

The Morality of Frantz Fanon's Philosophy of Violence

Chuka Fidelis Aghamelu, *PhD*
Department of Philosophy
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka
Anambra State, Nigeria

Cyril Emeka Ejike
Department of Philosophy
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka
Anambra State, Nigeria

Abstract

This paper examines Fanon's justification for violence within the context of anti-colonial struggle vis-à-vis the situationism and utilitarianism in which morality in the colonial world seems to be grounded. It employs the method of analysis to establish whether Fanon's justification for violent struggle meets the moral standards of situationism and utilitarianism. The research finds that deleterious effects of violent resistance on both the colonisers and the colonised make Fanon's commitment to creation of new humanity and restoration of human dignity through violence counter-productive. This is because his violence-laden decolonisation view tends to engender disastrous consequences for humanity, contrary to beneficial consequences of an action which distinctively define situationism and utilitarianism. Thus, Fanon's justification for counter-violence falls short of moral standards of both situationism and utilitarianism. The paper concludes therefore, that though we act and decide in a situation, we are morally obliged to weigh the pros and cons of our moral choices and actions, and opt for acts that relatively promote humanity for the common good.

Keywords: Fanon, morality, situationism, utilitarianism, violence

Introduction

Etymologically, morality is derived from the Latin word *mores* meaning that which concerns conduct, character, behaviour, or actions measured as being right or wrong good or bad, just or unjust, and so on. According to the Concise Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy, "morality is a distinct sphere within the domain of normative thinking about action and feeling; the whole domain, however is the subject of ethics" (2000, p. 295).

In a broad term, morality is a system of code or set of social principles and norms that guide or are intended to guide the conduct of people in a society. Morality reflects the actual

behaviour of social community, expressing what members ought to do or avoid in their interpersonal relations. Moral principles should help promote mutual welfare and common good.

Violence is the 'use of force to harm or destroy human beings or non-human objects for the purpose of preserving or altering political institutions, systems, governments, or policies' (Fashina, 1989, p. 181). It involves any behaviour (action or words) that is intended to hurt, abuse, injure, damage or destroy someone or something physically and psychologically. Thus, violence may be physical or psychological. Physical violence involves the use of physical

weapons like fists, whips, guns, machetes, and so on to inflict pains or injuries on someone or something. Psychological violence is the employment of words or gestures to cause emotional harm to someone or something.

Fanon conceives of the violence in the colonial world as both physical and psychological which are intended to diminish the sense of identity and dignity of the colonised. He therefore charges the colonised to free themselves from the grips of colonial oppression and exploitation, and restore their dignity and self-worth through violent resistance. Fanon develops a violence-laden decolonisation theory as a moral response to colonial violence.

The purpose of this paper is to examine Fanon's idea of right and wrong within the context of anti-colonial struggle in order to establish if his philosophy of violence can ever be justified on moral grounds. To this end, this paper will discuss colonial situations which shape Fanon's moral ideas in the colonial world. Thereafter, it will explore situationism and utilitarianism as theoretical frameworks for Fanon's moral ideas. It will then delve into Fanon's moral ideas in the colonial world as well as the natives and settlers' ideas of right and wrong. Finally, the paper will evaluate the morality of Fanon's theory of violence and draw a conclusion.

Background to Fanon's outlook on morality

Fanon's outlook on morality within the context of anti-colonial struggle was shaped by his experience of colonial violence when he was serving as the head of the Psychiatry department of Blida-Joinville hospital in Algeria

(which was then part of France). He noticed the aftermath of colonial violence on the human psyche as he was offering treatment to French and Algerian soldiers in the hospital (Aghamelu & Ejike, 2017).

Besides, his experience of racism in Europe, the French Caribbean and Africa during the Second World War, when he joined the Free French Army, had an enduring influence on his notion of morality in the colonial world. It was observed that in the army, Black Frenchmen were treated as inferiors as they were isolated from the whites and made to stay in a separate place. Fanon notes that violence is the defining feature of the colonial world. For him, "the colonial world is a Manichean world" (1963, p. 40). The world is partitioned into two opposing zones, namely, the zone of the natives and that of the settlers. There is conflict between the colonisers (the settlers) and the colonised (the natives).

