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FRANTZ FANON:

THE MAN AND HIS WORKS

by

Emmanuel Obiechina

Fanon is a good illustration of the saying that we are all products of our total consciousness and of our perception of and relatedness to the world around us; that we are all, in that respect, victims of our environment. But he is also an apt illustration that the truly creative man in us is not, and would never be, content to remain a victim of the environment but uses the inner resources of will and intellect to transform the environment and alleviate man's estate.

Racial Prejudice and Economic Exploitation

Fanon's first and critical encounter with his environment was the knowledge that the world was white but that he was black, that a good deal of his inner resources throughout his life might have to be devoted to coming to terms with this uncomfortable reality. From his early experience in his native Martinique and also subsequently during his years of medical and psychiatric training in metropolitan France, the fact of racism so totally dominated his entire perception of life that he had to devote his enormous intellectual powers, as a matter of priority, to sorting out its problems and implications. This gave rise to his first important work, *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs* (1952) (translated into English as *Black Skin, White Masks*), the very year after the completion of his medical studies.

The fact of racism is well documented in *Black Skin, White Masks* including the numerous open and subtle methods by which black men and women within white-dominated colonies were made to accept a built-in sense of racial inferiority. Fanon drew elaborately on his psychiatric training to understand fully the Black native's mental reactions to white-induced racial myths and stereotypes and to relate these to his neurotic and frustrating attempts to become like the white man. He explores the elaborate process followed by the white colonialist in systematically

destroying the native's sense of personal worth leading finally to the native's tacit acquiescence in the white man's image of the black man as a symbol of sin, as a slave and a savage.

But Fanon is shrewd enough to establish that psychology subserves the wider, more tangible issues of economics and politics. The white colonialist's depression of the black personality is a mere imperialistic ruse for destroying the black man's confidence in himself, for keeping him subservient to the white man and for giving the white man complete freehand in the exploitation of the black man's labor and economic resources. Racism is the handmaiden of economic exploitation and political enslavement.

Thus, the Black American - America's tenth man - sweats it out in his segregated ghettos of north and south United States so as to keep the white American's inflated standard of living; black men are whipped in the streets of South America and black strikers in the Republic of South Africa are mowed down with machine guns; in Rhodesia and in African territories under the Portuguese (barring less than one percent who constitute the *evolue* and the assimilated), the black is treated no better than an animal.

The process of depersonalization and dehumanization of the black man is quite straightforward and is reasoned out with schematic precision by Fanon: the black man falls under the colonial domination of the white man; the white man must keep his hold on those colonies because he needs the wealth of those people he has to colonize; to tap this wealth, he has to dehumanize and disarm the colonized owner, infusing into him the views of racial inferiority and guilt; the black man is thenceforth in no fit state to defend himself and his property; the dynamics of the situation ensure that the white man is master, the white man is superior; the white man being both master and superior can have the black man's wealth, his property, his raw materials, his minerals, his labor. This tacit acquiescence in what began as economic exploitation is internalized and epidermalized by the black man: "I am useless and do not deserve anything good because I am cursed, I am black."

The sense of racial guilt and inferiority is henceforth pressed by the white man because he understands the strong position which he holds. Having destroyed the black man's self-esteem and self-confidence, he imposes on him a

civilization whose values are determined by himself and begins to exert all forms of pressures on the colonized man to get him to conform. The black native's dilemma is now complete. He has to strive to be like the white man as a structural necessity for even keeping alive in the white man's world but it is in the interest of the white man and his desire for exploitation that the native must never be given the certificate of proficiency which will relieve him of his inferiority complex. It is the same white man who is to judge when the native has succeeded in absorbing enough of the white civilization to be worthy to be incorporated into it. But this certification eludes even the most intelligent and "evolved" native - he continues to be referred to as "tu," the child and ward of his colonizing master. It is of the utmost consequence that the native shall remain at worst a savage, in which case he will continue to be in need of the civilizing governance of the white master, or, at best, a dutiful child who would stand in need of the adult guidance of the white guardian. In either case the premise of inequality is firmly rooted and white exploitation ensured.

