

# Violence and Otherness: A New Perspective on Decolonisation Beyond Fanon

Written by Giulia Tempo

This PDF is auto-generated for reference only. As such, it may contain some conversion errors and/or missing information. For all formal use please refer to the official version on the website, as linked below.

## Violence and Otherness: A New Perspective on Decolonisation Beyond Fanon

<https://www.e-ir.info/2020/06/04/violence-and-otherness-a-new-perspective-on-decolonisation-beyond-fanon/>

GIULIA TEMPO, JUN 4 2020

For Frantz Fanon, a French West Indian psychiatrist and philosopher of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, decolonisation ends otherness. In his view, the construction of the Self-Other binary can and must be brought to an end with the struggle for independence – the latter being a response to violence, and therefore being necessarily tied to violence. Seeing alterity between global North and South as the carrier of Self-Other relations in human history, Fanon addresses the issue of otherness by theorising a New Humanity that, stemming from and following violent action, overcomes alterity by transcending the dichotomy between coloniser and colonised. ‘To shoot down a European is [...] to destroy an oppressor and the man he oppresses at the same time: there remain a dead man, and a free man’ (Sartre, 1961, p. 19).

This work, however, argues that violent struggle is only a tool to *decolonise* alterity; what is overcome is merely colonial, contextual otherness – while, ultimately, colonial struggle does not eradicate differences existing prior to and beyond colonialism, thus leaving open the *Question of the Other*. [1] North and South are a primary carrier of alterity, but their signification is more deep-rooted than the violent imposition of colonial bonds: whereas violent decolonisation can overcome the divide between settler and native, otherness *per se*, otherness made-immanent will remain. Decolonisation ends context-specific practices of othering entrenched in the colonial setting, but alterity – whose roots transcend the context – cannot be definitively and axiomatically transcended. Moreover, not only can otherness not be fully uprooted through decolonisation – but it is also necessary for it to persist ontologically, as it is constitutive of the very livelihood of *any* Self. The latter, as pointed out by Lévinas (1972), is open to the Other, being conscious of his radical lack of self-sufficiency: otherness can thus be conceived as constitutive of the Self, which would otherwise be ‘a part without a whole’ (Todorov, 1982, p. 5). Knowledge of the Self develops from knowledge of the Other, hindering the *in toto* rejection of otherness-made-immanent – while, concurrently, what is crucial is the key through which such *différence* is read.

Tzvetan Todorov’s notion (1982) that the Other should be considered as equal, albeit different, will serve as a key to read immanent alterity beyond Fanon. In this view, it is necessary to overcome the idea that either the Other is a manifestation of the Self – alterity being thus reduced to identity –, or he is an objectified inferior, with otherness being conceptualised as inequality. What needs to be pursued, therefore, is ‘equality without its compelling us to accept identity; but also difference without its degenerating into superiority/inferiority’ (Todorov, 1982, p. 249). It needs to be noted, however, that Todorov’s analysis is not entrenched in politics and history as could be said for Fanon’s militant text: due to his positionality, Todorov is not immediately concerned with North-South relations, nor with providing solutions to overcome concrete, context-based otherness.

As concerns the organisation of the present work, the first Chapter traces the conceptualisation of otherness in Fanon and Todorov, with the goal of outlining the commonalities and, importantly, the divergences existing between the two positions. This analysis prepares the ground for the argument that decolonisation does not ultimately *end* otherness. The second Chapter subsequently examines the notion of violence, to expound the motives that lead Fanon to consider violent decolonisation as ending alterity. The latter, for Fanon, is in fact a product of violence – whereas for Todorov settlers justify violence through pre-existing alterity. Lastly, the third Chapter examines a possible re-reading of otherness, based on the overcoming of inferiority and identity to achieve equality in spite of

# Violence and Otherness: A New Perspective on Decolonisation Beyond Fanon

Written by Giulia Tempo

difference.

