**Power and Violence**

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Jennifer Lawrence and Josh Hutcherson became an instant hit with their appealing taglines and striking looks in The Hunger Games (2012). Nevertheless, the film had more to it than blood-spattered battles and a star-studded cast; it featured a totalitarian government, which was determined to do whatever was required, may it be unleashing military force, public exploitation, or even controlling individual lives, to maintain its grip over masses. The above description closely resembles a colonist, who is, an, “…arrogant individual, whose power of authority and fear of losing it has gone to his head…” as described in Fanon’s Wretched of the Earth. To rephrase Fanon, people in Panem are ruled by a force that unbridles violence to ensure its own power. Let’s write closer to home and take a peep at the naked display of aggression and violence in protests regardless of their causes. The horrors of a brute cult movement that wished to raze down, trample upon and erase anything standing in their way a few months ago are still etched fresh in our minds. But what exactly, is the meaning behind violence and power? Are they really related?

The term power, often construed as authority, is defined as “the ability to control others, events, or resources; to make happen what one wants to happen despite obstacles, resistance, or opposition” (Max Webber). Moreover, theorists like Webber even go on to claim the necessity of violence for its acquisition, defining the state as, “the rule of men over men based on the means of legitimate, that is allegedly legitimate, violence” (Arendt): hence, equating political power with violence. Fanon is a strong advocate of the above phenomenon and explains the said relationship, via the lens of colonialism, in his text. He believes what the colonized covet is the colonizer and in his words, “There is no question for them of competing with the colonist. They want to take his place.”

All the colonized strive for is to, “work toward the death of the colonist.” The colonized can only rise to the colonist’s pedestal through violence, since colonialism, ”is violence in its natural state, and will only yield when confronted with greater violence’.’ He elaborates on the political dynamics by including a third dimension of party leaders, who rebel against the colonialists during decolonization, but later assume the very role of elites over the middle-class people, the “rapacious corrupt dictatorship” over the bourgeoisie. Hence, in essence, the native “is ready for violence at all times” and, that alone is his key to gaining power.

Even though Fanon talks explicitly about the “spiral of violence,” the colonized find himself in, -the violence embedding even in times of peace -, he restricts the phenomenon to sheer physical violence. For him, violence is the “sharpening of knives”, using whips to control populations, “and in the violence to the truth of lies and the judging and classification of African people by Western disciplines.”.

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Fanon seems to believe in an instrumental equation of power and violence; where the latter acts as a tool for the oppressed to reclaim what was previously theirs from the settlers by gaining the former. Hence, reactive violence is necessary, because (a) it is the only mechanism that changes the picture, and (b) is necessary to counter the existing violence.

Nevertheless, despite equating violence to power, every single time, he has described either the settler razing the colonized to the ground, or the colonized going up the ladder during decolonization, Fanon did not provide us with a clearer definition of power. And, that is, where Arendt comes into play. Hannah Arendt talks about power not in terms of individuals, but groups, “Power is never the property of the individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together.”

She criticizes theorists like Weber who equated “political power to the organization of violence”; and acknowledges quotes like, “We have to decide whether and in what sense ‘power’ can be distinguished from ‘force’, to ascertain how the fact of using force according to law changes the quality of force itself and presents us with an entirely different picture of human relations.” Thus, from the very start of the argument, Arendt is determined to trace the roots of the phenomenon.

Instead of condoning the mainstream view that “power comes out of the barrel of a gun,” she tries to define the two terms distinctly. While power is the human ability not just to act but to act in concert, which is dependent on the number of groups supporting the individual; violence is more reliant on implements, which are used to multiply strength, to a point at which they can replace it. Moreover, emotions like rage and fury are distinctive human responses and hence, violence is not as natural as ideologists make it seem. Arendt does believe that even if not legitimate, power may sometimes be justified, but still is a firm believer in distancing it from politics.

Even though Arendt makes quite clear-cut distinctions between the two pastures, applying the same boundary in the contemporary world can be quite problematic because of the intertwining in the real scenario. Take America, for example. The country is always criticized for meddling in power politics in the Middle East. White House statements that link the military intervention in Iraq to domestic security, might seem plausible to some groups, but others disapprove of the measures by highlighting the violence, which accompanies these policies. Arendt herself makes a note of this complexity that power and violence are never to be found in their true forms, more often intersecting with each other.

These ramblings may make little sense to those who have not studied political philosophy or take a keen interest in how things are run around us but if allowed to apply these dogmas to our contemporary realities, the mystifying haze might turn a few shades clearer.

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