The colonisers regard their zone "as being the sole sphere of humanity. So, if one does not belong to that sphere, one cannot claim to represent a civilized human species" (Aghamelu & Ejike, 2017, p. 25). Thus, the natives are being marginalised, enslaved, oppressed, abused and treated as inhuman by the colonisers. Fanon, therefore, views colonialism as a system of exploitation that treats the natives as slaves and animals and makes them feel inferior to the whites. He writes thus: "In fact the terms the settler uses when he mentions the native are zoological terms. He speaks of the yellow man's reptilian motions, of the stink of the native quarter, of breeding swarms, of foulness, of spawn, of gesticulation. When the settler seeks to describe the native fully in exact terms

he constantly refers to the bestiality”(1963, p. 41).

Fanon explains further that the exploitation of the natives by the colonisers is facilitated by use of physical weapons and brute force. In the light of this, he asserts:

The policeman and the soldier, by their immediate presence and their frequent direct action maintain contact with the native and advise him by means of rifle butts napalm not to budge. It is obvious here that the agents of government speak the language of pure force. The intermediary does not lighten the oppression, nor seek to hide the domination; he shows them up and puts them into practice with the clear conscience of an upholder of the peace; yet he is the bringer of violence into the home and into the mind of the native (1963, p. 37).

Thus, the rights, dignity and values of the blacks are punctured in the colonial world. There is no regard for culture, identity, and worth of the blacks. In his preface to *The Wretched of the Earth*, Sartre (1963, p. 14) sums up the dehumanising treatment meted out to the natives in this way:

The order is given to reduce the inhabitants of the annexed country to the level of superior monkeys in order to justify the settler's treatment of them as beasts of burden. Violence in the colonies does not only have for its aims the keeping of these enslaved men at arm's length; it seeks to dehumanize them. Everything will be done to wipe out their traditions, to

substitute our language for theirs and to destroy their culture without giving them ours.

In the light of the dehumanising conditions in the colonial world, Fanon proposes counter violence as a means of righting the wrong, restoring the natives' dignity, and creating new humanity.

Theoretical framework

In this paper, the analysis of Fanon's theory of violence is built around situationism and utilitarianism as moral theories. The use of these moral frameworks will enable us to determine the extent to which Fanon succeeds in applying situationism and utilitarianism in framing his theory of violence.

1. Situationism

Situationism is a moral theory “which emphasizes the situation as the determining factor in the morality of any action”(Omeregbe, 1993, p. 254). According to Higgins (1954, p. 132), situationism is “a system which is partially a reaction against legalistic formalism in ethics and partially a by-product of existentialism which stresses the actual existent, the value and uniqueness of the person.”

This theory credited to Joseph Fletcher (as cited in Omeregbe, 1993) argues that an action is right or wrong depending on the situation in which it is performed. Hence, the same kind of action cannot remain morally the same in all situations. Rightness or wrongness is not something inherent in certain actions as properties of such actions. Rather, we attribute the term ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ to an action by

considering the situation in which it is performed.

Accordingly, situationism insists that laws are only useful if they are interpreted with reference to the circumstances in which an action is performed (Eneh, 2001). Since the theory holds that it is the circumstance that determines the value of an action, it opposes all moral theories that "fail to recognize the role of situations or circumstances in ethical decision-taking" (Eneh, 2001, p. 57). Thus, for situationists, we need to carefully study the situation in which an action is performed before we pass a moral judgment on the action. This means that we must examine the total reality, including circumstances intentions and consequences before moral conclusion is drawn.

According to situationism, "there is no moral norm or law that is absolute in the sense that it is always applicable in all situations. Rather, it asserts that a moral law may be applicable in one situation but not in another" (Eboh, 2005, p. 36). The theory states that the only law that is absolute and applicable in all situations is the law of love. What it implies is that any action which is motivated by love is morally right.

Fletcher (as cited in Omeregbe, 1993) enumerates four working fundamental tenets of situationism. They are pragmatism, positivism, relativism and personalism.