## Otherness in Fanon and Todorov

This Chapter investigates the notion of alterity in Fanon and Todorov's works, to assess their perspectives and ground the claim that violent struggle merely *decolonises* alterity. The Chapter sheds light on the discrepancies between the two analyses – which deal with different matters and assume different takes – while concurrently putting the two authors in conversation on the issue of *différence*. Initially, the positionality of the writers is addressed – illustrating the implications of perspectivity both on otherness as a concept and on the specific relationship between settler and native. The basis is thus laid for the evaluation of the different arguments outlined by Fanon and Todorov. Subsequently, the analysis undertakes the examination of otherness through its spatial, visual, axiological and hierarchical facets – addressing the foundations upon which Fanon erects his claim that decolonisation ends otherness, in opposition to Todorov.

### *The legacies of positionality*

The two authors adopt dissimilar positionalities, thus regarding differently the framework for otherness as well as the settler-native relationship. Firstly, differing perspectivity and epistemological groundings lead the two authors to different conceptualisations of otherness. Fanon's historical-materialistic perspective prompts his appreciation of otherness as historically-rooted and politicised. The urgency of the Algerian historical cause is conjoined with the political reach of Fanon's analysis – encouraging a reading of otherness as politically-shaped and of the text as politically-oriented. If the political drive of otherness can be perceived throughout the whole assessment of the binary, the militant orientation of Fanon's book emerges clearly when a dialectic schema of Hegelian form comes to frame the assertion that the Self-Other binary needs to be overcome. Eventually, the colonised peoples come to play a role similar to that played by the Marxian working class (Marx & Engels, 1848/2002) – exceeding the contextuality of their struggle by 'starting a new history of Man' (Fanon, 1961, p. 254). What emerges, on the whole, is the realisation of the universal historical-political significance of the colonial peoples who engage in de-othering by igniting a revolutionary contradiction within the context of petrified structures, which have become a conservative force. While Fanon, positionally immersed in the subject matter, seeks to unveil the 'dialectical rules of motion' (Engels, 1878/1939, p. iv) that underpin otherness in history, Todorov's greater distance enables him to perceive the deeper roots of alterity constructs. Beyond history and politics, his conceptualisation of alterity is entrenched in culture and identity. It is thus argued that, being a construction pre-existent to colonisation, otherness cannot be radically overcome through decolonisation and should rather be read, as in the work of Lévinas (1972), as animating the very existence of the Self, thus being ontologically indissoluble from it. As will be shown (*infra*), alterity-made-immanent impedes the understanding of contextual decolonial violence as a solution to otherness – the answer to the latter rather being found in Todorov's multicultural coexistence of different-but-equal others. Todorov's positionality and consequent reading of alterity, however, leave unanswered Fanon's historically-materialistic tragedy of a North-South dualism entrenched in violence.

Secondly, dissimilar assumptions lead Fanon and Todorov to embrace different analytical focuses and authorial purposes *vis-à-vis* the specific relationship between settler and native. Fanon focuses on the native, thus intentionally omitting a detailing of the settlers as multi-layered and epistemologically complex. Concurrently, as regards the native, the settlers' reified construction of the Algerians does not drive Fanon to critically deconstruct the way their nature is defined outside of history and beyond individual specificities. The choice not to actively deconstruct the natives' alleged inferiority, however, is made clear by reference to Fanon's interlocutor: speaking programmatically to the Algerians themselves, he does not need to deconstruct a hierarchy that they already disregard. Moreover, his aim is urgently political, historical and revolutionary rather than *theoretically* deconstructive. As concerns Todorov, he rather focuses on the settler – whose positionality is ultimately closer to his own. He consequently attempts to draw a complex portrait of the Spaniards, but their embryonic opening to difference and equality is discursively corrupted into inferiority and identity (i.e. assimilation) by the settlers'. Moreover, Todorov – unlike Fanon – feels the need to make explicit that 'there is no "natural" inferiority on the Indians' side' (Todorov, 1982, p. 63), although his attempt to deconstruct hierarchy results undermined by his own tendency, throughout the text, to engage in *othering*.

