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THEORY, PRAXIS AND HISTORY:
FRANTZ FANON AND JOSÉ CARLOS MARIÁTEGUI

by

Ntongela Masilela

In the colonies the economic substructure is also a superstructure. The cause is the consequence; you are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich. This is why Marxist analysis should always be slightly stretched every time we have to do with the colonial problem.

--Frantz Fanon

The Marxist tactic is thus dynamic and dialectical as is the very doctrine of Marx; the socialist will not operate in a vacuum, does not disregard the pre-existing situation.... It conforms solidly to historical reality, but does not resign itself passively to it.

--José Carlos Mariátegui

This essay or presentation merely attempts to trace, within a delimited social space and historical context, a theoretical path through the readily available (i.e., in English translation) critical writings of Fanon and Mariátegui. Though this tracing is informed by a particular understanding and articulation of history (the central concept of class struggle, the question of class confrontations and ideological contestations), it does not pretend to be a comprehensive and total analysis of the nature and scope of the political and social praxes of Mariátegui and Fanon as evidenced in their respective writings in relation to particular historical conjunctures. Such an approach, which would be comprehensive in its totality, would require a concrete materialist analysis of the mode of production in dominance (in dominance because no mode of production in history ever exists in its purity and singularity, it is always a synthesis in relation to, and beyond certain particular variants of that mode of production), and also an analysis of the social relations of production, in relation to the social classes within a particular social structure. This

would be true for Fanon within Algeria in relation to other international social dynamics and confrontations, and also for Mariátegui within Peru in relation to other international confrontations and contestations. In short, such an approach would require mediation by two nodes which determine and guide theoretically any correct materialist analysis of social structures: an analysis of any society must begin by locating and determining the dominant mode of production, this would be in relation to the social relations of production which determine the nature of surplus extraction; through determining the dominant mode of production within a particular social space, one can locate its class structure and determine materialistically which class is in dominance and rules within particular social orders. These two nodes which determine a correct theoretical approach to social analysis of social structures were emphasized by Elizabeth Dore and John Weeks in a lucid article "Class Alliances and Class Struggle in Peru" which appeared in the Summer issue (1977) of *Latin American Perspectives*.¹

This particular, and to be sure, necessary analysis, is beyond the scope of this short essay or presentation; for the essay is not original and relies on secondary materials. That said, we have to ask ourselves two fundamental questions: what is the nature of the historical significance and political meaning of praxis in the writings and political practices of Mariátegui and Fanon? what is the relevance of their historical and social praxes for contemporary revolutionary struggles presently being waged in Latin America and Africa? The historical significance and political meaning of their praxes for our time can only be understood and realized in practice within a resolutely and implacably anti-imperialist perspective, i.e., within a context of national and social liberation (in short, class struggle). Only within this context can their respective praxes have concreteness for us today.

In a message (which in fact has become his political testament), to the first Congress of Latin American Communist Parties held in Montevideo, in late 1929, Mariátegui wrote:

*In conclusion, we are anti-imperialists because we are Marxists, because we are revolutionaries, because we oppose socialism to capitalism, believing them to be antagonistic systems and that socialism must follow upon capitalism. In the struggle against foreign imperialism we comply with our duty to demonstrate our solidarity towards the revolutionary masses of Europe.*²

And elsewhere he wrote:

While we must not fail to make use of any element of anti-imperialist agitation, or of any means of mobilizing those social sectors that may eventually participate in the struggle, our mission is to show the masses that only the socialist revolution can present a real and effective barrier to the advances of imperialism.³

In the same anti-imperialist vein, Fanon wrote in *The Wretched of the Earth*, defending in 1961 the Cuban Revolution against American imperialist aggression:

In the present international context, capitalism does not merely operate an economic blockade against African or Asiatic colonies. The United States with its anti-Castro operations is opening a new chapter in the long story of man's toiling advance toward freedom. Latin America, made up of new independent countries which sit at the United Nations and raise the wind there, ought to be an object lesson for Africa. These former colonies since their liberation have suffered the brazenfaced rule of Western capitalism in terror and destitution.

