

## RE-INVENTING KWAME NKRUMAH, FRANTZ FANON AND AMILCAR CABRAL'S CRITIQUE OF COLONIALISM

*Syed Eesar Mehdi*

*Research Scholar, South Asian University, New Delhi, India*

---

**Received: 14 Jun 2018**

**Accepted: 21 Jun 2018**

**Published: 26 Jun 2018**

---

### **ABSTRACT**

This paper focuses on the response to colonialism in the thought and philosophy of Kwame Nkrumah, Frantz Fanon, and Amilcar Cabral. It argues that these thinkers thought about colonialism as a pattern of domination that produced economic imbalances, racial discrimination, and cultural superiority by subjugating the colonizer. In this process of responding to colonialism, they challenged and, at the same time, revised the dominant definitions of race, culture, language and created an intellectual niche for themselves. This paper argues that by re-inventing Kwame Nkrumah, Frantz Fanon and Amilcar Cabral's critique of colonialism, an attempt can be made to debunk the various forms of colonialism that are operating in the continent of Africa.

**KEYWORDS:** *Colonialism, Economic Imbalances, Racial Discrimination and Cultural Superiority*

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Locating Africa in the Discourse of Colonialism**

The European powers colonized large swaths of territory in Africa. Except for Liberia, all African States have faced the trauma of the colonial experience. A cursory look at the map of Africa in the late nineteenth or the early twentieth century gives us a rough idea about the expanse of the European colonial powers in Africa. Almost every major European colonial power has participated in a "scramble for Africa".

There is a general consensus among scholars that "colonialism is a form of domination by individuals or groups over the territory and behavior of other individuals or groups" (Horvath, F. R, "A definition of Colonialism", *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 13, No.1, 1972, pp. 45-57). This form of domination was cultural, economic and political. Ania Loomba, an Indian literary scholar who has written extensively on colonialism, defines it as a "conquest and control of other peoples land and goods" (Loomba, Ania, *Colonialism/Post-colonialism*, London: Routledge Publication, 2005, pp. 8-9). She further adds that "modern colonialism did more than extract tribute, goods and wealth from the countries that it conquered—it restructured the economies of the latter, drawing them into a complex relationship with their own, so that there was a flow of human and natural resources between colonized and colonial countries" (Ibid). This continuous flow of slave (labor) and raw material from the colonies to the metropolis was meant only for metropolitan consumption. For getting cheap labor, slaves were moved from Africa to the Americas, and raw cotton was moved from India to be manufactured into cloth in England and then sold back to India whose own cloth production suffered as a result. Thus, human beings and materials traveled in all directions, but the profit always flowed back into the so-called mother country. In this way, the colonies were made economically bankrupt. Slavery was institutionalized by colonizers and with

the “institutionalization of slavery, black Africans were bought and sold and even transported to the U.S.A to a new world” (Harshe, Rajen, *Reflections on Nation Building: A Gypsy in the World of Ideas*, New Delhi: Pentagon Press, 2011, p. 97). This flow of profit involved enormous global shifts of population. Both the colonized and the colonizers moved: the former not only as slaves, but also as laborers, domestic servants, travelers and traders, and the colonial masters as administer, soldiers, merchants, settlers, teachers, and scientists. This produced an economic imbalance that was necessary for the growth of European capitalism and industry. In fact, colonialism was the midwife that provided the necessary engine on which European capitalism was born out, or that colonial expansion was must for the transition of colonialism to capitalism in Europe.

Colonialism in Africa had three key features: Economic exploitation, restructuring of Indigenous knowledge systems and racial and dehumanizing tinge.

