 1986.

Brown, Wendy. *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995.

Bulhan, Hussein Abdilahi. *Frantz Fanon and the Psychology of Oppression.* New York: Plenum Press, 1985.

Caldwell, Robert. *A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South Indian Family of Languages.* (Second Edition), London: Trubner and Co, 1875.

Castells, Manuel. *The Power of Identity* (Second Edition). Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.

Caute, David. *Frantz Fanon.* New York: Viking Press, 1970.

Cesaire, Aime. *Discourse on Colonialism.* Translated by John Pinkham, New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000.

Cesaire, Aime. *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land.* Translated by Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith, Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2001.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh. "Postcoloniality and the artifice of history: who speaks for" Indian" pasts?." Representations (1992): 1-26.

Cherki, Alice. *Frantz Fanon: A Portrait.* Translated by Nadia Benabid, New York: Cornell University Press, 2006.

Ciccareiello-Maher, George. “To Lose Oneself in the Absolute: Revolutionary Subjectivity in Sorel and Fanon.” *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge, V, Special Double-Issue*, summer 2007: 101-112.

Connolly, William E. *Why I am Not a Secularist.* London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.

Connolly, William. *Identity|Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox (Expanded edition).* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002.

Connolly, William E. *Pluralism.* London: Duke University Press, 2005.

Cooper, Melinda. "Part 1: Why I Am Not a Postsecularist." boundary 2 (2013) 40(1): 21-39.

Dane, Robyn. "When Mirror Turns Lamp: Frantz Fanon as Cultural Visionary." *Africa Today*, Vol. 41, No. 2, Arts and Politics in Africa (2nd Qtr., 1994): 70-91.

de Beauvoir, Simone. *The Ethics of Ambiguity.* New York: Citadel Press, 1948.

de Beauvoir, Simone. *Force of Circumstance.* Translated by Richard Howard, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1968.

Dirks, Nicholas B. "Castes of Mind." *Representations*, No 37 (1992): 56-78.

Dirks, Nicholas B. "Recasting Tamil Society: The Politics of Caste and Race in Contemporary South India." in *Caste Today,* edited by C.J. Fuller, 263-295.New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Eco, Umberto. "Between Author and Text." In *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, edited by Stefan Collini, 67-88. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Eco, Umberto. "Overinterpreting texts." In *Interpretation and Overinterpretation,* edited by Stefan Collini, 45-66. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Eco, Umberto. "Reply." In *Interpretation and Overinterpretation,* edited by Stefan Collini, 139-141. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Ehlen, Patrick. *Frantz Fanon: A Spiritual Biography.* New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2000.

Fanon, Frantz. *A Dying Colonialism.* Translated by Haakon Chevalier. New York: Grove Press, 1965.

Fanon, Frantz. *Toward the African Revolution: Political Essays.* Translated by Haakon Chevalier. New York: Grove Press, 1988.

Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth.* Translated by Richard Philcox. New York: Grove Press, 2004.

Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks.* Translated by Charles Lam Markmann. London: Pluto Press, 2008.

Faulkner, Rita A. “Assia Djebar, Frantz Fanon, Women, Veils, and Land.” *World Literature Today*, Vol. 70, No. 4, (Autumn, 1996): 847-855.

Forrester, Duncan B. “The Madras Anti-Hindi Agitation, 1965: Political Protest and its Effects on Language Policy in India.” *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 39, No. 1/2 (Spring - Summer, 1966): 19-36.

Forsythe, Dennis. “Frantz Fanon - The Marx of the Third World.” *Phylon* (1960-), Vol. 34, No. 2 (2nd Qtr., 1973): 160-170.

Fuss, Diana. “Interior Colonies: Frantz Fanon and the Politics of Identification.” in *Rethinking Fanon: The Continuing Dialogue,* edited by Nigel Gibson, 294-328. New York: Humanity Books, 1999.

Galtung, Johan. “Violence, Peace and Peace Research.” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (1969): 167-191..

Gates Jr, Henry Louis. “Critical Fanonism”, *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (Spring, 1991), 457-470.

