

Foreword: Framing Fanon by Homi K. Bhabha

The colonized, underdeveloped man is a political creature in the most global sense of the term.

Frantz Fanon: *The Wretched of the Earth*

And once, when Sartre had made some comment, he [Fanon] gave an explanation of his egocentricity: a member of a colonised people must be constantly aware of his position, his image; he is being threatened from all sides; impossible to forget for an instant the need to keep up one's defences.

Simone de Beauvoir, *The Force of Circumstance*

Frantz Fanon's legend in America starts with the story of his death in Washington on December 6, 1961. Despite his reluctance to be treated "in that country of lynchers",¹ Fanon was advised that his only chance of survival lay in seeking the leukemia treatment available at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Maryland. Accompanied by a CIA case officer provided by the American Embassy in Tunis, Fanon flew to Washington, changing planes in Rome, where he met Jean-Paul Sartre but was too

For my brother Sorab: doctor of my soul; healer of my mind. —HKB

¹ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Force of Circumstance, Vol. II: The Autobiography of Simone de Beauvoir*, trans. Peter Green (New York: Paragon House, 1992), 317.

enfeebled to utter a single word. A few days later, on October 3, Fanon was admitted to the hospital as Ibrahim Fanon, a supposedly "Libyan" nom de guerre he had assumed to enter a hospital in Rome after being wounded in Morocco during a mission for the Algerian National Liberation Front.

His body was stricken, but his fighting days were not quite over; he resisted his death "minute by minute," a friend reported from his bedside, as his political opinions and beliefs turned into the delirious fantasies of a mind raging against the dying of the light. His hatred of racist Americans now turned into a distrust of the nursing staff, and he awoke on his last morning, having probably had a blood transfusion through the night, obsessed with the idea that "they put me through the washing machine last night."² His death was inevitable. "We did everything we could," his doctor reported later, "but in 1961 there wasn't much you could do . . . especially when he came to us so late."³ Perhaps it was the writing of *The Wretched of the Earth* in a feverish spurt between April and July of 1961 that contributed to this fatal delay; when his wife, Josie Fanon, read him the enthusiastic early reviews of the book, he could only say, "That won't give me back my bone marrow."⁴ On the day of his death, the French police seized copies of *The Wretched of the Earth* from the Paris bookshops.⁵ After his death, Simone de Beauvoir remembered seeing Fanon's photograph all over Paris for a couple of weeks, "on the cover of *Jeune Afrique*, in the window of the Maspero bookstore, younger, calmer than I had ever seen him, and very handsome."⁶

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² Claude Lanzmann, as cited by David Macey in *Frantz Fanon: A Life* (London: Granta Books, 2000), 489–90. Much of the biographical detail and personal incident comes from Simone de Beauvoir's account of Fanon in *The Force of Circumstance*, and from David Macey's remarkably informed biography.

³ Joseph Alsop, "Passing of New Left's Hero an Odd Facet of U.S. History," in *Washington Post*, February 21, 1969, A21.

⁴ Macey, 489.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ de Beauvoir, 329.

A colonized person must constantly be aware of his image, jealously protect his position, Fanon said to Sartre. The defenses of the colonized are tuned like anxious antennae waiting to pick up the hostile signals of a racially divided world. In the process, the colonized acquire a peculiar visceral intelligence dedicated to the survival of body and spirit. Fanon's two most influential texts, *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*, evoke the concrete and contrasting worlds of colonial racism as experienced in metropolitan France in the 1950s and during the anticolonial Algerian war of liberation a decade later. Is his work lost in a time warp? Is his impassioned plea that "the Third World must start over a new history of man"⁷ merely a vain hope? Does such a lofty ideal represent anything more than the lost rhetorical baggage of that daunting quest for a nonaligned postcolonial world inaugurated at the Bandung Conference in 1955. Who can claim that dream now? Who still waits in the antechamber of history? Did Fanon's ideas die with the decline and dissolution of the black power movement in America, buried with Steve Biko in South Africa, or were they born again when the Berlin Wall was dismembered and a new South Africa took its place on the world's stage? Questions, questions. . . .

As we catch the religiosity in Fanon's language of revolutionary wrath — "the last shall be the first," "the almighty body of violence rearing up . . ."⁸ — and run it together with his description of the widening circle of national unity as reaching the "boiling point" in a way that "is reminiscent of a religious brotherhood, a church or a mystical doctrine,"⁹ we find ourselves both forewarned and wary of the ethnonationalist religious conflicts of our own times. When we hear Fanon say that "for the people only fellow nationals are ever owed the truth,"¹⁰ we furiously object

⁷ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (WE), 238.

⁸ WE, 2, 50.

⁹ WE, 84.

¹⁰ WE, 14.

to such a narrow and dangerous definition of “the people” and “the truth.” To have Fanon uphold the view that the building of national consciousness demands cultural homogeneity and the disappearance or dissolution of differences is deeply troubling. Is he not dangerously outdated? Fanon’s best hopes for the Algerian revolution were taken hostage and summarily executed, first by a bureaucratized military rule that violated his belief “that an army is never a school for war, but a school for civics . . . ,”¹¹ and then by the rise of fundamentalist groups like the Islamic Salvation Front. Josie Fanon looked out of her window in the El Biar district of Algiers in October 1988 only to find scenes of carnage. In violently quelling a demonstration in the street below, the army had enflamed the passions of Algerian youths, who responded by torching police cars before they were felled by a barrage of bullets. Speaking to her friend the Algerian writer Assia Djebar on the telephone, Josie sighed: “Oh Frantz, the wretched of the earth again.”¹² The legacy of Fanon leaves us with questions; his virtual, verbal presence among us only provokes more questions. And that is as it should be. “O my body, make of me always a man who questions!” was Fanon’s final, unfinished prayer at the end of *Black Skin, White Masks*.

The time is right to reread Fanon, according to David Macey, his most brilliant biographer, because “Fanon was angry,” and without the basic political instinct of anger there can be no hope for “the wretched of the earth [who] are still with us.”¹³ What hope does Fanon’s anger hold for us today? Although times have changed, and history never appears twice in the emperor’s new clothes, *mais plus ça change*. . . . New global empires rise to enforce their own civilizing missions in the name of democracy and free markets where once progress and development were

¹¹ WE, 141.

¹² Assia Djebar, *Le blanc de l’Algérie* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1995), 106–7, cited in Macey, 506.

¹³ Macey, 503.

seen as the shibboleths of a modernized, westernized salvation. As if such civic, public goods were exportable commodities; as if these “other” countries and cultures were innocent of the leavening spirit of freedom; as if the deplorable tyrannies and dictatorships of our day, which must be destroyed, were not themselves part of the intricate negotiations, and internecine histories, of world powers and their political interests; as if any civilizing mission, despite its avowed aims, had ever been free of psychological terror, cultural arrogance, and even physical torture. “The colonized, underdeveloped man is today a political creature in the most global sense of the term,”¹⁴ Fanon writes in *The Wretched of the Earth*, and it is my purpose, almost half a century later, to ask what might be saved from Fanon’s ethics and politics of decolonization to help us reflect on globalization in our sense of the term.