The liberation of Africa and the growth of consciousness among mankind have made it possible for the Latin American peoples to break with the old merry-go-round of dictatorship where each succeeding regime exactly resembled the preceding one. Castro took over power in Cuba, and gave it to the people. This heresy is felt to be a national scourge by the Yankees, and the United States now organizes counterrevolutionary brigades, puts together a provisional government, burns the sugar-cane crops, and generally has decided to strangle the Cuban people mercilessly. But this will be difficult. The people of Cuba will suffer, but they will conquer. The Brazilian president James Quadros has just announced in a declaration of historic importance that his country will defend the Cuban Revolution by all means. Perhaps even the United States may draw back when

faced with the declared will of the peoples. When that day comes, we'll hang out the flags, for it will be a decisive moment for the men and women of the whole world. The almighty dollar, which when all is said or done is only guaranteed by slaves scattered all over the globe, in the oil wells of the Middle East, the mines of Peru or of the Congo, and the United Fruit or Firestone plantations, will then cease to dominate with all its force these slaves which it has created and who continue, empty-headed and empty-bellied, to feed from their substance.⁴

Within our present historical context, the anti-imperialist perspective formulated and articulated by Mariátegui and Fanon has attained its profound historical significance and political meaning, its materialist and concrete form, in the solidarity of proletarian internationalism between Cuba and Angola. In this historical reality, the praxis of proletarian internationalism forges a concrete intersectional unity between the histories of Cuba and Angola, a unity in economic, social, political and cultural relations. A unity, which will have ideological effects on the developmental process of Latin American and African continents.

This present unity between Cuban and Angolan histories represents the most progressive moment in the developing relations between Latin American and Africa. This unity between Cuba and Angola is a continuation of the anti-imperialistic praxes of Frantz Fanon and José Carlos Mariátegui. Within an anti-imperialistic perspective, as Cabral has shown in his book, *Revolution in Guinea*, a people define and write their heroic history through the instruments of armed struggle.⁵ Debray calls this process of writing history through heroic struggle, seizing hold of the *now* of history:

Seizing hold of the 'now' of history (in a given country, at a given time, though of course it also involves a seizing of the world at a given time, just as it implies a knowledge of all the previous history of the country itself) serves as a kind of touchstone, for the theoretical validity of 'science'.....⁶

The anti-imperialist perspectives of Fanon and Mariátegui presuppose an understanding and articulation of history which is mediated by praxis within an on-going class struggle. It is necessary therefore to theorize, though briefly, a particular conception of history in order to make more comprehensible the praxes of Fanon and Mariátegui.

Though it is through a materialist and dialectical analysis of production systems within particular social formations (i.e., an analysis of a particular mode of production, or a synthesis of other modes within it, or their parallel existence), that one can understand the movement of history, it is only through establishing and pinpointing demarcations within it, that one can possibly understand the nature of the movement itself in relation to the mediating intervention of class struggle. The crisis points of history, or better still, the crisis points within history indicate the actuality of its movement; the culmination moment or process of an event and the beginning sequence of another within a complex historical time. The resolution of the crisis points of history gives rise to new situations and events which are qualitatively distinct from the givens of the past. The resolution of the crisis points of history is a manifestation of complex laws of social development, which also indicate the paradoxes of history (i.e., the delayed effects of social contradictions, means and ends situated in opposite relationship to each other). These crisis points of history, which to be sure, are a product of economic, social, political and cultural contradictions are, as Debray indicates, the driving forces of history:

The moment of the break-up is what we may call the crisis, the confrontation between two contraries, the point of articulation between two unities, two periods of history, two political or social regimes, two relationships between stable forces.⁷

The dialectical resolution of crisis points within social structures maps and traces the qualitative and quantitative transformational processes within history; these crisis points indicate social contradictions within a social structure in dialectical relation to social tensions from without. This particular movement of history through crisis articulates the process of dialectical unity between the specific and the universal; a reasoning which goes from theory to fact, from the logic of history to its embodiment in the immediate reality of society as concluded by Debray.

This conception of history effects a particular understanding of the revolutionary process of social structures: the

economic and social orders. The economic and social structures of underdeveloped countries, in our particular case Algeria and Peru, are governed by the law of uneven and combined development⁸; a law that makes comprehensible the superimposition of the most advanced capitalist structures on the most backward processes, or on the backward social terrain. The law articulates the simultaneous existence, within the same social space, of the most advanced production relations and the most backward production relations: a paradoxical and organic relationship is effected which merely illustrates the profane nature of history; a parallel relationship which is effected within a social synthesis. In short, the law of uneven and combined development traces the particular nature of the class structure within a social structure, and the historical traditions and political history of its agents of transformation.

Through the law of uneven and combined development of the productive process of a particular social structure, a materialist analysis maps the nature of the disproportionate development of social forces⁹; the unequal economic, political, social, and cultural relations between different social classes; the proletariat, the peasantry, the petty-bourgeoisie and the bourgeoisie class; and also the relations between their particular fractions. Of course, the law of uneven and combined development takes on particular *variations* within the social structures of particular underdeveloped countries. It is through articulating this law as a combinatorial unity of the reciprocity between social agents and social forces of a social structure that history as a movement of the dialectical synthesis of internal and external contradictions of an underdeveloped country becomes concretely comprehensible.

