Caribbean fanonism revisited: a note
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I. Caribbean Fanonism

The impending republication of Louis Lindsay’s paper *The Myth of Independence: Middle Class Politics and Non-Mobilization in Jamaica*, (Lindsay 1975) provides a timely opportunity for a reappraisal of the influence of the Martiniquan psychiatrist and political scientist, Franz Fanon, on radical Caribbean thought in the 1970s. Appearing in the mid-1970s, Lindsay's paper is a classic piece of post/anti-colonial psycho-political science. Appearing at the height—and in the heat—of the ideological ferment of that turbulent decade, it is written in an explicitly Fanonist mould. The thesis was clearly, consistently, and indeed brilliantly articulated. Jamaica's independence was "granted" by the British rather than taken as the culmination of a militant, popular, anti-colonial mobilization. Hence it was not independence at all, but a myth, created jointly by the colonial powers and the middle-class "nationalist" leaders. The British sought to maintain the essence of the colonial status quo, while the nationalists merely wished to substitute their formal authority for that of the colonial rulers, with all the trappings and perquisites of office that that brings. The result, Lindsay argued, was to cripple the collective capacity of the Jamaican people to forge a new society in the postcolonial era.

Lindsay was unstinting in his critique of the role of the icons of Jamaica's nationalist movement. Norman Manley and the other mainstream PNP leaders were portrayed as indisputably Anglophile in their personal, political and philosophical orientations. They lustily sang "God Save the King" at Party conclaves and believed in the inherent superiority of Westminster institutions. Their quest for self-government was limited to a desire to take their rightful places as equal members of the British Empire. They had no confidence in the innate capacities of the mass of the Jamaican people. The PNP's Marxist Left was itself shackled by the value-system of the brown middle class. Its members, distrusting their own abilities to mobilize the masses, sought to manipulate the Anglo-Saxon derived prestige of Norman Manley to their own ends. Richard Hart, the most intellectually capable, derived his own influence partly from his social standing as a scion of white Jamaica. According to Lindsay, Hart himself suffered from the Mother Country Complex, seeking to substitute the Soviet Union for Britain as Jamaica's patron and benefactor.

Lindsay’s withering critique was extended to the WPJ-led Marxist Left of the 1970s, which was seen as having reproduced the pathologies of the PNP's Marxist Left of the 1940s. The new Left was depicted as seeking to capitalise politically back on the popularity of Michael Manley, while deriving its theory and inspiration from Moscow. Michael Manley’s own kareba-suited and highly publicised campaign to "put work into Labour Day" by himself performing manual labour was dismissed as a blatant use of the technique of "symbolic manipulation". And Rex Nettleford's portrayal of Norman Manley as a true leader of the Jamaican people towards independence and nationhood was treated as at best misguided and at worst dishonest.
Perhaps the only figure who emerged with an enhanced reputation from Lindsay's devastating analysis was Alexander Bustamante. Caring little for the English and initially indifferent to the debate over self-government, Bustamante was regarded as an authentic leader who devoted himself to bread and butter issues of immediate concern to the masses. As a political type, he did not conform to any of Lindsay's sharply drawn categories: he was interested neither in negotiated independence (at least initially) nor in armed struggle; he was neither an Anglophile nor an Anglophobe, and certainly not a Russophile. Lindsay admired the Bustamante of the 1940s for his total lack of deference to the British, and for his indifference to the classist contempt which the middle-class PNP leadership openly displayed towards him.

For his paper, Lindsay drew heavily on primary archival sources and on his original elite interviews with many of the leading protagonists, amply reflected in the lavish footnotes, which he wished to be read as integral parts of argument. This material alone, together with Lindsay's acutely drawn political profiles of the chief personalities of Jamaica's independence movement, constitutes one of the most aspects of the paper, and helps to account for its enduring appeal over the years.

I have called this note "Caribbean Fanonism Revisited" because Lindsay's piece adopts an explicitly Fanonist theoretical framework and the paper is one of the clearest expressions of the application of Fanonist ideas to the de/re/colonization experience of Jamaica. My own observations are oriented by own interest in the political economy of decolonisation and selected developments in this field over the past quarter of a century. Hopefully others with specialist credentials in the politics of decolonisation, which was Lindsay's primary concern, will take up the debate.

