Introduction

To some, the Martinican revolutionary writer, Frantz Fanon and the British-born American activist, Thomas Paine make strange bedfellows because they are separated by almost two centuries. To most, they are rarely mentioned in the same context as they belong to two very distinct geographical and totally different cultural backgrounds. However, on closer examination of their writings and carriers, these two eminent theorists of revolution, are indeed “birds of a similar feather” due to their common vision of man and their unquestionable love for liberty, human rights and justice. Their indisputable commitment to the defence of liberty and equality between men made of them incomparable icons of the world’s struggles for overthrowing any sort of domination, mainly colonial. To explore this contention, using a comparative perspective, we shall place Fanon in relation to Paine to make visible their affinities. We intend to concentrate on each of their writings which rose to prominence and influenced the course of events in their two adoptive countries. The purpose is to make it clear that the two intellectuals catalyzed energies in favour of independence in Algeria and in America. During the Revolutionary War of America and the Algerian Liberation War, the role of some charismatic revolutionary leaders such a Mohamed Boudiaf, Mustapha Ben Boulaïd and Mourad Didouche in Algeria, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin in America, was prominent. Besides, the work of two men, Frantz Fanon and Thomas Paine was and remains referential.

Thomas Paine’s influence and contribution to the American Revolution and Frantz Fanon’s unquestionable support to the Algerian Liberation War deserves special attention. Both of them resented the avant-garde atmosphere after short span experiences in America for the former and Algeria for the latter. Thomas Paine used his pen to support the American Revolution and to develop his arguments in favour of the American Independence. The same arguments hold true for Frantz Fanon who got a significant place in Algeria through his writings to develop his ‘Theory of Revolution’ after he had understood the real nature of colonialism. Both of the two countries were indeed colonized. The American Revolution lasted almost eight bloody years while the Algerian Liberation War witnessed seven lasting years of bloodshed. One of the striking similarities of the two revolutions lies in the fact that both of them were neither sporadic nor spontaneous. They came to maturity after lengthy debates and extensive preparations as an outcome of general resentment against the colonial power. The Americans opposed the domination of the British Crown and the Algerians rebelled against the French colonial rule. In the two colonized countries, the two anti-colonial liberation movements were primarily organized by intellectuals who were involved even in the drafting of the fundamental texts that gave a start to the two revolutions. In America, the Founding Fathers wrote the Declaration of Independence in January 1776, as a decisive action to cut off the ties from Britain. To a large extent, in a quite similar manner, in Algeria, the fathers of the revolution drafted the 1st November Declaration in 1954.
Yet, before dealing with Paine’s and Fanon’s common features in their writings and their commitment to revolution through their works, I shall first briefly consider some similarities between their respective careers. The two thinkers share amazing similarities. Both of them are foreigners to their adoptive lands. Paine, the American, was English and Fanon, the Algerian, was Martinican. Paine is, in effect, considered as a passionate advocate of universal fights against monarchy and the defence of republicanism while Fanon built up his intellectual reputation as an ardent campaigner of Third Worldism. For Paine, “the cause of America is the cause of all mankind”. Likewise, for Fanon, the cause of Algeria is that of the Third World, making their vision of the world dimension of the two revolutions quite similar. Paine’s and Fanon’s theories of revolution are fore grounded in their various essays and works. The fame of Paine and Fanon has grown on the strength of their books with incisive insights into issues of oppression, freedom and the necessity of counter violence as a reaction to the colonial order.

**Thomas Paine’s Career and Works**

Thomas Paine was born on 29th January, 1737 at Thedford, in England. He was an effective pamphleteer and a committed writer and journalist. He was 37 when he arrived at the American shores at the eve of the War of Independence that would revolutionize America. Years earlier, he met Benjamin Franklin in Paris who was the spokesperson of his country in Europe. Paine was advised by the American leader to cross the Atlantic and settle in America with the purpose of setting up a school for young ladies. The project did not work out for Paine. So, he moved to political controversy as a freelance writer.

