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## DEBATE

# A radical supplement: Fanon, Gaza and the anxieties of empire

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## SUMMARY

This short piece raises awareness of how Frantz Fanon's ideas, in the year of his centenary, continue to provoke fear and anxiety within the Western imperialist political establishment, especially as his work gains renewed prominence among pro-Palestinian activists. It provides Sarah Jilani, one of the contributors to this special issue, with the space to respond to a 2025 policy report published by the British Conservative think tank Policy Exchange, titled *After Gaza: Fanon and His Acolytes*. The report, authored by former British diplomat John Jenkins and introduced by Conservative Party leader Kemi Badenoch, includes a footnote mocking Jilani while insulting Fanon's political legacy.

## KEYWORDS

Frantz Fanon; Gaza; Kemi Badenoch; violence; Libya; John Jenkins

Of all dead and living revolutionaries, perhaps none elicits as much fear in the Western ruling class today as Frantz Fanon. As a new generation of radical activists and scholars draws on Fanon to interpret and resist the Israeli settler-colonial

Correction: Two sentences on page 434 were amended after online publication. Kemi Badenoch was born in Britain and is not Nigerian-born, as was incorrectly stated. The foregoing sentence was also amended.

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genocide in Gaza, the imperialist establishment has wasted no time preparing its counterattack.

Earlier this year, the conservative British think tank Policy Exchange published a report under its ‘Security and Extremism’ theme, titled *After Gaza: Fanon and his Acolytes* (Jenkins 2025). The report was written by former British diplomat John Jenkins, who served in Libya in 2011 as Special Representative and later as Ambassador to the pro-Western National Transitional Council, during the same year the US and Britain led a NATO intervention that hijacked the Libyan revolt.

In addition to being penned by this avowed enemy of the African people, the document carried a foreword by none other than the unpopular British-Nigerian Conservative Party leader Kemi Badenoch. She writes with the contemptuous verve of a comprador confronted by the sight of the oppressed rising against her: ‘The slogan “Globalise the Intifada” is ... often dressed up as solidarity with the oppressed. Yet at its core, it channels the same Fanonian logic: that violent uprising is not just inevitable, but virtuous.’ Later she adds, ‘We cannot allow our universities to remain blind to all this’ (Jenkins 2025, 5–6).

Despite such outlandish claims, the report’s contempt spills over beyond its own arguments. In one footnote, Jenkins even goes so far as to name one Fanon scholar contributing to this special issue, Sarah Jilani – mocking her for a tweet she posted in praise of an article challenging Eurocentrism, as though he could not imagine that a fellow Oxbridge-educated academic might dare to cross such lines (*ibid.*, 32).

This inclusion makes it evident that the think tank’s publication is not simply a commentary. It is, crucially, a declaration of anxiety. The underlying message is this: the threat to our present-day neocolonial global order, of which US hegemony and Zionism form the cornerstones, will benefit from Fanon’s thought as it seeks to develops its theoretical coherence, historical literacy and liberation praxis. Far from being something to shrink from, this singling out of Fanon by the imperialist British political establishment is to be welcomed. The report reveals what those of us committed to anti-imperialism already know: Fanon’s thinking remains vital, relevant and, yes, dangerous to the structures of imperialism, Zionism and racial capitalism.

On the face of it, the report frames Fanon as a radicalising influence, linking his anticolonial theory to Islamist extremism and anti-Semitism through erroneous and cursory readings of the philosopher and revolutionary. In doing so, it shows the power of thinking with Fanon today, two years into a live-streamed genocide. It shows that his critique crosses borders, connects liberation struggles across differences of faith and culture, and provides intellectual tools with which we can unmask the empty promises of both a liberal worldview that thinks history is driven by the magnanimity of the powerful, and of the so-called ‘rules-based order’ whose institutions have proven toothless in the face of Zionist aggression. The report treats Fanon as an intellectual cancer to be contained rather than as a thinker to engage with seriously, reducing him to an advocate of mindless violence. This bad-faith reading, and the insupportable conclusions it draws, is evidence of how potent his ideas remain.