# Violence and Otherness: A New Perspective on Decolonisation Beyond Fanon

Written by Giulia Tempo

## *The facets of otherness*

These two sides of positionality – impacting otherness and the specific native/settler relationship – are reflected in the four facets through which otherness can be framed: spatial, visual, axiological and hierarchical. These must be addressed in order then to understand and respond to Fanon's radical de-othering through decolonisation. As concerns spatial alterity, Fanon uncovers – within a context of dialectical materialism – a world that is historically and politically 'cut in two' (Fanon, 1961, p. 29), and he insightfully addresses the native's perspective on the division: confronted with what he cannot have, the colonised drifts into revolutionary dreams that will prove pivotal for the development of an attempt to overcome othering. However, Fanon perceives the 'cut' as exclusively colonial, neglecting how alterity can be constructed *prior to* colonialism, becoming inherent to identity. Todorov usefully spells out *différences* existing prior to the conquest, illustrating how such naturalisation of alterity leads the Spaniards to perceive the natives as 'part of the landscape' (Todorov, 1982, p. 34).

Visually, geographical divisions are complemented by a focus on pigmentation, which for Fanon assumes a Manichean connotation constructed *ad hoc*: 'you are rich because you are white' (Fanon, 1961, p. 31). However, if otherness is indeed relational, Self-and-Other nevertheless transcend the colonies: whenever the face of the Other 'enters our world' (Lévinas, 1972, p. 16), crushing the yearn for omnipotence of the Self, the latter reacts by establishing whiteness as a form of authority to which the non-white must bend. Through Todorov, we come to perceive such visual otherness as deep-rooted and made-immanent, rather than and produced *post eventum*. Alterity acquires a visual connotation in Todorov as the natives 'seem bestial and go naked' (p. 36) – a physical differentiation with the settler that is apperceived after colonisation, but indeed precedes it and is thus beyond the reach of Fanon's colonial de-othering.

Spatial and visual alterity are inextricably linked to a set of axiologically-connoted representations. For Fanon, the settler reifies the native, painting him as the 'quintessence of evil' (p. 32). Todorov, on the other hand, portrays some of the settlers as performing a 'double movement' or constructing the natives as 'good' – although admittedly these views result from a projection of the Spaniards' ideals and of Christian values onto the Indians, rather than from a deep understanding of the Other. This complexity of axiological perspectives in *The Conquest of America* (1982) prompts Todorov to seek a key to mitigate contradictions, believing that separation can be hybridised to produce a conception of the Other as different-but-equal. In contrast, Fanon's dialectical materialism of an axiologically 'Manichean world' (Fanon, 1961, p. 31) connotes axiological alterity historically and politically – thus driving the author to chart a New Humanity that will radically overcome North-South divisions, rather than hybridising them. Fanon may thus be seen as *philosophically* addressing Todorov's otherness, but rooting it in a critical historical framework that sees the possibility – and necessity – to radically overcome historical contradictions.

The characterisations heretofore outlined are eventually hierarchised by the settler: for both authors, the different nuances of otherness are reduced, within settler discourses, to a superiority/inferiority binomial. For Fanon, the white man's claim of superiority ontologically culminates in the notion that it is him who has 'brought the native into existence and who perpetuates his existence' (p. 28). Todorov rather focuses on a deeper hierarchy-made-immanent, with the character of Sepulveda rooting in his understanding of Aristotle the claim that 'hierarchy, not equality, is the natural state of human society' (p. 152). Overall, if Todorov neglects historical and political contextual alterity, he nevertheless offers a key to transcend Fanon and to address those deeper traits of otherness-made-immanent, which constitute an undertone that cannot be de-othered through sheer violence.