The intelligibility of such a historical conceptualization is mediated by particular economic categories: (on the whole unique to a particular mode of production, its social ensembles unique to it) labour power, relative and absolute surplus value, capital, ground rent, etc; categories which are neither eternal fixed or abstract but are in a constant process of historicization¹⁰ in order to reveal the relativity and transitivity of the modes of production and their social formations. The economic categories themselves are historical and transitory specifying a moment of a determined historical conjuncture. Mariátegui and Fanon analyzed the structure of the social whole¹¹ of their respective historical-social terrains (Peru and Latin America, Algeria and Africa) through the instruments of Marxist economic categories in order not only to inform, but also to formulate the content of their unique, and respective concepts of history. It is the correct conceptualization of history in relation to a social structure (forces of production, production relations, social relations of produc-

tion), that determines and guides a correct political practice; a political practice which also in turn determines and informs, the content of the concept of history. Both Fanon's and Mariátegui's writings and praxes reflect an awareness of this nature of reciprocity.

It is not by chance therefore that in Fanon's writings, in particular *the Wretched of the Earth*, and Mariátegui's *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality* we find parallel theoretical formulations, which do not necessarily coincide or confirm each other, but reveal a singular instance of the historical trajectories of their political practices. Both give greater prominence to the analysis of cultural and superstructural levels or orders, as is the case with Western Marxism; similarly, both analyze the ideological effects and social consequences of colonial domination on the culture of dominated and oppressed peoples; as already indicated, they are resolutely anti-imperialist; and lastly, Fanon and Mariátegui interpenetrate the superstructural and infrastructural orders of a social formation, as a necessary theoretical presupposition for analyzing colonial domination.

It is necessary at this juncture to situate both Fanon and Mariátegui in their respective historical contexts in order to concretize the historical significance and political meaning of their praxes for us today.

III

The developmental unity of Mariátegui's intellectual formation was within the context of the historical, social, political and cultural after effects of the War of the Pacific (1879-1884); a war between Peru and Chile over, among other things, the control of the desert nitrate areas, in which Peru was defeated and Chile occupied Lima from 1881 to 1884. The era of the War of the Pacific is a great watershed in Peruvian history: a historical conjuncture characterized by the beginnings of the penetration of foreign monopoly capital, and exacerbated by the developing and intensifying class struggle between the national bourgeoisie and the rising proletarian class; an epoch in which according to Bollinger¹², there was an accelerated expansion of capitalist relations of production and the disintegration of the pre-capitalist modes of production. A critical period which has, to a large extent, determined the historical course of modern-day Peru.

Manuel González Prada was the outstanding intellectual figure who dominated and greatly influenced the nature of the ideological and cultural contestations within this particular

moment of Peruvian history; an influence that was to have pronounced effects on the intellectual development and formation of José Carlos Mariátegui. Four major themes dominated Gonzalez Prada's intellectual thought and political practice themes that were to be a point of departure for Mariátegui: national integration based on the indigenous Inca heritage; land reform and elimination of the *hacienda* system; criticism of the Catholic Church for its reactionary involvement in Peruvian politics.¹³

Though González Prada was critical of the pseudo-democratic nature of Peruvian society, his criticism lost its historical and social basis or legitimacy because of the anarchistic thrust which was central within it. Nevertheless, through his journal, *Germinal*, González Prada attempted to forge a unity between intellectuals and workers. An attempt which led him correctly to proclaim that the proletariat would solve the central problem, that of exploitation, through revolution: such a revolution for González Prada would be catalysmic, anarchistic, absolutely spontaneous, and messianic. Nevertheless, Manuel González Prada was a great figure who grappled with the most critical and central problems that effected Peruvian society at that time, the era between the War of the Pacific and the First World War.