II. "Independence" and "globalization": myth and countermyth

Events since 1975 certainly appear to vindicate Lindsay's position that Jamaica's independence was "mythical", in the sense of being more formal/constitutional than substantive. (Whether it was deliberately shambolic is another matter, as I argue below). Ironically, in retrospect the year 1975 may have marked a high point in the degree of effective sovereignty achieved in postcolonial Jamaica. The Bauxite Levy had just been imposed, over the opposition of the powerful aluminium companies. Michael Manley's PNP Government had defied the United States by supporting the Cuban involvement in Angola to resist the invasion from the forces of apartheid, had instituted a number of reforms to enlarge local control over the economy, and was campaigning strongly for a New International Economic Order.

By 1977 the constraints arising out of Jamaica's dependence on the global economy--and especially on the goodwill of the United States—had begun to reassert themselves. Collapse of tourism, cut-backs in bauxite production, and capital flight, provoked a grave economic crisis and forced the government into the first of a series of humiliating agreements with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The JLP election victory of 1980 confirmed the restoration of the conservative policies both domestic and foreign relations. The conditionalities imposed through loans from the IMF, and by World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank structural adjustment programmes, resulted in a steady erosion of economic sovereignty through the late 1970s to the mid-1990s. At one time, budgetary supervision exercised by these agencies may have been as strong, if not stronger, as that exercised by the British Colonial Office in the twilight of colonial rule. By the 1990s, the fall of the Soviet Union, the establishment of the World Trade
Organization and the globalization of financial ushered in a new world economic order under the rule of the O.E.C.D. and especially the United States. Under the mantra of globalization the relevance of the principle of national economic independence is either questioned or dismissed outright, and the idea of independence itself is held by many to be a myth (Power 1997: 75-80).

Other writers have argued the conclusion is not only premature but ideologically loaded (Hirst and Thompson 1996: 1-17; Chomsky 1998). It would be interesting to apply Lindsay’s the idea of “symbolic manipulation” to "the myth of globalization", seen as a device to induce developing countries into a state of helpless passivity in the face of the strategies of the rich and powerful.

III. National liberation and postcolonial reconstruction: the fate of Fanonism

Yet certain questions arise as to the implications of the Fanonist thesis in the postcolonial world generally and in Jamaica in particular. It is not clear, for example, that the comparative experience of postcolonial countries since 1975 provides support for the thesis that liberation secured by violent struggle creates the conditions for "true"—or at least "truer"—independence, and for the construction of a more viable post-colonial society, than that which is secured by non-violent means (Lindsay 1975:8,10, quoting Fanon 1967b: 83,84,104). Consider for example the tragic case of Algeria, the model for Fanon's work, which by the 1990s was afflicted by a bloody civil war that claimed tens of thousands of lives. Civil wars also afflicted Guinea-Bissau and Angola some two decades after the triumph of the armed liberation struggle. The experience of these countries show that, while revolutionary warfare may succeed in expelling the colonialists, it may become the prelude to prolonged and violent contention for power domestically, in the context of fragile state institutions.

Other cases suggest that the distinction between armed struggle and negotiation as routes to independence is not at clear-cut as depicted by the Fanonist model. In Zimbabwe and South Africa the two strategies went hand-in-hand, or rather, were used in stages where the former became the means of forcing the colonialists to the negotiating table. Further how does the Fanonist model handle the case of India, where Gandhi's campaign of non-violent civil disobedience was the crucial weapon used in the struggle against British imperialism? Can we be sure that a resort to a war of national liberation on the part of the Indian nationalists (a) would have been consistent with the cultural traditions of Hindu India, or (b) would have prevented, rather than exacerbated, the subsequent fragmentation of the country along religious lines?

