

Forging a New Psyche: Student Resistance, Identity Formation, and the Fanonian Imperative in the July Revolution's Aftermath

Mohammad Jashim Uddin*

***Mohammad Jashim Uddin**, Associate Professor, Department of English, Northern University Bangladesh, Bangladesh, Email: jashimuddinresearch@gmail.com

Abstract

The July Revolution of 2024 was a pivotal, student-led uprising against authoritarian governance in Bangladesh. This paper argues that, beyond its political outcomes, the revolution was a profound psychological event for its youth participants. Applying a Fanonian theoretical lens, this study conducts an in-depth psycho-political analysis of the student activists, exploring the transformation of their consciousness and the reformation of their individual and collective identities within the crucible of revolutionary struggle. Employing a qualitative methodology centered on critical discourse analysis, the research examines how activists navigated oppression, deconstructed pre-existing identities of fear and apathy, and forged new, liberated subjectivities. The findings suggest that the revolution functioned as a psychological catharsis, spurring a "decolonization of the mind." This created a new collective identity grounded in political efficacy and democratic aspirations. The paper concludes that this "Fanonian imperative"—the intrinsic drive to construct an empowered political consciousness—is essential for understanding the movement's legacy and its profound implications for Bangladesh's democratic future.

Keywords: July Revolution of 2024 in Bangladesh, Student Activism, Fanonian Theory, Political Psychology, Identity Formation.

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1.0 Introduction

The July Revolution of 2024 will be recorded in the annals of Bangladesh be recorded in the annals of

Bangladesh's history as a pivotal turning point. It was a widespread, student-led uprising against a backdrop of entrenched authoritarianism, systemic corruption, and severe human rights violations that had systematically stifled democratic aspirations. The students who stood at the vanguard of these protests demonstrated exceptional courage and organizational capacity, challenging the state's repressive apparatus and catalyzing a nationwide movement that culminated in profound political change.

As Bangladesh navigates the critical phase of national rebuilding and democratic consolidation, it is crucial to analyze the revolution beyond its immediate political and structural outcomes. The July Revolution of 2024 in

Bangladesh was not merely a series of external events; it was, more profoundly, an internal, psychological odyssey for the thousands of young people who risked their safety and futures to spearhead this transformation. The intense emotional and cognitive engagement demanded by such a struggle inevitably leaves deep imprints on the individual and collective psyche.

This paper argues that the student activists involved in the July Revolution underwent significant psychological processes of resistance, identity (re)formation, and consciousness transformation. Understanding these internal dynamics is vital not only for academic insight into the mechanics of social movements but also for informing the practical necessities of post-revolutionary societal healing, youth engagement strategies, and the cultivation of a resilient democratic culture. The experiences of these young individuals—their motivations, struggles, and emerging understandings of self and society—offer a crucial lens through which to comprehend the deeper human dimensions of this historical juncture. This research aims to investigate the transformation of their consciousness and the (re)formation of their identities within the crucible of revolutionary struggle.

2.0 Literature Review

The July Revolution of 2024 in Bangladesh, a potent illustration of youth-led political upheaval, necessitates a multifaceted analytical approach. To comprehend the profound psychological transformations experienced by the student activists at its forefront, this review synthesizes literature from four interconnected domains: the historical precedent of student activism in Bangladesh, the broader psychological dynamics of political resistance, the application of Fanonian theory to decolonial struggles, and the specific processes of identity (re)formation within social movements. While scholarship directly addressing the 2024 revolution is only beginning to emerge, a rich body of existing and contemporary research provides a robust framework for understanding the forging of a new psyche among Bangladesh's youth.

2.1 The Legacy and Evolution of Student Activism in Bangladesh

Student activism is deeply embedded in the political fabric of Bangladesh, serving as a catalyst for major historical transformations. The 1952 Language Movement, where students protested to establish Bengali as a state language, is a foundational moment in the nation's history, cementing the role of youth in shaping national identity. This legacy of resistance continued through the 1971 War of Independence, in which students played a pivotal role in organizing and disseminating revolutionary ideals, and the 1991 pro-democracy movement that ousted a military dictator. This history has created an enduring narrative of

students as active agents of political change and guardians of democratic aspirations against authoritarian tendencies.