Geetha , V. and S.V. Rajadurai. “Neo-Brahminism: An Intentional Fallacy?” in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 28, No. 3/4 (Jan. 16-23, 1993), 129-136.

Geetha, V. and S.V. Rajadurai. “Dalits and Non-Brahmin Consciousness in Colonial Tamil Nadu.” in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 28, No. 39 (Sep. 25, 1993), 2091-2098.

Geetha, V. and S.V. Rajadurai. “One Hundred Years of Brahminitude: Arrival of Annie Besant.” Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. 30, No. 28 (Jul. 15, 1995), 1768-1773.

Geetha, V. and S.V. Rajadurai. *Towards a Non-Brahmin Millennium: From Iyothee Thass to Periyar*. Kolkata: Samya, 1999.

Geetha, V. "Who Is the Third That Walks behind You? Dalit Critique of Modernity." *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (Jan. 13-19, 2001): 163-164..

Gendzier, Irene L. *Frantz Fanon: A Critical Study.* New York: Pantheon Books, 1973.

Geismar, Peter. *Fanon: The Revolutionary as Prophet; a Biography*. New York: Dial Press, 1971

Ghurye, GS. *Caste and Class in India.* Bombay: Popular Book Depot, 1950

Gibson, Nigel C. “Thoughts about doing Fanonism in the 1990s.” in *College Literature,* 26.2 (Spring 1999): 96-117.

Gibson, Nigel C. *Fanon: The Postcolonial Imagination.* Cambridge: Polity, 2003.

Gibson, Nigel C. “Is Fanon Relevant? Toward an alternative foreword to “The Damned of the Earth.”” *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self Knowledge*, V, Summer 2007: 33-43.

Gibson, Nigel C. "Relative Opacity: A New Translation of Fanon's Wretched of the Earth-Mission Betrayed or fulfilled?" *Social Identities*, Vol. 13, No. 1, January 2007: 69-95.

Gibson, Nigel C. "Fanonian Presences in South Africa: From Theory and From Practice." in eds. Elizabeth A. Hoppe & Tracey Nicholls, *Fanon and the Decolonization of Philosophy,* 211-246. Maryland: Lexington Books, 2010.

Gibson, Nigel C. *Fanonian Practices in South Africa: From Steve Biko to Abahlali baseMjondolo*. Scotsville: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011.

Gibson, Nigel C. "Living Fanon?" in *Living Fanon: Global Perspectives,* edited by Nigel C. Gibson, 1-10. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

Gordon , Lewis R., T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting and Renee T. White, "Introduction: Five Stages of Fanon Studies." in *Fanon: A Critical Reader,* edited by Lewis R. Gordon, T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting and Renee T. White, 1-10. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996.

Gordon, Lewis R. *Existentia Africana: Understanding Africana Existential Thought.* New York: Routledge, 2000.

Gordon, Lewis R. *An Introduction to Africana Philosophy.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Gorringe, Hugo. "Taming the Dalit Panthers: Dalit Politics in Tamil Nadu.", *Journal of South Asian Development* 2:1 (2007): 51-73.

Guha, Ranajit. "On some aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India" in *Selected Subaltern Studies,* edited by Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*,* 37-44. New York: OUP, 1988.

Guha, Ranajit. *History at the Limit of World-History.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2002.

Haddour, Azzedine. "Sartre and Fanon: On Negritude and Political Participation." in eds. Adrian van den Hoven and Andrew Leak *Sartre Today: A Centenary Celebration,* 286-301. New York: Berghahn Books, 2005.

Hall, Stuart. "Introduction: Who needs Identity?" in *Questions of Cultural Identity, e*dited by Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay, 1-17. London: Sage, 2003.

Hansen, Emmanuel. *Frantz Fanon: Social and Political Thought.* Columbus: Ohio State University, 1977.

hooks, bell. "Feminism as a Persistent Critique of History: What's Love got to do with it?" in *The Fact of Blackness: Frantz Fanon and Visual Representation,* edited by Alan Read, 76-85, London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1996.

Hountondji, Paulin. *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality.* Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996.

Howarth, David. “Complexities of identity/difference: Black Consciousness ideology in South Africa.” *Journal of Political Ideologies* (1997), 2(1): 51-78..

