

## Book Review

**Review of *Fanon, Education, Action: Child as Method* By Erica Burman  
Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 244 pages, \$35.96 paperback. ISBN 9781138089952**

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As more of Frantz Fanon's works emerge and become available in English, new ways of engaging with his writing burgeons in fields such as education and critical psychology. Fanon left an undeniable imprint and a pulsating critical voice in philosophy, psychoanalysis, and revolutionary political praxis. His radical and politically engaged perspectives withstood the test of time and continue to resonate and be applicable for most of us in the academic radical Left vis-à-vis the deterioration of our socio-political climate. Erica Burman (2018) invites Fanon to become a key player in critiquing her own field, clinical developmental psychology, and help develop an analytical approach that reads socio-political practices through the positioning accorded to child/hood and children.

'Child as method,' as Burman (2018) states, is "concerned with the (structural and subjectively occupied) positions produced for and about children, and how children engage with these positions" (p. 187). Her book *Fanon, Education, Action – Child as Method* is a sustained analysis of Fanon's work and an engagement with the various forms of child/ren that appear throughout his published works. Burman (2018) aptly describes the analysis as a "deep and critical evaluation of Fanon" that is also "critical with Fanon" (p. 7). Burman (2018) is not shy to bring in a radical feminist perspectives along with a Foucauldian lens, both of which have been critical of Fanon's work in the past (see p. 121 onwards). Instead of solely being critical, Burman (2018) draws connections between these various positions, in one instance she explains, "Fanon was explicitly and actively committed to a project of political transformation" (p. 120). This project of political transformation is fundamentally personal, something feminists of all types would agree with. The personal and the political converge much like the feminist rallying slogan "the personal is political." An added layer to this analysis appears in Burman's (2018) chapter on the "extemic child," which draws from Jacques Lacan's notion of 'extémité' to ascribe to the subject what is both interior and exterior since the individual and the social are infinitely intertwined. The extemic child is simultaneously included and excluded within societal practices. However, what Burman (2018) would like us to keep in mind is that children in the Fanonian sense are "not the prototypical children of normalized, globalized models but rather children who are at the margins, marginalized by (in his descriptions) racialisation, political allegiance, class, and gender" (p. 151). The child becomes a political subject who acts and reacts, who internalizes and becomes, and instantiates a project of transformation that is both personally and politically meaningful.

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This thorough exploration is a systemic analysis of the psycho-affective and cultural meanings set forth by Fanon with regards to the centrality of child/hood. These references made to the child are the starting point of Burman's (2018) analyses, which generate pluralistic and relevant discussions around four forms of child: The Idiotic child, the Traumatogenic child, the Therapeutic child, and the Extemic child (as mentioned above). I could argue that the 'method' is quadripartite in the sense that these various children are but facets of a uniting 'child.' These facets come to explain the construction of subjectivities by way of interactions (direct or indirect), which are, in Fanon's case, deeply affected and informed by racialization, colonial oppression, and the struggle for liberation. While Burman (2018) gives ample background of Fanon's personal history, the book also permits us to see what led Fanon to write, research, and critique. The medical and clandestine work he performed in Algeria, confronting racism in France, and supporting the struggle for Algerian independence showcase a different temporality than that of linear, logical, and historical succession. Instead, Burman (2018) echoes Fanon in that this personal-political project disrupts the developmental route and pays closer attention to narrative as a more adequate psycho-political and psychoeducational methodology.

As Burman (2018) explains, Fanon offers a 'sociodiagnostic,' which she similarly adapts to British society vis-à-vis Brexit. This is perhaps the most intriguing part of the book for it uniquely reads Fanon while exploring Burman's own concrete socio-political conditions. Parallels can be drawn between Fanon's and Burman's times. In the contemporary setting, we witness the rise of neo-fascism and the conservative Right, the parasitic stage of neoliberal capitalism, racism and xenophobia, the rampant inequality gap (intensifying under COVID-19), all of which must continually be brought into question. As readers, we are obliged to consider the current conditions of our time and see that movements such as Black Lives Matter are but new utterances of similar constant struggles. We ask, alongside Burman and Fanon, the question he posed at the end of *Wretched of the Earth*, "In reality, who am I?" (as cited in Burman, 2018, p. 126) because Black lives continue to be denied, dehumanized, and rendered dispensable in the US and elsewhere.

To decolonize and to dismantle systemic racial oppression forces all of us to continually ask this very question. Who am I and what am I doing about these persisting inequalities and injustices? Where do I stand and how am I to support others in the struggle for liberation? Let us, following Fanon and Burman, disrupt the developmental cycle and the linear succession, which undergirds it. As Burman (2018) points out, this question "is also a question about the claim on the world, on reality, and the demand for a different reality—a glimpse that this, current, reality is not all there is" (p. 126). For reality can be otherwise and it should be, we see history unfolding before our eyes, so what are we doing about it? In the chapter before last, Burman (2018) cites Fanon's call to the European colonizer, which in our day is a call addressed to every privileged white person in America and elsewhere, asking them to recognize their complicity (as cited in Burman, 2018, p. 154). We should say instead, white people "must first decide to wake up and shake themselves, use their brains, and stop playing the stupid game of Sleeping Beauty" (p. 154). Fanon and Burman shake the very ground of the reader and lay down the foundations for a path of personal and political transformation, for they question our complicity in today's most crucial issues.

Burman's book is thought provoking and extremely relevant today. It deserves more attention than it is currently being given and it is worthy of praise. I cannot do justice to the book with a short review, for it is a highly rich analysis that engages Fanon's work in a way that has not been done before. Other valuable angles of the book to explore are the various sections on 'pedagogy of failure' (p. 118 and earlier), the 'Brexit Street' readings (p. 62 onward), or Burman's (2018) interpretation of Fanon's cases in *Wretched of the Earth* (p. 126 onward). Burman's work remains an outstanding resource for scholars, activists, and practitioners engaging with, being critical of, or wishing to struggle alongside Fanon while considering the relevance of his ideas in today's socio-political climate. Burman handed us a powerful book, let us pay close attention to it.

## **Autobiographical Note**

María-Constanza Garrido Sierralta is an M.A. student in the Department of Philosophy at the University of New Mexico. Her research interests are critical phenomenology, psychoanalysis from the Global South, and Marxist theory and practice. She is a published translator, her most recent work is featured in *The Weariness of Democracy: Leading Theorists Confront the Failure of Liberal Democracy* (Palgrave, 2020). She is also the co-founder of the Critical Praxis Cooperative.