It was González Prada's anti-clericalism and identification with the Indian population which had the most immediate and pronounced effect on the generation of young intellectuals known as "the generation of 1919"; this anti-clericalism, of Gonzalez Prada expressed in a most uncompromising formulation:

*With very rare exceptions, from the time immemorial, priests have been the more determined oppressors of Humanity, especially of the underprivileged class. In the past, they did nothing to abolish pauperism and improve the social condition of the masses; in the present it is the same old story...They perpetuate the grossest superstitions and live petrified in an atmosphere of errors and lies. They constitute a force hostile to civilization...They have no reason to exist.*¹⁴

González Prada's influence which was most in depth and scope, was summarized in the following manner by Mariátegui:

González Prada was more a literary figure than a political one. But the political transcendence of his work may be greater than the literary...His individualist

*spirit...was not adequate for the direction of a vast collective work (i.e., the development of a revolutionary program). He was an accuser, not a builder...but... in the depths of this Parnassian there is a romantic who never despairs of the power of the spirit.*¹⁵

It was under this great historical legacy of González Prada that Mariátegui's intellectual formation and political practice took on a concrete development: a legacy that was a product of the social tensions, class contradictions and ideological contestations; an intellectual development that was to be later influenced by Pierro Gobetti, the Italian revolutionary democrat, Henri Barbusse, the French writer and socialist thinker, Julian Sorel, the French syndicalist thinker, and Antonio Gramsci, the great Italian Marxist philosopher and founder of the Italian Communist Party during his European exile, 1919 to 1923; an exile period whose historical concatenation and vicissitudes influenced Mariátegui's turn towards socialism and Marxism; a turn towards socialism that was also influenced by the historical consequences of the October Revolution of 1917.

From the time of his employment as a copy boy and later as proofreader for the newspaper, *La Prensa*, in 1909 to his death in 1930 (at the time when he was editor of his great journal, *Amauta*), Mariátegui's political praxis was a reflection of an intervention in the Peruvian class struggle, in an attempt to forge unity between the working class, the Indians and revolutionary intellectuals; a forged unity that was historically realized in the Peruvian Socialist Party (founded by Mariátegui in 1928) which was three years later to transform itself into the Peruvian Communist Party. Mariátegui's intervention in the Peruvian political and class struggle, which was intensifying and in a process of qualitative growth at a remarkable pace, had ideological effects on the political partisanship of his publication; a partisanship that forged solidarity with the proletarian class. Consequently, the banning of Mariátegui's different cultural and political publications by the Leguía government, was not an attempt merely to stifle the "intellectual subjectivity of José Carlos' political growth"¹⁴, but an attempt to break the unity between revolutionary intellectuals and the working class and the qualitative growth of the Peruvian class struggle. In short, each of Mariátegui's journals (*Colónida*, a cultural and literary journal co-sponsored with Abraham Valdelomar, Félix del Valle, and César Falcon; *Nuestra Epica*, whose content was more political than literary; *La Razon*, a leftist journal co-founded with César Falcon, which called for the creation of a socialist society; *Claridad*,

joint publication with Haya de la Torre in 1923 and 1924, which shifted its political orientation from solely appealing to students and militants, to solidarity with the working class; *Amauta*, a social and political journal which became an instrument for organizing a political party and concretizing the unity between militants and workers), reflected a particular phase of his intellectual development and political practice within a particular phase of the class struggle and ideological confrontations in Peru; a concretizing of the politics of the present struggle; a singular social phase reflecting the changing politics and social structure of the Peruvian composite social formation.

In the first issue of *Amauta*, published in 1926, Mariátegui defined his historical project and political practice in the following eloquent manner:

*The object of this journal is to state, to clarify and become acquainted with the problems of Peru from doctrinal and scientific points of view. But we will always consider Peru within the world panorama. We will study all of the movements of social change -- political, philosophical, artistic, literary and scientific. Everything human is within our scope. This journal will find the new man of Peru, first with those peoples of Latin America, and finally with the other peoples of the world.*¹⁷

It was the presentation and execution of this historical project—the analysis of Peruvian class and social contradictions from the perspective of historical materialism (the science of Marxism), the linking of the Peruvian proletarian revolutionary struggle with other international proletarian revolutionary struggles, the necessity for left-wing intellectuals to examine cultural products and processes from the perspective of dialectical materialism (the philosophy of Marxism), the analysis of praxis which is a product of the practical unity between the working class and revolutionary intellectuals, the historical integration of Amerindians within particular Latin American countries - by Mariátegui and the Peruvian Socialist Party (later to become the Communist Party of Peru) that brought about the opposition of, and the eventual break with Haya de la Torre and APRA (The American Popular Revolutionary Alliance) in 1924.