Paine used first the American newspapers to convey his views of Man. Some time after his arrival to America, he contributed to the Pennsylvania Magazine, one of the numerous periodicals that flowered at that time in America. Paine started his career as a journalist with a provocative article entitled “African Slavery” which he published in 1774. Throughout the article, Paine didn’t hesitate to criticize rudely slavery, a phenomenon seen by the journalist as unjust and inhumane. Paine sided against the institution of slavery, denouncing any form of servitude and subordination. Paine’s writings and articles had a great impact on the American minds and helped greatly to shape the radical political changes which would lead to the American rebellion against the British colonial rule.

The coming events, namely the successive waves of heavy taxes imposed by the British authorities caught the attention of Thomas Paine. Indeed, after the “Boston Tea Party” affair which occurred on December 16th, 1773, a seditious spirit mounted steadily in the colonies. The reaction of the colonists against the imposed taxes on them by the English government was justified by their claim of a right of representation in the British Parliament at Westminster. The atmosphere of resentment was remarkably seized by Thomas Paine who attacked allegiance to the English monarchy, and the common sense of the matter to Paine, was that King George III bore the responsibility for the malevolence toward the colonies.

January 1776 was a turning point in Paine’s career as an outstanding theorist of revolution. He published then, his famous pamphlet, entitled, Common Sense. The book received a significant acclaim in America and was duplicated in thousands of copies. The content of the pamphlet includes Paine’s formulated ideas of independence and his commitment to social justice and equality. Paine’s book can be regarded, in my view, not only as the foundation on which the American Declaration of Independence rests, but also as the fountainhead from which the U.S Constitution was inspired. Equally of importance is Paine’s
Crisis Papers, published during the war. The papers were written when Paine volunteered in the Continental Army. It was during the period from 1776 to 1783 that Paine began to write his sixteen Crisis Papers intending to motivate and encourage the American soldiers who were fighting in the battlefield. Through the papers, Paine aimed to spur and urge his readers, mainly American, to get rid of the British yoke.

After the end of the war for the American Independence, Thomas Paine returned to France where, in 1791, he published The Rights of Man, a book in which he defended the French Revolution against monarchy. The book is considered as the most advanced statement of democracy in action at that period. In France, Paine was seen as a national hero and a victim of British tyranny. Paradoxically, Thomas Paine, who was a true republican, as a member of the French National Convention, voted against the execution of the dethroned King Louis XVI. As a result of his controversial position, he was sent to prison in 1793. It was during his imprisonment that he wrote and started to publish his The Age of Reason. When he was released from prison, in 1802, he went back to America where he, disappointedly learnt that the great majority of his countrymen considered him as an infidel and a traitor despite his unrelenting engagement for the American cause. Paine’s life ended in a sad way, he died very poor and totally forgotten by his compatriots in 1809. At the ceremony of his funerals, there were only six persons. (Vincent.1983:368).

Frantz Fanon’s Career and Works

Frantz Fanon was born on 20 July, 1925 in Martinique. The island was then a French colony whereas today it is a French “Department”. He was issued from a mixed family background of African slaves. At an early age, when he was just fifteen, he experienced racism in his homeland. During WWII, the Martinicans were ill-treated by the French soldiers who were blockaded there. The latter had racist behaviour towards the natives. The harsh treatment was to become a substantial formative influence on the young Fanon. What he witnessed as a teenager, cemented in a solid manner his feelings concerning alienation and he came to understand the realities of racism. (Allesandrini, 1999:112).

However, despite those misadventures and condemnable misconducts of the French army in Fanon’s fatherland, the latter joined, nonetheless, the French forces at the age of 18. He even enlisted later in the French army and participated in the bloody battles of Alsace. In 1944, he was wounded in the battleground and received the Croix de Guerre medal. In 1945, after recovering from his wounds, Fanon returned home to Martinique, as a decorated war veteran. His biographer, Alice Cherki, maintains that Fanon’s experience of racism in Martinique, in the army, and on the streets of the France helped to shape his political outlook. (Cherki, 2000:23). During his stay in his home country, Fanon worked for the parliamentary campaign of his mentor, the poet and statesman, Aimé Césaire, who influenced him greatly. After he had succeeded in his baccalaureate exam, Frantz Fanon returned to France where he studied medicine and psychiatry. In 1953, he was sent to Algeria and he was appointed as chef de service in Blida-Joinville hospital where he worked until his resignation in 1956.