Another question dramatised by the experiences of Zimbabwe and South Africa, is the following: once the war is over, what happens with the warriors, and with the arms and ammunition they have accumulated? Institutionalizing and regularizing the revolutionary army presents difficulties when there are many other demands on fiscal resources, and employment opportunities in the civilian economy are limited. Yesterday's heroic freedom fighters can all too easily become today's bandits. This is a problem that the Fanonist thesis apparently failed to anticipate. The cases of Mozambique and Vietnam also suggest that the problems of winning a revolutionary war can pale into insignificance by comparison with those of rebuilding the infrastructure destroyed by the imperialists. There are also the difficulties of addressing the profound social and economic dislocation that a protracted revolutionary war inevitably generates. Hence there seems to be no
unambiguous evidence that an experience of prior armed struggle necessarily provides an advantage in postcolonial reconstruction and development.

Let us also consider the experience of other countries that have achieved independence practically as a "gift". Here the record is also mixed. In the Caribbean some, like Barbados and the O.E.C.S. countries, have fared reasonably well, others, like Jamaica and Guyana, not so well at all. Similar observations could be made about the fate of "gift-independent" states in Africa and Asia—for example Singapore and Malaysia have progressed rapidly in economic terms for most of the postcolonial period, whereas most of sub-Saharan Africa has encountered severe economic and political problems.

In short, the historical record shows no simple correspondence between the means by which formal political independence is achieved, and the subsequent success of states in postcolonial reconstruction. Indeed, a review of the Fanonist thesis might lead to the conclusion that its greatest value lies in its analysis of the "psychology of liberation" at the personal, individual and hence micro-political levels. Problems arise when its theory of the psychologically liberating effects of armed struggle at the individual level is used as the basis for a theory of the preconditions of successful postcolonial reconstruction at the macro-social and macro-political levels. Fanon himself appears to have fallen into this trap: he directed his greatest anger and sarcasm at the neo-colonial Ivory Coast and its collaborationist Francophile leader Houphouet-Boigny, which were presented as the polar opposites of revolutionary Algeria and the leaders of its liberation struggle (Fanon 1967b: 117; Cited by Lindsay 1975: 11).

IV. Norman Manley: a Jamaican Houphouet-Boigny?

If the Fanonist foundation is flawed, can the Lindseyan edifice stand? Fanon's treatment of Houphouet-Boigny and the Ivory Coast appears to be the model which Lindsay used in his treatment of Norman Manley and the Jamaican decolonization process. At this point, several problems arise. Lindsay does not explicitly argue that armed struggle would have been a feasible and desirable option for the Jamaican nationalist movement to employ. But the clear implication is that this route would have been preferable, if not necessarily feasible (Lindsay 1975: 12-14). Yet, as we have suggested, the historical experience does not support the view that, even if feasible, this route would have meant that Jamaica's postcolonial experience would necessarily have been more successful or "independent".

One of the most controversial aspects of Lindsay's paper lies in his portrayal of Norman Manley and the mainstream PNP leadership as rank Anglophiles with no confidence in the Jamaican masses—the Caribbean equivalent of Houphouet-Boigny and his cronies. The evidence for this is Manley's professed admiration for Westminster institutions around the time of Jamaica's Independence in 1962, the strong expressions of loyalty to Britain made by PNP leaders immediately after the outbreak of World War II, and the fact that the PNP's goal of self-government always retained a strong element of attachment to Empire/Commonwealth and to things British. According to Lindsay, the PNP's Anglophilism made it unnecessary to adopt a strategy of militant anti-colonial popular mobilization as the preferred route to national independence. Indeed such a strategy would have been dangerous to their own leadership position, which was based on their possession of Anglo-Saxon credentials of education, speech, and personal culture. And in any case
such a strategy would have been ruled out by their deep-seated Anglophilism, which did not admit of confidence in the creative capacities of the majority of the Jamaican people who were yet to be fully socialized into Anglo-Saxon characteristics (Lindsay 1975: 12-21, 26-27).