## **Violence in Fanon and Todorov**

This Chapter investigates the different understanding of violence in Fanon and Todorov, building upon Chapter One to seek to assess the relationship violence establishes with alterity. The goal is that of explaining the motives that lead Fanon to conclude that violent decolonisation ends otherness, to then remark through Todorov the immanence of alterity relatively to that which Bakhtin (1979) would define as a dialogically-oriented Self. It will thus be shown, through Todorov and beyond Fanon, that otherness assumes a connotation of essentiality that hinders de-othering: to quote Campbell (1992), the logic of the Self 'requires difference' (p. 70).

# Violence and Otherness: A New Perspective on Decolonisation Beyond Fanon

Written by Giulia Tempo

## *Violence in Fanon: decolonial de-othering*

For Fanon, the settler's violence historically and politically constructs otherness, being read as a colonial process of violent othering. The oppressive division has in fact been established and upheld through violence, both physical and mental: on the one hand, the coloniser imposes himself through forced labour, infliction of pain and fatigue; on the other, he attempts to force the native into believing that he is inherently inferior, the 'perverse offspring' (Fanon, 1961, p. 170) whom the parent endeavours to protect. Raised by and through violence, the sole language the Algerian speaks is that of violence – the sole linguistic tool available for the composition of the *Bildungsroman* of emancipation, maturity and independence of a colonised people.

Fanon's conception of violence as productive of alterity conducts him to the conclusion that decolonisation – being a violent response to colonially-imposed *différence* – relieves from otherness. The settler does not succeed in silencing the native's quest for dignity through narratives of superiority and enlightenment: the colonised knows he is not an animal and laughs when he is referred to in zoological terms. 'It is precisely at the moment he realises his humanity' (Fanon, 1961, p.33) that he decides to bear arms, turning conflict into a weapon for structural change. Here, the Other – offended by the spirit of expansion of the Self (Lévinas, 1972) – violently calls upon the latter to take responsibility for his actions. Thus, colonial othering being entrenched in violence, Fanon is undoubtedly correct in describing conciliation and passive resistance as useless for the emancipation of a subjugated colonial Other and for the overcoming of the racialised superior-inferior dichotomy. The native acknowledges the inferiority into which he is forced and accepts that no communication can take place between two reciprocally-mute Others, who stand at the opposite sides of the ravine of inequality dug by Western colonial forces. Determined to bridge the abyss of hierarchised alterity and to become the master, the Algerian comprehends that only violence will serve his purpose. It is argued, however, that violence does not *ontologically* overcome otherness – and colonially-seated de-othering does not address alterity-made-immanent prior to and beyond colonialism. If, for Fanon, the contradiction inherent to alterity not only triggers revolutionary de-othering driven by the natives, but it ultimately serves the purposes of history, it can nevertheless be argued that its role in overcoming otherness is merely contextual. Colonial contradictions do find conciliation in history, and the latter undergoes a processual evolution through the very contradictions of alterity – but such historical progression is rather the *contextual* outcome of a decolonisation of otherness through violence. The violent overturning of the superior-inferior binomial remains in fact limited to the colonial context, while after the independence there will still be Others. There remains therefore the question of how to address *différence*-made-immanent.

## *Alterity-made-immanent to justify violence: Todorov's critique*

For Todorov, violence in the Spaniards' view is justified by their very acknowledgement of otherness – which acquires a connotation of pre-existence and immanence that is identity-based and cultural. Violent colonial conduct is in fact channelled and affected by the precedential notion 'of the Indians as inferior beings, halfway between men and beasts. Without this essential premise, the destruction could not have taken place' (Todorov, 1982, p. 146). Brutality against the natives is perpetrated as if the Indians were animals, plants or objects – thus constituting the inhumanly logical and brutal culmination of the hierarchised de-subjectification of the native. Sepulveda's reasoning – entrenched in Aristotle's *Politikē* – follows the reassuring logic of *ipse dixit* and reaches its zenith with the claim that, according to 'the greatest philosophers', violent action 'may be undertaken by a very civilized nation against uncivilised people' (Todorov, 1982, p. 156). In *Democrates Alter*, Sepulveda claims that if Others engage in practices such as human sacrifice or cannibalism, hierarchical violence aimed at *civilising* them is not only legitimate, but it is elevated to the status of moral imperative (Todorov, 1982). Indeed, the same holds true for peoples 'whose natural condition is such that they should obey others' (Todorov, 1982, p. 154). As confidently asserted by Columbus, the Indians 'are fit to be ruled' (Columbus, as quoted in Todorov, 1982, p. 46) and, if they do not force themselves into submission, they can be rightfully annihilated.