Fanon's contribution to the study of racism is his understanding of it as an aspect of the many-sided picture of domination and economic exploitation the process of which embodies the destruction of the native's base civilization:

In the Weltanschauung of a colonized people there is an impurity, a flaw that outlaws any ontological explanation----ontology----once it is finally admitted as leaving existence by the wayside - does not permit us to understand the being of the black man. For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man. Some critics will take it on themselves to remind us that this proposition has a converse. I say that this is false. The black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man. Overnight the Negro has been given two frames of reference within which he has had to place himself. His metaphysics, or, less pretentiously, his customs and the sources on which they were based, were wiped out because they were in conflict with a civilization that he did not know and that imposed itself on him.

Escapist Theories and Concepts

Having diagnosed the causes of racism, Fanon proceeded to suggest cures. His view of the situation is put forward with cool deliberation and enormous, unanswerable logic. How can the black man wring from an unwilling world a recognition of his humanity and human relevance?

First of all, Fanon has to isolate and destroy a number of false solutions put forward by some well-meaning but misguided blacks. Among these are the compromisers who seek a dialogue with the white man and who expect to weigh with him on the basis of the reasonableness of the black man's case. Such blacks want to convince the white man that there is a future in the world for black and white on the basis of racial equality and mutual respect. The white people listen to them with politeness but they laugh afterwards and think and feel that such black men must be mad. The approach is doomed to failure from the very beginning because within it is a certain basic self-delusion and blubbing naivete which totally ignores the nature of the question at issue. Trapped and mesmerized by the liberal trash heaped on the world by the same people who destroy his humanity, the "reasonable" black man takes up the very shibboleth of his emasculation: "Towards a new humanism---- understanding among men----mankind, I believe in you----. To understand and to love----." He forgets that the makers of these fine phrases are also the beneficiaries of the black man's exploitation.

It is no wonder that as soon as the black man takes up the meaningless slogans, meaningless in the sense that they beguile him and drain him of the will to action, to assertion, then he cannot achieve a full consciousness of his total degradation. And without a full consciousness, there is no action and without action, there is no salvation. "There is a zone of nonbeing," says Fanon, "an extraordinarily sterile and arid region, an utterly naked declivity where an authentic upheaval can be born. In most cases, the black man lacks the advantage of being able to accomplish this descent into a real hell."

The Arab, the Vietnamese, some species of Black Americans have already attained this descent. The continental black man has hardly begun the descent at all. And yet, in it resides the ultimate hope for salvation.

A substitution of this "descent" into the full consciousness of his suffering and degradation with soothing liberal balderdash is the undoing of the "reasonable" negro, the "white" negro. He has become more or less a joke both to the white man and to the perceptive blacks.

Very much like the black compromiser, and as equally ineffectual, is the black man who posits what Jean-Paul Sartre calls "anti-racist racism," the black exponent of the Negritude ideology, the black man who utters "the great Negro cry with a force that will shake the pillars of the world."

Fanon acknowledges that Negritude is an understandable reaction to the white man's racial and cultural arrogance, but he raises serious doubts as to its viability. Denied of a historical role, stripped of civilization and trapped in the strait-jacket of centuries-old white-projected myths and stereotypes of him, the black man lost his racial confidence and his impulse for creativity within his native culture. To recover this lost confidence, therefore, the theoreticians of Negritude postulate the autonomy, integrity and sufficiency of black civilization. Translated into psycho-aesthetic terms, this gave rise to Leopold Singhor and Aime Cesaire's postulation of the cult of black consciousness, rhythm and spirituality. They projected ideas which reversed the myths and stereotypes of the white man. With unabashed eloquence they began a celebration of primitivity and to aspire to the domination of the world with the Negro's intuition.

