

CREATION OF A ‘NEW SPECIES’: A DECOLONIAL READING OF FRANTZ FANON AND B.R. AMBEDKAR

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Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* describes decolonisation in emergent nation-states as “the veritable creation of new men”¹. Here, he does not merely allude to the shift of political power from the coloniser to the colonised. Instead, he makes a larger argument about the consequences of colonialism, particularly “cultural imperialism and psychological anxiety”², that has imprinted onto the minds of the colonised. Fanon believes that decolonisation without any transition period, which transforms the colonised from a ‘thing’ to a man and “frees itself”³, would simply mean “replacing of a certain ‘species’ of men by another ‘species’ of men”⁴. Consequently, this “disordered”⁵ approach to decolonisation will only produce citizens who lack self-determination and blindly assimilate into a colonial society in a seemingly decolonised nation.

B.R. Ambedkar, on the other hand, argues that the caste system classifies the Untouchables as “broken men”⁶ and dispossesses them of political rights, social standing and cultural significance. As a solution, he proposes de-sanctioning the authority of the *Shastras* and *Vedas* that provide the divine framework for the caste system and instead, listen to the Untouchables assert their “individual opinions and beliefs; independence and freedom”⁷. This change prompts “social reforms”⁸ from which surface citizens or new species, who practise principles of liberty and equality that are fundamentally different from the exclusionary morality of the caste system. This paper, therefore, argues that both Fanon’s critique of colonialism and Ambedkar’s evaluation of the caste system share similarities because they present a

¹Frantz Fanon, ‘Concerning Violence’, in *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington, Reprinted, Penguin Classics (London New York: Penguin Books, 2001), 28.

²John C. Hawley and Emmanuel S. Nelson, eds., ‘Decolonization’, in *Encyclopedia of Postcolonial Studies* (Greenwood Press, 2001), 137.

³Fanon, ‘Concerning Violence’, 28.

⁴Ibid at 27.

⁵Ibid at 27.

⁶Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, *The Untouchables: Who Were They and Why They Became Untouchables?*, 1st edition (New Delhi: Samyak Prakashan, 2017), 32.

⁷Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, ‘Annihilation of Caste’, in *The Essential Writings of B. R. Ambedkar*, ed. Valerian Rodrigues, 1st ed. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), 274.

⁸Ibid at 273.

psycho-social analysis of the oppressed human condition and advocate for radical reforms to overcome this suppression. Eventually, these reforms materialise as the emergence of a ‘new species’ as they possess different social, political and economic consciousness from their earlier counterparts.

Fanon in his critique of colonisation claims that the methods used for oppression imprison the mind. This leads to a loss of originality in culture, identity and self-determination ultimately causing economic and political unproductivity. Although colonisation began as an economic system, it evolved into a process that objectified the colonised and enforced a strict structure of “domination and submission”⁹ between the coloniser and the colonised. According to Fanon, this objectification obliterated multiple complexities of the colonised society with “individualism [being] the first to disappear”¹⁰. He theorises that colonisation replaced the native’s ideas of society—from a civilisation that respected the expression of personal opinion to a community that prioritises mass interest at the expense of individual thought and freedom¹¹. Along with destabilising a “whole culture and way of life”¹², the colonisers associated negative emotions like fear with the colonised and often expressed them as “Mamam, look, a Negro; I’m scared! Scared!”¹³. At the same time, the colonisers asserted their “distinct identity”¹⁴ and termed it “religious or magical”¹⁵, thus elevating the colonisers’ identity as an aspiration for the colonised. Such disrespectful treatment of the colonised generates existential angst that compromises their identity, eventually subverting it to such an extent that it becomes unpleasant to subscribe to it. Substituting the colonised society with aspects from their own culture allows the coloniser to create a mute homogenised society that seldom challenges colonial rule. As a result, the colonised internalise the loss of culture and selfhood that catalyses the genesis of their inferiority complex.