This historical break between José Carlos Mariátegui and Haya de la Torre, was a delayed culmination of the ideological effect of the general strike of 1918 and the worker's strike and insurrection of 1919; a strike and an insurrection which marked "...the onset of a long period of ideological and political

struggle between socialists, led initially by José Carlos Mariátegui, and the petty bourgeois Aprista Party (APRA), led by Haya de la Torre..."¹⁸ This historical break was also partially a process of the rupture and quantitative transformation of production relations within the Peruvian social formation due to the penetration of imperial and finance capital:

The petty-bourgeoisie opposes imperialism but not capitalism, since commodity production is its material base...The proletariat is not destroyed by imperialism, but grows with it as capital expands. While both the petty-bourgeoisie and the proletariat are oppressed by imperial capital, the proletariat alone is exploited by imperial capital. While the petty-bourgeoisie involves itself in commodity production willingly in the hope of rising into the bourgeoisie, the proletariat involves itself in commodity production only because it has nothing to sell but its labor power, and produces commodities under the tyranny of capital. That is the proletariat is alienated from its labor; the petty-bourgeois is not. It is out of these production relationships that two political lines develop in the anti-imperialist struggle. The petty-bourgeois line calls for the expulsion of the imperialists and the maintenance of a utopian capitalism. The proletarian line also calls for the expulsion of imperialism but demands a socialist revolution. These two lines emerged clearly in Peru in the 1920's embodied in two men...Torre,...and Mariátegui,...¹⁹ (emphasis in the original).

The different class positions taken by Mariátegui (proletarian) and de la Torre (petty bourgeois) in relation to the growing workers' movement and the great proletarian class struggles of the 1920's under the repressive dictatorship of Augusto B. Leguía, was reflected in the programs of their respective political parties, the Peruvian Socialist Party (later the Peruvian Communist Party) and the APRA (The American Popular Revolutionary Alliance). The political program of the Peruvian Socialist Party encompassed among others, the following fundamental principles: that, the party is the vanguard of the proletariat; that, only through the praxis of the proletariat, which is anti-imperialist, can be the emancipation of the economy be effected; that, only through or within the scope of socialism can class and social contradictions be resolved in Peru; that, the economy of the country is linked to the world capitalist system, thus the necessity of solidarity with other proletarian revolutionary struggles; that, the contradictions of the capitalist economy grow sharper; and that capitalism was in its stage of

imperialism.²⁰ In contradistinction to these materialist propositions of the Socialist Party, the original program of the APRA formulated by Haya de la Torre (at his petty-bourgeois imperialist stage, that is rhetorical) was to serve as a base against "...North American imperialism; movement towards political unity in Latin America; nationalization of land and industry; internationalization of the Panama Canal; and world-wide solidarity with all oppressed peoples and classes"²¹; by 1965 (during phase, which continues up to the present, of APRA's collaboration with the forces of reaction, repression, and capital) these political propositions had become: "we now distinguish between U.S. Capital, which we clearly need, and exploitative capital that we reject, whatever its nationality may be; we now consider Latin American unity to be a utopian solution; we now hold that only public services should be nationalized; some time ago we discarded the idea of the internationalization of the Panama Canal; of course, we still support solidarity with oppressed peoples and classes."²² This has been, and continues to be, the collaborationist nature of the APRA in its historical betrayal of the Peruvian working class.

The great historical task of Mariátegui's political practice and its intervention within the historical process (on the on-going class struggle), was not only to combat the collaborationist and opportunistic nature of Haya de la Torre and the American Popular Revolutionary Alliance, but also, and more important, to forge a unity (fusion) between marxist theory (science and philosophy) and the worker's movement in Peru and ultimately in the whole of Latin America. It was this dual task which informed the historical, theoretical and social ensembles (elements) of Mariátegui's praxis. A praxis which in turn informed his political, social, economic and cultural writings (essays) in *Amauta*; some of which were collected together in the book, *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality*.²³

IV

If today we are quick to criticize Frantz Fanon, it is because his historical and social praxis forms a significant sediment of our African cultural and political climate: a praxis that has re-awakened the revolutionary impulse within African history; a praxis that has dialectically re-established the continuity of African history which had been ruptured by the imposition of European history in the form of colonial domination; a praxis that had forged a path and the action for the possible unification of Africa, a unification which is not based on the Negritude myth of the supposed cultural and racial homogeneity of the African peoples, but rather, a unity that is a product of armed struggle to overthrow colonial and neo-colonial domination, and the active participation of the masses

within history, Cabral has clearly indicated the historical trajectory of this unity:

*In Africa we are for African unity, but we are for African unity in favour of the African peoples. We consider unity to be a means, not an end. Unity can reinforce and accelerate the reaching of ends, but we must not betray the end. That is why we are not in such a great hurry to achieve African unity. We know that it will come, step by step, as a result of the fruitful efforts of the African peoples. It will come at the service of Africa and of humanity.*²⁴

As such, the historical legacy of Fanon is truly prodigious.