Fanon’s writing career began with the publication in 1952 of his book, Black Skin, White Masks in which he scrutinizes the impact of colonial subjugation on the black psyche while he was in France. The book is also a very personal account of Fanon’s experience as a black, as a man, and an intellectual. It announces his future theory of the revolution (Lucas: 1971:151).
Yet, it was in Blida that he initiated revolutionary methods of treatment and care based on socio-therapy, connected with his patients’ cultural background. In his writings, he discusses in depth the effects of torture on Algerian fighters. His bitter experiences of colonisation urged him to change his perceptions of the colonial system. Ultimately, he decided to make his mind. Indeed, in 1956, he wrote his famous "Letter of resignation to the Resident Minister", of France and made a definitive break with his French assimilationist cultural background in favour of a critical position toward the French domination and hegemony in Algeria. As a reaction to Fanon’s resignation and his commitment for the Algerian cause, the French authorities signed an order of expulsion, obliging the psychiatrist to settle in Tunis. He was indeed expelled from his adoptive land, Algeria, in January, 1957. There, he joined the “exterior delegation of the FLN” to which he had been previously admitted. It was also in Tunis that he first took care of the ALN soldiers and the Algerian refugees. During the same period, Fanon had worked in the FLN press organs as Résistance algérienne before it ceased publication. He, afterwards, contributed in the columns of El Moudjahid newspaper. He wrote up for this publication until the end of his life. Frantz Fanon did not only contribute to the different issues of the publication, anonymously, like Thomas Paine, but was also given a post in the “Commission de presse”, a press division of the FLN. He also served as Ambassador to Ghana for the Provisional Algerian Government in 1960.

A certain number of his writings from that period were collected posthumously in a book entitled Toward the African Revolution, published in 1975, in which he shows himself as a war strategist. In one the sections of the book, Fanon discusses the necessity of opening a southern front to the war and how to meet the needs and how to run the supply lines (Fanon. 1975; 78). It was actually, after his arduous trip across the Sahara to open a third Front for the Algerian revolution, that he was diagnosed with leukaemia. He went to the Soviet Union for treatment. Because of his disease, he could not write himself his famous book, The Wretched of the Earth. That was why he dictated it. Because he was not healed, he went for further leukaemia treatment in the USA but died in Washington, D.C., on December 6, 1961 under the name of Ibrahim Fanon. He was buried in Algeria. Later, his body was moved to a martyrs (chouhada) graveyard at Ain Kerma in eastern Algeria.

Today, we can say that all of Fanon’s writings are concentrated on the Algerian revolution. This holds true mostly with his series of political essays published in L’An cinq de la révolution algérienne (1959), translated into English as Dying Colonialism in which he calls for armed struggle against the French imperialism. Unlike Thomas Paine who supported another revolution, the French, Fanon did not fulfil his dream because he did not live long enough to witness Algeria’s independence.

Paine’s and Fanon’s Theories of Revolution

It was in the 1960’s that Fanon started to be associated with the idea of an armed revolution in the Third World. In the words of his biographer, David Macey, in his book, Frantz Fanon: A Life : “Fanon came to be seen as the apostle of violence, the prophet of a violent Third World revolution that posed an even greater threat to the West than communism” and “the spokesmen of a Third Worldism which held that the future of socialism-or even the world- was no longer in the hands of the proletariat of the industrialised countries, but in those of the disposed wretched of the earth. (Macey.2000: 63).”

Fanon believed that violent revolution is the only means of ending colonial repression and cultural trauma in the Third World. "Violence," he argued, "is a cleansing force. It frees
the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect." "I have no wish to be the victim of the Fraud of a black world. My life should not be devoted to drawing up the balance sheet of Negro values. There is no white world, there is no white ethic, and any more than there is a white intelligence. There are in every part of the world men who search. I am not a prisoner of history. I should not seek there for the meaning of my destiny. I should constantly remind myself that the real leap consists in introduction invention into existence. In the world through which I travel, I am endlessly creating myself." (Fanon.1952: 236).