Through Todorov it can be argued that, if violence is justified through precedential alterity, violent decolonial action cannot be cast in the role of ending otherness. Otherness is pre-ordinated to conquest and, on a deeper level, it can be read as the understructure, the very bedrock of individuality – its immanence thus being substantiated. For Bakhtin (1979), on whose notion of exotopy Todorov builds, the Other cannot be overcome – being the

# Violence and Otherness: A New Perspective on Decolonisation Beyond Fanon

Written by Giulia Tempo

interdependent locus within which the Self is situated. More precisely, the Self exists by virtue of the Other, the latter being located *hors sujet* (Lévinas, 1972). The Self thus expresses a partial void in want for alterity, interlacing and interweaving with a Bakhtinian Other-from-Self that is extra-located. This very extra-location, together with the apparent impossibility of Self-sufficiency, delineates a Platonic portrait of the Self's 'desire and quest for the whole' (Plato, 385–370 BC/1981, p. 213) – thus resulting in a type of otherness more deep-rooted than the colonial context enables to appreciate. Consequently, the roots of otherness being deeper than conquest, Todorov does not accept decolonial violence as legitimate – asserting that 'such actions only reproduce the worst of what the Europeans have already accomplished, and nothing is more distressing than to see history repeating itself' (p. 246). However, the positional distance from an active engagement with the historical context – the involvement characterising Fanon's militant text – and the lack of a specific preoccupation with North-South colonial relations cause Todorov to neglect that violence is productive of decolonial liberation, albeit not of axiomatic de-othering. Ultimately, therefore, *The Conquest of America* does not present a solution to transcend the power-imbued, hierarchised colonial situation. Despite this limitation, however, Todorov's work offers a re-reading of otherness and enables to attain a new perspective, building upon but moving beyond Fanon, on how to encompass the engrained and pre-ordained alterity-made-immanent.

## From inequality-and-identity to difference-and-equality: re-reading otherness through Todorov's lens

This Chapter enacts a re-reading of otherness, based on the premise that Fanon's conceptualisation of violent decolonial action, although addressing alterity through a historical-materialistic attention to colonial relations, ultimately does not eradicate *différence* and thus leaves open the *Question of the Other*. Building upon this foundation, the goal is that of overcoming – through Todorov's work – the notion that the Other is either like the Self, or hierarchically subordinated to the latter, thus constituting an objectified subaltern entity. In Todorov's framework, the type of othering that needs to be overcome is entrenched in 'the failure to recognise the Indians, and the refusal to admit them as a subject having the same rights as oneself, but different' (p. 49). In other words, the Self is 'tempted to identify with the other and also to eliminate the other' (Nguyen, 2017, p. 81), with the two impulses coexisting within the Self and within a culture. If the Other is to be re-read as different-but-equal, therefore, two figures must be vanquished. Firstly, *inequality* – which substantiates the edification of a superior Self in relation to an Other whose subalternity legitimates extermination – must be overcome; secondly, the goal must be that of defeating *identity*, which proceeds by projecting the Self's values and by reducing alterity to the 'sovereign coincidence with the Self' (Lévinas, 1972, p. 16). For Todorov, '[t]hese two elementary figures of the experience of alterity are both grounded in egocentrism' (p. 42), being premised on the elevation to the status of universality of the values and of the perceptive primacy of the *I*. The figures of inequality and identity are hence summarised and reviewed, with the intent of researching in Todorov's work the tools to overcome them, thus building a new approach *vis-à-vis* otherness-made-immanent.