Howarth, David R. *Poststructuralism and After: Structure, Power and Agency.* New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013.

Huntington, Samuel P. *The Clash of Civilizations and The Remaking of World Order.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003.

Irele, Abiola. “A Defence of Negritude.” in *Transition*, No. 13 (Mar. - Apr., 1964): 9-11.

Irele, Abiola. “Negritude-Literature and Ideology.” in *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (Dec., 1965): 499-526.

Irschick, Eugene F. *Politics and Social Conflict in South India: the Non-Brahman Movement and Tamil Separatism. 1916–29*, Berkeley, 1969.

Ismail, Qadri. “'Boys Will Be Boys': Gender and National Agency in Frantz Fanon and LTTE.” *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 27, No. 31/32 (Aug. 1-8, 1992): 1677-1679..

Jean-Marie, Vivaldi. *Fanon: Collective Ethics and Humanism.* New York: Peter Lang, 2007.

Jenkins, Richard. *Social Identity* (Second Edition). London: Routledge, 2004.

Jinadu, L. Adele. *Fanon: In Search of the African Revolution.* London: KPI, 1986.

Jodhka, Surinder. *Caste.* New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Kalaiyarasan, A. “A Comparison of Developmental Outcomes in Gujarat and Tamil Nadu.” *Economic and Political Weekly,* April 12, 2014, vol. xlix no. 15: 55-63.

Kannan, R. *Anna: The Life and Times of C.N. Annadurai*, New Delhi, Penguin-Viking, 2010.

King, Richard. *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and ‘The Mystic East’.* London: Routledge, 1999.

Kojeve, Alexandre. *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit.* Translated by James H. Nichols Jr., New York: Basic Books, 1969

Kothari, Rajni. “Introduction: Caste in Indian Politics.” in *Caste in Indian Politics,* edited by Rajni Kothari, Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 1970.

Kruks, Sonia. “Fanon, Sartre and Identity Politics.” in *Fanon: A Critical Reader,* edited by Lewis R. Gordon, T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting and Renee T. White, 122-133. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996.

LaCapra, Dominick. “Rethinking Intellectual History and Reading Texts.” History and Theory, Vol. 19, No. 3 (Oct., 1980): 245-276.

Laclau, Ernesto. “Constructing Universality.” in *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left,* Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Zizek, 281-307, London: Verso, 2000.

Laclau, Ernesto. “Identity and Hegemony: The Role of Universality in the Constitution of Political Logics.” *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left,* Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Zizek, 44-89. London: Verso, 2000.

Laclau, Ernesto. *Emancipation(s).* London: Verso, 2007.

Laing, RD and DG Cooper. *Reason and Violence: A Decade of Sartre’s Philosophy 1950-1960.* London: Tavistock Publications, 1964.

Lazarus, Neil. “National consciousness and the specificity of (post) colonial intellectualism.” in *Colonial Dicourse/Postcolonial Theory,* edited by Francis Barker, Peter Hulme, and Margaret Iversen ,197-220. New York: Manchester University Press, 1994.

Lee, Christopher J. *Frantz Fanon: Toward a Revolutionary Humanism,* Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2015

Lundahl, Mikela. “Negritude – An Anti-racist Racism? (Or who is the racist?)” in *Negritude,* edited by Isabelle Constant and Kahiudi C. Mabana, 83-96, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009.

Macey, David. *Frantz Fanon: A Life.* London: Granta Books, 2000.

Malcolm X, *Malcolm X Speaks: Selected Speeches and Statements.* New York: Grove Press, 1965.

Mbembe, Achille. “On the Postcolony: A Brief Response to Critics.” *Qui Parle,* Vol. 15, No. 2, 2005: 17-20.

Memmi, Albert. “The Impossible Life of Frantz Fanon.” Translated by Thomas Cassirer, G. Michael Twomey in *The Massachusetts Review*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Winter, 1973): 9-39.

Mercer, Kobena. “Decolonisation and Disappointment: Reading Fanon’s Sexual Politics.” in *The Fact of Blackness: Frantz Fanon and Visual Representation,* edited by Alan Read, 114-131, London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1996.