This inferiority complex, or as Fanon describes, “zone of nonbeing”¹⁶, manifests itself in the post-independent nation as the acceptance of the colonial bourgeoisie who concentrate the country’s wealth, leaving large sections of the

⁹ Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1972), 42.

¹⁰ Fanon, ‘Concerning Violence’, 36.

¹¹ Ibid at 37.

¹² Frantz Fanon, *Towards an African Revolution*, trans. Haakon Chevalier (New York: Grove Press, 1964), 33.

¹³ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks*, trans. Philcox Richard (New York: Grove Press, 2008), 91.

¹⁴ Frantz Fanon, ‘Algeria Unveiled’, in *Decolonization: Perspectives from Now and Then*, ed. Prasenjit Duara (Routledge, 2003), 46.

¹⁵ Ibid at 46.

¹⁶ Frantz Fanon, ‘Introduction’, in *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Philcox Richard (New York: Grove Press, 2008), xxi.

emerging nation poor¹⁷. Most of the economic and political systems in post-colonial countries are modelled after the colonisers' countries and thus, require the colonised intellectuals to run these structures. The gap in the language and knowledge between the people and "colonised intellectuals"¹⁸ allows the latter to develop complacency and become "completely ignorant of the economy of their own country"¹⁹. Hence, the bourgeois pave the way for more corruption and stagnation of the nation's economic progress rather than any social development. Similarly, political parties also become rigid and instead of acting as a "free flow of ideas from the people to the government"²⁰ morphs into a structure that consolidates power and capital. Therefore, they decelerate the economic and political growth of a supposedly independent and post-colonial nation²¹.

Fanon argues in order to build systems that truly liberate the natives from colonial vision and propel their development—total and complete decolonisation is necessary²². He characterises the process of decolonisation as the creation of "new men [humans]"²³, who are self-realised and assertive rather than dehumanised "passive"²⁴ and colonised objects. But complete decolonisation is an active process of self-reflection and demands "action"²⁵ to challenge the psycho-social residue of colonisation. Hence, Fanon suggests that violence is the most powerful method to arouse protest against the colonisers and describes decolonial violence as a "positive formative aspect [that] cleanses the individual and unifies the people"²⁶. However, violence for Fanon is not bloodshed or massacres. As Ciccariello-Maher perceives, violence is the "essential precondition of national identity [and] stands at the very centre of the dialects of decolonisation as its only source of motion"²⁷. Violence is any rupture to the coloniser's ideology that provides an impetus for the colonised to form and believe in their own economic, political and social identity. The rejection of armed violence to battle wars and disputes is also violence because it challenges the conventional notions of violence. The absence of any institutionalised framework or protocol to rely upon causes the colonised to come together and form a cohesive

¹⁷ Frantz Fanon, 'The Pitfalls of National Consciousness', in *The Wretched of the Earth* (Penguin Random House, 1963), 121.

¹⁸ Fanon, 'Concerning Violence', 32.

¹⁹ *Ibid* at 42.

²⁰ *Ibid* at 147.

²¹ Fanon, 'Concerning Violence', 74.

²² *Ibid* at 27.

²³ *Ibid* at 27.

²⁴ *Ibid* at 57.

²⁵ *Ibid* at 56.

²⁶ *Ibid* at 74.

²⁷ George Ciccariello-Maher, *Decolonizing Dialectics* (Duke University Press, 2017), 86.

unit. Fanon believes that “each individual in that violent link”²⁸ is mobilised enough to visualise a new country with a decolonised vision and structures that teem with their unique identity. Consequently, violence becomes an important first step to disseminating “a common cause” for national liberation, unifying the country and creating a collective consciousness. Hence, with new characteristics such as self-realisation, assertion, willpower and individual agency, decolonisation through violence produces a ‘new species’ that embody a renewed perception of nation, culture and identity.