We can consider that the practice of psychiatry in a colonial situation had deep effects on the psyche of Fanon himself. His visions changed and Fanon regarded the oppression, the horrors, and the torture the Algerian populations underwent during the war as “terrifying”. For Fanon, the struggle for national liberation in Algeria had become patent because of the brutal French repression. Consequently, he decided to resign from his duties, and became one of the most articulate spokesmen of the Algerian insurgents. In his letter of resignation sent to the Resident Minister in 1956, we can read:

If psychiatry is the medical technique that aims to enable man no longer to be stranger to his environment, I owe it to myself that the Arab, permanently an alien in his own country, lives in a state of absolute depersonalization. What is the status of Algeria? A systematized de-humanization. It was an absurd gamble to undertake at whatever cost, to bring into existence a certain number of values, when the lawlessness, the inequality, the multi-daily murder of man were raised to the status of legislative principles. (Quoted in Fanon.1964: 51)

Black Skin White Masks published in 1952, is considered both as part manifesto and part analysis. Actually, it not only presents Fanon’s personal experience as a black intellectual in a whitened world but also elaborates the ways in which the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized is normalized. In his early life and because of his schooling and cultural backgrounds, the young Fanon conceived of himself as French. However, his perceptions profoundly changed after his initial encounter with French racism. That turning point in his life shaped his psychological theories about culture decisively. He concludes through his medical and psychological practice that racism generates harmful psychological constructs that subvert the black man and subject him to a universalized white norm, alienating his consciousness. That undermines that speaking French means that one accepts the collective consciousness of the French. Blackness is thus obviously identified with evil and sin. Fanon points that under these conditions, the black man is necessarily alienated from himself.

The same arguments hold true for Thomas Paine. He rose to fame and attracted public attention with his pamphlet Common Sense that helped to bring the lukewarm patriots into the revolutionary movement and many colonial newspapers published it. It is worth mentioning that at that time, the delegates to the Second Continental Congress felt resentment against the British colonial rule. Concerning the significant role of Paine’s work, Michael Emery notes:

This challenge was hurled at the Dickensonian Whigs, who shuddered at the word “independence”, and they replied in the local newspapers with condemnation of this upstart. In a matter of weeks, however, Paine’s views in Common Sense were known to virtually every literate American, and it is significant that only six months later, the Declaration of Independence committed the former colonies to this doctrine”. (Emery: 2000: 55).

We totally agree with Emery, when he stresses that Paine shaped the American Revolution from the ideological point of view. For, in Common Sense, Paine developed all
arguments either political or economic that pleaded in favor of the American Independence. Indeed, Paine considered that “The cause of America is in a great measure the cause of all mankind”. Tom Paine attacked the monarchy: “A French Bastard (…) establishing himself king of England against the consent of the natives”. (Foner, 1995: 5, 17)

Despite the high political and ideological qualities of *Common Sense*, Paine’s famous pamphlet remained anonymous. Paine maintained in his pamphlet that:

> Who the Author of this Production is, is wholly unnecessary to the Public, as the Object for Attention is the Doctrine itself, not the Man. Yet, it may be unnecessary to say, That he is unconnected with any party, and under no sort of Influence public or private, but the influence of reason and principle. (Ibid. 6)

Most of Paine’s political ideas were put into practice after America had recovered its independence. Actually, the ideological work of Thomas Paine shaped the popular representation principle based on the number of population in a colony and that “will become necessary to augment the number of the representatives” in a legislative branch of power where “the whole colony may assemble to deliberate on public matters. It is more than probable that their first laws will have the title only of regulations.” Thomas Paine’s virulent attacks against Monarchy were substantiated in what he found absurd “the distinction of men into Kings and Subjects”. The rejection of the monarchical system and its replacement by a popular representation was developed by Paine in this way:

> To the evil of monarchy we have added that of hereditary succession; and as the first is degradation and lessening of ourselves, so the second, claimed as a matter of right, is an insult and an imposition on posterity. For all men being originally equals, no one by birth could have a right to set up his own family in perpetual preference to all others for ever, and though himself might deserve some decent degree of honours of his contemporaries, yet his descendants might be far too unworthy to inherit them”. (Ed. Kramnick. 1976. p.76)