Fanon treats Negritude with ambivalence. He recognizes its psychological basis but he also sees its impotence as a way of answering the white man's oppression of the Negro. Rhetoric is, in his view, the weapon of the weak and the expression of his escape into mysticism. The Negritude cultists make many claims for the black civilization. Most of these claims are probably well grounded as far as they go, but they cannot alter the real predicament of the black man. It is one thing for the black man to say that he has this and that quality of excellence which the white man has not got, it is quite a different thing to have the white man recognize these claims or alter his view of the black man on the basis of such claims.

Fanon sees Negritude as a barren narcissism which is grossly inadequate for the redemption of the black man. To him, Negritude tackles white racism at a level at which it

is least likely to get result because it tends to skirt around the real cause of this racism, which is the white man's desire to exploit the black man economically.

It is no wonder therefore that the white man, knowing the diversionary nature of the ideology of Negritude, actively advances it, mounts international forums for its dissemination and invests its advocates with the aura of statesmanship and intellectualism. The white racist, while creating the appearance of accepting the cultural assumptions of Negritude, and in fact while financing the art festivals for dramatizing the ideology, presses forward, as relentlessly as ever, with the domination and exploitation of the black man's economic life. While the black man is giving expression to "rhythm" and celebrating his "nearness to nature" in his artistic and cultural fiestas, the white man is "inartistically" carting away the former's minerals, raw materials and other economic resources to his metropolitan home for the improvement of his people's already high standard of living.

Fanon's answer to racism is simple but provocatively explosive:

*However painful it may be for me to accept this conclusion, I am obliged to state it:
For the black man there is only one destiny.
And it is white.*

This sounds like a paradox. Its implications are however quite clear. It does not mean that the black man should turn himself white, an impossible condition some simple-minded blacks have been trying to achieve with the aid of "whitening" creams. What Fanon means is that the black man should not imprison himself in his blackness or cripple himself with the effort to prove that he is as good as the white man (or even better) in his cultural accomplishments. Rather, the black man must recognize certain economic and social realities and a correlation between them. He must be "willing to get rid of the worm-eaten roots of the structure" of his world. And in this task, he must call to his aid the machinery, the skill and techniques that the white man has developed and used to dominate the world. He must answer the white man in his own terms, but first of all he must understand the dynamics of the situation that confronts him. To tackle the matter on the cultural level or on the level of the individual's attempt at

self-emancipation, is to miss the point altogether. The black man must take up the problem of the backwardness of his society which for centuries had exposed it to white exploitation.

Thus, to the Negritude "cultists" Fanon admonishes a quick transformation of the world of the black man first, so as to remove black oppression and set the black man where he can play a positive role on the stage of the world:

I need to lose myself in my negritude, to see the fires, the segregations, the repressions, the rapes, the discriminations, the boycotts. We need to put our fingers on every sore that mottles the black uniform.

And a little later:

It is my belief that a true culture cannot come to life under present conditions. It will be time enough to talk of the black genius when the man has regained his rightful place.

But how can the Negro regain "his rightful place"? Again Fanon's answer is simple and to the point: the Negro must regain it through action; he must struggle for his human dignity:

To educate man to be actional, preserving in all his relations his respect for the basic values that constitute a human world, is the prime task of him who, having taken thought, prepares to act.

The dialectic of the black man's situation must teach him to say "yes to life. Yes to love. Yes to generosity." But the same compulsion must drive him to saying 'no' to every negation of his humanity and dignity:

Man is also a no. No to scorn of man. No to degradation of man. No exploitation of man. No to the butchery of what is most human in man: freedom.

This prescription is its own justification. It is only in freedom that men will meet and make contact with one another's humanity. On the bar of truly liberated people there is neither black nor white.

Need for Revolutionary Action

The life of Frantz Fanon was one continuous growth, an extension and deepening of one of the most sensitive consciousnesses that have left their greatest impressions on the world far and beyond their initial illumination. But it is necessary to state that the outline of growth was there from the very beginning. Having in his most seminal work refused to be encased in racial patch-work and having opted for the universalizing values of freedom and true humanity, Fanon left himself free to be nourished by the life-giving air of universal sympathy. For, Fanon's understanding of racial neuroses convinced him that the true liberation of the man of color must be sought in the total removal from his life of any traces of these neuroses. The first step must constitute in the black man's sounding of the depth of his degradation and oppression. The next phase must be concerned with a waging of struggles by the black man to smash the forces of oppression.