As Kai Mora (2024) recently argued, quoting from *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon’s analyses illuminate what is being done to Gaza: ‘colonialism persists “like the smoking ashes of a burnt-down house after the fire has been put out, which still threaten to burst into flames again”’. Gaza is not just a war theatre but an illustration

of present-day colonial structures: a world divided into zones of light and zones of rubble, civilians and ‘animals’. As Fanon diagnosed,

it is not enough for the settler to delimit physically, that is to say with the help of the army and the police force, the place of the native. As if to show the totalitarian character of colonial exploitation the settler paints the native as a sort of quintessence of evil. (Fanon 1963 [1961], 41)

The policy report’s alarm, which bespeaks a full belief in the notion that the oppressed are mindlessly prone to being ‘corrupted’ by ideas of violent vengeance, confirms Fanon’s observation (Jenkins 2025).

The British establishment’s insistence on branding Fanon as dangerous tells us two things. First: he still poses a threat to the prevailing order. Second: we need him now, more than ever. If Fanon is being repeatedly demonised, caricatured and deliberately misread as a nihilistic advocate of violence, this is a telling admission that, if the status quo were indeed just, it would have no reason to fear him. For anti-imperialists, Fanon remains vital not because he issues a blanket endorsement of violence but because he forces us to rethink liberation in a world that is ostensibly meant to be ‘postcolonial’, yet is not.

For Fanon, anticolonial violence was never a celebration of bloodshed nor an exhortation to nihilistic revenge. It was a diagnostic category, a way of naming the fact that colonial domination had already made violence the organising principle of everyday life. In *The Wretched of the Earth* (Fanon 1963 [1961]), he insists that the colonised do not fall into violence but are formed within a world maintained by police raids, militarised borders, forced labour and the constant threat of murder. Anticolonial violence is therefore not an ethical ideal but a political response: the moment when the colonised reclaim their agency and declare that the coloniser no longer has a monopoly on life itself. Crucially, the psychiatrist in Fanon saw this rupture as valuable only insofar as it opened the possibility of creating new social relations – relations no longer structured by racial hierarchy, extraction or dehumanisation. Violence, for him, was not an end but a passage: a brief, necessary and often traumatic interval through which a dominated people could recover their subjecthood and begin the far more difficult work of constructing a just society. To reduce this to fanaticism or extremism is to erase the structural violence he laid bare.

Consider Gaza not only as territory but as symbol: a place so exposed that the dividing line is visible, so brittle that the logic of apartheid, of settler colonialism, of racial-capitalist extraction is laid bare (Ebb 2024). In that sense, the policy report is a defensive manoeuvre: attack Fanon, delegitimise his heirs, freeze the field of struggle. Hysterically labelling him anti-Semitic – when in fact his *Black Skin, White Masks* (Fanon 1968 [1952]) also touches on the racialisation of Jewish people, and his own biography is nothing if not one of self-immersion in the conditions of those not of his religion or skin colour – is a revealing snapshot of how vulnerable the status quo is and of how tired its old divide-and-conquer tactics are getting. Power fears that subjectivities may shift, people may demystify the sources of their oppression and alliances may cross ethnic, class or national lines.

When the political establishment frames Fanon as the root of the problem, it is acknowledging that we are the problem – anyone who refuses to simply accept that

the majority of the world is, and should remain, powerless in the face of genocide and exploitation. The empire is anxious because the steadfastness of Palestinians has made ever-growing numbers of us realise that liberation is not merely the defeat of settler colonialism but the collective remaking of economic, political and social structures altogether.

That defenders of imperialism demonise and caricaturise Fanon is significant not because it wins the argument but because it betrays a hit nerve. It admits that a world order founded on imperial-racial logic fears thinkers who have demystified its workings, who are capable also of becoming actors. The task for us then is to continue thinking, acting and recreating what freedom means, against and despite its current meaning: that a minority has the freedom to murder with impunity, while a majority must endure quietly.

The threat, they tell us, will come from quarters that have read Fanon. We can only hope so.

## Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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