It must seem ironic, even absurd at first, to search for associations and intersections between decolonization and globalization—parallels would be pushing the analogy—when decolonization had the dream of a “Third World” of free, postcolonial nations firmly on its horizon, whereas globalization gazes at the nation through the back mirror, as it speeds toward the strategic denationalization of state sovereignty. The global aspirations of Third World “national” thinking belonged to the internationalist traditions of socialism, Marxism, and humanism, whereas the dominant forces of contemporary globalization tend to subscribe to free-market ideas that enshrine ideologies of neoliberal technocratic elitism. And finally, while it was the primary purpose of decolonization to repossess land and territoriality in order to ensure the security of national polity and global equity, globalization propagates a world made up of virtual transnational domains and wired communities that live vividly through webs and connectivities “on line.” In what way, then, can the once colonized woman or man become figures of instruction for our global century?

¹⁴ WE, 40.

To this end, there is an immediate argument to be made that suggests that the economic “solutions” to inequality and poverty subscribed to by the IMF and the World Bank, for instance, have “the feel of the colonial ruler,” according to Joseph Stiglitz, once senior vice president and chief economist of the World Bank. “They help to create a dual economy in which there are pockets of wealth. . . . But a dual economy is not a developed economy.”¹⁵ It is the reproduction of dual, unequal economies as effects of globalization that render poorer societies more vulnerable to the “culture of conditionality,” through which what is purportedly the granting of loans turns, at times, into the peremptory enforcement of policy. These dual economies claim to sustain diverse worlds of opportunity, consisting of global villages, silicon valleys, and oases of outsourcing dotted across the North and the South. The landscape of opportunity and “choice” has certainly widened in scope, but the colonial shadow falls across the successes of globalization. Dual economies create divided worlds in which uneven and unequal conditions of development can often mask the ubiquitous, underlying factors of persistent poverty and malnutrition, caste and racial injustice, the hidden injuries of class, the exploitation of women’s labor, and the victimization of minorities and refugees. For instance, “India shining,” the 2004 election slogan of the “high tech” Hindu nationalist BJP government, failed to mention the darker, daily reality of the 63 percent of rural households that do not have electricity and the ten to fifteen hours of blackouts and brownouts that afflict those that do on any given day.¹⁶

Global duality should be put in the historical context of Fanon’s founding insight into the “geographical configuration” of colonial

¹⁵ Joseph E. Stiglitz, *Globalization and Its Discontents* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2003), 40.

¹⁶ Anil K. Rajvanshi, “Key Issues in Rural Electrification,” published in *Projects Monitor*, 16 October 2003, <http://pune.sancharnet.in/nariphaltan/ruralelec.htm>.

governance,¹⁷ his celebrated description of the Manichaean or compartmentalized structure of colonial society. The generic duality that spans the global world of colonized societies is “a world divided in two . . . inhabited by different species.”¹⁸ Spatial compartmentalization, Macey acutely argues, is typical of the social structure of settler societies like Algeria, but demographic duality is also found in other colonial societies that were divided between the club and the bazaar or the cantonment and the civil lines. Fanon’s emphasis on the racialization of inequality does not, of course, apply uniformly to the inequities of contemporary global underdevelopment. However, the racial optic—if seen as a symbolic stand-in for other forms of social difference and discrimination—does clarify the role played by the obscuring and normalizing discourses of progress and civility, in both East and West, that only “tolerate” differences they are able to culturally assimilate into their own *singular* terms, or appropriate within their own *untranslated* traditions. As Fanon puts it in what is perhaps the most quoted (and quarreled over) passage in *The Wretched of the Earth*:

The singularity of the colonial context lies in the fact that economic reality, inequality, and enormous disparities in lifestyles never manage to mask the human reality. Looking at the immediacies of the colonial context, it is clear that what divides this world is first and foremost what species, what race one belongs to. In the colonies the economic infrastructure is also a superstructure.¹⁹

In my view, *The Wretched of the Earth* does indeed allow us to look well beyond the immediacies of its anticolonial context—the Algerian war of independence and the African continent—toward a critique of the configurations of contemporary globalization.

¹⁷ *WE*, 3.

¹⁸ *WE*, 5.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

This is not because the text prophetically transcends its own time, but because of the peculiarly grounded, historical stance it takes toward the future. The critical language of duality—whether colonial or global—is part of the *spatial* imagination that seems to come so naturally to geopolitical thinking of a progressive, postcolonial cast of mind: margin and metropole, center and periphery, the global and the local, the nation and the world. Fanon's famous trope of colonial compartmentalization, or Manichaeism, is firmly rooted within this anticolonial spatial tradition. But there is another time frame at work in the narrative of *The Wretched of the Earth* that introduces a *temporal* dimension into the discourse of decolonization. It suggests that the *future* of the decolonized world—"The Third World must start over a new history of Man . . ."—is imaginable, or achievable, only in the process of resisting the peremptory and polarizing choices that the superpowers impose on their "client" states. Decolonization can truly be achieved only with the destruction of the Manichaeism of the cold war; and it is this belief that enables the insights of *The Wretched of the Earth* to be effective beyond its publication in 1961 (and the death of its author in that year), and to provide us with salient and suggestive perspectives on the state of the decompartmentalized world after the dismemberment of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

Fanon is resolute that the Third World should follow the socialist path, "based on the principle that man is the most precious asset."²⁰ But he is equally insistent that the Third World "must not be content to define itself in relation to values which *preceded* it. . . . The basic issue with which we are faced is not the *unequivocal choice* between socialism and capitalism such as they have been defined by men from different continents and different periods of time" (my emphasis).²¹ If decolonization can be achieved only through the destruction of the "comparten-

²⁰ WE, 56.

²¹ WE, 55.

talized" colonial system, then the "new humanism" of the Third World cannot properly emerge until the bipolar tensions, contradictions, and dependencies of the cold war are brought to an end. There are two histories at work in *The Wretched of the Earth*: the Manichaeism of colonialism and decolonization embedded in text and context, against which the book mounts a major political and ethical offensive; and a history of the coercive "univocal choices" imposed by the cold warriors on the rest of the world, which constitute the ideological conditions of its writing. In attempting to think proleptically of questions of freedom and fairness beyond the cold war, Fanon intriguingly projects unfinished business and unanswered questions related to the mid-twentieth century and the "end" of empire into the uncertain futures of the *fin de siècle* and the end of the cold war. It is in this sense that his work provides a genealogy for globalization that reaches back to the complex problems of decolonization (rather than the simpler story of the death of communism and the triumph of free-market neoliberalism), and it could be said, both factually and figuratively, that *The Wretched of the Earth* takes us back to the future. Reflect, for instance, on Fanon's far-reaching wariness about the national consciousness of "young" nations, then absent it from his wider critique of the "underdeveloped" nationalist bourgeoisie of postcolonial countries and listen to his statement as a weather report on our own day:

National consciousness is nothing but a crude, empty fragile shell. The cracks in it explain how easy it is for young independent countries to switch back from nation to ethnic group and from state to tribe—a regression which is so terribly detrimental and prejudicial to the development of the nation and national unity.²²

It is, of course, one of the most significant lessons of the postcolonial experience that no nation is simply young or old, new

²² WE, 97.

or ancient, despite the date of its independence. "New" national, international, or global emergences create an unsettling sense of transition, as if history is at a turning point; and it is in such *incubational* moments—Antonio Gramsci's word for the perceived "newness" of change—that we experience the palimpsestical imprints of past, present, and future in peculiarly contemporary figures of time and meaning. Fanon's description of the "crude, empty fragile shell" of emergent national histories quickens the long shadows cast by the ethnonationalist "switchbacks" of our own times, the charnel houses of ethnic cleansing: Bosnia, Rwanda, Kosovo, Gujarat, Sudan. Less spectacular, but no less tragic, are the regressions that lead to the "tribalisms" of religious fundamentalism. And then there are those deeply disabling theses of "the clash of civilizations" once turned against Islam and now targeting migrants, refugees, and minorities more generally.