In other words, Fanon saw revolutionary action as the only way out of the black man's racial dilemma. The matter must be removed from the area of myth-making and stereotypes to an area of occult resistances and uncompromising struggle. The Algerian War of independence gave Fanon a life-time's chance to test the truth of these tentative revolutionary theses.

Dr. Fanon was assigned by the French Administration to the Headship of the Psychiatric Department of Blida-Joinville Hospital, near Algiers, in 1953. He was there when the Algerian revolutionary war broke out in 1954.

The whirlwind revolutionary action by the Algerian people against the inhumanities and oppression of French settlers brought home to Fanon, with frightening clarity, the full weight and scope of imperialist violence as well as the beauty and mobility of oppressed men's fight for dignity. The revolution became a school from which Fanon's insatiable curiosity absorbed, to the tiniest element, the many-sided significance of its message. All this he has

faithfully recorded in his second important work: *L'An Cinq de la Revolution Algerienne* (1959) (the English translation is titled: *A Dying Colonialism*).

Fanon's switch of allegiance from the imperialist French metropolis to the downtrodden but revolutionary Algerian people fully justified his central thesis that the answer to the problem of human oppression lies, not in abstract protestations of moral outrage, but in direct involvement in action to replace the oppressive order. Earlier, and in his letter of resignation to the French Minister in Algeria, he had been scathingly critical of the Administration and its effort to destroy the will of the Algerian people through repressive legislation and terror. The situation, as Fanon saw it, generated immense neuroses such as the Hospital at Blida was meant to cure. It was rather foolish and futile, in his view, to continue to try to cure neuroses where their cause was inherent in the type of society in existence. The answer to socially induced neuroses did not lie in the establishment of psychiatric hospitals but in the change of the social order. He wrote to the Minister:

The function of a social structure is to set up institutions to serve man's needs. A society that drives its members to desperate solutions is a nonviable society, a society to be replaced.

Again more specifically:

It was an absurd gamble to undertake, at whatever cost, to bring into existence a certain number of values, when the lawlessness, the inequality, the multi-daily murder of men were raised to the status of legislative principles.

The social structure existing in Algeria was hostile to any attempt to put the individual back where he belonged.

One he committed himself formally to serving the interest of the revolution, Fanon threw into it every ounce of his tremendous powers, physical and intellectual. He became its roving ambassador as well as one of its chief theoreticians.

A Dying Colonialism, in which Fanon records his impressions of that momentous and stormy era, is one of the most vital books existing because its matter bears testimony to one of the highest endeavors of the human kind - the struggle for freedom and human dignity. In outline, the book records the fact that imperialist oppression can descend to any level of bestiality, and further that the chief instrument of imperialism is violence and terror. In full contrast to the wholesale and negative capability of imperialist oppression and violence is the organized and relentless resistance of the Algerian people. The humanity and noble generosity of the freedom-fighters contrasted most acutely with the inhuman brutality of the colonizers. But Fanon dwells in endearing detail with the positive aspects of the revolutionary struggle.

Fanon gives a number of facts a greater deal of emphasis. First, he stresses the fact that a revolutionary resistance such as that undertaken by the Algerian people has the effect of releasing the resources and latent energies of an oppressed people. The liberation of the consciousness from fear, superstition and intellectual torpidity sets the stage for the realization of those near-miraculous feats of arms and courage which make the history of a resistance movement read like a heroic saga from remote antiquity. The greatest gains are achieved by the most underprivileged in the colonial social structure. The newly awakened spirit of freedom assaults not only the bastions of colonial oppression but the age-old native feudalism. The peasantry who under both feudalism and colonialism had been down-trodden and relegated to the dust-heap of history find for themselves a noble role in the revolution. They single-mindedly embrace the revolution because it gives back to them their dignity and respect as human beings.

