

"Overcoming the Humiliation of Oppression through Nonviolence: Using Mimetic Theory to Re-read Fanon"

Frantz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* has had a tremendous influence on the theorization of the process by which a marginalized group becomes free of the oppression of a dominant group. Usually it is read as arguing for the necessity of violence in this process, to free the marginalized group from its "humiliation" so that they may then revolt. In this paper, I plan to re-read *Wretched of the Earth* through the lens of René Girard's mimetic theory, suggesting thereby a practice of nonviolence as an alternative for freeing a marginalized group from the humiliation that undergirds its oppression.

Jean-Paul Sartre, in his introduction to *Wretched of the Earth*, suggests that in the colonial setting the "settlers" are not able to kill the "natives" outright, or reduce them to "animal-like degradation," because of the need to exploit them effectively. This modicum of strength that natives must be allowed by settlers is at the heart of what Sartre terms a "relentless logic" that leads ultimately to decolonization.

Transposing this logic into the terms of mimetic theory, the natives or other marginalized group can be thought of as providing a standing reserve of scapegoats needed to stabilize the dominant group, much as the *pharmakoi* helped to stabilize ancient Athens. The members of the marginalized group are given a degree of material comfort and autonomy. The only function of this may seem to be to secure their acquiescence in their marginalization. However, it also ensures the greater degree of stabilization of the dominant group that only a *human* sacrifice, as opposed to an animal sacrifice, can provide. In analogy to Fanon's account, it is this modicum of *humanity* left to the marginalized group that ensures their ultimate victory. Because without humanity, there can be no humiliation at having acquiesced to being scapegoated. And without humiliation, there is no possibility for courage, the sign of that humiliation having been overcome.

In the terms of mimetic theory, courage is the subjective correlate of a move against mimetic pressure. Violence is one possible source of this courage, but, I will argue, a practice of nonviolence can be as well.

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