Pragmatism: Situation ethics is both pragmatic and utilitarian. It is pragmatic since it utilises the practical consequences of moral actions as a criterion for determining the truth and value of such actions. An action is true and meaningful if it has practical

usefulness or works in practice. It is also utilitarian because it endorses actions that have beneficial results and rejects those acts whose consequences are disastrous. It is the good or evil consequences of an action that determines its rightness or wrongness.

In this sense, situationism adopts teleological approach to making moral decisions. It concentrates on the ultimate goal or end of an action and thus one is required to estimate the consequences of one's action before making moral decisions. An action is morally right if its good effects outweigh the bad ones. Accordingly, we must choose the lesser evil when we are placed between two alternative evils and we must choose the greater good when we are placed between two alternative goods. Situationism therefore calls for weighing of various values prior to making moral decisions.

Positivism: Situationism holds that moral decisions and actions must be based on practical experience and not on metaphysical principles or ideas. An action or decision is morally justifiable if it is shaped by sensory experience and observation, and interpreted through reason and logic. The point situationism is making is that verifiable sense experiences must provide a basis for our moral actions and decisions. It is the observable and verifiable situation on the ground that determines the rightness or wrongness of an action. Thus, the theory adopts an empirical approach to moral decisions and actions (Omeregbe, 1993).

Relativism: Situationism maintains that morality is relative; there is no absolute moral law or truth. Different societies have different ideas of what

constitutes moral or immoral actions. This is due to varying situations as well as customs and laws that exist in different societies. Morality of human actions and decisions therefore depends on the situation. What is morally right in one situation can be considered morally wrong in another situation. No human action is therefore, intrinsically good or evil, absolutely right or wrong.

Personalism: Situationism considers a human person as the supreme value and key in the estimation and evaluation of moral actions and decisions. Human well-being must be taken into consideration when making moral decisions since morality is meant for the development of the human person. Moral laws are designed to promote humanity and not to destroy it in this regard, Omeregbe states that "morality is meant for the human person, not the human person for morality" (1993, p. 258).

Therefore, human welfare is pivotal in determining the rightness or wrongness of moral actions and decisions. It is worthy of note that situationism does not deny the fact that there are universal moral laws. However, the contention of the theory is that these laws should not be regarded as absolute which must be obeyed in all circumstances, at all times and at all costs.

2. Utilitarianism

Utilitarianism is an "ethical theory which holds that the morality of an act consists essentially of its utility as means for attainment of happiness of man, happiness in most cases being considered as temporal" (Eboh, 2005, p. 45). Utilitarianism maintains, therefore, that utility (happiness or

pleasure) is the standard of morality. That is to say that it is the yardstick for measuring the rightness or wrongness of an action. An action is right if it produces happiness or satisfies more than any other alternative action, and wrong if otherwise.

According to Jeremy Bentham (as cited in Omeregbe, 1993), one of the main proponents of this theory, the measure of right and wrong is the greatest happiness of the greatest number. He believes that "man is by nature a pleasure-seeking and a pain-avoiding animal" (Bentham, as cited in Omeregbe, 1993, p. 233). For Ayer, "one of the principal utilitarian tenets...is that rightness or wrongness of an action depends upon its consequences" (1985, p. 36). He states that utilitarianism holds that pleasure alone is intrinsically good and pain alone is intrinsically evil. Thus, an action which produces pleasure is right, while an action that produces pain is wrong.

Utilitarianism is said to belong to the consequential action of morality. For utilitarians, therefore, the determinant of one's action is the consequence, and not nature. Utilitarianism is a goal-based moral theory which is after what gives pleasure, irrespective of the action leading to such pleasure. This is why it is often called a teleological moral theory. There are two forms of utilitarianism, namely, act utilitarianism and rule utilitarianism.

Act utilitarianism holds that actions which will produce the greatest amount of satisfaction to the greatest number of people should be performed. Here, the rightness or wrongness of an action is determined by its results and not by adopted rules about the kinds of

action that produce the greatest happiness of the greatest number. On the contrary, rule utilitarianism insists on the performance of action in accordance with adopted rules (Ekwutosi, 2006). It maintains that those rules which will result in the greatest amount of satisfaction to the greatest number of people should be followed.