The women of the Algerian revolution emerged overnight from a state of non-being into the lime-light of history. It was not only that three of their members detonated the bombs that ushered in the positive action but that involvement in revolution destroyed once and for all the veil, that feudal badge of feminine inferiority in the Arab world. Fanon attests to the liberating power of revolution. Revolution liberates enslaved women and throws her together with the men in comradesly destiny. Overnight, the awakening of the woman's enthusiasm makes available to the Revolution the iron and steel of its strength. The Algerian woman, with her veil torn off,

became the wily liaison officer of the Revolution; stripped forever of her traditional coyness, she became an active combatant, a bearer of grenades, weapons and messages to her male comrades. The relationship with her male comrades was theretofore redefined by comradely equality.

Fanon gives testimony in *A Dying Colonialism* to the indestructibility of the will of the masses once they have been structured and steeled in struggle. The masses develop all kinds of mechanisms for survival, even in the face of terrible disasters. Thus, in spite of the barbarities of the French colonialists, the organized massacres and systematic tortures and frightful mutilations, the Algerian people refused to be broken. They developed new mechanisms for quick regrouping and instant recovery. They developed a precision of movement, an alertness of the senses and an agility of intellect which only a common objective fanatically held can evoke.

In *A Dying Colonialism*, Fanon's political perception reached maturity and in return qualified him to speak with authority on the subject of revolution. He gives testimony of that deep and abiding attachment to the downtrodden and the oppressed which is the distinguishing feature of all true revolutionaries. He forged a totally mystical link with the Algerian masses, so that the sorrows of Algeria became his sorrows, the fears and anxieties of Algeria became his fears and anxieties. The triumphs of Algeria also became his triumphs. The Algerian masses recognizing the appearance of a true friend and adopted son repayed Fanon's love and loyalty with their absolute trust by making him both their chief theoretician and ambassador-at-large.

Continental Unity and Solidarity

Fanon was deeply concerned with the liberation not only of Algeria but also of the entire African continent; for, his revolutionary instinct had told him that as long as any part of the continent remained under foreign rule, then whatever achievements made on the continent by way of independence of states must be heavily qualified. The recent history of Europe affords incontrovertible evidence of the triumphant quest for freedom by all those who have seriously taken it upon themselves to challenge the forces of oppression and imperialism. The Nazi regime roused the concerted fear and hatred of Europe by its dastardly cruelties, including its mass terrorisms and genocides. The combined will of the free peoples of Europe not only destroyed

Nazism but also smashed up the regimes that sustained it. In the same way, Fanon saw the hope for Africans to rid themselves of French, English, Portuguese and South African imperialistic impositions in a common and determined assault by all the continent, and not only the continent but by the solidarity of progressive mankind.

Fanon's musings on these and allied subjects between the publication of *Black Skin, White Masks* and the *Wretched of the Earth* in 1961 were put together under the title, *Towards the African Revolution* (1964).

The unity and solidarity of the African continent engaged the close attention of Fanon because, already by 1960, several disturbing signs had begun to appear. The divisive and chauvinistic trends that accompanied the independence of a number of the countries were beginning to threaten the unity and sense of common purpose of the continent. Fanon had seen with increased alarm the middle class politicians of different African countries grab independence and immediately proceed to barricade themselves in utter oblivion of the plight of the rest of the continent still under colonial domination. Fanon saw that unless the continent generated ideas strong enough to unite the efforts of the new rulers in a common endeavor, the continent would be bound to go through the whole gamut of nationalist wars and upheavals which had wracked Ghana and Senegal, Somali and Ethiopia, Morocco and Mauritania and the two Congos.

Fanon saw that nothing but disaster would follow African independence without continental unity and a common ideology. Such a development was bound to immobilize the continent, halt any further effort at decolonization and encourage the erst-while imperialist powers to stage a come-back and a new colonization of the continent. The Congo was proving a real test case where the true nationalists were being assassinated and puppets foisted on the nation to hold the fort for the former imperialist powers.