Fanon's vision of the global future, *post* colonialism and after decolonization, is an ethical and political *project*—yes, a plan of action as well as a projected aspiration—that must go beyond "narrow-minded nationalism" or bourgeois nationalist formalism because "if nationalism is not explained, enriched, and deepened, if it does not very quickly turn into a social and political consciousness, into humanism, then it leads to a dead-end."²³ Now many readers have held that *The Wretched of the Earth* is long on prophecy and polemics and short on policy and planning—a deliberately universalized level of analysis that has led *The Wretched of the Earth* to become, as Stuart Hall has remarked, the "Bible of decolonisation."²⁴ It has also been justly argued that Fanon's Third World is an iconic evocation of Africa, a symbol of Pan-African solidarity composed of his syncretic experiences of the Maghreb, West Africa, South Africa, and the Antilles, with scant

²³ WE, 144.

²⁴ Interview with Stuart Hall in *Frantz Fanon: Black Skin, White Masks*. dir. Isaac Julien (UK: Arts Council of England, 1996).

awareness of Latin America (with the exception of Cuba), Asia, or the Middle East.²⁵

These fine historical readings have greatly enhanced our understanding of the universalizing, generalizing tendency in Fanon's writings. There is more to be said, however, about Fanon's universalism if it is read, as I have proposed, in relation to a concept of the Third World as a project marked by a double temporality. Decolonization demands a sustained, quotidian commitment to the struggle for national liberation, for when the high, heady wind of revolution loses its velocity, there is no "question of bridging the gap in one giant stride. The epic is played out on a difficult day to day basis and the suffering endured far exceeds that of the colonial period."²⁶ But the coming into being of the Third World is also a *project of futurity* conditional upon being freed from the "univocal choice" presented by the cold war. Fanon's invocation of a new humanism—"Let us endeavour to invent a man in full, something which Europe has been incapable of achieving"²⁷—is certainly grounded in a universalist ontology that informs both its attitude to human consciousness and social reality. The historical agency of the discourse of Third Worldism, however, with its critical, political stance against the *imposed* univocal choice of "capitalism vs. socialism," makes it less universalist in temper and more strategic, activist, and aspirational in character:

The basic confrontation which seemed to be colonialism versus anti-colonialism, indeed capitalism versus socialism, is already losing its importance. What matters today, the issue which blocks the horizon, is the need for a redistribution of wealth. Humanity will have to address this question, no matter how devastating the consequences may be.²⁸

²⁵ Macey, 469.

²⁶ WE, 90.

²⁷ WE, 236.

²⁸ WE, 55.

Fanon's call for a redistribution of wealth and technology beyond the rhetorical pieties of "moral reparation"²⁹ is a timely reminder of the need for something like a "right" to equitable development (controversial though it may be) at a time when dual economies are celebrated as if they were global economies. And coming to us from the distances of midcentury decolonization, Fanon's demand for a fair distribution of rights and resources makes a timely intervention in a decade-long debate on social equity that has focused perhaps too exclusively on the culture wars, the politics of identity, and the politics of recognition. Fanon's call has certainly been heard by popular movements and social institutions committed to debt relief or forgiveness; it has led to health initiatives that see the availability of generic drugs for HIV-AIDS as an economic necessity for the "right" to life and human capability; and his influence is felt amongst reformist bodies that seek to restructure international trade and tariffs, and democratize the governance of global financial institutions, in favor of equitable assistance and redistribution.

The actors and agents of these global initiatives of an international civil society *in the making*, whether they are NGOs, human rights organizations, international legal or educational bodies, or national and transnational popular movements, have done their best to resist the coercive cultures of univocal choice. Sometimes they succeed; often they fail; most likely they survive uncertainly between success and failure. By seeing the need for equitable distribution as part of a humanistic project, Fanon transforms its economic terms of reference; he places the problem of development in the context of those forceful and fragile "psycho-affective" motivations and mutilations that drive our collective instinct for survival, nurture our ethical affiliations and ambivalences, and nourish our political desire for freedom.

²⁹ WE, 40.

I want to turn now to Fanon's exploration of the psycho-affective realm, which is neither subjective nor objective, but a place of social and psychic mediation, and—if I may quote Fanon out of context—"the glowing focal point where citizen and individual develop and grow. . . ."³⁰ It is Fanon's great contribution to our understanding of ethical judgment and political experience to insistently frame his reflections on violence, decolonization, national consciousness, and humanism in terms of the psycho-affective realm—the body, dreams, psychic inversions and displacements, phantasmatic political identifications. A psycho-affective relation or response has the semblance of universality and timelessness because it involves the emotions, the imagination or psychic life, but it is only ever mobilized into social meaning and historical effect through an embodied and embedded action, an engagement with (or resistance to) a given reality, or a performance of agency in the present tense.

The nervous conditions and political agitations of psycho-affectivity compose and decompose the compartmentalized worlds of colonialism and metropolitan racism. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon dramatically explores the psycho-affective predicament of the Antillean Negro as he is assailed by the de-personalizing, discriminatory gaze of racist recognition: "Look, a Negro . . . !" The black person, a free French citizen from an overseas department of the republic, is assailed on a public thoroughfare in Lyon or Paris. He is forced to inhabit an alienating and fragmented reality as soon as "the white man's eyes" calls forth this "other" being who is "battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetichism, racial defects. . . ."³¹ Black citizens are fixed as dyes in the personae of stereotypes whose persecutory force creates a sense of social death; or they are vaporized into a more general "climate of opinion" where

³⁰ WE, 40.

³¹ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press), 116.

the racialized person is seen as a threat, an infection, a symptom of social decline: "overdetermined from without . . . dissected under white eyes . . . I am fixed . . . and my long antennae pick up the catch phrases strewn over the surface of things. . . ." ³² It is the peculiarity of regimes of racial oppression that they make immediately visible and vivid the more mediated and abstract practices of power such as class division, the exploitation of labor, and social hierarchies of status. "Looking at the immediacies of the colonial context," Fanon writes, "it becomes clear that what divides this world is first and foremost what species, what race one belongs to. In the colonies the economic infrastructure is also a superstructure. The cause is effect: you are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich." ³³

It is the Manichaeian mentality that goes with such racial-cultural discriminations, and the economic divisions set up to accommodate and authorize them, that create the violent psycho-affective conditions that Fanon describes in *The Wretched of the Earth*. The colonial vocabulary is shot through with arrogance, antagonism, and anxiety: *those* hysterical masses; *their* blank faces; *this* vegetative existence. ³⁴ The colonized, who are often devoid of a public voice, resort to dreaming, imagining, acting out, embedding the reactive vocabulary of violence and retributive justice in their bodies, their psyches: "To blow the colonial world to smithereens is henceforth a clear image within the grasp and imagination of every colonized subject. To dislocate the colonial world. . . . To destroy the colonist's sector. . . . Challenging the colonial world is not a rational confrontation of viewpoints. It is not a discourse on the universal, but the impassioned claim by the colonized that their world is fundamentally different." ³⁵

³² Ibid.