In retrospect, the argument appears overstated and in need of some refinement. One could question whether Manley's belief in the superiority of Westminster institutions is necessarily and logically inconsistent with confidence in the capacities of the Jamaican people. As Lindsay's own quotation shows, Manley was not about rejecting British institutions merely because they were British: if he considered that Jamaica could use them to its advantage, why not use them? (Lindsay 1975: 13). In this context, it seems possible for Manley to have had confidence in the capacities of the Jamaican people while simultaneously holding that Westminster institutions provide the most effective vehicle within which these capacities can be realized at the level of national politics.

My own belief is that this more closely approximates Norman Manley's true position. Let us look, for instance, at an example of his thinking in 1942:

I once met a man walking down a dusty road with bare feet and dirty clothes. For every square inch of cloth that made his old garments there were two square inches of patch and most of the patches had burst the stitches and hung loose leaving little windows that opened on bare skin.

Manley goes on to describe the abject poverty in which this rural labourer lives with his woman and flock of children. He goes on:

This is the circle of life as nine-tenths of all the world knows it. Men and women born with nature's great gift to us all, the fresh ability of each generation to achieve what is born in us unharmed by the hurts of our parents, are doomed to become only what the last generation have been……

Suppose, I cried, all these men and all these women could see themselves and their children and the generations to come as they really are with all the waste of the lovely beautiful new life that comes up and is spoilt and passes, suppose I said, they could feel the power in their million hands and the will of their million hearts, what could they not do to end this old badness and make a better world! (Manley 1942:237).

These are hardly the words of a man who does not believe in the inherent capacities of the unlettered and the illiterate Jamaican. Later, in 1948, Manley was to declare to a gathering apprehensive of Bustamante's accession to power:

I have an abounding faith in the people of this country. They are great people to lead in any field of activity, in any sort of life. They have their faults, but these are the faults of the social and economic condition under which they live, and the fruit of the historical legacy they suffer from. They have endured all these things and are enduring today with the great potentialities which they possess. It is the greatest proof of the unquenchable power of the human spirit. Greater potentialities could not be found anywhere in the world. You have only got to move among our own people of the poorest classes today to know what are in their minds, and the hopes and ambitions they possess (and you see it most markedly in the young) to know what a power there is in the spirit of this country when we can harness it and mould it into one whole. (Manley 1948:243).

To be sure, in both of the passages from which the above quotes are taken, Manley also points to the critical role of leadership in realizing the potential of ordinary people. A close reading of his text, however, suggests that he did not necessarily equate leadership with Anglo-Saxon characteristics (although clearly, as Lindsay points out, his colleagues and followers undoubtedly put great store by his impeccable Anglo-Saxon credentials). Manley spoke of leadership in terms of
his vision of what could be accomplished by masses of ordinary people when they were mobilized in support of their own interests and their own salvation, and of the ability of the leader to communicate this vision to the people themselves. In his belief that the solutions to the problems of the masses lay within the masses themselves, he came close to the Fanonist ideal of "liberation of self".

Still, Lindsay may choose to dismiss such words as mere rhetorical flourishes (though much of Lindsay's own evidence of PNP Anglophilism is indeed rhetorical). As he points out, it is action that matters, not words. And while the PNP was preaching loyalty to the Empire, he points out, Bustamante in contrast was campaigning for better wages and working conditions for the pauperised working class. Bustamante's role in this regard is not to be denied. But surely the "proof-in-action" of the PNP conviction is that from the early 1940s it was campaigning for self-government based on universal adult suffrage, when the majority of upper-class and many middle-class Jamaicans believed that the illiterate and culturally backward Jamaican masses were "not yet ready" for this. In other words, Manley and the PNP leadership had to argue against those who held that ordinary Jamaicans were incapable of responsibly exercising the political power that the vote would confer. Manley himself held this position with unswerving conviction even after the victory of the allegedly "semi-literate" Bustamante in 1945 and again in 1949 appeared to vindicate the doubts of many PNP followers. He was to maintain it to his own political detriment in the Federation referendum of 1961. For him, it appears to have been a fundamental principle. And the doubts Manley harboured about his own capacity, as an upper class professional Jamaican, to effectively mobilize the Jamaican masses, may speak more to a sense of his own inadequacy, rather than to his belief in the inadequacy of those whom he aspired to lead.