Past research into student politics in Bangladesh has often highlighted the dynamics of patronage and the co-optation of student wings by major political parties, which used them to exert control on campuses. However, the July Revolution appears to mark a departure from this clientelistic model. The 2024 movement, initially sparked by protests against a controversial job quota system, rapidly evolved into a broader, more unified call for systemic change against entrenched corruption and authoritarian governance, transcending traditional party lines. This shift suggests a move from activism based on patronage to one grounded in widespread grievances and a collective desire for a more equitable and democratic future.

2.2 The Psychological Terrain of Political Resistance

Engaging in high-risk activism against a repressive state has profound psychological consequences. The psychological impact is not uniformly negative; the very act of resistance can be a source of empowerment and psychological transformation. Recent scholarship is increasingly recognizing that activism can foster a sense of purpose, self-expression, and flourishing, even while exposing individuals to costs like harassment and conflict.

A study by Jiménez-Benítez et al. (2025) found that participation in collective action is strongly linked to a strengthened belief in the possibility of social change, which in turn fuels further political engagement. This research aligns with the concept of "sociopolitical synergy," where high levels of interest, knowledge, and involvement in a cause are associated with a greater sense of belonging and purpose among young activists. Thus, for the students in the July Revolution, confronting the state's repressive apparatus was likely a dual experience of trauma and empowerment, where the struggle itself became a vehicle for developing resilience and political efficacy.

2.3 The Fanonian Imperative: Decolonizing the Mind

To fully grasp the internal, psychological odyssey of the July Revolution's activists, the theoretical lens of Frantz Fanon is indispensable. Fanon argued that colonialism inflicts deep psychological wounds, creating a "colonized" consciousness characterized by feelings of inferiority and alienation. For Fanon, the process of decolonization is not merely a political transfer of power, but a profoundly psychological process of liberation—a "decolonization of the mind." He posited that through the struggle against oppression, the colonized subject reclaims their humanity and forges a new, liberated consciousness.

Scholars have applied Fanon's work to understand modern resistance movements, framing them as "ruptures" where prevailing, often oppressive,

social and epistemic norms are challenged, creating space for new ideas and social relations to emerge. The "Fanonian moment" in South African student movements, for instance, saw a direct challenge to the psychic legacies of apartheid, linking decolonization to the everyday practice of liberation. Similarly, the July Revolution can be analyzed as such a rupture. The students' direct confrontation with an authoritarian system that devalued their futures can be seen as the "Fanonian imperative" in action—an intrinsic drive to cast off a psychology of subjugation and construct an empowered political identity.

2.4 Forging a New Psyche: Identity (Re)Formation in the Crucible of Revolution

Social movements are critical sites for the formation and reformation of identity. The shared experience of protest, the collective articulation of grievances, and the solidarity forged in the face of adversity contribute to a powerful new sense of self and community. The transition from a protest focused on a specific policy (quota reform) to a nationwide movement demanding the government's fall signifies a profound identity shift among the participants. They moved from being students concerned with future employment to becoming citizens enacting a wholesale rejection of an authoritarian political order.

In the context of Bangladesh, the July Revolution provided a crucible in which a new political generation was forged. Through their collective action, the student activists not only catalyzed political change but also underwent a profound internal transformation, shedding inherited identities of political apathy or clientelism and forging a new, empowered psyche grounded in a demand for democratic rights and social justice. This emergent identity, shaped by the "Fanonian imperative," is the most critical legacy of the revolution and a central force in shaping Bangladesh's future.