Similarly, Ambedkar argues that caste discrimination in India dehumanises not only the Untouchables but also other castes such that they are alienated from economic and political opportunities. Thereby, preventing any “social intercourse”²⁹ between castes in the Hindu community. Ambedkar believes that the effect of the caste system on the ethics of all Hindus is “deplorable”³⁰ and “kill[s] public spirit”³¹. He posits that virtue and loyalty—common characteristics of a community—are also caste-bound. Due to this “sympathy to the deserving”³², “appreciation of the meritorious”³³ and “charity to the needy”³⁴ are limited in Hindu society. Further, Brahmins are also perceived to be “semi-gods”³⁵ while the Untouchables are thought to be “broken, objectified and removed”³⁶ from society. The caste system, particularly “locks [the Untouchables] outside the norms of humanity so that any action against them is seen [as] reasonable”³⁷. As a result, the caste system dehumanises not only the Untouchables but also the Brahmins, therefore, isolating the Hindu society to be only a collection of castes³⁸ rather than a cohesive civilisation.

However, this dehumanisation alienates different castes from economic and political opportunities differently. Due to education and involvement with national movements³⁹, upper-caste individuals mobilise and occupy economic and political structures faster than lower-caste communities. Accordingly, the same power

²⁸ Fanon, ‘Concerning Violence’, 73.

²⁹ Bhimrao Ramji. Ambedkar, ‘Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development’ (Anthropology Seminar of Dr. A.A. Goldenwieser, Columbia University, New York: Patrika Publications, 1916), 2.

³⁰ Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, 275.

³¹ *Ibid* at 275.

³² *Ibid* at 275.

³³ *Ibid* at 275.

³⁴ *Ibid* at 275.

³⁵ Ambedkar, ‘Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development’, 27.

³⁶ Ambedkar, *The Untouchables Who Were They And Why They Became Untouchables*, 45.

³⁷ Isabel Wilkerson, *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* (New York: Random House, 2020), 132.

³⁸ Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, 267.

³⁹ Myron Weiner, ‘The Struggle for Equality: Caste in Indian Politics’, in *The Success of India’s Democracy*, ed. Atul Kohli (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 196.

equations that exist within the caste system translate themselves into modern consciousness and institutions of governance. Research from Desai and Dubey shows that even in 21st-century independent India that believes in equality, liberty and fraternity, upper-caste communities continue to dominate most of its bureaucratic, political and economic structures⁴⁰. Hence, caste never ceases to be a structure that exerts control over individual choices and grants privileges to maintain the discriminatory status quo such that the Untouchables are always economically, politically and socially alienated.

Given this migrational feature of the caste system, it becomes clear that caste is not only a physical barrier. It is a notion; a “state of mind”⁴¹ and thus is also Fanon in some attributes. It is an internalised morality whose legitimacy stems from the divinity of the *Shastras* and *Vedas*, particularly the *Manusmriti* (Laws of Manu)—texts that describe the caste system. Similar to Fanon's conceptualisation of the negro's internalised inferiority complex that despite being “conscious”⁴² is not acknowledged, Ambedkar postulates that the divinity of the *Shastras* normalises the atrocities of the caste system giving rise to unconscious acceptance of such cruelty⁴³. Hence, preventing any widespread dissent opposing the caste system before the 20th century.

Thus, in order to abolish the caste system, Ambedkar proposes to “destroy the belief in the sanctity of the *Shastras*”⁴⁴, which leads to “social reorganisation and reconstruction of the Hindu society”⁴⁵. Ambedkar elaborates that the “actions of the people are a product of the beliefs”⁴⁶ formed from reading and internalising the *Shastras* and *Vedas*. Because the caste system is legitimised from such a divine source, people need to go against their “fundamental religious beliefs”⁴⁷ and essentially reconfigure their minds. Ambedkar also recognises the difficulty of such a radical change of consciousness and therefore, characterises the destruction of caste under the third species of reform which is a “stupendous task, well-nigh impossible”⁴⁸. Additionally, Ambedkar prioritises social reform of this nature over political and economic reforms, explaining that the complete success of the latter is contingent on radical social reform. In *Annihilation of Caste*, he criticises the prominent political

⁴⁰ Sonalde Desai and Amaresh Dubey, ‘Caste in 21st Century India: Competing Narratives’, *Economic and Political Weekly* 46, no. 11 (12 March 2012): 40–49.