### **Economic Exploitation and Dependency**

The link between capitalism and imperialism is theoretically explained by Lenin in his seminal work *Imperialism the highest stage of Capitalism*. In this book, he argues that “imperialism is the highest (advanced) stage of capitalism, requiring monopolies (of labor and natural-resource exploitation) and the exportation of finance capital (rather than goods) to sustain colonialism, which is an integral function of said economic model” (Lenin, V. I, *Lenin’s Selected Works*, Progress Publishers, 1963, Moscow, Volume 1, pp. 667-766). World system theorists like Immanuel Wallenstein extended on Lenin’s thesis to show elaborative how core countries (advanced capitalist states) draw raw materials and other economic benefits from periphery countries (weak capitalist states)? This continuous extraction of raw materials from the periphery states makes them dependent on core states. In the African context, Kwame Nkrumah, a Pan-Africanist, brought to fore the economic exploitative feature of colonialism. In his influential work, *Neo-Colonialism: the Last Stage of Imperialism*, he argues that “colonialism is the policy by which a foreign power binds territories to herself by political ties with the primary object of promoting her own economic advantage” (Nkrumah, k, *Neo-colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism*, London: Heinemann, 1965). For Nkrumah economic exploitation is the main entity attached to colonialism and through this system of exploitation, the colonizers remain permanently dependent on colonized due to an underdeveloped economic system. For Nkrumah the state which in theory is independent, but its economic system and political policy is directed and controlled from outside is in the last stage of imperialism that he calls ‘neo-colonialism’.

### **Restructuring of Indigenous Knowledge Systems**

Another highly exploitative dimension of colonialism was the restructuring of indigenous knowledge systems. This dimension of colonialism is elucidated by anthropologist Bernard Cohn by revealing ‘how colonizers shape and structure knowledge systems and use language as an important tool of control and command’ (Cohn, B. S, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge*, Princeton University Press, 1996). By restructuring knowledge systems, colonizers make certain categories of knowledge deeply entrenched into the mind of the colonized subject by using what Louis Althusser, calls an “ideological state apparatus” (Althusser, Louis, *Ideology, and Ideological State Apparatus*, New Delhi: Critical Quest, 2012). In fact, colonialism was about making indigenous knowledge systems weak and replicating the European model of knowledge system to legitimize their colonialism of non-European countries. It was all due to colonial expansion that other forms of knowledge were relegated to the back burner because they were a creation of inferior non-European minds. In the African context, Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong’o vehemently opposed the operationalization of European languages in

Africa. He asserted that “Africa can’t break free from the clutches of Western control over its resources and culture until the use of European languages is replaced by the native languages” (Thiong'o, Ngũgĩ wa, *Decolonizing the Mind*, United Kingdom: Heinemann, 1986). He saw latent colonial aggression in the learning of European languages. This is what he succinctly called the “politics of language”. For Ngũgĩ, language is a carrier of one’s culture and the use of foreign language alienates an individual from his own culture. Another influential African thinker Julius Nyerere conceived colonialism as undemocratic and authoritarian, which has a tendency to stand diametrically opposite to indigenous cultures and traditions. He emphatically rejects the capitalist notion of individual land ownership, which, he argues, is entirely “contrary to the African traditions according to which land customarily belongs to the community” (Nyerere, Julius, *Freedom and Socialism*, London: Oxford University Press, 1974). Nyerere’s concept of *Ujamaa* (meaning ‘community’ or ‘family-hood’) is a specific type of African socialism that is totally different and distinct from both capitalism and socialism. It is opposed to capitalism “which seeks to build a happy society on the basis of the exploitation of man by man; and it is equally opposed to doctrinaire socialism which seeks to build a happy society on a philosophy of inevitable conflict between man and man” (Nyerere, Julius, *Ujamaa: Essays on Socialism*, London: Oxford University Press, 1971).