It may also be necessary to set in context the declarations of loyalty to "Mother England" made by PNP leaders in the period 1939-1941 (Lindsay 1975: 17-18). During this period the PNP also took a conscious decision to put demands for constitutional reform on the back-burner. At this time the threat to England from fascist Germany was at its highest. The Axis countries controlled the entire European continent and Scandinavia. Germany had launched devastating air raids on the British Isles and had assembled a huge force for the invasion of England. The United States had not yet entered the War. A German victory was very much on the cards. Given the "master race" ideology of the Nazis, and their ruthless treatment of other European peoples in the occupied territories, the possibility of German victory could hardly have been regarded in Jamaica and other colonies with equanimity, let alone enthusiasm.

One should, therefore, concede the potential weight of thinking based on both tactical considerations ("ease off Britain whilst the threat of defeat is very real") as well as self-preservation ("better the British than the Germans"). This interpretation is consistent with the PNP's resumption of agitation for self-government after 1941, which Lindsay attributes to the realisation that the British Government was "largely indifferent to the self-imposed truce of silence which had been imposed by the PNP and its Anglophile allies" (Lindsay 1975: 43). It is also possible that the PNP felt it was "safe" to resume agitation insofar as the immediate threat to Britain had receded: by this time the United States had entered the war, and the German invasion had been launched eastwards, towards the Soviet Union.
Here, Lindsay draws interesting contrasts between the attitude of the PNP leadership with that of the leaders of the anti-colonial movements in Africa and Asia who, he says, refused to compromise the struggle for independence by supporting a "Mother Country" which had been viciously exploiting them (Lindsay 1975: 19, and note 25). But we also need to know whether this position was consistently maintained throughout the entire duration of the war, or developed with the changing fortunes of the war in the European, African and Asian theatres. We also need a consideration of whether the concrete possibilities for anti-colonial struggle would have been the same Jamaica, a small island of just over 1 million people, as they would have been for countries on the African and Asian land masses with tens and hundreds of millions of people.

V. Conclusion: the need for a Conclusion.

Lindsay’s paper remains a fertile source of further enquiry and discussion. Apart from the issues visited above, there is continuing interest in his treatment of Alexander Bustamante, of Ken and Frank Hills, of Richard Hart and Arthur Henry, of Florizel Glasspole, of Manley’s relationship with Governor Denham, and of the Marxist Left of the 1970s; and there is his cynical vignette on Michael Manley. These merit careful study and further research, and will provide fodder for further debate. The burning questions of Jamaica’s independence are: What went wrong? Could it have been otherwise? Can it be set right? And if so, how? The ultimate rationale of a work of this kind is its potential to take us nearer to finding answers for these questions.


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i Reappraisal of the radical tradition in the Caribbean social sciences is an on-going exercise. See for example Meeks and Lindahl (eds.) 2000.

ii It seems significant that much of the literature on postcolonial affairs in the English-speaking Caribbean refers to the "post-Independence" period, as if in implicit/subconscious recognition that "Independence" is an event, rather than a condition.

iii Lindsay's account of Bustamante's meeting with the Colonial Office in 1948, in which he surprised the British by announcing that he was not interested in independence, but if they wanted to give him he wouldn't turn it down, makes hilarious reading (pp. 45-46).

iv This has been the trend: there have been moments of relatively autonomous action, as in the 1986-1989 period under Seaga's JLP Administration; and since 1996 under the current PNP Administration.

v Particularly revealing is Lindsay’s account of the dismay of the PNP leadership when the British Socialist, Stafford Cripps, launched a blistering attack on British colonialism at the Party's Founding Conference in 1938 (Lindsay 1975:15, and note 18).

vi Lindsay's references to these doubts, garnered from Manley's personal diaries quoted by Nettleford (1971) and from interviews with Manley’ s contemporaries, are especially instructive (Lindsay 1975: 22-23, note 30). It is also interesting to speculate that Norman's son, Michael, sought to rectify this inadequacy by combining the intellectual acumen of his father with the skills in popular communication of Bustamante.