3.0 Research Gaps

The provided literature review synthesizes scholarship on Bangladeshi student activism, the psychology of protest, Fanonian theory, and the formation of identity. However, a critical analysis of this literature reveals several significant gaps which this study aims to address:

- i. **The Novelty of the July Revolution:** As a very recent event, the July 2024 Revolution lacks in-depth, scholarly psycho-political analysis.
- ii. **Beyond Political and Structural Analysis:** Existing literature on student activism in Bangladesh has primarily focused on its political history and role in macro-level political change. A significant gap remains in understanding these movements as sites of profound psychological transformation for the participants themselves.

- iii. **Application of Fanonian Theory in the Bangladeshi Context:** While Fanon's work has been applied to decolonial struggles globally, its specific application to the contemporary Bangladeshi socio-political landscape is underdeveloped.
- iv. **The Psychology of the Shift in Activism:** The literature review highlights a departure from the patronage-based student politics of the past. However, the psychological underpinnings of this generational shift remain unexplored.

This study, therefore, is uniquely positioned to fill these voids by conducting a focused, qualitative, and theoretically grounded analysis of the psychological odyssey of student activists in the aftermath of the July Revolution.

4. Objectives of the Study

The primary goal of this research is to conduct an in-depth psycho-political analysis of the student activists involved in Bangladesh's July Revolution. To achieve this, the study has the following specific objectives:

- i. To analyze the psychological transformation processes among student activists during and after the July Revolution.
- ii. To investigate the (re)formation of individual and collective identities among student activists as they navigated the challenges of political resistance.
- iii. To apply a Fanonian theoretical lens to examine how the struggle against authoritarian oppression served as a catalyst for the "decolonization of the mind" and the forging of a new, liberated political subjectivity.
- iv. To deconstruct the narratives and discourse used by student activists, we aim to understand how they articulated their grievances, constructed new identities, and conceptualized a future for Bangladesh.
- v. To explore the potential implications of this new, empowered political consciousness for the future of youth engagement and democratic consolidation in post-revolutionary Bangladesh.

5.0 Research Questions

To guide the inquiry and meet the stated objectives, this study will be centered around a primary research question and a set of secondary questions.

5.1 Primary Research Question:

How did the student activists involved in the July 2024 Revolution experience psychological transformation and forge new political identities through the lens of the Fanonian imperative?

5.2 Secondary Research Questions:

- i. What were the pre-existing psychological and identity-based conditions of the students that catalyzed their initial involvement and mass mobilization in the revolution?
- ii. In what ways did the direct confrontation with state oppression and violence act as a crucible for the (re)formation of individual and collective identities among the activists?
- iii. How do the narratives, symbols, and discourse employed by the student activists reflect Fanonian concepts of psychological liberation, the rejection of a "colonized" mindset, and the construction of a new national consciousness?
- iv. What are the defining characteristics of the new collective psyche that emerged from the July Revolution, and what are its potential long-term implications for civic engagement and the democratic trajectory of Bangladesh?

6.0 Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

To adequately dissect the profound psychological shifts experienced by the student activists of the July Revolution, this research is anchored in the psychopolitical framework developed by Frantz Fanon. His seminal works, particularly *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*, provide an indispensable lens for analyzing the dialectical relationship between oppression, resistance, and the formation of a liberated consciousness. This study operationalizes Fanon's thought through four interconnected concepts.

6.1 The Psychology of Oppression: The Colonized Mentality

Fanon's foundational insight is that systemic oppression is not merely a set of external political and economic structures; it is a force that penetrates the psyche of the oppressed. In

Black Skin, White Masks, he meticulously detailed how the colonized individual internalizes the logic of the oppressor, leading to a "colonized mentality" characterized by an "inferiority complex," alienation, and self-doubt. This study posits that the student activists had to first confront this internalized dimension of oppression. Their initial resistance, therefore, was not just against the state apparatus but against a prevailing sense of powerlessness.

6.2 The Catharsis of Struggle: Forging Agency Through Resistance

Fanon's most influential concept is the therapeutic and cathartic power of revolutionary struggle. He argued that the act of resisting—of directly

confronting the oppressor—is a necessary step to purge the "colonized mentality". This confrontation is a profoundly liberating experience that allows the oppressed to reclaim their agency, shed their inferiority complex, and assert their humanity. This research applies the concept of catharsis to the students' courageous acts of defiance: organizing mass protests, facing down state security forces, and articulating a vision in direct opposition to the regime. These acts of high-risk activism are analyzed as the crucible in which fear was transformed into collective power and a new sense of self-worth was forged.