³³ WE, 5.

³⁴ WE, 7.

³⁵ WE, 6.

There is more to the psycho-affective realm than the subject of violence, which has become the cause célèbre of the first chapter of *The Wretched of the Earth*, "On Violence." Hannah Arendt's assault on the book in the late sixties was an attempt at staunching the wildfire it spread across university campuses, while she readily acknowledged that it was really Sartre's preface that glorified violence beyond Fanon's words or wishes. Sartre fanned the flames—"We have certainly sown the wind; they are the whirlwind. Sons of violence, at every instant they draw their humanity from it" ³⁶—while arguing that despite the doctrine of liberatory violence, Fanon, "the man, deep down hated it." ³⁷ It is difficult to do justice to Fanon's views on violence, or to appreciate his passionate approach to the phenomenology of decolonization, without acknowledging a profound internal dissonance, in French colonial thought, between the free standing of the citizen and the segregated status of the subject—the double political destiny of the same colonized person. Indeed, I want to argue that the troubled traffic between the psychic body and the body politic—the subjective experience of objective reality ³⁸ so typical of Fanon's style—suggests that the psycho-affective relation is also "the glowing focal point where citizen and individual develop and grow. . . ." ³⁹ When Fanon insists that the colonized's impassioned claim to difference is a challenge to the discourse of rational confrontation and universality, he is both using and opposing the very words and values—rationality, universalism—upon which the French *mission civilisatrice* founded its governmental practices of colonial assimilation, associationism, and integration.

³⁶ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*, trans. Haddour, Brewer, and McWilliams (London: Routledge, 2001), 149.

³⁷ Ibid., 158.

³⁸ Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwells, 2001), 274. Young provides a most cogent and clarifying introductory account of Fanon's life and work.

³⁹ WE, 40.

The originality of the French phenomenological approach to colonialism and decolonization lies in its awareness of the abiding instability of the system, however stable its institutions may appear. "If one chooses to understand the colonial system," Albert Memmi writes in *The Coloniser and the Colonized*, "he must admit that it is unstable and its equilibrium constantly threatened."⁴⁰ The civilizing mission is grounded in a profound sense of instability—not a surmountable or sublatale "contradiction"—as the French Republic gazes anxiously upon its own mirror image as a world power. On the one hand, France is the supreme bearer of universal Rights and Reason—"bearer even of a new category of time for the indigenous populations";⁴¹ on the other, its various administrative avatars—assimilation, association, integration—deny those same populations the right to emerge as "French citizens" in a public sphere of their own ethical and cultural making. The principle of citizenship is held out; the *poesis* of free cultural choice and communal participation is withheld.

The fear of instability and disequilibrium between freedom and fealty, as I have described it, is evident in the history of colonial Algeria. Citizenship becomes the unstable, unsustainable psycho-affective site in the conflict between political and legal assimilation, and the respect for, and recognition of, Muslim ethical and cultural affiliations. Between 1865 and 1936, fewer than three thousand Algerian Muslims had availed themselves of Napoleon's *senatus consulte*, which extended French citizenship to those Muslims who agreed to divest themselves of civil status under Islamic law.⁴² Again, the Algerian statute of 1947

⁴⁰ Albert Memmi, *The Coloniser and the Colonised* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967) 120.

⁴¹ James D. LeSueur, *Uncivil War: Intellectuals and Identity Politics During the Decolonization of Algeria* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 22.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 20. I am indebted to this excellent work for historical information on the civilizing mission.

made a "grand" gesture, which was no more than a sleight of hand. The electoral system was divided into two colleges: one for Europeans and a small number of Muslims who were granted full political rights, the other for the majority of the Muslim population. Fearful of the increase in the Muslim vote, the statute allotted half the seats in the Algerian assembly to the first college, and in 1948 and subsequent years, the colonial administration rigged the ballots to prevent further Muslim participation.⁴³ Such widespread disenfranchisement bred a deep distrust in the Muslim population, leading a number of dissident groups to amalgamate in 1954 to form the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN). Hussein Bulhan describes the process: "Gradually those who for decades sought assimilation into French society and the traditional nationalists joined forces in the FLN."⁴⁴ When "integration" was proposed by the last governor-general, Jacques Soustelle (after the Algerian War of Independence began in 1954), the "Algerian fact" of diverse regional cultures, languages, and ethnicities was recognized, so long as these "provincial"—provisional?—French citizens could be kept "secure" under the surveillant eye of the paternalistic colonial power that deeply distrusted what it saw as the regressive zealotry of Islam.⁴⁵ Such a threatened equilibrium leads to a phenomenological condition of nervous adjustment, narcissistic justification, and vain, even vainglorious, proclamations of progressive principles on the part of the colonial state; and it is these very psycho-affective symptoms that reveal the injustices and disequilibrium that haunts the colonial historical record. Fanon was quick to grasp the psycho-affective implications of a subtly punishing and disabling paternalistic power:

⁴³ Paul Clay Sorum, *Intellectuals and Decolonization in France* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977), 60.

⁴⁴ Hussein Abdilahi Bulhan, "Revolutionary Psychiatry of Fanon," in *Rethinking Fanon: The Continuing Dialogue*, ed. Nigel Gibson (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1999), 155.

⁴⁵ LeSueur, 23–27.

At the level of the unconscious, therefore, colonialism was not seeking to be perceived as a sweet, kind-hearted mother who protects her child from a hostile environment, but rather a mother who constantly prevents her basically perverse child from committing suicide or giving free rein to its malevolent instincts. The colonial mother is protecting the child from itself, from its ego, its physiology, its biology, and its ontological misfortune.⁴⁶

French colonial policy acknowledges the naked right of the colonized *as individual*—divested of cultural differences—to be identified as a citizen of the republic. But there exists, at the same time, a discriminatory denial or disavowal of the colonized citizen's right to be represented and recognized as a culturally clothed subject who may not conform to the norms and practices of French civil society. Without the rights of representation and participation, in the *public* sphere, can the subject ever be a citizen in the true sense of the term? If the colonized citizen is prevented from exercising his or her collective and communal agency as a full and equal member of civil society, what kind of shadow does that throw on the public virtue of the French republic? This does not merely make an ass of the law of assimilationist colonialism; it creates profound ethical and phenomenological problems of racial injustice at the heart of the psycho-affective realm of the colonial relation. As Sartre perceived the problem, "One of the functions of racism is to compensate the latent universalism of bourgeois liberalism: since all human beings have the same rights, the Algerian will be made a subhuman."⁴⁷ It is this anomalous and ambivalent situation of universality-with-racism, and formal citizenship-without-equality, that is an unresolvable embarrassment within the ideals and ideologies of the civilizing mission. I use the word *embarrassment* advisedly, to return to the question of colonial "instability" and my discussion of the psycho-affective sphere in *The Wretched of the Earth*.

⁴⁶ WE, 149.

⁴⁷ Sartre, 45.