The idea of right and wrong in Fanon's Philosophy of Violence

Fanon's idea of right and wrong is implicit in his justification for violence as a moral response to colonial oppression and exploitation. He believes that understanding the context in which an action is performed is necessary in deciding whether an action is right or wrong. In other words, what is right or wrong depends on the situation. Therefore, Fanon's view of right and wrong is situational. In this regard, Fanon states:

As far as the native is concerned, morality is very concrete; it is to silence the settler's defiance, to break his flaunting violence – in a word, to put him out of the picture. The well-known principle that all men are equal will be illustrated in the colonies from the moment that the native claims that he is the equal of the settler. In fact, he has already decided to eject him and to take his place; as we see it, it is a whole material and moral universe which is breaking up (1963, pp. 43-44).

Ordinarily, Fanon would not advocate violence, but for him, the inhuman

condition of the natives in the colonies makes the use of violence necessary. He admits in the *The Wretched of the Earth* that somehow in some case violence may not be appropriate. He writes thus: "We know for sure today that in Algeria the test of force was inevitable, but other countries through political action and through the work of clarification undertaken by a party have led their people to the same results" (1963, p. 193). However, within the context of anti-colonial struggle, he holds that violent resistance is inevitable if the natives must gain their freedom and achieve equal status with the settlers.

Fanon maintains that morality is relative to varying situations. He argues that the term 'right' or 'wrong' is not a property inherent in an action, but an attribute of a situation. Certain circumstances in different societies and epoch define morality. In the words of Fanon:

The problem of truth ought also to be considered. In everyone, among the people, truth is the property of the national cause. No absolute verity, no discourse on the purity of the soul can shake this position. The native replies to the living lie of the colonial situation by an equal falsehood. His dealings with his fellow nationals are open; they are strained and incomprehensible with regard to the settlers. Truth is that which hurries on the break-up of the colonialist regime; it is that which promotes the emergence of the nation; it is all that protects the natives, and ruins the foreigners. In this

colonialist context there is no truthful behaviour: and the good is quite simply that which is evil for them (1963, p. 49).

However, the question is: why does Fanon believe that violence is the right option for extricating the natives from the grips of colonial domination? In other words, why does he think that violent resistance is right within the context of anti-colonial struggle? First, Fanon thinks that violent resistance is right because, for him, it is only through decolonisation in form of removing the oppressors violently can the oppressed free themselves. As he puts it: "The colonized man find his freedom in and through violence" (1963, p. 85).

He conceives of decolonisation as a violent phenomenon because, for him, it is "the meeting of two forces, opposed to each other by their very nature, which in fact owe their originality to that sort of substantiation which results from and is nourished by the situation in the colonies" (1963, p. 35). He tries to justify morally his notion of decolonisation as a violent phenomenon. For him, decolonisation is necessarily violent because it seeks to right the evils of colonialism. Just as colonisation seeks to violently uproot the natives from their cultural placing and make them inhuman, so is decolonisation a veritable means of creating new persons and making the natives become humans again (Aghamelu&Ejike, 2017).

Again, Fanon (1963) understands and justifies violence in two main ways. First, it is an instrument for achieving and sustaining political power - the power to rule. This rule can be colonial, exploitative or self-

determining. Second, it is an organic force or energy. As energy, it operates analogously with physical laws, in which the imposition of force provokes an equal reaction. For him, the instrumental utilisation of violence works in tandem with violence as a natural energy or force which can be channeled to create a new and better world.

Fanon's argument for violence as the only effective way of ending colonial domination and exploitation is reinforced by a reactive argument in which the natives need to perpetrate violence against the colonisers as the only means of expressing and getting rid of the violence they (the natives) experience in the colonial world. Thus, Fanon (1963) contends that violence, as an organic force, is a condition for the productive use of violence as a political instrument for overthrowing the colonisers. In so doing, the natives cleanse themselves and their world of violence.