### Racial and Dehumanizing Tinge

The racial and dehumanizing tinge attached to colonialism was brought to the fore by Frantz Fanon. For him “in the colonies the cause is the consequence; you are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich” (Fanon, Frantz, *The Wretched of the earth*, London: Penguin books, 1963, p. 31). In Fanon’s sense, native is always devalued and abandoned by the colonizer “by denying the existence of their indigenous cultures and civilizations” (Harshe, Rajen, *Reflections on Nation Building: A Gypsy in the World of Ideas*, New Delhi: Pentagon Press, 2011, p. 98). Through this, colonizer gain cultural superiority over its subjects. This cultural superiority engenders a sort of false consciousness in the minds of a native and he gets severely caught in inferiority complex. In his book *Black Skin, White Masks* Fanon defines the colonized people not as those whose labor has been appropriated but those “in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality” (Fanon, Frantz, *Black Skin, White Mask*, New York: Grove Press 1967, p. 18). Aimé Césaire, a famous intellectual and Fanon’s teacher, wrote in his powerful essay *Discourse on Colonialism* that colonialism, not only exploits, but dehumanizes and objectifies the colonized subject, even as it degrades the colonizer himself.

He explains this by a stark equation by saying that “colonization = thingification” (Césaire, Aimé, *Discourse on Colonialism*, New York and London: Monthly Review Press, 1972, p. 21). Césaire was one of the founding fathers of negritude movement that emphasized the cultural antagonism between Europe and the ‘others’. If, in Kipling’s words, “East is East, and West is West and ne’er the twain shall meet” then negritude angrily endorsed this conceptual distance. Césaire places ‘Africa’ as the binary opposite of ‘Europe’, a Europe that is ‘decadent’, ‘stricken’ and ‘spiritually indefensible’ (Ibid, p. 9). Césaire issues a sweeping indictment of Europe on the one hand, and a ‘systematic defense of the non-European civilizations’ on the other, claiming that they were communal, anti-capitalist, democratic, cooperative and federal before they were invaded by European colonialism, capitalism and imperialism.

This paper has chosen Kwame Nkrumah, Frantz Fanon and Amilcar Cabral’s critique of colonialism because they have responded to the three dominant colonial powers in Africa that is Britain, France and Portugal respectively.

All the three intellectuals responded to colonialism either through their writings or through their speeches. In the following sections, I would like to discuss them at length so as to get a proper understanding of various forms of colonialism in Africa and its critique from their perspective.

### **Pan-Africanism and Consciencism: Nkrumah's Response to Colonialism**

Kwame Nkrumah was a Pan-Africanist, one of the founders of the Organization of African Unity and the first leader of independent Ghana. His early education began in local missionary schools. In 1935, Nkrumah went to America for getting higher education at Lincoln University. He then pursued graduate studies at the University of Pennsylvania (Fuller, Harcourt, *Building the Ghanaian Nation State*, United States: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, p. 22). During his ten years stay in America, Nkrumah became aware about the Pan-Africanist thinkers who inspired him like Marcus Garvey and W.E.B. Du Bois. In 1945, Nkrumah went to London for studying at the London school of economics and political science. Here Nkrumah became active in politics and student union organizations. He played a prominent role in the organization of the Fifth Pan African Congress in Manchester. This gave Nkrumah an opportunity to get acquainted with the other African nationalist leaders such as Jomo Kenyatta, Peter Abrahams and W.E.B. Du Bios. In 1947, Nkrumah left Britain and returned to the Gold Coast to become the general secretary of the newly created, anti colonial United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC). After one year in 1948, Nkrumah left UGCC over political differences and founded his own radical nationalist party, the Conventional People's Party (CPP), which demanded 'full self-government'. In 1950, Nkrumah and his party CPP campaigned under the idea of 'positive action' that led to strikes and demonstrations all over the colony. The authorities of the colony declared the state of emergency and Nkrumah was once again put behind the bars. After getting out of the jail, Nkrumah's party CPP easily won the general elections and Nkrumah became the first president of the Ghana and was re-elected unopposed in 1965. But in 1966, he was overthrown by a military coup and he went into exile in Guinea, where Sekou Toure made him an honorary co-president.