Nevertheless, certain historical correctives of Fanon's ellipses, torsions, convolutions, excesses and displacements are in order. It is not necessary for us to dwell on Fanon's great merits, which are enormous and incomparable; but rather, it is historically important to examine the nature of Fanon's oversights, and the historical trajectory of their thrust, in order to concretize the historical significance and political meaning of Fanon's legacy for contemporary political, social, economic and cultural struggles in the Third World today. For the most profound and pronounced historical correctives of the historical trajectory of Fanon's praxis were articulated by Nguyen Nghe,²⁵ the Vietnamese Communist philosopher, within the context of the heroic and recently successful Vietnamese Revolution, and by the late Amilcar Cabral²⁶, the founder, leader and ideologue of the PAIGC (the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde), and also great Marxist thinker, within the context of the Guinean (Cape Verdean) Revolution. These profound critiques are not mere accidents of history, but rather reflect the correct process of the dialectical within the contradictory movement of history. We shall examine only one type of Fanon's oversight, since it occupies a central position within his discourse, and indicates the nature of Fanon's ellipses.

Fanon writes in *The Wretched of the Earth*:

It cannot be too strongly stressed that in the colonial territories, the proletariat is the nucleus of the colonized population which has been most pampered by the colonial regime. The embryonic proletariat of the towns is in a comparatively privi-

leged position. In capitalist countries, the working class has nothing to lose; it is they who in the long run have everything to gain. In the colonial countries, the working class has everything to lose; in reality it represents that fraction of the colonized nation which is necessary and irreplaceable if the colonial machine is to run smoothly: it includes train conductors, taxi drivers, miners, dockers, interpreters, nurses, and so on. It is these elements which constitute the most faithful followers of the nationalist parties, and who because of the privileged place which they hold in the colonial system constitute also the "bourgeoisie" fraction of the colonized people.²⁷

and again:

In the colonies, it is at the very core of the embryonic working class that you find individualist behaviour.²⁸

For Fanon, the mass of country people, and particularly the peasantry remain "disciplined and altruistic. The individual stands aside in favour of the community." Continuing on this theoretical exposition Fanon adds:

... discover that the mass of the country people have never ceased to think of the problem of their liberation except in terms of violence, in terms of taking back the land from the foreigners, in terms of national struggle, and of armed insurrection.²⁹

For Fanon, the peasantry is the only revolutionary class within the colonial context, since it is the "... only spontaneously revolutionary force."³⁰ Fanon's inversion of the Marxist postulate, that the proletariat is the only revolutionary class within a capitalist mode of production (i.e., the structural position they occupy in the production process, for it is in the production process, not in the circulation process, that exploitation of the proletariat takes place through surplus extraction) is based on the "unique" and singular nature of colonialism:

The originality of the colonial context is that economic reality, inequality, and the immense difference of ways of

life never come to mask the human realities.... In the colonies the economic substructure is also a super-structure. The cause is the consequence; you are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich. This is why Marxist analysis should always be slightly stretched every time we have to do with the colonial problem. Everything up to and including the very nature of pre-capitalist society, so well explained by Marx, must here be thought out again.³¹

Nguyen Nghe's riposte, to Frantz Fanon's social analysis and theoretical formulation that the peasantry is the only revolutionary class within a colonial context, is in the classical Marxist tradition. Though paying tribute to Fanon's great achievement—"Fanon's book, which is an echo and reflection of the Algerian Revolution, through its ebullition as well as through the sparkles of truth it casts, retains, to a certain extent, the greatness and richness of that revolution... Unfortunately, Fanon has left us while the book remains. The respect that we owe him cannot prevent us from criticizing the theses put forth in this work³²--Nghe rightly criticizes Fanon's conception of social class and the denial of the revolutionary potential of the proletariat within a colonial context:

There is first the error of ranging in the same social class, the dockers and miners, with interpreters and nurses. The former constitute the real proletariat, the industrial working class (in the colonies, one has also to put in this class the workers in the big plantations); the latter are part of the small bourgeoisie,..... In the colonies the working class is not a privileged class in the sense that Fanon defines it, that is to say cajoled by the settlers; it is privileged in the revolutionary sense, by the fact of colonial exploitation, to conceive the way of the future for the society as a whole. In a revolutionary perspective, miners and dockers are much better placed than the doctor or lawyer, or the small peasant lost in his village.³³