Given the oppression, police brutality, racial discrimination and psychological abuses meted out to the natives, Fanon also attempts to justify violence as a means of purging the natives' minds of ill violent feelings engendered by the violence-laden colonial world. In his words: "At the individual level, violence is a cleansing force. It rids the colonized of their inferiority complex, of their passive and despairing attitude. It emboldens them, and restores their self confidence" (1963, p. 93).

Fanon's argument is that the colonisers have first violated the universal moral principles by denying the colonised equal right to human dignity and respect, and right not to be held in servitude or subjected to

inhuman treatment. Hence, the right thing to do is not to force the natives to comply with universal moral norms but to employ an effective and necessary means to liberate themselves from their dehumanising experience and restore their human dignity, respect, and self-worth. That necessarily means, for Fanon, is violence. He views the natives' violent resistance as a demonstration of their equality with the settlers and as a means of achieving equal status and peaceful coexistence between two conflicting parties.

Fanon's justification for the rightness of violence resistance is also based on his claim that the national bourgeoisie are complicit in the colonial domination and exploitation. They capitalise on anti-colonial struggle to acquire more power and pursue their personal interests, to the detriment of the poor natives. Fanon (1963) thus argues that the national bourgeoisie have taken for themselves the power and advantages that are heritage of the colonial era and have just replaced the colonial bourgeoisie. Aghamelu and Ejike (2017, p. 29) explain that:

Though the national bourgeoisie are violent in their words before the common natives to keep the nationalist zeal alive, they are reformist in their attitudes. In other words, they speak a lot and in great words to their people without any action. They claim to be identifying with the plight of the poor natives, but they do not want the transformation of the colonial system.

Fanon (1963) therefore sees any attempt by the natives to entrust their

eventual freedom to negotiation between the elite class and the colonisers as a false path. This is because, for him, the oppressive rules and exploitation will continue if the corrupt native elite rule the people under the dictates of the colonisers, thereby making it impossible to restore human dignity. Violence for freedom, distinct from violence for domination is, therefore, for Fanon, the necessary means through which the natives can liberate themselves and create new humanity.

Fanon's claim that it is morally right to adopt revolutionary violence in resistance and defeat of oppression is in line with the Marxist revolutionary tradition. He alludes to the Marxist doctrine that the violence of the political and economic domination as well as the exploitation of the working class by the capitalist state must and will be resisted and eventually overthrown through the violent action by the revolutionary working class (1963).

The natives' idea of right and wrong

Fanon (1963) notes that the dehumanising experience of the natives makes them become insensitive to universal norms of morality. For the natives, what is right is violent resistant that will lead to the destruction of the settlers and the existing laws that propagate their (settlers') personal interests. The natives frown upon and mock at western values whenever those values are mentioned. This is because the settlers employ violence to affirm the supremacy of their values over the natives' culture and thought. The natives in turn find their freedom in and through violence. Fanon writes thus:

The native is declared in sensitive to ethics, he represents not only the absence of values, but also the negation of values. He is, let us dare to admit, the enemy of values and in this sense he is the absolute evil. He is the corrosive element, destroying all that comes near him; he is the deforming element, disfiguring all that has to do with guilty or morality; he is the depository of maleficent power, the unconscious and irretrievably instrument of blind forces (1963, p. 40).

Whereas the settlers employ violence to gain dominance over the natives, the use of violence by the natives is to gain freedom and independence. The natives believe that any action that will dislodge the settlers, dismantle the existing laws and pave the way for them to affirm their existence as well as their cultural identity and values is morally good. Fanon (1963) asserts that the exploited natives insist that their liberation implies the use of all means and, more importantly, the use of brute force. That is to say that their concern is not on the nature, but the consequence of their actions. Therefore, the natives' notion of right and wrong is utilitarian and situational.

For the natives, the only way to recapture their humanity and create a new and better world is to extricate themselves from the grip of colonialism by violent resistance. They are therefore ready to fight to overthrow the existing colonial government in order to free themselves. In the light of this, Fanon states: "One step more and he is ready to fight to be more than the settlers. In

fact, he has decided to eject him and to take his place; as we see it; it is a whole material and moral universe which is breaking up" (1963, p. 43-44).