### *Inequality and its overcoming*

The figure of inequality, anticipated in the previous Chapters through the investigation of hierarchy, is signified within Todorov's work by the positions expressed by Vitoria, Ortiz and Oviedo. Vitoria's 'juridical expression of the doctrine of inequality' (Todorov, 1982, p. 150) builds upon a division – engendered by Lévinas's expansion of the *I* – between a civilised Self and a barbarian Other, and constructs the Indian as objectified and 'imperfectly human' (Todorov, 1982, p. 150). Ortiz conceptually situates the Indians on the same level – or even on an inferior one – with beasts of burden such as horses and asses, while for Oviedo the natives are ontologically situated 'somewhere among construction materials, wood, stone, metal [...], on the side of inanimate objects' (Todorov, 1982, p. 151). This hierarchised difference, as noted above, thus legitimises in the conquerors' eyes ruthless violence – the latter ultimately surging to the level of an *Endlösung*, a 'final solution' (Todorov, 1982, p. 151). This dramatic culmination of inequality is reflected in Nguyen's portrayal (2016) of the impulse to eliminate the *inferior* Other. In his reflection on the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, in fact, Nguyen remarks the tendency to render the Others 'inhuman in order to destroy them with inhuman behaviour' (p. 92).

The goal, however, is here that of identifying a response to inequality – namely through the acknowledgement of the Other as *equal*. Beyond Fanon, *différence* indeed remains – being constructed prior to colonisation – but it need not

# Violence and Otherness: A New Perspective on Decolonisation Beyond Fanon

Written by Giulia Tempo

be conceived as hierarchically ordered. Emblematic of this first facet of the re-reading of otherness is Las Casas' 'assertion of equality to the detriment of hierarchy' (Todorov, 1982, p. 191), developed in the last part of his life, after a personal anthropological evolutionary path. Las Casas, in fact, attempts to transcend hierarchising and objectifying practices of othering by engaging with the demonstration of the acceptability, *de facto* and *de jure*, of human sacrifice and cannibalism (Todorov, 1982). He then de-subjugates the Aztecs' faith by eulogising their superior religious feeling – with the consequent denaturalisation and deconstruction of the inferiority of the Indians' cult. On the whole, what Las Casas is erecting – thus providing a pivotal tool with which to dialogically re-read otherness – is the displacement and relativization of the very notion of barbarism, triumphally culminating in the intuition that 'each of us is the other's barbarian' (Todorov, 1982, p. 190). As a corollary of this relativistic shift in colonial gnosis, 'there is no longer a true God (ours), but a coexistence of possible universes' (Hanke, as quoted in Campbell, 1992, p. 104). As anticipated above, however, it can be claimed that Todorov's attempt to transcend inequality is somewhat tarnished by his very tendency, dictated by his positionality, to charge with a connotation of superiority and 'evolution' the Spaniards' side. Emblematic of this biased bent is the author's signification of the Spaniards as *Logos* and the Indians as *Mythos* – the former notion having allegedly overtaken the latter in the context of European civilisations. Importantly, *Logos* in ancient Greek designates not only *reason*, but also *word* – thus coming to reproduce the binary characterisation of civilisation as opposed to barbarism (i.e. the inability to speak). By acknowledging and avoiding such bias, however, it is possible to find in Todorov the key to overcome inequality – the first lens through which to re-read the exotopical alterity-made-immanent that Fanon's decolonisation cannot ontologically overcome.