"On Violence" describes the struggle between brute realities and resistant bodies in a prose that rises off the page to take you by the hand, "to touch my reader affectively, or in other words irrationally or sensually. For me words have a charge. I find myself incapable of escaping the bite of a word, the vertigo of a question-mark."⁴⁸ The colonialist declares the native to be "a corrosive element . . . distorting everything which involves aesthetics or morals . . . an unconscious and incurable instrument of blind forces."⁴⁹ Such an ontological obliteration of the "other" results in "the colonised's affectivity [being put] on edge like a running sore flinching from a caustic agent,"⁵⁰ as the psyche retreats into muscular spasms and hysterical symptoms. Treating the natives as *something* less than human—settler vigilante groups called their wanton killing of Muslim Algerians "rat-hunts"⁵¹—results in a process of depersonalization that creates a sense of bodily memory and a violent corporeal agency: "The shanty-town is the consecration of the colonised's *biological* decision to invade the enemy citadel at all costs, and if need be, by the most underground channels" (my emphasis).⁵² These violent aspects of the realm of psycho-affective conflict and defense do not, however, tell the whole story to be found in *The Wretched of the Earth*.

Much of the book is devoted to exploring the processes by which decolonization turns into the project of nation building; and by delving into the "bubbling trepidation"⁵³ that exists in the moment of transition, *The Wretched of the Earth* opens up possibilities for positive and productive psycho-affective relations. "Reclaiming the past does not only rehabilitate or justify the promise of a national culture," Fanon writes, "it triggers a change of

⁴⁸ Macey, 159.

⁴⁹ WE, 6.

⁵⁰ WE, 19.

⁵¹ Bulhan, in Gibson, 155.

⁵² WE, 81.

⁵³ WE, 161.

fundamental importance in the colonised's psycho-affective equilibrium."⁵⁴ The psycho-affective equilibrium achieved through the creation of a national culture passes through a "national stage" on its way to constructing a world-system based on the ideals of global equity. "This cold war . . . gets us nowhere," Fanon argues repeatedly. "The nuclear arms race must be stopped and the underdeveloped regions must receive generous investments and technical aid. The fate of the world depends on the response given to this question."⁵⁵ If the anticolonial movement aims at establishing national sovereignty and cultural independence, the visionary goal of decolonization is to dismantle the "either-or" of the cold war that dictates ideological options and economic choices to Third World nations as an integral part of the supranational, xenophobic struggle for world supremacy. Cold war internationalism, with its dependent states and its division of the spoils, repeats the Manichaeian structure of possession and dispossession experienced in the colonial world. The unraveling of the Soviet system saw the rapid emergence of ethnoregional patriotisms and nationalisms of a fissionary kind that destroyed the existence of the very possibility of civil society in the midst of civil war and ethnic cleansing.

Fanon was committed to creating a world-system of Third World nations that fostered a postcolonial consciousness based on a "dual emergence" of national sovereignty and international solidarity, for "it is at the heart of national consciousness that international consciousness establishes itself and thrives."⁵⁶ The hopeful symmetry of Fanon's dual emergence was based not on a "metaphysical principle" of cultural authenticity or geopolitical exceptionalism (the African "tradition," the Asian "temperament," the Latin American "spirit") but on the political and ethical principles of independence and security—a regional

⁵⁴ WE, 148.

⁵⁵ WE, 61.

⁵⁶ WE, 180.

solidarity extended to any nation that seems to be internally vulnerable to antidemocratic governance or externally threatened by hegemonic, quasi-colonial powers.⁵⁷ In many ways, Fanon's cherished ideals of regional integration and economic collaboration on broad socialist principles of urban and agrarian development were sullied by the corrupt and nepotistic practices of the colonial bourgeoisie that he despised for its hedonistic appropriation of the role of the settler, its small-time racketeering, its lack of the "pioneering aspect, the inventive, discoverer-of-new-worlds aspect" of a progressive national bourgeoisie. (According to a World Bank Working Report, almost 40 percent of South African private wealth is held outside the country.)⁵⁸ But Fanon's belief in the critical importance of economic and technological support for "underdeveloped regions"—"the fate of the world depends on the response given to this question"—is a troubling issue that returns each time a new famine occurs, or a developing country is shackled by unredeemable debt, and these problems have had no satisfactory solution across the half century from his day to ours.

With a few exceptions, the cartography of the global south follows the contours of the Third World. The unanswered call for "development as freedom,"⁵⁹ to use Amartya Sen's excellent phrase, has a long history of failure (for which national governments must share responsibility with the international community). However, Fanon's proleptic proposal that the postcolonial narrative of independent nation building could enter its international phase only after the end of the Cold War telescopes that long history of neglect into our times, whence it reveals the poignant proximity of the incomplete project of decolonization to the

⁵⁷ WE, 179.

⁵⁸ Paul Collier, Anke Hoeffler, and Catherine Pattillo, "Flight Capital as a Portfolio Choice," *World Bank Policy Research Working Paper* no. 2066 (February 1999).

⁵⁹ See Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (New York: Anchor Books), (see Oxford UP, 1999).

dispossessed subjects of globalization. Caught up in this spiral of history, the wretched of the earth, in our time and Fanon's, enter the zone of psycho-affectivity and echo the horrifying call to violence. Fanon for our times.

And Fanon for other times and places . . .

* * *

In 1966, Bobby Seale and Huey Newton read *The Wretched of the Earth* in a house in Oakland, and—so the story goes⁶⁰—when they were arrested some months later for “blocking the sidewalk,” the text provided foundational perspectives on neocolonialism and nationalism that inspired the founding of the Black Nationalist Party. In *A Panther Is a Black Cat*, written in 1971, Reginald Major (Kelley) acknowledges Fanon's influence on the Panthers. With a sexist swagger that was part of the macho style of the times, Major praises Fanon's analysis of the colonial mentality in understanding the yardstick of “whiteness” that devalues black consciousness and results in a “cultural and psychic genocide”⁶¹ that leads to the inadequacy of black manhood. Gillo Pontecorvo's *Battle of Algiers* became a cult film among the Bay Area Panthers because it was “Fanon-linked,” and young revolutionaries attentively watched its depiction of terrorist acts and the organization of covert cells. “They found satisfaction in the flick. The natives won.”⁶²

* * *

In the early seventies, Steve Biko's room in the student residence at the University of Natal became the meeting place for members of the South African Students Association; it was also the intellectual center of the black consciousness movement. That dorm room in Durban was the place where Biko, “the person

⁶⁰ Sandra Adell, ed., *African American Culture* (Detroit, MI: Gale Research, 1996), 50–51.

⁶¹ Reginald Major, *A Panther Is a Black Cat* (New York: William Morrow, 1971), 138–39.

⁶² *Ibid.*

who brought ideas,”⁶³ first circulated *The Wretched of the Earth* to his friends and comrades—writers, activists, community workers, actors, students—who were also conversant with the poetry and the politics of the Black Panther movement. Fanon's singular contribution to the theoretical understanding of the black consciousness movement lay in his extension of the economic theories of Marxism toward a greater emphasis on the importance of psychological and cultural liberation—the psycho-affective realm of revolutionary activism and emancipation.