The natives hold that it is morally justifiable to repel the colonialists and liberate themselves from colonial oppressors. They see the settlers as their enemy that must be overthrown. The basis of the natives' argument is that the settlers first initiate the process of domination and exploitation which has caused psychological damage to them (the natives). Violent resistance, for the natives, will lead to the cathartic liberation of their souls and restoration of their self-confidence.

The natives believe that once they uproot the settlers violently through decolonisation, they will achieve self-determination. Through self-rule, they hope to build a new human world in which their identity, dignity and self-worth will be restored and promoted. The creation of a new humanity can be realised through building a national identity and promoting national culture.

The settlers' idea of right and wrong

The settlers' view of right and wrong is situational and utilitarian. They do not uphold the universal norms of morality. They fashion out what is right and wrong for them. They enact law and perpetuate acts that will ensure continuous enslavement, exploitation and domination of the natives. Hence, the natives accuse them of shattering the concept of humanity. The settlers consider any attempt by the natives to free themselves and affirm their existence as wrong. This is because the settlers believe that they are superior

species and that their values and culture are supreme.

The settlers believe in laws and actions that serve their individual interests at the expense of the natives. They make obnoxious policies and use law enforcement agents to oppress and maltreat the natives to maintain the status quo and ensure that the natives remain inferior to them. They employ violence to dominate the natives and affirm their supremacy over the natives. For the settlers, the natives are mere objects to be used as means to an end. The concern of the settlers is to accumulate wealth and enrich themselves, irrespective of the means of such acquisition. Thus, whatever satisfy their personal aggrandisement is right, while that which goes contrary is wrong. Fanon (1963, p. 46) explains thus:

The native intellectual has learnt from his masters that the individual ought to express himself fully. The colonialist bourgeoisie had hammered into the natives' mind the idea of a society of individuals where each person shuts himself up in his own subjectivity, and whose only wealth is individual thought. Now the native who has the opportunity to return to the people during the struggle for freedom will discover the falseness of this theory. The very forms of organization of the struggle will suggest to him a different vocabulary. Brother, sister, friend – these are words outlawed by the colonialist bourgeoisie, because for them my brother is my purse, my friend is part of my scheme for getting-on.

Juxtaposition of the natives and settlers' ideas of right and wrong

Fanon (1963) observes that what is right for the natives is wrong for the settlers due to clash of interests and values. While the natives believe that it is right to use violence to extricate themselves from the grip of colonialism and create new humanity, the settlers hold that it is right to employ violence to dominate, exploit, and enslave the natives. In other words, the use of violence for freedom is right for the natives, while the use of violence for domination is right for the settlers.

For the natives, any action that will destroy the colonialists and the existing laws is good, but for the settlers any action or law that will prevent the freedom of the natives is good. While the former consider as wrong any action or law that perpetually enslaves them and makes them inferior to the settlers, the latter consider as wrong any action or law that prevents them from using the natives as mere means to an end. Thus, the views of both camps on right and wrong are utilitarian and situational. They are ready and willing to employ whatever means possible to actualize their goals. While the utilitarianism of the settlers lies in perpetual domination and exploitation of the natives, that of the native lies in their freedom from the situation of alienation and oppression. Fanon (1963, p. 49) captures both camps' notions of right and wrong in this way:

The native replies to the living lie of the colonial situation by an equal falsehood. His dealing with his fellow nationals are open, they are strained and

incomprehensible with regard to the settlers. Truth is that which hurries on the break-up of the colonialist regime; it is that which promotes the emergence of the nation; it is all that protects the natives, and ruins the foreigners. In this colonialist context there is no truthful behaviour: and the good is quite simply that which is evil for 'them'.

Evaluation and conclusion

Disgusted by the violence of the colonial regime, Fanon sees violent revolution within the context of anti-colonial struggle as a moral response to colonial oppression and exploitation. In his view, counter-violence is needed to counter-balance the violence of the colonisers, for action and reaction are equal and opposite (Newton's third law of motion). As Fanon puts it: "The violence of the colonial regime and the counter-violence of the native balance each other and respond to each other in an extraordinary reciprocal homogeneity" (1963, p. 87).