## *Identity and its overcoming*

Within the framework of otherness, the figure of identity is exemplified in Todorov by the Spaniards' filtering of the native through Self-imposed Christian values. *Différence*, by whose radicality the Europeans are abashed, is reduced to and reconducted within the realm of the known through a set of Christian 'imaginative geographies' – as Said (1978) would define these reassuring Western organisational patterns. Marshalled through identity, alterity is trivialised by emphasising that 'the Indians possess Christian traits' (Todorov, 1982, p. 163) – thus assuaging the epistemological anxieties and exigencies of the West. The Christian dogma being universalist, from the European angle 'an essential non-difference on the part of all men' (Todorov, 1982, p. 162) is proclaimed. More specifically, such a figure can be detected in Las Casas' initial framing of the natives through a projection of his own ideals, with evidence of alterity being 'easily assimilated, failing as it did to unsettle any previously established modes of understanding in Europe' (Campbell, 1992, p. 102). The Self's egocentric perception of the Other, therefore, assumes the connotation of 'assimilationism, the projection of his own values on the others' (Todorov, 1982, p. 42). Mirroring the wider universalism of Christian belief, Las Casas in his initial appraisal of the Indians negates there being differences among peoples: as beheld by Lévinas (1972), there is a tendency within mankind to reduce alterity to a facet of the Self, giving way to a form of 'complacency for the very disavowal of the Other's individuality' (Lévinas, 1972, p. 65). Building upon Lévinas, Nguyen tracks an egotistic consolidation of the *I* 'at the expense of the other, whom we wish to turn into the "same"' (Nguyen, p. 79).

The direct confrontation with the Other, however, urges a Copernican re-reading of alterity *hors sujet*, i.e. terminating that substantiation of the Self as gravity centre of gnosis that leads to equality being corrupted into identity. As in the transcendence of the Self's egocentrism outlined by Lévinas, the face of the Other enables to outstrip identification by prompting the Self to exit his intimacy and to recognise the impossibility of converting the Other into the Self. Through Todorov, an answer to this Self-centric drive to identification can be worked out: the Other must be considered as *different* – a response exemplified by Las Casas' shift from an assimilationist to a perspectivist or distributive position, and from a religious to an anthropological theology. The Self may hence reach the conclusion that 'each has his own values' (Todorov, 1982, p. 190), thus being alive to the human and inhuman contained both in the Self and in the Other (Nguyen, 2016). Additionally, another of Todorov's characters can be considered to epitomise the upending of identification: Shagun, when portraying the Indians in his narration, attempts not only to spot the human and inhuman in the Other, but he also endeavours to maintain the Self and the Other separate. His desire to avoid a fusion of the two – found, in contrast, in Cabeza de Vaca's narrative – may be read as a resolve, albeit subject to setbacks, to let the Other 'speak' (Spivak, 1988). Through his decision to reproduce as closely as possible the Other's words, while acknowledging him as ontologically separate, Shagun embodies the overcoming of a hybrid situation – which had enabled the transcendence of inequality but could risk engendering identification. He

# Violence and Otherness: A New Perspective on Decolonisation Beyond Fanon

Written by Giulia Tempo

thus contributes to the achievement of equality in spite of difference – responding to an otherness-made-immanent that colonial de-othering cannot tackle. Through these re-narrations of alterity, therefore, ‘equality is no longer bought at the price of identity’ (Todorov, 1982, p. 190).

## Conclusion

It has been argued that Fanon’s violent decolonisation enables to overcome contextual alterity, but it does not ultimately end practices of othering. Indeed, context-specific otherness embodied by North-South relations – which in contrast does not constitute the central problematic for Todorov – is a carrier of *différence*, is constructed through historical and political violence and is ultimately overcome through decolonisation. However, even if this consideration enables Fanon to philosophically address Todorov’s *Question of the Other*, the preeminent otherness-made-immanent is not vanquished: in the post-colonial world, there will still be counterposed Others. On a deeper level, otherness has been addressed as not only made-immanent, but also vital for the subsistence of the Self – the latter being indeed *activity* and therefore yearning for totality, but displaying concurrently a passive need for the Other (Lévinas, 1972). As delineated by Campbell (1992), the acknowledgement and evaluation of the Other is thus necessary for the very sustenance of the Self; however, it has here been attempted to enact a re-reading of *différence*, thus deconstructing and scripting *de novo* the evaluative account of the Other.