Fanon envisaged the only hope for the continent in the Socialist ideology which would give the continent a frame-work of unity and create a feeling of common purpose and solidarity among the different peoples and states. The alternative to socialism would be internecine and destructive strife and disintegration of confidence among the middle classes, accompanied by the total emasculation of the masses. The case of Eastern Europe with its

endemic instability was a living illustration: Eastern Europe only found stability when she also found a body of ideas strong enough to attract various peoples to itself in comradely understanding and collaboration. Socialism would in Africa as in Eastern Europe, provide the impetus towards stability and unity. Here is Fanon's assessment of the situation as it struck him in 1960:

Colonialism and its derivatives do not, as a matter of fact, constitute the present enemies of Africa. In a short time this continent will be liberated. For my part, the deeper I enter into the cultures and the political circles the surer I am that the greater danger that threatens Africa is the absence of ideology. Old Europe had toiled for centuries before completing the national unity of the states. And even when a final period could be put to it, how may wars still! With the triumph of socialism in Eastern Europe we witness a spectacular disappearance of the old rivalries, of the traditional territorial claims. That nucleus of wars and political assassinations that Bulgaria, Hungary, Estonia, Slovakia, Albania presented, has made way for a coherent world whose objective is the building of a socialist society.

In Africa, on the other hand, the countries that come to independence are as unstable as their new middle classes or their renovated princes. After a few hesitant steps in the international arena the national middle classes, no longer feeling the threat of the traditional colonial power, suddenly develop great appetites. And as they do not yet have any political experience they think they can conduct political affairs like their business. Perquisites, threats, even despoiling of the victims. All of which is of course regrettable, for the small states have no other choice but to beg the former metropolis to remain just a little longer. In these imperialist

pseudo-states, likewise, an extreme militarist policy leads to a reduction of public investments in countries which in certain respects are still medieval. The discontented workers undergo a repression as pitiless as that of the colonial periods. Trade unions and opposition political parties are confined to a quasi-clandestine state. The people, the people who had given everything in the difficult moments of the struggle for national liberation, wonder, with their empty hands and bellies, as to the reality of their victory.

In the twilight of African independence, Fanon's fears might have seemed totally exaggerated. But with a decade of hindsight behind us, we are able to attest to the justness of his assessment and the acuteness of his perception. The forces of national chauvinism still threaten the unity and solidarity of the continent; the middle classes have expropriated, and continue to expropriate, the African masses of the rewards of independence; repression of the working people and the peasantry is still the order of the day; massacres, police brutalities, arbitrary imprisonment of political opponents, brutal suppression of dissentient views take place every day; the sense of common purpose which existed at the time of the anti-colonial agitation has since disappeared only to be replaced by mutual suspicion, intrigue and cut-throat rivalries among the diverse contenders for political and economic power; coups and counter-coups have almost become part and parcel of life on the continent. The process of decolonization which in 1960 seemed to Fanon to be irreversible has since been halted. A good part of the continent remains trodden down under the iron hoof of colonial imperialism in South Africa, Rhodesia and African territories under Portugal. Millions of African peoples continue to be oppressed by minority racist regimes; millions of young men and women still taste the bitter pills of colonial humiliation; millions daily see the flight of all their natural human aspirations in their own lands, bereft of confidence, of dignity and of a sense of human worth. Their sense of person is daily negated in a world which continually celebrates the march of peoples to the platform of history.

Fanon had foreseen that the only hope for the continent rested in the peoples of Africa coming to terms with

the problem of unity and solidarity so as to pursue, collectively and unswervingly, interests that appertain to the welfare of the African masses, especially those that appertain to their total liberation:

The inter-African solidarity must be a solidarity of fact, a solidarity of action, a solidarity concrete in men, in equipment, in money.