Paine refused the doctrine of reconciliation and defended the idea of independence. He insisted: “Every quiet method for peace hath [sic] been ineffectual […] I am not induced by motives of pride, party, or resentment to espouse the doctrine of separation and independence; I am clearly, positively, and conscientiously persuaded that it is the true interest of this continent to be so”. Paine’s strong belief that independence will come “sooner or later must arrive” had its roots in his conviction that “reconciliation and ruin are nearly related”. (Ibid. 86). Paine’s success was due to his combination of an insight passion and a vivid straightforward prose. He wrote his *Common Sense* after two years of immersion in revolutionary politics in Philadelphia and after a lifetime of a dissent in his native England. Paine’s immediate audience was the Philadelphian artisan class that found its political voice in the Revolution. Paine developed his counter arguments against the royalists as follows:

> Tell us of harmony and reconciliation, can ye restore to us the time that is past? Can ye give to prostitution its former innocence? Neither can ye reconcile Britain and America. The last cord now is broken, the people of England are Presenting addresses against us. They are injuries that nature cannot forgive. (Ibid. 87)

The above quotation shows that Paine schematized and simplified the controversy between reconciliation and independence. He considered the former, as “a matter exceedingly perplexed and complicated” and the latter option as “being a single simple line contained within ourselves”. Paine did not take part in the drafting of the U.S. Constitution but if we stand back far enough, the plan he sketched out in Common Sense seems to be in perfect harmony with the American Constitution. The following quotation illustrates the point: “Let
the assemblies be annual, with a President only. The representation more equal, their business wholly domestic, and subject to the authority of Continental Congress.” (Foner. 1995: 32).

It is worth mentioning that early in June 1776, a committee composed of Benjamin Franklin from Pennsylvania, John Adams from Massachusetts, Roger Sherman from Connecticut, Robert R. Livingston from New York and Thomas Jefferson from Virginia carried out one of Tom Paine’s suggestions, by drafting a Declaration of Independence. Thomas Paine displayed in his pamphlet Common Sense a certain number of arguments aiming at supporting the idea of separation and establishing a republican government. Paine has certainly referred to John Locke’s philosophical ideas expressed in his Two Treaties of Government.

This paper then, highlights the different achievements of Thomas Paine before and during and the American war of independence. It shows how Common Sense succeeded to commit the American opinion to the ideals of freedom and liberation and managed to make many converts to independence. The pamphlet, indisputably allowed the Americans to rediscover the principles of republicanism that they had adopted later on, as the pillars upon which their government is built. The contribution of Thomas Paine through his writings during the American Revolution is not limited to his pamphlet Common Sense. This is actually can be considered as an ideological work. His involvement in that liberation movement as a war strategist may be read in his sixteen American Crisis Papers he published during the war.

Conclusion

To conclude, the outline of Paine’s and Fanon’s careers shows clearly that the two men share most and foremost an undeniable commitment against tyranny. Both Paine and Fanon voiced their common concern of independence, appealed for violence, and their writings tended to repudiate the colonial tutelage on their adoptive countries. In my view, despite the two centuries that separate Paine’s and Fanon’s engagements to liberation movement in their adoptive countries (Paine in 1776 and Fanon in 1956), the age of their commitment (Paine was 37 when he started his struggle, and Fanon died at the age of 36 leaving behind him long years of battle), their respective contributions to freedom in two different continents remains undoubtedly identical. Both of them shared the same relics of their country of origin; Paine was expelled by the British authorities after he had supported the French Revolution of 1791 and Fanon’s fate was the same. The French government outlawed him as soon as he had denounced the atrocities of the French colonial power and defended the rights of the Algerians to independence. The two famous men shared other amazing similarities. Actually, Paine, as well as Fanon, had been official representatives of their countries of adoption; the former was appointed as an advisor of James Monroe during the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 and the latter was appointed as an ambassador of the Provisory Government of Algeria (GPRA) in Ghana in 1960.

Today, Fanon’s legacy appears crucial for the study of issues in relation with contemporary cultural politics, though his field of studies have been the site of various theoretical and political disagreements. Similarly, many works are devoted to Paine in a need to be understood as he emerges as a human and lonely and heroic figure who represents actually an uncompromising fighter to define man’s fullest freedom and worth in spite of his final drunken degeneration. Last, but not the least, both of the two thinkers did not have official honors after their death. Paine’s funerals were almost clandestine while Fanon was not
buried in the graveyard of El Alia, in Algiers, as Algeria does with historic and official personalities.

References