In the words of Bernasconi, it is only through 'the dialectical reciprocity of antagonism' (2010: 39) can the dialectic be resolved. Therefore, in Fanon's thinking, true decolonisation lies in violent confrontation as it does not only resolve the dialectic of opposition inherent in the colonial system, but also restore the dignity, identity, cultural legacy, and humanity of the natives that have been eroded by colonisation. So, basically, for Fanon, the return of violence for violence is the only avenue of regaining and restoring the humanity and dignity of the natives respectively.

No doubt, the dehumanisation and degradation of the natives in the

colonial world prompts Fanon to advocate violent resistance. He does not only see concrete dehumanising situations in the colonial world as a moral justification for his theory of violence, but also the utilitarian gains - cathartic experience, restoration of cultural legacy and identity, human dignity, creation of new humanity, and so on - he envisages.

Now, let us examine Fanon's justification for violent confrontation. His justification can be summed up as follows: It promotes individual self-respect; realizes political independence, and creates a new humanity. Violence promotes individual respect because, for him, it destroys myths, releases tension and aggression, and helps the oppressed take charge of their own lives. It actualises the realisation of political independence and decolonisation since it reveals the reality of colonial violence and clears the foundation upon which a new order may be built. Violence lastly creates a new humanity by building national identity and promoting national culture.

However, Fanon's case for revolutionary violence seems absurd. The common denominator of situationism and utilitarianism, which provide frameworks for Fanon's justification for violent struggles, is that both moral theories approve of actions and decisions that have beneficial effects and reject those decisions and actions whose consequences are disastrous.

Though every situation is an opportunity for man to act, judicious and proper consideration of the consequences of one's actions is prior to any moral decisions and acts. From the perspective of situationism, an

action is morally good if its good effects outweigh the bad ones.

History and experience have shown that the employment of violence against violence "has only succeeded in escalating violence" (Akpuru-Aja, 2007, p. 112), thereby adding to the vicious circle of violence, instead of creating a new humanity and achieving national unity, among other good benefits that Fanon envisages. For instance, violent revolution attempts made by some African nations in a quest for political emancipation resulted in the Nigerian Civil War, the Mozambican Civil War, the Zaire/Angolan conflict, and the Nationalist Guerillas and the central government in Ethiopia (Nweke, 2013).

Nevertheless, the negative effects of these armed struggles still scourge those countries till date and, regrettably, issues that triggered the violent struggles and confrontation are yet to be completely addressed. Besides, solidarity still eludes sections of the nations that employed such armed struggles. The fact is that violent resistance is usually counter-productive. A violent struggle that attempts to punish and destroy oppressors will initiate a constant cycle of violence, thereby impeding the expected change.

Again, it is untenable to hold that the identity conflict between the colonisers and the colonised can be solved by brute force. We are not bound by any moral obligation to fight colonialism by means of violence, irrespective of situations in the colony. Most African countries like South Africa, Nigeria and Ghana got their independence through nationalist struggles, rather than armed struggles. Indeed, violence inherent in the colonial world calls for determined, strong and

united will of the people in order to present a united front and embark on non-violent demonstration and agitation for self-rule. The concerted efforts of the colonized should be channeled into achieving independence through non-violent struggles. The essence of non-violent resistance is to eliminate oppression without harming the oppressors. In this way, the oppressed consistently win the understanding, friendship and cooperation of the oppressed.

Fanon succumbs to the temptation of conceiving decolonisation as a radical overthrow of the colonial oppressors and/or means of getting rid of colonial system, on account of a Manichean struggle. However, decolonisation is better viewed as a process of achieving economic and political independence through proper sensitisation and re-education aimed at decolonising the mind and creating self-consciousness needed for freedom. It is in this regard that Julius Nyerere (as cited in Okolo, 1993) advocates education for self-reliance in his Ujamaa socialism. Any new society that emerges out of a violent struggle cannot withstand the test of time; it will soon collapse, just like Marxian socialism - a product of class struggle.