Africa shall be free. Yes, but it must get to work, it must not lose sight of its own unity. It is in this spirit that one of the most important among a number of points at the first Congress of African Peoples in Accra in 1958 was adopted. The African Peoples, it was said in that resolution, pledge themselves to create a militia which will have the duty to support the African peoples fighting for independence.

In 1960, the voice in which Fanon called for continental unity and concerted action against colonialism and imperialism was most urgent. It was a voice calling for immediate mobilization, immediate unrelenting pressure against retreating colonialism. Today, a decade after, the sense of urgency is all gone. The colonialists have returned as the neo-colonialist bearers of "economic aid," as "foreign aiders," as "foreign investors," as "experts and advisers." They no longer rule the continent directly of course but those who rule do so at their sweet pleasure. To displease these "powers behind the throne" is to be immediately swept away in a coup and replaced with more pliable puppets. As for the vision of continental unity and liberation, how can it be sustained when those who rule the continent are not even masters within their own homes. The Organization of African Unity has since been established of course, but like the German assembly in the nineteenth century, it was no more than "a house of phrases." Tons of resolutions continue to be passed at the Organization's annual summits, mountains of rhetoric are expended by all manner of orators at conferences, most of which go to demonstrate the impotence of the continent. African freedom-fighters are starved of inspiration, of arms and of money for ridding the rest of the continent of the ulcers of foreign domination. The idea of a continental militia which seemed like a viable proposition ten

years ago has now receded far beyond view. Nationalist politicians immediately become hesitant and pussy-footed the moment an African High Command is mentioned. They trot out all manner of clever excuses why the idea will not work. Orators are never lacking who do nothing but rationalize the continent's weaknesses.

Mobilization

Fanon died in 1969. The exertions of the past six years had exhausted him and he had contracted cancer. He might have survived if he had gotten prompt medical treatment. But his commitments, physical and intellectual, just then, to the Revolution could not allow him to think about himself. As the roving ambassador of the Revolution, he was busily engaged with the problem of opening up a southward route for supplying the Algerian freedom-fighters, the French having tightened their patrols of the borders between Algeria and Morocco and Tunisia. Moreover, Fanon was working feverishly to complete his book, *Les Damnés de la Terre* (translated into English as *The Wretched of the Earth*), in which he gathered together and consolidated his revolutionary theses. This book contains the most authoritative statements on the subject of anti-colonial revolution and is sometimes regarded as "the bible of the African Revolution" and "the voice of the Third World."

Fanon's opening thesis in *The Wretched of the Earth* is that violence and organized force are essential in anti-colonial struggle. The alternative which precludes an armed conflict is in his view a fantastic hoax.

The logic of this thesis is overpowering. The colonial situation, he argues, was set up and sustained by a systematic and unremitting application of force and physical violence: the colonizers exploited their initial superiority of technological and military power to overawe and subjugate the natives; they used force and physical coercion to pacify the colonial territory; and after pacification, the colonial administration employed its monopoly of superior force (the regular colonial army, the police force, the prison warders, the colonial militia) to keep the colonized people down and ensure that political and economic control rested with the colonizing group. Fanon describes this dominance of violence in truly dramatic language:

*The colonial world is a world cut in two.
The dividing line, the frontiers are shown*

by barracks and police stations. In the colonies it is the policeman and the soldier who are the official, instituted go-betweens, the spokesmen of the settler and his rule of oppression. In the capitalist societies the educational system, whether lay or clerical, the structures of moral reflexes handed down from father to son, the exemplary honesty of workers who are given a medal after fifty years of good and loyal service, and the affection which springs from harmonious relations and good behaviour - all these aesthetic expressions of respect for the established order serve to create around the exploited person an atmosphere of submission and of inhibition which lightens the task of policing considerably.

In the capitalist countries a multitude of moral teachers, counsellors and "bewilderers" separate the exploited from those in power. In the colonial countries, on the contrary, the policeman and the soldier, by their immediate presence and their frequent and direct action maintain contact with the native and advise him by means of rifle-butts and napalm not to budge. It is obvious here that the agents of government speak the language of pure force. The intermediary does not lighten the oppression, nor seeks to hide the domination; he shows them up and puts them into practice with the clear conscience of an upholder of the peace; yet he is the bringer of violence into the home and into the mind of the native.