* * *

In a prison cell in the notorious H-Block of Belfast prison, sometime after 1973, a young apprentice coach builder and member of the Irish Republican Army, Bobby Sands, first read Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, of which there were multiple copies on the H-Block shelves. A historian of the IRA⁶⁴ suggests that Fanon's incendiary spirit may have set alight IRA passions because of passages like this:

“The last shall be first and the first last.” Decolonisation is the putting into practice of this sentence. . . . For if the last shall be first, this will only come to pass after a murderous and decisive struggle between the two protagonists. That affirmed intention to place the last at the head of things . . . can only triumph if we use all means to turn the scale, including, of course, that of violence.

* * *

The Shiite revival of the 1960s and 1970s, which developed into the Iranian revolution led by Ayatollah Khomeini, was based on a revision of Shiite doctrine influenced by Marxism and com-

⁶³ N. Barney Pityana, M. Ramphela, M. Mpumwana, and L. Wilson, eds., *Bounds of Possibility: The Legacy of Steve Biko and Black Consciousness* (Cape Town, South Africa: David Phillip, 1991), 28–29, 109, 147.

⁶⁴ Richard English, *Armed Struggle: The History of the IRA* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 197–99, 234–35.

mitted to the ideology of Third World liberation.⁶⁵ No scholar or intellectual was more respected among the student militants who followed the People's Mujahideen than Ali Shariati, who had read Fanon during his student days in Paris and translated *The Wretched of the Earth* into Persian. According to Giles Keppel, a historian of political Islam, "Shariati rendered the difference between 'oppressors' and 'oppressed' with the Koranic terms *mostakbirnie* (the arrogant) and *mostadafine* (the weakened or disinherited), thus transposing the theory of class struggle into the terminology of Islam."⁶⁶ This "translated," hybrid term crept into Khomeini's political rhetoric—via Shariati's translation of Fanon—after 1978, in his attempt to broaden the appeal of his message and address a more diverse audience.

* * *

Finally, on September 19, 2001, Richard Perle, former U.S. assistant secretary of defense (1981–87), wrote the following three passages:

There is an air of Vichyite defeatism about some of the commentary on the current war on terrorism.

We constantly hear the reiteration of such themes as "We don't know who the enemy is," "We don't know where to strike them" . . . and that the "Wretched of the Earth" (to use the title of Frantz Fanon's famous anti-colonial tract) are so desperate that they would not fear honorable death at the hands of what they see as the Great Satan.

The U.S. Defense Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld . . . [is] quite right to say that it is a totally new kind of war which the Free World now faces.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Giles Keppel, *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam*, trans. Anthony F. Roberts (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002). My account derives from this book.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Richard Perle, "Get Governments out of Terrorism Business," *National Post*, September 19, 2001, A16.

* * *

Fanon acknowledges the enormous significance of this phenomenological level of life when he opens his essay "On National Culture" with one of his most enigmatic and inspiring pronouncements: "Each generation must discover its mission, fulfill it or betray it, in relative opacity."⁶⁸ I turn to that issue by first returning to my beginning: What forms of unhappy consciousness prevail among the colonized who feel threatened from all sides? How does the body speak in extremis, how does the mind withstand? "Colonialism forces the colonized to constantly ask the question: 'Who am I in reality?'"⁶⁹ Fanon writes in *The Wretched of the Earth*. From where does the spirit of revolt arise in the midst of the confusion of "myriad signs of the colonial world"?⁷⁰ How do the oppressed discover the enduring strength to found a free and just society, a national consciousness, if they are continuously aware of their own anxiety and fragility?

The Wretched of the Earth emerges, year after year, in Oakland, Natal, Belfast, Tehran, Washington, Paris, to say nothing of Bombay, where I first read it, or wherever you may be today as this book falls into your hands. Fanon is invoked repeatedly by liberal students, radical activists, human rights workers, cultural historians, literary scholars, journalists, even a former U.S. assistant defense secretary. It could be said that Fanon's street fighting days came to an end in the 1970s and 1980s, and that he now takes his place on the bookshelves alongside CLR James, Sartre, Memmi, Marcuse, Guevara, Angela Davis. . . . Those who claim to follow in Fanon's footsteps, it is often said, only absorb his abstract arguments and stirring sentiments; they fail to understand his selfless engagement with the Algerian War of Independence and turn a blind eye to his failure to consider the possibility that a state built on the revolutionary violence of the FLN could slide

⁶⁸ WE, 145.

⁶⁹ WE, 182.

⁷⁰ WE, 16.

more easily into state terror and religious fanaticism. Marxists have traditionally distanced themselves from Fanon's emphasis on psycho-affective factors in political reasoning while criticizing his refusal to prioritize the role of the organized proletariat in the anticolonial revolution.

The insurgent energies of the Algerian peasantry and lumpen-proletariat, Fanon believed, would guard against the corruption and cooptation of "westernized" nationalist parties led by urban elites. But in the opinion of some of his FLN comrades, Fanon displayed a naïve *nostalgie de la boue* in championing a peasantry that had become fragmented and displaced through the 1950s, some of them confined to refugee or resettlement camps in Tunisia and Morocco, others having migrated to cities in Algeria or France.⁷¹ It was in the late 1950s that Fanon's commitment to the Algerian cause seemed to turn from a political commitment into a more inward identification, a consummate self-fashioning of himself as an Algerian. This radical indigenization of identity, like his overestimation of the peasantry, could be seen as his avoidance or enhancement of his own natal and psychic reality—a compensatory family romance that would disavow his Martinican origins,⁷² through a phantasmatic denial of the "unheroic assimilation" of the Antillean heritage in favor of the "virile and decolonised fraternity" of the FLN.⁷³ Simone de Beauvoir's memories of her conversations with Fanon flesh out this poignant and problematic predicament. "Above all I don't want to become a professional revolutionary,"⁷⁴ Fanon anxiously observed of himself, as he lamented his exilic existence as an Antillean fighting for Algerian independence.

⁷¹ Mohamed Harbi, quoted in Macey, 481.

⁷² See Albert Memmi's remarkable essay, "The Impossible Life of Frantz Fanon," in *Massachusetts Review* (Winter 1973), 9–39, and *Dominated Man: Notes Toward a Portrait* (New York: Orion Press, 1968).

⁷³ François Verges, *Monsters and Revolutionaries: Colonial Family Romances and Métissage* (Durham: Duke University Press), 211.

⁷⁴ de Beauvoir, 317.

Fanon's involvement in the Algerian revolution was primarily as witness, doctor, diplomat, writer—or as he was once known in Tunisia, "the pamphleteer from Martinique." (This moniker refers to his frequent contributions to *El Mujahid*, the Algerian nationalist newspaper, after he took up residence in Tunis, having been expelled from Algeria by the French administration in 1957.) During his tenure at the psychiatric hospital at Blida (1953–56), there were occasions on which he covertly trained the *fidayine* (village militias) to cope with their own attacks of terror and anxiety while they were carrying out assassination attempts; he also taught them psychological ways and physiological means of withstanding torture and resisting interrogation.⁷⁵ In 1960, Fanon was involved in exploring the possibility of establishing a Saharan front in southern Algeria, to be accessed from Mali, which could provide a line of supply and support for FLN forces.⁷⁶

The years leading up to the composition of *The Wretched of the Earth* in 1961 were fraught with the violence and uncertainty of the Algerian War of Independence, which the French state pursued as if it were no more than the "pacification" of a civil uprising. French left-wing intellectuals came together under the banner of the "Manifesto of the 121" to support the Algerian nationalists, and compared the French military presence in Algeria to the "Hitlerite order": "Does it have to be recalled that fifteen years after the destruction of the Hitlerite order, French militarism has, because of the demands of a war of this kind, succeeded in reintroducing torture and has once more institutionalised it in Europe?"⁷⁷

Simone de Beauvoir, one of the staunchest supporters of the Manifesto, expressed a shared sense of disgust and despair: "Ten thousand Algerians had been herded into the Vel' d'Hiv' like the Jews at Drancy once before. Again I loathed it all—this country,

⁷⁵ de Beauvoir, 315.