Meszaros, Istvan. *The Work of Sartre. Volume One: Search for Freedom.* Sussex: Harvester Press, 1979.

McClintock, Anne. “Fanon and Gender Agency.” in *Rethinking Fanon: The Continuing Dialogue,* edited by Nigel Gibson, 283-93. New York: Humanity Books, 1999.

McCulloch, Jock. *Black Soul, White Artifact: Fanon's Clinical Psychology and Social Theory.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

Mouffe, Chantal. *The Return of the Political.* London: Verso, 1993.

Mouffe, Chantal. "Carl Schmitt and the Paradox of Liberal Democracy." in *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt,* edited by Chantal Mouffe, 38-53. Verso: London, 1999.

Moulard-Leonard, Valentine. "Revolutionary Becomings: Negritude's anti-humanist Humanism." in *Human Studies,* Vol. 28, No. 3, (Nov 2005): 231-249.

Nancy, Jean-Luc. *Identity: Fragments, Frankness.* New York: Fordham University Press, 2015.

Nayar, Pramod K. *Frantz Fanon.* New York: Routledge, 2013.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Anti-Christ, Ecce Homo, Twilight of the Idols, and Other Writings.* Translated by Judith Norman, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *A Nietzsche Reader.* Edited and translated by R.J. Hollingdale, London: Penguin, 2003.

Norval, Aletta J. "Letter to Ernesto." in Ernesto Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of our Time,* London: Verso, 1990: 135-173.

Omvedt, Gail. "Hinduism as Delhi Rule: Periyar and the National Question." in *Communal Identity in India: Its Construction and Articulation in the Twentieth Century,* edited by Bidyut Chakrabarty, 256-264. New Delhi: OUP, 2003.

Onwuanibe, Richard C. *A Critique of Revolutionary Humanism: Frantz Fanon*. Warren H. Green: Missouri, 1983.

Pandian, Jacob. "Re-Ethnogenesis. The Quest for a Dravidian Identity among the Tamils of India." *Anthropos,* Bd. 93, H. 4./6. (1998): 545-552.

Pandian, MSS. "Beyond Colonial Crumbs: Cambridge School, Identity Politics and Dravidian Movement(s)." in *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 30, No. 7/8 (Feb. 18-25, 1995): 385-391.

Pandian, MSS. *Brahmin and Non-Brahmin: Genealogies of the Tamil Political Present.* Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2007.

Pandian, MSS. "Nation Impossible." *Economic and Political Weekly,* Vol. 44, No. 10 (Mar. 7 - 13, 2009): 65-69.

Pandian, MSS. "Caste in Tamil Nadu – II: Slipping Hegemony of Intermediate Castes." *Economic and Political Weekly,* Vol – XLVIII No. 04, January 26, 2013: 13-15.

Parekh, Bhikku. *A New Politics of Identity.* New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2008.

Parry, Benita. "Resistance theory/theorising resistance or two cheers for nativism." *Colonial Dicourse/Postcolonial Theory,* edited by Francis Barker, Peter Hulme, and Margaret Iversen, 172-196. New York: Manchester University Press, 1994.

Perinbam, B. Marie. *Holy Violence: The Revolutionary Thought of Frantz Fanon; An Intellectual Biography.* Washington: Three Continents Press, 1982.

Pithouse, Richard. "'That the tool never possess the man': taking Fanon's humanism seriously." *Politikon: South African Journal of Political Studies*, 30:1, 2003: 107-131.

Rabaka, Reiland. *Forms of Fanonism: Frantz Fanon's Critical Theory and the Dialectics of Decolonization.* Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2010.

Ram, N. "Pre-History and History of the DMK: The Politics of Cultural Nationalism in South India by Marguerite Ross Barnett." *Social Scientist*, Vol. 6, No. 5 (Dec., 1977): 59-91.

Ramasamy, EV. *Dear Youths.* trans. AS Venu, Chennai: Periyar Self-Respect Propaganda Institution, 1998.

Ramasamy, EV *Declaration of War on Brahminism.* Translated by A.S. Venu, Chennai: Dravidar Kazhagam Publication, 1998.

