

# National Culture: The Force To Resist And Perpetuate The Survival

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**Abstract:** Since the past few decades 'culture' has become a 'playing ball' for the literary and cultural critics. Everyone tries his hands on it in a different way and still it seems similar. For some it's a way of life and for others, it's still a way of life. But this way of life differs at the level of political boundaries; that is state wise or nation wise. Every nation has a culture of its own what Frantz Fanon called the 'national culture.' This paper deals with the theme of national culture as a form of resistance. Culture is a mechanism of perpetuating survival on the earth in every human society. But since the concept of power and dominion emerged into the human psyche, the 'national culture,' we may say a sub-category of culture, has become a form of survival and resisting the invading forces. Earlier the invaders were the western colonists and nowadays they are again the Westerns, if not literally colonists, but ideological invaders. The proposed paper will further look into the problems of how the technological advancement has expanded and extended the western domination all across the globe. And how the 'national culture,' can play a significant role to deconstruct this western hegemony; of the so-called 'being civilized' and globalization.

**Keywords:** National Culture, Colonialism, Western, Domination.

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Culture is perhaps "one of the two or three most complex words in the English language" (Eagleton 1). Since the past few decades 'culture' has become a 'playing ball' for the literary and cultural critics. Everyone tries his hands on it in a different way and still it seems similar. For some it's a way of life and for others... it's still a way of life. But this way of life differs at the level of political boundaries; that is state wise or nation wise. Every nation has a culture of its own what Frantz Fanon called the 'national culture.'

It is only since the recent century that the concept of 'nation' is restricted to the political definition and dominated by the terminology propounded by political thinkers. From the very ancient times, nation had been a territory where lived the people of a particular culture, religion, ethnicity, or various cultures and ethnicities together, with some moral, social, and universal codes of behavior as being a human. Culture, now, in the most general sense, is a way of living. Though, the word culture has many different connotations, which have been changing with the passage of time, but as being a way of living, culture is a powerful tool for human survival. Human beings have been able to survive in their present form just because of their cultural qualities. Every nation had and has its own culture, the people, who lived there, followed certain things in the form of knowledge, belief, art, law, custom, ritual, religion etc.

The culture, the people of a nation have followed is called their 'national culture'. But in today's context, the concept of national culture ceases to exist, because the history of humans has not been the same. It has been a journey of thousands of years since the emergence of life on the Earth, and during this journey there have been indefinite changes, people have travelled, there have been discoveries of new lands, there have been wars and conquests, and in the modern world the globalization. So these factors are very important, as far as the 'multi-cultural' assimilation is concerned, and thus today there is hardly a culture in the world that is indigenous. The era of colonialism is the most responsible factor in the emergence of this 'cultural hybridity'. Many literary and cultural critics have studied upon this and discovered that how the colonizers came and attempted to tempt the natives through their false assumptions about the past of the natives and sought a room to rule, govern, exploit and deprive them of their identity under the camouflage of the so-called

Enlightenment and civilizational discourse. In his seminal work *The Wretched of the Earth*, Martinique-born French writer Frantz Fanon has made an argument about why the revival of the 'national culture' has become so much important in order to survive. But before that, I would like to mention how the colonialism affected the natives and what the colonizers did to them which led to the cultural revolt.

Take, for example, two major territories Africa and Middle-East, one of which had been colonized and the other has been never a colony of the European empire. But both the territories were taken into consideration by the Western scholars and colonists to establish the idea of Western superiority over the world. During the phase of colonialism emerged the idea of 'Euro-centrism.'<sup>1</sup> The idea of 'Euro-centrism' was propounded and practiced through both mental and physical domination of the natives, or to say the 'rest' of the world. A central idea of Edward Said's magnum opus *Orientalism* is that Western knowledge about the East is not generated from facts or reality, but from preconceived archetypes that envision all Eastern societies as fundamentally similar to one another, and fundamentally dissimilar to Western societies. This *a priori* knowledge establishes 'the East' as antithetical to 'the West.' Such Eastern knowledge is constructed with literary texts and historical records that often are of limited understanding of the facts about the life in the Middle East. As Said himself put that "Orient" is not a place, in fact, but an imaginary place to compare "Occident" with and "Orientalism" is nothing but "a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident'"(Said 2). He also called "Orientalism" "A Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient"(3). The very similar views were proposed by Frantz Fanon in his essay "On National Culture", about how the Europeans have dominated the minds of the natives and legitimizing their power practice in the Africa, in the name of civilization. "By a kind of perverted logic," he writes, "colonialism turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it... The effect consciously sought by colonialism was to drive into the natives' heads the idea that if the settlers were to leave, they would at once fall back into barbarism, degradation, and bestiality"(Fanon 210).