Nkrumah's understanding of the term ideology was quite different from his predecessors. He thought about ideology, not as a metaphysical category, but something which would bring a radical and reformative change. This approach made Nkrumah a renowned praxis who believed "practice without thought is blind and thought without practice is empty" (Nkrumah, Kwame, *Consciencism: Philosophy and Ideology for Decolonization*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970, p. 78). There seemed a link between practice and ideology in Nkrumah's thought. He argued that "an ideology doesn't merely express the wishes that the present social order should abolish rather it seeks to defend and maintain the new social order which it introduces" (Martin, G, *African Political Thought*, United States: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, p. 87). The best possible way to understand the evolution of political thought of Kwame Nkrumah would be essential to refer to his autobiography *Ghana: The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah*. While going through the pages of the book, it becomes clear that the most essential characteristic of Nkrumah was his staunch and unremitting commitment towards nationalism. His anger against colonialism dates back to his early years as a student in America. He writes that "Independence for gold coast was my aim. It was a colony and I have always regarded colonialism as the policy by which foreign power binds territories to herself by political ties with the primary object of promoting her own economic advantage" (Nkrumah, *Ghana: The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah*, London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1959, p. 5).

Nkrumah understood nationalism only as the initial stage of the liberation struggle but his ultimate aim was the achievement of Pan-Africanism and socialism. He saw nationalist phase as the initial step towards the liberation struggle but this must be linked with the emancipation of economic and cultural exploitations of the whole African continent. When he was in London, he thoroughly thought about Pan-Africanism and socialism. In his autobiography, he mentions the names of the scholars and thinkers who have impressed him. He attributes his political thought to Marx and Lenin. Both the thinkers impressed him to such an extent that he candidly asserted that the solutions to all our problems reside in their philosophy. Whether, Nkrumah was a Marxist or not, has perplexed many thinkers, but his belief was that "Marxism is not a dogma, but a guide to action" (Ibid, p. 37). It was only the Marxist analysis of imperialism and Lenin's characterization of imperialism 'as the highest stage of capitalism' that convinced Nkrumah to assert that "the penetrating analysis of imperialism is given by Marx and Lenin" (Ibid, p. 11).

Nkrumah was highly influenced by the Christian notion of ethics during his days in the United States. In his philosophy of conscience—defined as an ideology for decolonization—he considers religion of not necessarily being inconsistent with it. He argues that "philosophical conscience even though deeply rooted in materialism, is not necessarily atheistic" (Nkrumah, Kwame, *Conscience: Philosophy and Ideology for Decolonization*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970, p. 84). In his autobiography, he describes, himself as a "non-denominational Christian and a Marxist socialist" who has "not found any contradiction between the two" (Nkrumah, Kwame, *Ghana: The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah*, London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1959, p. 10). For Nkrumah, Africa consists of three main segments that includes, Traditional, Christian and Islamic. Thus, a new ideology is required based on the unity of the three main segments and indigenous humanist African principles. He calls this ideology as 'philosophical conscience'. This philosophy of conscience is in reality African socialism, which encompasses indigenous African cultures wherein society is classless and egalitarian.

Nkrumah was highly inspired by M.K. Gandhi as well. In his struggle for independence of Ghana, Nkrumah found a great source of inspiration in the form of 'non-violence' which was used by Mahatma Gandhi in his struggle against the British rule. When Gandhi died, Nkrumah acknowledged that "we too mourned his death, for he has inspired us deeply with his political thoughts, notably with his adherence to non-violent resistance" (Nkrumah, Kwame, *I Speak for Freedom*, London: Heinemann, 1961, p. 2). It is from Gandhi's non-violent resistance that Nkrumah derived his own 'positive action' which he used in the struggle against the British rule. His concept of positive action was "employing legitimate agitation, newspaper and political educational campaigns, and the application of strikes, boycotts and non-cooperation based on the principle of non-violence" (Nkrumah, *Ghana: The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah*, London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1959, p. 85).

### **Racism and Dehumanization: Frantz Fanon's Response to Colonialism**

Frantz Fanon was a political philosopher and a prominent psychiatrist. David Macey in his biography of Fanon calls him "a man of multiple identities and multiple talents" (Macey, David, *Frantz Fanon: a Biography*, London: Verso, 2012, p. 7). He went on to metropolitan France first as a soldier in World War II then as a medical student at the University of Lyon. Finally, he moved to Algeria and Tunisia working as a psychiatrist in the Blinda-Joinvilla hospital and later as a propagandist for Algeria's National Liberation Front (FLN) in Tunis during the bloody war of independence against the French (1954-62).