Ramasamy, EV. *Thoughts of Periyar EVR (Speeches and Writings of Periyar EV Ramsamy),* First Series (Revised and Enlarged), [Volume 3, Politics Part-2]. Chennai: Periyar EV Ramasamy-Nagammai Education and Research Trust, 2009.

Ramasamy, EV. *Thoughts of Periyar EVR (Speeches and Writings of Periyar EV Ramasamy)* Volume 6. Agitations and Messages, Part -1. Edited by V. Anaimuthu, Chennai: Periyar EV Ramasamy-Nagammai Education and Research Trust, 2009.

Ramasamy, EV *Periyar Kalanjiyam: Jaathi-Theendaamai, Paagam (1),* Chennai: Periyar Suyamariyathai Prachaara Niruvanam, 2011

Ramasamy, EV. *Periyar Kalanjiyam: Jaathi-Theendamai Paagam (4).* Chennai: Periyar Suyamariyathai Prachaara Niruvanam, 2011.

Ramasamy, EV *Periyar Kalanjiyam: Jaathi-Theendaamai, Paagam (11).* Chennai: Periyar Suyamariyathai Prachaara Niruvanam, 2011.

Ramasamy, EV. *Tamizhum, Tamizhargalum.* Chennai: Periyar Suyamariyathai Prachara Niruvana Veliyeedu, 2011.

Ramasamy, EV *Thoughts of Periyar.* Edited by K. Veeramani, Chennai: Dravidar Kazhagam Publications, 2011.

Ravikumar, V. *Venomous Touch: Notes on Caste, Culture and Politics.* Kolkata: Samya, 2009.

"Resolutions passed at various self-respect conferences relating to women empowerment", in *Periyar Feminism,* edited by K. Veeramani, Thanjavur: Periyar Maniyammai University, 2010.

Rorty, Richard. “The Pragmatist’s Progress.” In *Interpretation and Overinterpretation,* edited by Stefan Collini, 89-108. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Said, Edward W. *Orientalism.* London: Penguin, 2003.

Said, Edward W. “Representing the Colonized: Anthropology's Interlocutors.” *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 15, No. 2. (Winter, 1989): 205-225.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Existentialism and Humanism.* trans. Philip Mairet, London: Metheun, 1948.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *The Problem of Method.* London: Metheun, 1963.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. “Black Orpheus.” trans. John MacCombie *The Massachusetts Review*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (Autumn, 1964 - Winter, 1965): 13-52.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *The Spectre of Stalin.* Translated by Irene Clephane, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1969.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Anti-Semite and Jew: An Exploration of the Etiology of Hate.* Translated by George J. Becker, with preface by Michael Walzer, New York: Schocken Books, 1995.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology.* Translated by Hazel E. Barnes, Oxon: Routledge, 2003.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Between Existentialism and Marxism.* trans. John Matthews, London: Verso, 2008.

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *What is Literature?* Translated by Bernard Frechtman, Oxon: Routledge, 2010.

Savarkar, Vinayak Damodar. “Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?” In *Hindu Nationalism: A Reader,* edited by Christopher Jaffrelot, 87-96. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007.

Schmitt, Carl. “Ethic of State and Pluralistic State.” in *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt,* edited by Chantal Mouffe, 195-208. Verso: London, 1999.

Schmitt, Carl. *Theory of the Partisan: A Commentary/Remark on the Concept of the Political.* Translated by A.C. Goodson, East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2004.

Sekyi-Otu, Ato. *Fanon’s Dialectic of Experience.* USA: Harvard University Press, 1996.

Sen, Amartya. *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny.* London: Allen Lane, 2006.

Senghor, Leopold Sedar. “Black Woman.” trans. Lucille Clifton in *The Massachusetts Review*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (Summer, 1974): 506-507.

Senghor, Leopold Sedar. “Negritude: A Humanism of the Twentieth Century.” in *I am because We are: Readings in Black Philosophy,* edited by Fred Lee Hord and Jonathan Scott Lee, 45-54. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995.