⁴¹ Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste*, 289.

⁴² Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks*, 129.

⁴³ Ambedkar, ‘Annihilation of Caste’, 288.

⁴⁴ *Ibid* at 290.

⁴⁵ *Ibid* at 265.

⁴⁶ *Ibid* at 292.

⁴⁷ *Ibid* at 292.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 291.

parties of the 1930s, namely, Social Conference, for being unconcerned about the evils of the caste system⁴⁹. Since it is primarily an organisation of upper-caste Hindus, Ambedkar deems them to be unfit “to rule another class”⁵⁰ when they do not allow Untouchables to use “public schools, public wells and public streets”⁵¹. Instead, they are concerned about abolishing their own social evils like child marriage. Consequently, a social reform that opens up a more free and mobile society would be necessary for grievances from all communities to be addressed. Similarly, occupational division as one of the foundations of the caste system is highly harmful because it attempts to maintain economic progress by subordinating the “natural inclinations”⁵² of men. Forcing professions can limit individuals from exploring their interests thereby economically alienating them from opportunities. Hence, “caste also becomes a direct cause of the unemployment”⁵³ observed. For better economic development also, social restructuring to suit greater social mobility is necessary and therefore must be prioritised.

When analysed like this, Ambedkar’s critique of the caste system demands the formation of a ‘new species’ who are capable of evaluating their beliefs and critically engaging with institutionalised texts like *Vedas*. It is through this critical line of inquiry that they understand the flawed foundations of caste and make efforts to not believe in the divinity of the *Shastras* and consequently the caste system. Thus, they are also fundamentally different from the others because their morality and outlook on life have undergone a magnitude of change. The distinct morality and belief system of the ‘new species’ is clearly reflected in their economic, political and social decisions. They are open to inter-caste dining, inter-caste marriage and display “respect and reverence”⁵⁴ for all individuals in the society. Not only do they value verbal communication across all communities but also the exchange of ideas allowing the development of what Ambedkar calls “social endosmosis”⁵⁵. Unlike the supporters of the caste system, the ‘new species’ would also be liberal and accepting of individuals choosing their respective professions and careers. Therefore, ‘new species’ who discard the caste system actively demonstrate this in society are a product of Ambedkar’s vision of dismantling the caste system.

Fanon and Ambedkar’s critiques of and solutions to colonisation and the caste system respectively possess similarities in creating a ‘new species’ in two ways. Firstly, both Fanon and Ambedkar strongly criticise the foundations, namely, the

⁴⁹ Ibid at 271.

⁵⁰ Ibid at 271.

⁵¹ Ibid at 271.

⁵² Ibid at 264.

⁵³ Ibid at 264.

⁵⁴ Ibid at 276.

⁵⁵ Ibid at 276.

fragile European Spirit and the authority of the *Shastras*, from which systems like colonisation and caste system arise. Thereby, illustrating that European thought of nations and Brahminical ideas of society is not the only legitimate ideologies, hence, making room for alternative or ‘new’ notions of society. Fanon, in the conclusion to *The Wretched of the Earth*, highlights the dichotomy between the ideals of equality and liberty that European Enlightenment propagates and their “cynical”⁵⁶, “violent”⁵⁷ leadership using which they took over the world. He writes that the “European spirit has strange roots”⁵⁸ and has not only encroached on land but also the minds of “four-fifths of humanity”⁵⁹. He advocates to “escape the stasis of Europe”⁶⁰ and assimilate into the changing “dialectics”⁶¹ of the post-colonial nations. By suggesting a departure from European thought, Fanon questions its legitimacy and validity in the process of decolonisation. Demonstrating the frailty of colonisation and European thought allows the colonised to imagine their nation and world rooted in their culture and thought rather than in colonial institutions. Consequently, creating not only a new species of people but also a new species of countries that do not conform to the colonial vision of progress and nation-state.

