



## FRAMING OUR TASKS WITH FANON: RECONSIDERING CRITICAL QUESTIONS OF LIFE

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**DR. MAULANA KARENGA**

WITHOUT A DOUBT AND WITH NO REAL reason for reservation, Frantz Omar Fanon stood out for our organization Us and remains as a model and mirror of the revolutionary thought and practice which we committed ourselves to and dared. We did not then and do not now find the need to accept the opinions and assessments of him from others hostile or who feel a faddist deconstructionist need to find fault with heroes and heroines, great men and women. Nor do we abandon a water-worthy ship when the tide turns or wind-up spitting in the wind to see which way a new wind or wave is blowing. Our respect for Fanon, like all the models and mirrors we use to ground and measure ourselves, is based on a deep reading and reasoning as the African tradition of excellence teaches and demands.

In this month of July, the month of Fanon's birth (July 20, 1925). We turn to reread and renew our understanding of him in still other and more expansive ways. For he aids us in dealing with some of the critical questions of life and thus also critical questions of struggle. Fanon writes, as we live still, in a context of severe and savage oppression and righteous and relentless struggle to end it and create an ever-expanding realm of human freedom.

In the chapter titled "On National Culture" in his masterpiece, *Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon begins with an often-quoted passage. It is: "Each generation must out of relative obscurity, discover its mission, fulfill it or betray it." The "relative obscurity" Fanon speaks of is a lack of clarity and sometimes difficulty we experience in trying to discern what we should give our lives to or what vocation we should pursue. Thus, it is an implicit admonition against assuming we know without due consideration what life's work we should be about. And it suggests we must think deep about such an important decision, even when it might seem on the surface obvious. For we can indeed read both texts and times wrongly and therefore, need to reread and re-think them regularly.

Again, Fanon is living, writing and fighting in the midst of a revolution and he wants us to

think deeply about the times and circumstances we live in and ask ourselves critical questions of identity, purpose and direction. These are questions that center us and give grounding and meaning to our lives. In Kawaida, we see culture as the central source for ways to engage and answer these interrelated and critical questions of life and struggle. And it is here that we agree with him and Haji Sekou Touré, Haji Malcolm and Amilcar Cabral that in the context of oppression and resistance, "the demand for national culture and the affirmation of the existence of such a culture represent a special battlefield." Thus, we have since the 60's claimed and reclaimed African culture as the central source of our self-understanding and self-assertion in the world.

Fanon tells us, then, that whatever other mission we have, in the context of oppression, none is more important than choosing, pursuing and fighting for freedom. It is, he suggests, as his contemporary, Haji Malcolm taught, part of what it means to be human. That is to say, it is normal and necessary to struggle to achieve freedom, be free and exercise freedom to live good lives, think new thoughts and dare to constantly expand the realm of good in the world. He wants us to reject the corrupt and corruptive views, values and practices of our oppressors. He urges us to "waste no time in sterile litanies and nauseating imitation" of our oppressor. Indeed, he condemns our white supremacist and racist oppressors who "are never done talking of abstract man yet murder (real) men (and women) everywhere they find them."

Fanon criticizes the racists, colonialists and imperialists who "stifled almost the whole of humanity in the name of a so-called spiritual experience." And this so-called spiritual experience was a racialized Christianity constructed to use religion as a tool of conquest and willing submission, getting their white-faced and white-fashioned god to underwrite and sanction radical evil in the world. But in spite of their claims of salvation from sin and savagery, we know we were not saved from the sin of the sinner, nor the savagery of the savage, for our enslavers and oppressors were the evil ones they preached

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about and projected on us. And Fanon mocks them saying that after all that arrogant and racist raging and ranting about sin, salvation, savagery and such, they have not saved and searched themselves. And now “look at them today swaying between atomic and spiritual disintegration.”

But Fanon wants us to know that struggle for freedom and growth to be ourselves and free ourselves requires sacrifice, discipline and dedication. For as he says in various ways, the battle and war are not won by removing the oppressor from our land and lives. But also removing them from our hearts and minds. For he says to us concerning culture that to free ourselves from the views and values of the oppressor, we must fight to liberate our culture. But to fight for our culture is in the final analysis “to fight for the liberation of the nation,” the liberation of our people themselves. That is to say to fight for “that material keystone which makes the building of culture possible.” Indeed, he concludes, “There is no other fight for culture which can develop apart from the struggle of the people.”

Here Fanon teaches of that love of the people and respecting their capacity to free themselves and build their lives and future. There is no stronger expression of his love of our people than the one in which he teaches that they, themselves, are the source of their own salvation, indeed, their own liberation in every sense and substantive meaning of the word. In a word, he teaches, as we say in Kawaida, we are the source of the magic and miracles we must perform and make. Furthermore, we are own liberators and a people that cannot save itself is lost forever.

Thus, Fanon teaches us that any leader, organizer, teacher, political or social educator must dare and discipline themselves to provide an

education of liberation, one that is dedicated to opening the minds and awakening the people to their own capacity and potential. In other words, he says, it is urgent and morally imperative that in our effort to educate the masses that we “try relentlessly and passionately to teach the masses that everything depends on them; that if we stagnate, it is their responsibility and that if we go forward it is due to them too; that there is no such thing as a demiurge (Plato’s minor deity responsible for the world); that there is no famous man (or woman) who will take responsibility for everything, but rather the demiurge is the people themselves and the magic hands are finally only the hands of the people.” Likewise, the miracle and magic making minds are only the minds of the people. And those hands and minds, our sacred text teaches us, must be about the work of bringing and sustaining good in the world.

**L**ET US THEN, FANON TELLS US AND teaches us, dare to “reconsider the question of humankind.” Let us not do what our oppressors do or as we say in Kawaida, “our oppressor cannot be our teacher.” For indeed Fanon tells us, “Humanity is waiting for something from us other than such an imitation which would be almost an obscene caricature.” On the contrary, he concludes, we must think deep, think new and in the interest of African and human good and the well-being of the world. In a word, he says, we must “work out new concepts and try to bring into being a new man (and woman)” and “initiate a new history of humankind.” We talk here of a history that is dignity-affirming, life-enhancing and world-preserving in the best tradition of our ancestors and in the best moral reasoning and practice we can achieve. ▲

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