So these were some false assumptions spread by the colonists or to say Europeans to legitimize that the Europe is superior and civilized to the rest of the world, and kept the native falsely in the knowledge of his own history as something uncivilized, barbarian, and savage. But after a long time's oppression and exploitation, the "legitimacy of the claims of a nation' was felt and the legitimacy of the European oppression was questioned and then emerged the revival of the 'national culture'" (207). Fanon argued in the very beginning of his essay that to write a patriotic song is not enough to revive the feeling of national culture, but he meant that your every act of existence should be a rebellious one. To counter the European hegemonic power structure, the native intellectuals must dig deep down their own history and bring the same old glorious past national culture back in order to throw the colonists out and reclaim their self-identity. Fanon is of the view that the Europeans have obliterated the real African history by persuading her natives with the false assumptions about their past as dark, savage, barbarian and uncivilized, in order to maintain the structure of domination. For example, Joseph Conrad has been criticized a lot for his depiction of Africa in his novella *Heart of Darkness*. Conrad has presented a very dark picture of the Africa, totally primitive, pre-historic, inhuman, savage and un-earthly, while on the other hand, he has been very much complimentary in the depiction of London (Europe) when he describes London as "... the biggest, and the greatest town on the earth"(Conrad 1). The book was considered a very abusive and racial attempt of writing by the African writer Chinua Achebe.

These were the tricks or tactics of the European invaders to demolish and negate the national or continental reality, which trapped the natives and perpetuated the colonialism in the Africa and the other parts of the world. Colonists propounded the theory of 'pre-colonial' barbarism in their colonies and settled themselves there as the volunteers of the civilizational discourse, but by the time they tried to disarm the national demands and that led to the rebellion against them. Fanon says that every generation must perpetuate what their fathers followed; he further says that "there was nothing to be ashamed of in the past, but rather glory, dignity and solemnity"(Fanon, 169). His resolution to oppose the colonial regime is to 'dissect the heart of his people', to uncover, reconstruct, and legitimate a past that is actively repressed by the colonialist.(211). The issue is difficult, as Fanon points out that, colonialism understands its subjects on a continental level, not regional, tribal or national. The entire continent of Africa is considered dark, pre-historic and barbaric by the European, they don't acknowledge any distinction between the different tribes and countries of Africa, they are

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<sup>1</sup> Euro-centrism denotes the idea of Europe being the center of the earth/world and the entire worldview is centered on western civilization.

generalizing the entire Africa as 'savage', thus, it then becomes native intellectual's job to refine, distinguish and encourage. National culture, then, begins with a 'Negro' culture.<sup>2</sup>

Though, the idea of national culture is questioned by some thinkers as it demarcates the world into pieces and destroys the feeling of universal brotherhood and humanity, but Fanon's approach here is a kind of Gandhian in its essence, because the way the colonized countries suffered by the hands of their invaders, it became obvious to dethrone the oppressive masters and bring their past back into the present to secure their future. Mahatma Gandhi set an example in front of Fanon through his 'non-cooperation' movement in India, which was not to respond to the British and be the true native of India, and the movement worked to an extent in India as people denied everything that was British and used their own things like handmade clothes and all. So Fanon's idea is more of a cultural revolution, where the national history is revived from the lost and deformed past, and the native culture is brought back, felt, realized and celebrated. And this celebratory moment does not come immediately, but following a long process of realization of the reality of colonialism by the native intellectuals. Fanon discusses the assimilation of the colonized intellectuals into the European culture and the importance of Negritude on the contrary of the white culture. He points out that the native intellectuals become a part of the colonizer's culture; using their methods of writings and other forms of arts. Eventually the colonized intellectuals forget their real objective (freedom) and finds themselves alienated from their own past, this according to Fanon is the beginning stage of the transformation. Fanon divides this process of realization into three stages; first he says, full assimilation of the colonized intellectuals into the Western culture. In the second stage they realize the superficiality of their work and find themselves no less than the subservient to the whites, here they remember the past and realize the falsity of colonialism. Finally, they immerse themselves back into their indigenous culture, and rouse the people to write to influence the rest, reclaim their identity, the real identity, rediscover the history and encourage the people with the hope of revolution. Fanon emphasizes the need for nationalism, like Indian nationalism, and nationalism comes before culture in any territory of the world.