⁷⁶ Macey, 437–44. Once again, Macey provides the definitive account of the Mali expedition.

⁷⁷ *Manifesto*, quoted in Macey, 449.

myself, the whole world."⁷⁸ During a particularly brutal offensive in July 1959 named Operation Binoculars, General René Challe's troops sought to root out the insurgents of the Armée de Libération Nationale (ALN) hiding in the high Kabylia mountains by annihilating local villages that offered support to the nationalists. The policy of *regroupement*, or resettlement, moved the rural population to barbed-wire compounds resembling concentration camps—fifteen thousand people sequestered in a space meant for three thousand and surrounded by bleak torched fields "without water, without sewage or sanitation of any kind, without land to cultivate and for the most part without work. . . ."⁷⁹ A couple of years earlier, in 1957, the southern edge of the Kabylia had been the site of the appalling massacre of Melouza. The rivalry between the FLN and the MNA (Mouvement Nationaliste Algérienne), which had centered on territorial control and tribal affiliation, exploded into a bloodbath when the FLN leadership ordered its operatives to "exterminate this vermin"⁸⁰—a chilling, uncanny echo, half a century later, of Kurtz's command, "Exterminate the brutes," in Joseph Conrad's classic tale of colonial turpitude in the Belgian Congo, *Heart of Darkness*. The FLN herded all males above the age of fifteen, Alistair Horne writes, "into houses and into the mosque and slaughtered them with rifles, pick-axes and knives: a total of 301."⁸¹

Fanon forged his thinking on violence and counterviolence in these conditions of dire extremity, when everyday interactions were turned into exigent events of life and death—incendiary relations between colonizer and colonized, internecine feuds between revolutionary brotherhoods,⁸² terrorist attacks in Paris

⁷⁸ de Beauvoir, 321.

⁷⁹ Jules Roy in Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954–1962* (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), 338.

⁸⁰ My account is based on Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace*, 221–22. For the discursive representation of the event, and the implications of its various ideological interpretations and manifestations, see LeSueur, "Massacre at Melouza: The 'Whodunit' of the French-Algerian War?" 166ff.

⁸¹ Horne, 222.

⁸² WE, 18.

and Algiers by the ultra right-wing OAS (Organisation Armée Secrète) and their *pieds noirs* supporters (European settlers in Algeria). As a locus classicus of political resistance and the rhetoric of retributive violence, *The Wretched of the Earth* captures the tone of those apocalyptic times:

The colonized subject discovers reality and transforms it through his praxis, his deployment of violence and his agenda for liberation.⁸³

But how do we get from violence to setting violence in motion? What blows the lid?⁸⁴

When the Algerians reject any method which does not include violence . . . they know that such madness alone can deliver them from colonial oppression. A new type of relationship is established in the world. The peoples of the Third World are in the process of shattering their chains, and what is extraordinary is that they succeed.⁸⁵

Hannah Arendt's objection to *The Wretched of the Earth* has less to do with the occurrence of violence than with Fanon's teleological belief that the whole process would end in a new humanism, a new planetary relation to freedom defined by the Third World. Collective violence engenders close political kinships like suicide squads and revolutionary brotherhoods, she wrote, but "No body politic I know was ever founded on equality before death and its actualisation in violence."⁸⁶ Arendt is, at best, only half right in her reading of Fanon. He is cautious about the celebration of spontaneous violence—"where my blood calls for the blood of the other"—because "hatred is not an agenda" capable of maintaining the unity of party organization once violent revolt breaks down into the difficult day-to-day strategy of

⁸³ WE, 21.

⁸⁴ WE, 31.

⁸⁵ WE, 34.

⁸⁶ Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1970), 69.

fighting a war of independence.⁸⁷ On the other hand, Sartre's preface to *The Wretched of the Earth* (the nub of Arendt's attack on Fanon's ideas) is committed to bringing the colonial dialectic to its conclusion by carrying home— to metropolitan France—the lessons and the lesions of anticolonial violence.⁸⁸ Those who adhere to principles of nonviolence in the face of colonial oppression are taunted with the ethical *impossibility* of their positions—“even your non-violent thoughts are a condition born of an age-old oppression. . . .”⁸⁹ Sartre pares away the pieties and vanities of Enlightenment universalism to reveal its tolerance of racist ideas and practices. He confronts his compatriots with a spectacular “strip-tease of our humanism”⁹⁰ while justifying the uses of violence to recover an ontological claim to humanity for those who have been treated as subhuman: “Sons of violence, at every instant they draw their humanity from it: we were human beings at their expense, they are making themselves human beings at ours.”⁹¹

For Arendt, Fanon's violence leads to the death of politics; for Sartre, it draws the fiery, first breath of human freedom. I propose a different reading. Fanonian violence, in my view, is part of a struggle for psycho-affective survival and a search for human agency in the midst of the agony of oppression. It does not offer a clear choice between life and death or slavery and freedom, because it confronts the colonial condition of life-in-death. Fanon's phenomenology of violence conceives of the colonized—body, soul, culture, community, history—in a process of “continued agony [rather] than a total disappearance.”⁹² He describes this

⁸⁷ WE, 89.

⁸⁸ I have slightly altered Sartre's phrase “to bring the dialectic to its conclusion.” See Sartre, *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*, 150.

⁸⁹ Sartre, 151.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 150.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 149–50.

⁹² I have adapted this phrase from Frantz Fanon, “Racism and Culture” in *Towards an African Revolution*, 35.

state of political consciousness and psychic being with a harrowing accuracy:

Exploitation, tortures, raids, racism, collective liquidations . . . [all] make of the native an object in the hands of the occupying nation. This object man, without means of existing, without a *raison d'être*, is broken in the very depth of his substance. The desire to live, to continue, becomes more and more indecisive, more and more phantom-like. It is at this stage that the well-known guilt complex appears.⁹³

Does the “guilt complex” lie at the very origins of violence, or does the struggle for liberation have to violently free itself of guilt in order to be effective? The double-edged nature of this question—guilt as a stimulant, or an obstacle to freedom, or possibly both—fulfills Fanon's wish (expressed to Sartre and Beauvoir) that “all political leaders should be psychiatrists as well.”⁹⁴ Fanon's style of thinking and writing operates by creating repeated disjunctions—followed by proximate juxtapositions—between the will of the political agent and the desire of the psycho-affective subject. His discourse does not privilege the subjective over the objective, or vice versa, nor does his argument prescribe a hierarchy of relations between material reality and mental or corporeal experience. The double figure of the politician-psychiatrist, someone like Frantz Fanon himself, attempts to decipher the changing *scale* (measure, judgment) of a problem, event, identity, or action as it comes to be represented or framed in the shifting ratios and relations that exist between the realms of political and psycho-affective experience.