Therefore, Fanon's oversight is due to a lack in his social analysis and theoretical discourse: the absence of a histori-

cal analysis of the particular nature of the mode of production within a colonial context (what is the *type* of its synthesis, the *nature* of its dominance, the *unity* of certain elements and processes within it), the particular social formation in which it forms the central whole. This would have concretized the differential analysis of the social relations of production within the context of the Third World countries ("The notion of the Third World, however, is devoid of any positive, sufficiently rich and dynamic content to base upon it a theory of historical development."³⁴) Amilcar Cabral, in a text delivered at the seminar held at the Frantz Fanon Center in Treviglio, Milan, analysed and discussed such fundamental issues in West African social formations as: the *existence* and *absence* of social stratification within different ethnic groups, the singular nature and ownership of the instruments of production, the position of women within the production process, the mediating factor of Islamic religion and the changing nature of relations between principal and secondary contradictions (and their aspects). The differential class formations within different ethnic groups and their synthesis constitute the social whole of the Guinean social structure. Cabral further analysed the type of synthesis of internal and external contradictions with the intervention of foreign capital, the contradictory relation between country and town, the embryonic nature of the Guinean working class; the revolutionary role of different social classes within the social and national liberation struggle; and last, but not least, the transformation of the PAIGC from being a *front* to being a *political party* of the Guinean revolutionary masses.³⁵ Such a totalizing conception of the historical process facilitates an objective analysis of the structural coordinates of class formation of class dominance within a singular social formation (a synthesis of modes of production).

It is within this historical context and in relation to this particular social analysis that Cabral supports the critique of Nghe's against Fanon's conception of the peasantry being a revolutionary class (force):

Here I should like to broach one key problem, which is of enormous importance for us, as we are a country of peasants, and that is the problem of whether or not the peasantry represents the main revolutionary force. I shall confine myself to my own country, Guinea, where it must be said at once that the peasantry is not a revolutionary force-- which may seem strange, particularly as we have based the whole of our armed liberation struggle on the peasantry.

A distinction must be drawn between a physical force and a revolutionary force; physically, the peasantry is a great force in Guinea: it is almost the whole of the population, it controls the nation's wealth, it is the peasantry which produces; but we know from experience what trouble we had convincing the peasantry to fight.³⁶

Cabral's articulation of the type of mode of production (developmental unity of its synthesis, and/or the thrust of its dominance), and the nature of class relations therein, is informed by a concrete analysis of the history of class formation within the Guinean social formation, pre and post-colonial domination (i.e., a concrete theorization of the process of history):

In fact in the general evolution of humanity and of each of the peoples of which it is composed, classes appear neither as a generalized and simultaneous phenomenon throughout the totality of these groups, nor as a finished, perfect, uniform and spontaneous whole. The definition of classes within one or several human groups is a fundamental consequence of the progressive development of the productive forces and of the characteristics of the distribution of the wealth produced by the group or usurped from others.³⁷

This leads us to pose the following question: does history begin only with the development of the phenomenon of 'class', and consequently of class struggle? To reply in the affirmative would be to place outside history the whole period of life of human groups from the discovery of hunting, and later of nomadic and sedentary agriculture, to the organization of herds and the private appropriation of land. It would also be to consider--and this we fuse to accept--that various human groups in Africa, Asia and Latin America were living without history, or outside history at the time when they were subjected to the yoke of imperialism.³⁸

This means that before the class struggle--and necessarily after it, since in this world there is no before without an after--one or several factors was and will be the motive force of history. It is not difficult to see that this factor in the history of

each human group is the mode of production--the level of production forces and the pattern of ownership--characteristic of that group.³⁹

This is a result of the uneven development of human societies, whether caused by internal reasons or by one of more external factors exerting an accelerating or slowing-down influence on their evolution.⁴⁰

The absence in Fanon's exposition of an analysis of a mode of production lead to an oversight of the law of uneven and combined development, which is a fundamental law of the process of social development (whether through its qualitative crisis and breaks or through its "harmonious" growth) of underdeveloped countries, which were the concrete object of Fanon's discourse. By declaring that the peasant class was a revolutionary force, Fanon confused and equated class origin with class position,⁴¹ by obliterating the dialectical distinction of the historical process in which a class may be a leading force, a moving force, or a principle force⁴² (or the possible synthesis of these three nodes in a concrete historical subject). This oversight of Fanon's was a product of complex and interrelated objective historical factors; it was a product of a blinding illumination.

V

Nevertheless, both Frantz Fanon and José Carlos Mariátegui have left us a historical legacy which is profoundly anti-imperialist, and implacably universal, materialistic, in helping a people's liberation from economic, political, social and cultural oppression; a historical legacy from which develops a social and cultural oppression; a historical legacy from which develops a social praxis which is an instrument for liberating people from the realm of necessity to the realm of freedom. Herein lies their historical significance for us today.