6.3 The Emergence of a New Psyche: The "New Man"

For Fanon, the ultimate goal and outcome of a successful decolonizing struggle is the birth of a "new man"—a consciousness unshackled from the psychological pathologies of the past. This "new psyche" is characterized by critical awareness, creative energy, and a collective commitment to building a just and sovereign society. This study aims to investigate the emergence of this new psyche among the activists of the July Revolution. Through discourse analysis, it will examine their narratives, aspirations, and articulations of national identity to find evidence of a shift from a reactive, grievance-based identity to a proactive, visionary one focused on democratic rebuilding and social justice.

6.4 The Decolonization of the Mind: A New National Consciousness

Underpinning the entire framework is the "Fanonian imperative" for the "decolonization of the mind". This study is the process of intellectual and psychological emancipation from the dominant narratives, values, and epistemologies of the oppressive power structure. It involves a critical interrogation of received histories and the active construction of a new national consciousness from the ground up. This study will operationalize this concept by analyzing how the student activists challenged and dismantled state-sanctioned narratives about patriotism, development, and political stability. By framing their own movement through a lens of democratic rights and social justice, they were actively engaged in decolonizing the political discourse of Bangladesh, thereby laying the psychological groundwork for a new era.

7.0 Research Methodology and Methods

To address the research questions concerning the subjective, internal experiences of the activists, this study employs a qualitative research paradigm. Given that the revolution is a recent and sensitive event, this study is based exclusively on the analysis of publicly available secondary data, which provides a rich and accessible repository of the movement's collective expression.

The core methodology for this research is a critical discourse analysis (CDA). CDA is exceptionally well-suited for this study as it facilitates a

systematic examination of how language, symbols, and narratives were used by the student activists to construct meaning, challenge dominant ideologies, and forge new, liberated subjectivities.

The research draws upon a wide range of publicly available textual and visual data sources generated during and in the immediate aftermath of the July Revolution. The dataset includes:

- i. Public Statements and Digital Manifestos
- ii. Social Media Content
- iii. Protest Slogans, Chants, and Visuals
- iv. Media Reports and Commentaries

The data from these sources were subjected to a rigorous thematic analysis. Through this process, emergent codes, recurring themes, rhetorical strategies, and key metaphors were systematically identified.

Thematic codes were developed based on the research questions and were also informed by the a priori categories of the Fanonian framework, such as "colonized mentality," "catharsis," "new psyche," and "decolonization of the mind." This allowed for a direct mapping of the data to the theoretical concepts.

These themes were then interpreted through the guiding concepts of the Fanonian framework. This approach enables a robust analysis that maps the collective, public-facing discourse of the revolutionary movement, allowing for a theoretically grounded interpretation of the psychological and identity shifts experienced on a collective level.

7.1 Limitations and Ethical Considerations

This study acknowledges the inherent limitations of relying solely on secondary data. First, without direct interviews or firsthand accounts, there are potential gaps in the data, and it is challenging to capture the full diversity of lived experiences among all activists. Second, the use of social media content introduces a risk of selection bias, as the voices that are most prominent online may not be representative of the entire movement. Finally, while the data is publicly available, ethical considerations were carefully addressed by focusing on collective discourse and avoiding the identification of specific individuals to ensure privacy.

8.0 Critical Analysis

This analysis interprets the qualitative data gathered from public discourse through the lens of the Fanonian theoretical framework. It deconstructs the

psychological journey of the student activists, tracing their transformation from a state of subjugation to the formation of a new, liberated political psyche.

8.1 Shedding the Colonized Mentality: From Apathy to Agency

The data reveal that participants widely described the pre-revolutionary atmosphere as one of pervasive cynicism and political alienation, mirroring Fanon's concept of a "colonized mentality." This psychological state of internalized oppression was a significant barrier to collective action. The initial protests against the job quota system served as a critical trigger, beginning the process of rupturing this apathy.