So, the main issue in Fanon's study of colonialism is that it destroys the national culture systematically,

Colonial domination, because it is total and tends to over-simplify, very soon manages to disrupt in spectacular fashion the cultural life of a conquered people. This cultural obliteration is made possible by the negation of national reality, by new legal relations introduced by the occupying power, by the banishment of the natives and their customs to outlying districts by colonial society, by expropriation, and by the systematic enslaving of men and women.(190)

Further he points out that this systematic dominance has a powerful psychological effect on the colonizers, dynamism is destroyed, defense mechanisms are established, "Every effort is made to bring the colonized person to admit the inferiority of his own culture which has been transformed into instinctive behavior, to recognize the unreality of his 'nation', and, in the last extreme, the confused and imperfect character of his own biological structure"(190). In short, a powerful form of racism is instilled into the thinking of the victim and the oppressors as well. These forms of oppression, both physical and mental, turn the colonized person to revolt. Here, Fanon argues, comes the moment of realization that leads to the nationalism and the revival of national culture. In his speech at the Congress of Black African writers, 1959, Fanon said that "Colonial exploitation, poverty and endemic famine drive the native more and more to open, organized revolt. The necessity for an open and decisive breach is formed progressively and imperceptibly, and comes to be felt by the great majority of the people"(192). And he is right in saying so, because humans have their limitations also, no force can hold the river still for a long time.

So this was the situation of early and mid-20<sup>th</sup> century colonialism. And today in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, things are different, but the situation is somewhat like an extension of the colonialism. The Western dominion still persists; the only thing that has

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<sup>2</sup> Negro is an English word that refers to a people of black ancestry or appearance. Since past few decades the word is considered as offensive because of its association with the long history of slavery, segregation, and discrimination that treated African Americans as second class citizens, or worse.

changed is the character of domination. Earlier it was more a forceful while today it's totally an ideological one. Today's is an age of Globalization. The world has turned 'flat,' earlier, which was considered as a round (Thomas L. Friedman 5). Marshall McLuhan calls it the "global Village." (McLuhan 6) The concept of nationalism or national culture is ceasing to exist. Cosmopolitanism is the 'new nationalism.' The world is being digitalized with the speed of light and so is the character of domination. Today's mechanism of domination is called 'Electronic Colonialism' or e-colonialism (McPhail 1981). The term was coined by the Canadian media theorist Tom McPhail in his book with the same title. E-colonialism is not about setting physical colonies like colonialism, but it's a process of establishing an empire through control over the mind of the masses throughout the world. Mass media and digital technology are the tools of this empire. The internet is the 'virtual blood' that runs through the veins of this 'digital demon', because internet is the medium that makes the transmission and flow of information possible. There is an ideology that is prevailing today; that is, we are living in the 'information age' and it is the best of all time. But the reality is quite different or may be quite contrary to it. The masses are still under the domination of the state or the ruling class and they are further controlled by the western authorities, because internet is not somebody's personal property, it is controlled by the state authority and then completely by the western corporations like Microsoft, Google etc. we are under constant surveillance. This is what George Orwell prophesied sixty five years back. This is the real character of e-colonialism driven by capitalism.

The most destructive characteristic of e-colonialism is that it causes the death of indigenous cultures. In colonialism, they distorted and destroyed the past of the colonized people to control their present, in e-colonialism, they destroy the present of colonized people to control their future also. In an e-colonialism, those are the rulers who are technologically advanced and own the technological corporations. They still claim the western culture as more civilized and advanced to the rest of the world and disseminate the western culture and values through the mass media all across the globe. This cultural imperialism is causing the death of many cultures throughout the world, because the only thing that is being published, telecasted and propagated is the western civilization and its cultural values by the mass media, which is embraced uncritically by the compliant masses of the developing nations' masses. I will give you only one example of this cultural death and that is the AIB Knockout show that was performed by the Bollywood celebrities in India. This was completely just an imitation of the vulgarity that western so-called advanced culture spread in society.

Thus to conclude, I would summarize Fanon's argumentation for the need of an indigenous 'national culture', in order to get freedom from the oppressive forces of the world. He has made a full analysis of how the mechanism of colonialism is set, how the native is legitimized as inferior and uncultured, how the power functions, then how the false reality of the colonialism is realized by the native intellectual and the freedom struggle is perpetuated. In the 21st century the advertisement industry plays the biggest role in controlling the mind of the masses. And the rapid advancement in science and technology paves the way for complete control of human minds. Though it is acknowledged that science and technological advancement has been a boon for human, but there is a problem and very serious one it is; that is if technology continues to be used addictively and immoderately then the majority of humans on the earth are going to be enslaved within a matter of a few years. And that would lead to a situation where the planet earth would be reduced to a culture-less techno-authoritarian regime of capitalism.

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