Finally, Fanon's call for violent resistance within the context of anti-colonial struggles makes a mockery of his claim to be committed to promoting humanity, regardless of one's race, status or class. This is because humanity is indivisible. When one brutalises one's oppressor/enemy, one brutalises another human being. Counter-violence destroys both the colonised and the colonisers, as well as their dignity, respect and self-worth. Fanon (1967) himself admits in his

book, *Black Skin, White Masks*, that violence can cause more psychological damage to the psyche of both the colonised and the colonisers. He even gives an instance of patients that suffered from various types of anxiety like neurosis which he treated when he was in the hospital of Blinda-Joinville in Algeria.

Thus, the natives and the settlers “deprive themselves and the world of the benefits of their potential contributions to humanity” (Aghamelu & Ejike 2017, 39) through counter-violence. In the light of this, Caute (1970) argues that Fanon's proposal for violence contradicts his thirst for humanism. He states thus: “If, for example, a peasant kills his enemy who belongs in another social class, he kills another human being, another man. Killing itself is dehumanizing” (1970, p. 87). Therefore, humanity and human dignity cannot be restored through counter-violence.

In conclusion, no doubt, Fanon is very committed to the equal right of every human being to have their human dignity and self-worth recognised and respected by others. It is the dehumanising experience of the blacks in the colonial world that shapes his decolonisation theory as a violent phenomenon. However, his recommendation of violence as a means of achieving freedom cannot be justified on moral grounds. This is because the result of his proposed revolutionary violence falls short of the standards of situationism and utilitarianism in which his justification for counter-violence are grounded. Violent struggle poses a danger for humanity and hampers the realisation of human potentials and common good. As we act and decide in a situation, we

have a moral obligation to weigh the pros and cons of our moral choices and actions, and opt for acts that relatively promote humanity for the common good.

References

- A concise routledge encyclopedia of philosophy. 2000. London: Routledge.
- Aghamelu, F. C. and Ejike E. C. 2017. “Understanding Fanon's theory of violence and its relevance to contemporary violence in Africa.” *IGWEBUIKE: An African Journal of Arts and Humanities* 3 (4): 20-39. <http://igwebuikejournals.com>
- Akpuru-Aja, A. 2007. *Basic concepts, issues and strategies of peace and conflict resolution*. Enugu: Keny and Brothers Ent.
- Ayer, A. 1985. *Freedom and morality and other essays*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Bernasconi, R. 2010. The wretched of the earth as the fulfillment of Sartre's critique of dialectical reason. *Sartre Studies International* 16 (2): 36-46.
- Caute, D. 1970. *Fanon*. London: Fontana.
- Eneh, J. O. 2001. *War and peace: Aspects of practical ethics*. Calabar: Afranedoh Ltd.
- Fanon, F. 1963. *The wretched of the earth*. Trans. C. Farrington. New York: Grove Weidenfeld.
- Fanon, F. 1967. *Black skins, white masks*. Trans. C. L. Markmann. New York: Grove Press.
- Fashina, O. 1989. Franz Fanon and the ethical justification of anti-colonial violence. *Social Theory and Practice* 15 (2): 179-212.
- Higgins, T. J. 1958. *Man as man: The science and art of ethics*. Milwaukee: the Bruce Publishing Company.

Nweke, C. C. (2013). The Philosophy of non-violence and the Niger Delta question. *Nnamdi Azikiwe Journal of Philosophy*, 5 (1): 50-64.

Okolo, C. B. 1993. *African social and political philosophy*. Nsukka: Fulladu Publishing Company.

Omeregbe, J. 1993. *Ethics: A systematic and historical study*. Ikeja: Joja Educational Research and Publishers Ltd.

About the authors

Dr Chuka Fidelis Aghamelu lectures at Department of Philosophy, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria. E-mail: fidelisagamelu@gmail.com.

Cyril Emeka Ejike lectures at the Department of Philosophy, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria. E-mail: cyril.ejike@gmail.com.