Frantz Fanon wrote numerous books and articles, of which *The Wretched of the earth* remains the most reflective of his philosophy and political thinking. He represents an Ideal synthesis of an intellectual committed to deep thinking and political commitment and activism. Fanon always stood against the waywardness in a liberation struggle. He believed that a successful liberation movement should have specific doctrine and clearly defined goals. He writes that “Things must be explained to [the people]; the people must see where they are going and how they are to get there. an program is necessary for a government which really wants to free the people politically and socially....in fact, there must be an idea of man and of the future of humanity” (Fanon, Frantz, *The Wretched of the Earth*, London: Penguin books, 1963, pp. 112-113).

Fanon observed the same in his work *Towards the African Revolution* by foreseeing the absence of ideology and lack of proper objectives in the African liberation movement. He considered this as a danger to this cause.

Fanon was greatly moved by the ideas of socialism and his idea of ‘ideal society’ was a reflection of egalitarianism and non-authoritarianism. He dreamed of a free and non-repressive society which is basically a socialist society. Fanon praises socialist system by arguing that “the choice of the socialist regime, a regime which is completely geared towards the people as a whole and based on the principle that man is the most precious of all possessions will allow us to go forward more quickly and more harmoniously” (Ibid, p. 78).

Fanon saw a psychological dimension of racial domination attached to colonialism. He viewed colonialism as an endeavor to establish cultural superiority over its subjects. The establishment of cultural superiority is what Rajen Harshe calls “a psychological need of a colonial rule” (Harshe, Rajen, *Reflections on Nation Building: A Gypsy in the World of Ideas*, New Delhi: Pentagon Press, 2011, p. 98). Thus, Fanon sees a dehumanizing and racial tinge attached to colonialism. For him “in the colonies the cause is the consequence; you are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich” (Fanon, Frantz, *The Wretched of the Earth*, London: Penguin books, 1963, p. 31). In fanon’s understanding, natives are always dehumanized, devalued and abandoned by the colonizer by denying the existence of their indigenous cultures and civilizations. The cultural superiority engendered by the political and social processes unleashed by the colonizer generates a sense of the immense inferiority complex in the minds of the colonized. Fanon defines colonized people not those whose labor has been appropriated but those “in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality” (Fanon, Frantz, translated by Haakon Chevalier, *Towards the African Revolution: Political Essays*, New York: Grove Press, 1967, p. 18).

Franz Fanon’s writings had a huge impact on the liberation struggles in Africa. After his death, the liberation struggle in Portuguese became highly intensified. Such was his effect on African common people. In fact, his intellectual responses to colonialism and racism are still valid and relevant.

### **Nationalism and Re-Africanization: Amilcar Cabral’s Response to colonialism**

Amilcar Cabral was born in Bafata (Guinea-Bissau) on 12 September, 1924. He was a polymath. He attended school in the Cape Verde and afterwards went on to study agronomy and hydraulic engineering at the advanced school of agronomy in Lisbon. In Portugal, he stressed on reclaiming of African culture and history. This is what he mellifluous called as “re-Africanization of the mind”. While returning to Portuguese Guinea as an agriculture engineer; he became acquainted with the land, its people, and its problems.



In 1956, he founded a national liberation movement, African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC). This party became so successful that they controlled the two third of the total territory.

For Cabral theory and practice is inextricably linked; both are interconnected. He maintains that there was a lack of ideology—or revolutionary theory—in the nationalist liberation struggles of Africa. It is because of this reason that they failed to fulfill their goals. . In his unique style, he argues “the ideological deficiency, not to say the total lack of ideology, within the nationalist liberation movements...constitutes one of the greatest weaknesses of our struggle against imperialism, if not the greatest weakness of all...nobody has made a successful revolution without a revolution theory” (Handyside, Richard, *Revolution in Guinea: Selected Texts by Amilcar Cabral*, edit. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1969. pp. 92-93).