The connections between guilt and violence are part of such a delicate balance:

The colonized subject is always on his guard: *confused by the myriad signs of the colonial world he never knows whether he is out of line.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ de Beauvoir, 318.

Confronted with a world configured, the colonized subject is always presumed guilty. *The colonized does not accept his guilt, but rather considers it a kind of curse, a sword of Damocles.* But deep down the colonized subject knows no authority. *He is dominated but not domesticated.* He is made to feel inferior, but by no means convinced of his inferiority. He patiently waits for the colonist to let down his guard and then jumps on him. The muscles of the colonized are always tensed. . . . The symbols of society such as the police force, bugle calls in the barracks, military parades, and the flag flying aloft, serve not only as inhibitors but also stimulants. They do not signify: "Stay where you are." But rather "Get ready to do the right thing." . . . This impulse to take the colonist's place maintains a constant muscular tonus. It is a known fact that under certain emotional circumstances an obstacle usually escalates action (my emphasis).⁹⁵

It seems, at first, that this is a straightforward spectacle of Fanonian retributive violence. The origins of violence lie in a presumptive "false guilt," which the colonized has to assume because of his powerless position; but it is a guilt that he does not accept or interiorize—"He is made to feel inferior, but by no means convinced of his inferiority." The eruption of violence is a manifestation of this anxious act of masking, from which the colonized emerges as a guerrilla in camouflage waiting for the colonist to let down his guard so that he might jump; each obstacle encountered is a stimulant to action and a shield to hide the insurgent's intention to take the colonist's place. Because he is dominated by military power and yet not fully domesticated by the hegemonic persuasions of assimilation and the civilizing mission, the anticolonial nationalist is able to decipher the double and opposed meanings emitted by the sounding symbols of society, the bugle calls or police sirens: "They do not signify: 'Stay where you are.' But rather 'Get ready to do the right thing.'" From the torqued mind and muscle of the colonized subject "on guard"

⁹⁵ WE, 16.

emerges the nationalist agent as mujahid (FLN soldier) or *fidayine* (FLN guerrilla).

There is, however, another scenario that runs through this narrative of violence and is somewhat unsettling to its progress, although not unraveled by it. Here the psycho-affective imagination of violence is a desperate act of survival on the part of the "object man," a struggle to keep alive. The "false" or masked guilt complex (as I have called it) emerges, Fanon tells us in the preceding quotation, when the very desire to live becomes faint and attenuated, "more and more indecisive, more and more phantom-like."⁹⁶ At this point, the splitting, or disjunction, between being dominated and being domesticated—the irresolvable tension between the colonized as both subject and citizen from which anticolonial violence emerges—is experienced as a psychic and affective *curse* rather than, primarily, as a political "cause" (in both senses of the term). The native may not accept the authority of the colonizer, but his complex and contradictory fate—where rejected guilt begins to *feel* like shame—hangs over him like a Damoclean sword; it threatens him with an imminent disaster that may collapse both the internal life and the external world. At this moment, the political agent may be shadowed—rather than stimulated—by the psycho-affective subject who also inhabits his bodily space. The colonizer's constant muscular tension may turn into a hysterical rigid limb, just as Fanon observes that "the colonist is an exhibitionist."⁹⁷ The mujahid may hear the double call of siren and bugle and yet be caught "in the tightly-knit web of colonialism,"⁹⁸ psychically split and politically paralyzed between the command to "Stay where you are" and the desire to "Get ready to do the right thing." There

⁹⁶ In a larger version of this essay to be published in *A Global Measure* (Harvard University Press), I develop the concept of "false-guilt" in the direction of an understanding of shame.

⁹⁷ WE, 17.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

is every possibility, as Fanon writes, "that the colonist keeps the colonized in a state of rage, which he prevents from boiling over . . . [and this] periodically erupts into bloody fighting between tribes, clans, and individuals."⁹⁹ The aspiration to do the right thing might be felled by the fragility of the individual, by atavistic animosities, by the iron hand of history, or by indecision and uncertainty, but these failures do not devalue the ethical and imaginative act of reaching out toward rights and freedoms.

Fanon, the phantom of terror, might be only the most intimate, if intimidating, poet of the vicissitudes of violence. But poetic justice can be questionable even when it is exercised on behalf of the wretched of the earth. And if, as I have argued, the lesson of Fanon lies in his fine adjustment of the balance between the politician and the psychiatrist, his skill in altering the "scale" between the social dimension and the psycho-affective relation, then we have to admit that he is in danger of losing his balance when, for instance, he writes: "Violence can thus be understood to be the perfect mediation. The colonized man liberates himself in and through violence. The praxis enlightens the militant because it shows him the means and the end."¹⁰⁰ Knowing what we now know about the double destiny of violence, must we not ask: Is violence ever a *perfect* mediation? Is it not simply rhetorical bravura to assert that *any* form of secular, material mediation can provide a transparency of political action (or ethical judgment) that reveals "the means *and* the end"? Is the clear mirror of violence not something of a mirage in which the dispossessed see their reflections but from which they cannot slake their thirst?

Fanon has a rich variety of readers who do not come to his work to seek the "perfect mediation" of violence. They turn to *The Wretched of the Earth*, generation after generation, for a more obscure reason, armed only with an imperfect sense of obligation toward the ideals they want to serve and the values they seek

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ WE, 44.

to preserve. The message they take away from Fanon's book is a quieter, more contemplative one: "*Each generation must discover its mission, fulfill it or betray it, in relative opacity.*"¹⁰¹

According to his friends, Fanon was somewhat opaque in person. There was a dark and hesitant air about him that infused his speech and writing with "an enigmatic quality, as though they contained obscure, disturbing prophecies."¹⁰² His publisher, Francis Jeanson, called it the "bodily aspect of his intellectual approach."¹⁰³ Jean Daniel, the editor of *Le Nouvel Observateur*, remembers that the handshake of the dying Fanon became "more urgent and always seemed to have a message."¹⁰⁴ The deeper messages of poet-politicians are never as easy to decipher as the myths offered up in their names. It is for this reason that I have tried, in this essay, to trace the prophecies of Fanon's living hand as it rises again to beckon enigmatically toward our own times, in this new translation of *The Wretched of the Earth*.

Each age has its peculiar opacities and its urgent missions. The parts we play in the design and direction of historical transformations are shadowed by the contingency of events and the quality of our characters. Sometimes we break the mold; at others, our will is broken. What enables us to aspire to the fraught and fervent desire for freedom is the belief that human beings are capable of imagining what Fanon once described as a "time [that] must no longer be that of the moment or the next harvest but rather of the rest of the world."¹⁰⁵

I would like to thank Mark Jerng and David Mulrooney for invaluable assistance with this essay, and Lia Brozgal for her excellent translations.

¹⁰¹ WE, 132.

¹⁰² de Beauvoir, 317.

¹⁰³ Francis Jeanson, quoted in Macey, 159.

¹⁰⁴ Macey, 433.

¹⁰⁵ WE, 122.

OTHER WORKS BY FRANTZ FANON
PUBLISHED BY GROVE PRESS:

Black Skin, White Masks

A Dying Colonialism

Toward the African Revolution

THE WRETCHED OF THE EARTH

Frantz Fanon

*Translated from the French
by Richard Philcox*

*with commentary by
Jean-Paul Sartre
and
Homi K. Bhabha*



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