Sharpley-Whiting, Denean. *Frantz Fanon: Conflicts and Feminisms.* Lanham MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997.

Singh, Hira. "Confronting Colonialism and Racism: Fanon and Gandhi." *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self Knowledge*, V, Special Double-Issue, Summer 2007: 341-352.

Sinha, Mrinalini. "Introduction." in *Mother India,* Katherine Mayo, edited by Mrinalini Sinha, 1-10, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000.

Skinner, Quentin. "Motives, Intentions and the Interpretation of Texts." *New Literary History*, Vol. 3, No. 2, On Interpretation: I (Winter, 1972): 393-408..

Skinner, Quentin. "A reply to my critics." in *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and his Critics,* edited by James Tully, 231-288. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988.

Skinner, Quentin. *Visions of Politics.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Slisi, Fouzi. "Islam: The Elephant in Fanon's The Wretched of the Earth." in *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies,* vol. 17, no. 1, Spring 2008: 97-108.

Spleth, Janice. *Leopold Sedar Senghor*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1985.

Spivak, Gayatri. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture,* edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988: 271-313.

Spivak, Gayatri. *Outside in the Teaching Machine.* London: Routledge, 1993.

Spivak, Gayatri. *Other Asias.* Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008.

Subramaniam, Narendra. "Identity Politics and Social Pluralism: Political Sociology and Political Change in Tamil Nadu." *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics, 40:3,* 2002: 125-139.

Srinivas, M.N. *Caste in Modern India and Other Essays.* New York: Asia Publishing House, 1962.

Srinivasan, Vivek. Delivering Public Services Effectively: Tamil Nadu and Beyond, New Delhi: OUP, 2014.

Strauss, Leo. *Liberalism, Ancient and Modern.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968.

Taylor, Charles. "The Politics of Recognition." in *Multiculturalism: A Critical Reader,* edited by David Theo Goldberg, 75-106. Oxford: Blackwell, 1994.

Teltumbde, Anand. *The Persistence of Caste: The Khairlanji Murders and India's Hidden Apartheid.* New Delhi: Navayana, 2010.

Thapar, Romila. *The Aryan: Recasting Constructs.* Gurgaon: Three Essays Collective, 2008.

"The Non-Brahmin Manifesto." in *The Justice Movement 1917,* edited by Varadarajulu Naidu, Chennai: Dravidar Kazhagam, 2010, 1-10.

Thorat, Sukhdeo. *Dalits in India: Search for a Common Destiny.* New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2009.

Vaitheespara, Ravi. "The Limits of Derivative Nationalism: Marxism, Postcolonial Theory, and the Question of Tamil Nationalism." *Rethinking Marxism: A Journal of Economics, Culture & Society*, 24:1, 2012: 87-105.

Wallerstein, Immanuel. "Reading Fanon in the 21st Century." *New Left Review,* 57, (May – June 2009): 1-9.

Webster, John C.B. "Who is a Dalit?" in *Dalits in Modern India: Visions and Values,* edited by S.M. Michael, 76-88. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2007.

Williams, Robert R. *Recognition: Fichte and Hegel on the Other.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992.

Whitaker, Mark P. *Learning Politics from Sivaram: The Life and Death of a Revolutionary Tamil Journalist in Sri Lanka.* London: Pluto Press, 2007.

Wideman, John Edgar. *Fanon.* New York: Mariner Books, 2010.

Wyatt, Andrew. *Party System Change in South India: Political Entrepreneurs, Patterns and Processes.* Oxon: Routledge, 2010.

Young, Lola. "Missing Persons: Fantasising Black Women in Black Skin, White Masks." in *The Fact of Blackness: Frantz Fanon and Visual Representation,* edited by Alan Read, 86-101, London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1996.

Zahar, Renate. *Frantz Fanon: Colonialism and Alienation.* Delhi: Aakar, 2010.

Zerilli, Linda M. G. "This Universalism Which Is Not One." in *Diacritics*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (Summer, 1998): 3-20.

Zizek, Slavoj. *First as Tragedy, Then as Farce.* London: Verso, 2009.

Zizek, Slavoj. *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections.* London: Profile Books, 2009.