Building upon the notion of the incompleteness of the Self and of the consequent impossibility for otherness to be radically overcome through decolonisation, Todorov’s work has been employed as a key with which to re-read alterity beyond Fanon. To avoid an oversimplification of the intellectual conversation between Fanon and Todorov, it has initially been shown how the two authors differ in their understanding of otherness and of violence – premised on dissimilar positionalities and on different levels of involvement with the subject matter. Building upon this, the goal has been that of expounding how, through Todorov, a Bakhtinian dialogically-oriented Self may come to apperceive the Other as indeed different – rather than identical –, but at the same time equal instead of inferior. Mirroring Bakhtin’s concern, in his work on semiotics (1979), with an understanding of the Other that does not turn him into mere passivity, through Todorov alterity can be subjectified – building upon the moral trajectory he outlines from other-as-object to other-as-subject, ‘equal to / but different from it’ (Todorov, 1982, p. 147). This requires, to a certain extent, a transcendence of the Self – or of Self-centrism – allowing for allocentrism and for the ‘epiphany of the Other’ (Lévinas, as quoted in Todorov, 1982, p. 250).

The issue with Todorov’s approach, however, has been identified in the positionality of his work – which prevents him from actively seeking a solution to context-specific otherness entrenched in real-world imperialist patterns. Todorov looks beyond decolonisation, acknowledges the immanent patterns of alterity and attempts an axiomatic re-reading of *différence* – but he overlooks the very process leading to independence. To a certain extent, he disregards the historical-materialistic basis of otherness, acknowledging the axiomatic connotation of the Self-Other relationship but neglecting the material contradictions which, having taken root in the colonial locus, might kindle decolonial, revolutionary violence. However, if Fanon may overstep Todorov by outlining a historically-materialistic, violent overcoming of context-specific alterity, the dialogue between the two nevertheless enables one to transcend Fanon’s account of violent de-othering. It has thus been shown that *différence* is made immanent beyond contextuality – accomplishing, through Todorov’s tools, a re-reading of the Other as different-but-equal.

## References

- Bakhtin, M. (1979). *L'autore e l'Eroe. Teoria Letteraria e Scienze Umane*. [Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity]. Torino, IT: Einaudi.
- Campbell, D. (1992). *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and The Politics of Identity*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Engels, F., Burns, E., & In Dutt, C. P. (1939). *Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science (Anti-Dühring)*. New York, NY: International Publishers. (Original work published in 1878)

# Violence and Otherness: A New Perspective on Decolonisation Beyond Fanon

Written by Giulia Tempo

Fanon, F. (1961). *The Wretched of the Earth*. London, UK: Penguin Books.

Hegel, G. W. F., Miller, A. V., & Findlay, J. N. (1977). *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press. (Original work published in 1807)

Lévinas, E. (1972). *Humanism of the Other*. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Marx, K., Engels, F., & Stedman Jones, G. (2002). *The Communist Manifesto*. New York, UK: Penguin Books. (Original work published in 1848)

Said, E. (1978). *Orientalism*. London, UK: Penguin Books.

Sartre, J. P. (1961). Preface to *The Wretched of the Earth*, by Fanon, F. London, UK: Penguin Books.

Spivak, G. C. (1988). *Can the subaltern speak? Reflections on the history of an idea*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Plato (1981). *Il Convito*. [Symposium]. Milano, IT: Garzanti. (Original work dating back to 385–370 BC)

Todorov, T. (1982). *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press.

## Note

[1] The expression refers to 'The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other', written in 1982 by the Bulgarian-French philosopher Tzvetan Todorov.

*Written by: Giulia Tempo*  
*Written at: London School of Economics and Political Science*  
*Written for: Prof. Tarak Barkawi*  
*Date written: February 2019*