In addition, Cabral points out that any nationalist struggle or any revolutionary ideology has its specific characteristics that are grounded in some kind of historical and social circumstances. Arguing in the manner of Frantz Fanon, he asserts that since colonial and neo-colonial rulers resort to violence, nationalist liberation struggles should also stick to violent methods as a tool to forgo violence. He argues that “the essential instrument of imperial domination is violence...there is not, and can't be national liberation without the use of liberating violence by the nationalist forces, to answer the criminal violence of the agents of imperialism” (Ibid, p.107).

The central concept of the national liberation struggle of Amilcar Cabral is the notion of “return to the source”. This includes the right of the people to reclaim their history and culture. That is, “the nationalist liberation of the people is the regaining of the historical personality of that people, its return to history through the destruction of the imperialist domination to which it was subjected” (Ibid, p. 102).

Hence, it can be argued that in Cabral's sense, the national liberation was to be defined not so much as the right of people to rule itself rather it was the right of the people to reclaim their history and culture. Cabral aspired for a nation without oppression, suppression and subjugation and longing for a state that would have humans living under the shade of their history and culture. Patrick Chabal considers Cabral a nationalist, realist, humanist and above all a pragmatist. He writes that “Cabral was first and foremost a nationalist. Nationalism, not communism, was his cause. But he was also a humanist, a socialist and above all a pragmatist. His political values were largely based on moral commitments...the other key aspect of his personality was his deep commitment to humanist ideals and his direct concern for human beings, especially the oppressed and downtrodden” (Chabal, Patrick, *Amilcar Cabral: Revolutionary Leadership and People's War*, London: Cambridge, 1983, p. 168).

## CONCLUSIONS

African intellectuals treated colonialism as a form of subjugation that needed to be completely eradicated from the African states. They considered colonialism and its various forms as a pattern of domination that produces economic imbalances and cultural inferiority by subjugating the colonial subject. For them, colonialism stands diametrically opposite to their indigenous cultures and civilizations. They saw the asymmetrical relationship in economic structures that were attached to colonialism in which colonies were entirely dependent on the colonizers. Some African thinkers saw colonial aggression in European languages; some saw cultural aggression attached to colonialism whereas, some saw a racial tinge attached to it.

**REFERENCES**

1. *Althusser, L. (2012). Ideology and ideological state apparatus. New Delhi: critical quest.*
2. *Césaire, A. (1972). Discourse on Colonialism. New York and London: Monthly Review Press.*
3. *Chabal, P. (1983). Amílcar Cabral: Revolutionary Leadership and People's War. London: Cambridge.*
4. *Cohn, B. S. (1996). Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge. Princeton University Press.*
5. *Fanon, F. (1967). Black Skin, White Mask. New York: Grove Press.*
6. *Fanon, F. (1963). The Wretched of the Earth. London: Penguin books.*
7. *Fuller, H. (2014). Building the Ghanaian Nation State. Palgrave Macmillan.*
8. *Handyside, R. (1969). Revolution in Guinea: Selected Texts by Amílcar Cabral. New York: Monthly Review Press.*
9. *Harshe, R. (2011). Reflections on nation building: A gypsy in the world of ideas. New Delh: Pentagon press.*
10. *Horvath, R. F. (1972). A definition of Colonialism. Current Anthropology , 1 (13), 45–57.*
11. *Kipling, R. (1889). The Ballad of East and the West .*
12. *Lenin, V. (1969). Imperialism: The highest stage of capitalism . International Publishers.*
13. *Loomba, A. (2005). Colonialism/Post-colonialism. Routledge Publication.*
14. *Macey, D. (2012). Frantz Fanon: a Biography. London: Verso.*
15. *Martin, G. (2012). African Political Thought . Palgrave Macmillan.*