



**FRANTZ FANON, LIBERATION AND THE CULTURAL REVOLUTION:
BRINGING INTO BEING A NEW PEOPLE AND A NEW WORLD**

Los Angeles Sentinel, 07-13-23, p.B-1

DR. MAULANA KARENGA

THE MONTH OF JULY ALWAYS BRINGS TO mind the life and legacy of Nana Frantz Fanon (July 20, 1925 - December 6, 1961), freedom fighter, radical psychiatrist, revolutionary theorist and deep thinker, diplomat and visionary for bringing into being a new man, woman and world. In his seminal work, *The Wretched of the Earth*, he poses a radically transformative task to African people everywhere vital to the interests of African and human good and the well-being of the world. He tells us that to free ourselves and humanity from the anti-Black and anti-human oppression and legacy of Europe, its offspring and imitators of every kind, we must not only defeat our oppressors, but also destroy within ourselves the will to emulate and be like them.

As we wage our liberation struggles to free ourselves and be ourselves, Fanon's writings offer us, as always, an invaluable source for deepening and rightly directing our thought and practice to achieving the new people and a new world he rightfully calls for and gave his life to bring into being. To truly free ourselves politically and culturally and build a new world in the process of our struggle, "We must", he says, "turn over a new leaf; we must work out new concepts and we must set afoot a new man (and woman)". It is a call for and task of a radical re-imagining of ourselves and the world and audaciously daring to victoriously bring both into being, as Kawaïda contends, in the most ethical, effective and expansive ways.

This revolutionary proposal to set afoot or bring into being a new African person and people who is neither a conception, reflection or "obscene caricature" of Europe or its offspring, finds its ultimate and inevitable solution on the subjective and objective level, in

both our radically transformative understanding of ourselves and the world and a similar self-assertion in it. And it is all-encompassing, for it is about the way we conceive and live our lives as well as how we do our work and wage our liberation struggles. It is here that the cultural revolution is defined and discussed by Nana Frantz Fanon, Malcolm X, Sekou Toure and Amilcar Cabral as well as by Kawaïda which borrows from and builds on the thought of these revolutionaries. For, in fact, cultural revolution, as a broad, profound and thorough-going social project, of necessity, involves a deep cultural grounding which must find its practical translation, not only in the transformation of society, but also and simultaneously in the transformation of the people themselves. As Fanon noted, liberation of the individual does not follow national liberation, but is an inseparable part of it. In fact, "An authentic national liberation exists only to the precise degree to which the individual has irreversibly begun his own liberation".

Thus, to bring into being a new African person is a holistic project which requires understanding and decisive action on the cultural as well as political level. It is, in other words, a liberational thrust which begins with the battle to break the monopoly the oppressor has on the minds of so many of our people and it reaches culmination in their political seizure and effective use of power over their destiny and daily lives and the decisive transformation of society. Cultural revolution also seeks to ensure that the end of economic and political oppression and exploitation is not delayed or denied by unfronted and unchecked psychological disorientation and deformation, i.e., personality structures and dispositions in direct contradiction with

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aspirations for liberation and ever higher levels of human life. As Fanon poses it, "It is very specifically a question of knowing whether we shall liberate ourselves without aftermath from an alienation which for centuries has made of us the great absentees of Universal History", and especially artificial absentees of our own history.

Culture, for Fanon and Kawaïda, is both a source and support of the struggle for liberation which gives it added life, pushes it to the limits of its possibilities, and shapes it in the image and interests of the decolonized and self-consciously liberated person. Moreover, he and Kawaïda pose culture as both a source of domination as well as liberation, depending upon the peoples' ability to resist the oppressor's impositions and the "mummification" of their culture, and to achieve a culture full of adaptive vitality and expansiveness through the struggle and liberation of the people. In posing the dual character and possibilities of culture, i.e., as both a means of domination and liberation, Fanon notes that colonial domination disrupts "in spectacular fashion the cultural life of conquered people". In fact, "every effort is made to bring the colonized person to admit the inferiority of his culture". Moreover, "not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying brains", colonialism turns to the past of the oppressed people and "distorts, disfigures and destroys it".

At this point, culture has two options - to mummify under oppression and turn into "automatic habits" and "instinctive patterns of behavior" or to inspire and support the liberation struggle and gain a new and expanded life of meaning through it. Fanon opposes the self-erasure and submission of those who reject their culture or those who try to substan-

tiate "the claims of (a) culture in a way that is passionate but rapidly becomes unproductive". He argues that there can be no real creativity in a context in which oppression is accepted and not contested. For "the poverty of the people, national oppression and the inhibition of culture are one and the same thing" and must be solved in the same process - the national liberation struggle of the people.

The possibility and need for struggle is ever present, for oppression provokes resistance. And cultural workers, writers, artists and intellectuals must lend themselves and their work to the liberation of the people and their culture, to call them to struggle, "to awaken (their) sensibility and to make unreal and unacceptable the contemplative attitude or the acceptance of defeat". This cultural initiative must happen and does happen, Fanon contends, as Cabral and Toure also argued, "well before the political or fighting phase of the national movement" and helps bring it into being. Thus, cultural resistance precedes, sustains and makes possible political resistance.

At the same time, Fanon struggle transforms culture, freeing it from old self-limiting values, and giving it a new dynamic. "It is," he states, "the fight for national existence which sets culture moving and opens to it the doors of creation". In fact, "the struggle itself in its development and its internal progress bends culture along different paths and traces out entirely new ones for it", refusing to "give back to the national culture its former value and shapes". For the struggle, both a political and cultural project, must ensure that "After the conflict there is not only the disappearance of colonialism but also the disappearance of the colonized person".

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In THE FINAL ANALYSIS, “TO FIGHT FOR NATIONAL culture means in the first place to fight for the liberation of the nation, that material keystone which makes the building of a culture possible”. On the ideological level, the battle is to redefine the world in dignity-affirming and liberating ways, but the ideological struggle always must be joined with the practical one. Fanon observes that “You may speak about everything under the sun; but when you decide to speak of that

unique thing in man's life that is represented by the fact of opening up new horizons, by bringing light to your own country, and by raising yourself and your people to their feet, then you must collaborate on the physical plane”. In a word, practical and transformative struggle is unavoidable and indispensable and clearly the most promising pathway to bringing into being both a new people and a new world.▲

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