Footnote:

1. Dore, Elizabeth and John Weeks. "Class Alliances and Class Struggle in Peru," in *Latin American Perspectives*, issue 14, Vol. IV, Number 3, Summer 1977, p.4-5.
2. Mariátegui, José Carlos. "The Anti-Imperialist Perspective," in *New Left Review*, Number 70, November-December

- 1971, p.72.
3. Cited in an anonymous introduction to Mariátegui's "The Anti-Imperialist Perspective" in *New Left Review*, Number 70, November-December 1971, p.66.
 4. Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*, Grove Press, Inc., New York, 1968, p.97 ff.
 5. Cabral, Amilcar. *Revolution in Guinea: Selected Texts* Monthly Review Press, New York, 1969.
 6. Debray, Régis. *Prison Writings*. Allen Lane, London, 1973, p.89.
 7. *Ibid.*, p.100.
 8. Debray, Régis. *Che's Guerilla War*, Penguin Books, London, 1975, p.44.
 9. *Ibid.*, p.46.
 10. Althusser, Louis and Etienne Balibar. *Reading Capital*. Pantheon Books, New York, 1971, p.91-92.
 11. *Ibid.*, p.97.
 12. Bollinger, William. "The Bourgeois Revolution in Peru: A Conception of Peruvian History" in *Latin American Perspectives*, issue 14, Vol. IV, No.3, Summer 1977, p.19.
 13. Baines, John M. *Revolution in Peru: Mariátegui and the Myth* University of Alabama Press, Alabama, 1972, p.13. A valuable book, though its political analysis and appraisal of Mariátegui is very questionable.
 14. Cited by William Rex Crawford. *A Century of Latin American Thought*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Revised Edition, 1967, p.181.
 15. Cited by John M. Baines, op. cit., p.16.
 16. Such a view is held by bourgeois scholars, for example John M. Baines, op. cit., chapter 10.
 17. The full text (the opening essay of the first issue of *Amauta*) is cited by John M. Baines, op. cit., p.64-66. Our specific citation is on p.66.
 18. William Bollinger, op. cit., p.46.

19. Elizabeth Dore, John Weeks, and William Bollinger, an introduction to Victor Villanueva's "The Petty-Bourgeois Ideology of the Peruvian Aprista Party" in *Latin American Perspectives*, issue 14, Vol. IV, Number 3, Summer 1977, p.58.
20. Cited in Appendix I, "Program of the Peruvian Socialist Party, 1928", by John M. Baines, op. cit., p.148-149.
21. Cited by Victor Villanueva, "The Petty-Bourgeois Ideology of the Peruvian Aprista Party", op. cit., p.59. Part of a statement by Haya de la Torre, while in exile in Mexico (1924), defining the nature and political thrust of the APRA.
22. Cited by Victor Villanueva, op. cit., p.59-60 ff. A statement by Ramiro Priale, the Secretary General of the APRA, in an interview with *Time* magazine.
23. A detailed reading of this Marxist classic will be attempted in another essay.
24. Cabral, Amilcar. op. cit., p.80.
25. Nghe, Nguyen. "Frantz Fanon et les Problemes de L'Independence", in *La Pensée*, No. 107, Fe rier 1963. Translated as "Frantz Fanon and the Problems of Independence" to appear in the forthcoming *Fanon Quarterly* (January 1978) from the Fanon Research and Development Center, Los Angeles.
26. Cabral, Amilcar. op. cit., and *Return to the Source: Selected Speeches*, Monthly Review Press with Africa Information Service, New York and London, 1973.
27. Fanon, Frantz. op. cit., p.108-109.
28. *Ibid.*, p.111.
29. *Ibid.*, p.127.
30. Emphasized by Emanuel Hansen in quoting Fanon, in *Frantz Fanon: Social and Political Thought*, Ohio State University Press, 1977, p.147.
31. Fanon, Frantz. op. cit., p.40.
32. Nghe, Nguyen. "Frantz Fanon and the Problems of Independence", in the upcoming *Fanon Quarterly*, p.4-5.

33. *Ibid.*, p.10-11.
34. *Ibid.*, p.15.
35. The text, "Brief Analysis of the Social Structure in Guinea", in *Revolution in Guinea: Selected Texts*, p.56-75.
36. *Ibid.*, p.61. My emphasis.
37. *Ibid.*, p.93.
38. *Ibid.*, p.95.
39. *Ibid.*
40. *Ibid.*, p.97.
41. Delbray, Regis. *Che's Guerilla War*, p.53.
42. *Ibid.*, p.51.

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