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Empathy is an Empty Vessel**Brij Mohan**

Life would remain unexamined if benign thoughts were not followed by thoughtful actions. Gandhi's *Satyagraha* is an unmatched example. Protests war crimes is a good cause. The burden of this brief essay is to underscore the salience of struggle against the pervasive wickedness of darkest forces.

Adam Shatz has masterfully authored *The Rebel's Clinic* (2024)¹; it is a tribute to a revolutionary spirit that merits impassionate critique. These validate its contextual relevance *a priori* formulations:

- The ubiquity of oppression and violence is a mega problem. Both Global South and Global North are deeply implicated in this human tragedy.
- Conflicts in the Middle East and between Ukraine and Russia are rooted in history. Geopolitics have confounded these wounds of the past.
- Violence is evil in all its manifestations. Human proclivities, however, perpetuate this subconscious 'Death Wish.' There is an *Exit* if citizens, especially their leaders, recognize the basic truth: *It's a Wonderful World*.

John Wideman, author of *Fanon* and *Look for Me and I'll be Gone*, introduces both Fanon and Shatz:

"*The Rebel's Clinic* is a diligent, scrupulous, serious book. Adam Shatz keeps Frantz Fanon alive as one of us--a human being--not

simply the larger-than-life subject of academic study. This book offers a careful reconstruction of Fanon's times, especially the war in Algeria, and resonates at a moment when we are tragically no longer closer to solving the problems Fanon dedicated his life and writing to understanding."

Few writers have changed the world they live in. Fanon was an iconic writer whose war against colonial oppressors inspired the *Third World* peoples. His swansong *Wretched of the Earth* is the Gita for post-colonial liberation.

Decolonization of the mind and 'desalination' are cornerstones of Fanonian praxis. The toxicity of globalization has refurbished capitalist expansion at the expense of people who remain victims of inequality and injustice. Social Development--its ideology, theory, and practice--stands at the crossroads of this trajectory. This validates the legitimacy of Fanon's work.

The organization and contents of the book are thoughtfully designed. In five parts, seventeen chapters have been sequenced thoughtfully. The structural design follows:

- I. Native Son: 1 A Small Place; 2 Wartime Lies; 3 Black Man, White City; 4 Toward Black Existentialism; 5 Refusal of the Mask; 6 The Practice of Disalienation.
- II. The Algerian: 7 A World Cut in Two; 8 The Algerian Explosion.
- III. The Exile: 9 Vertigo in Tunis; 10 Disalienating Psychiatry; 11 Fanon's "Tape Recorder"; 12 Black Algeria.
- IV. The African: 13 Phantom Africa; 14 "Create the Continent."
- V. The Prophet: 15 Roads to Freedom; 16 Voice of the Damned; 17 In the Country of Lynchers.

Epilogue: Specters of Fenon

Pankaj Mishra's tribute to both Shatz and Fanon: "Frantz Fanon has found his Issac Deutscher in Adam Shatz." Still better: "What James Balwin was for America, Fanon was for the world" (p. 13). The traumas of racist domination and violence and the struggle for

freedom and disalienation--a tussle “between the wound and the will” (p. 13) posed prophetic challenges to Fanon. Did he succeed or fail? Shatz gives a glimpse of his totality as a man:

“Today, Fanon is an intellectual celebrity whose writing is enlisted on behalf of a range of often wildly contradictory agendas: Black nationalist and cosmopolitan, pan-African and pan-Arab, secular and Islamist, Marxist and liberal, defenses of identity politics and critics of identity politics. He has been denounced as a misogynist for suggesting that some white women who fear blacks secretly wish to be raped by them and praised as a precocious Third World Feminist. Right-wing intellectuals have attacked him as the founding father of modern terrorism and critical race theory, yet they have also drawn inspiration from his work.” (p. 352)

From Sartre to Said, Naipaul to Abu Iyad, and Black Panthers to PLO have admired Fanonian philosophy to decolonize cultures, minds, and people. The birth of post-colonial has somewhat--to paraphrase Shatz--contributed to the ‘Americanization of Fanon’, ‘Clinical Fanonism,’ and Afro-pessimism among numerous incredible gestures of deification and demonization worldwide. His signature contribution is to legitimize the creative power against the oppressors and predators in a failed civilization. What Hamas did to Israel on October 7 is unforgivable. The killing field of Gaza now deepens the wounds they have been inflicting on the body and soul of Palestinian humanity. It’s an alert: Beware of the “Return of the Leviathan” (Mohan, 2024)².

The ‘Colonial Trauma’ is a syndrome, The liberal West’s need to pathologize it is a pang of subconscious guilt that contemporary Social Development may not mitigate. Force against the forces of domination is a consequence of unprincipled *Independence* and unacceptable meanings of *Freedom*. All violence against people and peoples is evil.

Empathy is an empty vessel unless filled up with indelible courage and conviction to change the world. Principled Protest is one the pillars of what I call *Logical Humanism*. This consciousness dates to

Gita. Student sometimes threatens American universities while protesting the war. The horrors and lessons of Vietnam are not lost on conscientious minds. The idea of universal humanity persists, so does ‘praxis’:

“All praxis has several moments to it. Action partially negates that which *is* (the practical field represents a situation *to be changed*) to the profit of that which *is not* (the end in view, a redistribution of the initial elements of the situation in order, ultimately, to reproduce life). ... Thus, all praxis contains a moment of practical knowledge that reveals, surpasses, preserves, and already modifies reality. ... Truth comes into being out of non-being, into the present out of the practical future.” (Sartre, 1974: 231)³

¹ This Essay is largely based on a Review Article in *Social Development Issues*, 2025, 47.1. *The Rebel’s Clinic: The Revolutionary Lives of Frantz Fanon* by Adam Shatz. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2024; ISBN 9780374176426; pp. 451 (Cloth); \$US32.00.

² Mohan, Brij. 2024. *Return of the Leviathan*. Amazon.com

³ Sartre, Jean-Paul. 1974. *Between Existentialism and Marxism* (Sartre on Philosophy, Politics, Psychology, and the Arts). New York: Pantheon Books.

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