Similarly, Ambedkar in *Annihilation of Caste* claims that the caste system will persist until the divinity of the *Shastras* and *Vedas* is not discarded. He believes that anything built on the foundations of caste will break and “never be a whole”⁶². He understands caste as a “powerful tool to prevent reform”⁶³ than provide an impetus for any development. In his essay, *Untouchability and Pax Britannica*, Ambedkar attributes the continuation of caste to the belief in the *Shastras* and the inefficiency of the Mughal or British governments to address issues of caste⁶⁴. There was no government intervention against Untouchability and ultimately address the lack of social interactions within the castes. Hence, Ambedkar believes that it is not only the beliefs that carry forward the caste system, its roots also lie in the lack of legal documentation and intervention of the atrocities following the casteist practices can incur. Hence, Ambedkar’s two-fold solution of dismantling the authority of the *Shastras* and criminalising Untouchability surfaces from these foundations. Further, centuries of deep-rooted assimilation of the *Shastras* make it nearly impossible for

⁵⁶ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 253.

⁵⁷ Ibid at 253.

⁵⁸ Ibid at 252.

⁵⁹ Ibid at 252.

⁶⁰ Ibid at 252.

⁶¹ Ibid at 252.

⁶² Ambedkar, ‘Annihilation of Caste’, 288.

⁶³ Ibid at 263.

⁶⁴ Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, ‘Untouchability and Pax Britannica’, in *The Essential Writings of B. R. Ambedkar*, ed. Valerian Rodrigues, 1st ed. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002), 351–58.

individuals or societies to imagine their future without its very fundamentals. Therefore, the search for substitutions leads to at least the beginnings of a ‘new species’ or new crux of civilisation.

Secondly, undertaking Ambedkar’s proposed dismantling of the *Shastras* and *Vedas* implicitly references Fanon’s idea that violence is necessary to mobilise individuals towards a renewed collective consciousness. Developing a critical relationship with the *Shastras* and *Vedas* requires the individuals to infuse decolonial violence to their engagement with these texts. Then, they can recognise the oppression and alienation caste causes and fundamentally rupture the mainstream notions about the caste system. Acknowledging the lack of a system for social organisation, these individuals who now form the ‘new species’ can construct alternative and more inclusive structures of social organisation. However, it is difficult to develop a critical relationship with the *Shastras* without channelising inner violence and opening expressing disagreements with the current circumstance. Hence, Fanon’s idea of violence also becomes a precursor to Ambedkar’s notion of ‘new species’—“[a] change of notions, sentiments and mental attitudes of people”⁶⁵. In conclusion, Fanon and Ambedkar’s critiques of colonisation and the caste system share similarities in creating a new species because of their psycho-social meditations on the oppressed human condition in these systems. A significant similarity is that the psychological impact of oppression, evident both in Fanon’s inferiority complex theory and Ambedkar’s argument about the caste system dehumanising individuals manifests in social, economic and political alienation of the oppressed. Institutional support from political structures like governments and law results in complacency to maintain the status quo, thereby providing evidence for Fanon’s theory that violence is the necessary precondition of national identity and Ambedkar’s rejection of the authority of the *Shastras* as an essential step to discard the caste system. Consequently, producing citizens and societies that are radically different in economic, political and social capabilities compared to their earlier counterparts. They possess more agency for a unique expression of cultural identity and the formation of governing institutions. Hence, Fanon and Ambedkar’s critique and solutions to colonisation and the caste system bear similarities of creating a ‘new species’, both at an individual and societal level.

⁶⁵ Ambedkar, ‘Annihilation of Caste’, 278.

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