8.2 The Catharsis of Confrontation: Forging Identity in the Crucible of Struggle

The state's violent crackdown on the initial protests, rather than quelling the movement, served as the primary catalyst for its psychological transformation. This research aligns directly with Fanon's thesis on the cathartic and liberating nature of struggle. The analysis of protest slogans and symbols from this period reveals a marked shift from a specific grievance to a call for the downfall of the regime, representing a fundamental shift in identity. This process, a dual experience of trauma and empowerment, was the crucible in which a new, resilient collective identity was forged.

8.3 Decolonizing the Discourse: The Language of a New National Consciousness

A critical analysis of the movement's discourse reveals a clear and deliberate "decolonization of the mind." The student activists successfully created a "rupture" in the state's dominant narrative. They co-opted nationalistic symbols, connecting their struggle to the legacy of the 1971 Liberation War, and articulated a vision of a "second liberation"—this time from internal autocrats. By consistently framing their demands in the universal language of human rights, democracy, and social justice, they constructed a new, compelling national narrative.

9.0 Research Findings

Based on the critical analysis of the collected data, this study presents the following key findings:

- i. The July Revolution of 2024 in Bangladesh was preceded by a widespread psychological state among students that aligns with Fanon's concept of a "colonized mentality," characterized by political apathy, fear, and internalized powerlessness.

- ii. The act of collective resistance, particularly in the face of state violence, served as a powerful Fanonian catharsis, purging activists of their fear and forging a sense of empowerment and collective agency.
- iii. A fundamental identity transformation occurred among participants, who shifted from seeing themselves as single-issue-focused students to embodying a broader identity as empowered citizens and agents of national change.
- iv. The student activists successfully engaged in a "decolonization of the mind" by dismantling the state's dominant political discourse and constructing a new, alternative national narrative centered on democratic rights, justice, and historical liberation.
- v. The revolution culminated in the forging of a "new psyche"—a new collective political consciousness among the youth, characterized by a rejection of patronage politics, a profound belief in their own political efficacy, and a sustained commitment to democratic ideals.

10.0 Conclusion

This research aimed to investigate the profound psychological transformations experienced by the student activists at the center of Bangladesh's July Revolution. By applying a Fanonian theoretical lens, this study has demonstrated that the revolution was not merely a political event but a deeply internal process of psychological liberation and identity reformation. The findings illustrate a clear trajectory, moving from a state of internalized oppression to a cathartic struggle that ultimately forged a new, empowered political psyche among the nation's youth.

The implications of these findings are significant for the future of Bangladesh. The new generation of activists, having shed the psychological shackles of fear and clientelism, represents a powerful force for democratic consolidation. Their newly forged identity will likely shape the contours of civil society, political engagement, and governance for years to come.

Practical recommendations to support this new youth engagement could include establishing youth-led governance councils, integrating civic education into school curricula that emphasize democratic values and rights, and creating platforms for transparent dialogue between young activists and the new political leadership.

This study, conducted in the immediate aftermath of the revolution, is necessarily limited by its temporal proximity to the events. Its qualitative nature provides depth but not statistical generalizability. Therefore, future research is

essential. Longitudinal studies are needed to track the long-term evolution of this new psyche and its impact on the political careers and civic engagement of the activists. Furthermore, comparative analyses with other contemporary youth-led movements could provide broader insights into the global phenomenon of youth-led resistance in the 21st century.

In essence, the July Revolution serves as a powerful testament to the Fanonian imperative: that the struggle against oppression is intrinsically a struggle to forge a new, liberated human consciousness.

Author's Declaration

I declare that the submitted manuscript is my original work and has not been published, nor is it under consideration for publication elsewhere. All sources have been appropriately cited, and the work is free from plagiarism, falsification, and fabrication. Any use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools in preparing this manuscript has been transparently disclosed, and full responsibility for the content rests with the author.

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