To upset the colonial order which is hedged in and sanctioned by force and physical violence, nothing seems more logical therefore than that force and physical violence should be employed.

In a sense, this violence is inevitable if the struggle against injustice and colonial oppression is to yield maximum benefit to the people, if it is to give them back their freedom and to revive their humanity which had been terribly

distorted under colonial rule. By banding themselves together in one massive common effort to throw off the oppressor's yoke, the people attain a certain mystical union among themselves which becomes a source of constructive energy at the end of the colonial struggle. People who have fought together and suffered together are not likely to make light of their revolution because it represents a covenant which they have sealed with their blood and tears.

Fanon pours scorn on the school of thought which stands for a bloodless revolution, for the winning of independence "on a platter of gold." Where independence was awarded, after a hurried and limited dialogue between the colonialists and the middle class nationalist politicians, as in most African countries, the result has proved a near disaster for the continent.

With the end of the second world war, nationalist parties led by middle class intellectuals and drawing their followership from the urban slums and shanty towns sprang up all over Africa like poisonous weeds. They set up a din for political independence and threatened the colonizing powers with fire and brimstone unless political power was handed over to them. They drowned every other sound with their clamor for the "rights of men to freedom from hunger." They talked volubly about "the rights of peoples to self-determination" and invoked all types of liberal western ideas to justify their claim to speak for the people.

The colonialists soon became wise to the situation. They knew that the middle class parties lacked popular base, that they were not in touch with the peasantry who comprised ninety percent of the people; they reckoned that by the nature of the middle classes, the leaders of the nationalist parties would prove wonderfully pliable and opportunistic the moment they were vested with power. They therefore decided it was in their ultimate interest to pass through the motion of decolonizing but indeed, what they did was to go out through the front door and re-enter through the back-door. As expected, they found the middle class nationalist leader a most congenial ally, someone to do deals with them in order to cheat the masses out of the fruits of independence.

The truth is that, short of armed struggle and the investing of political sovereignty in the masses and their leaders, the pattern that has developed in Africa is that

as soon as the middle classes got control of political power, they proceeded to run the state much in the same way that the departing imperialists had done before them, calling up for support the same repressive legislations, using the same instruments of coercion to ensure perpetuity in office, and avoiding the disturbance of the bureaucratic structure as much as possible, so that to all intents and purposes, nothing much would have changed except that the color of the new rulers is black where that of the colonialists was white.

Fanon's revolutionary theory acknowledges the peasantry as the mainstay of the impulse for transformation of the African Society, the chief source of its inspiration and the nerve-center of its radical energy. The African intellectual, the middle class professional, the urban worker and all the other members of the rising modern class, would have to receive their revolutionary baptism by energizing themselves with the culture and social outlook of the African peasantry if they are to make themselves worthy of the revolutionary cause.

There are at least three good reasons why a truly African revolution must have its root in the village and draw its inspiration from the peasants. First, the peasants constitute more than three-quarters of the entire population; secondly, the peasants are the least affected by the colonial culture which has the effect of devitalizing the African personality; and thirdly, the peasants have gained least from the colonial social structure and are therefore ever ready, once sufficiently roused, to tear down the colonial edifice, without looking back.

The most serious weakness of the nationalist parties in Africa therefore has been their failure to mobilize the people, especially the peasantry, fully in the struggle for freedom.

Fanon stresses that full mobilization of the entire people during the struggle against oppression, and in the era of national construction that follows it, is the only sensible approach to politics in Africa, and, in fact, in all the Third World. The revolutionary movement, should, in his own words, "incarnate the people."

But the position does not preclude a clear-cut leadership. A mass of people in action requires leaders who

partake of its mission and aspirations and who provide the movement with direction. Here is how Fanon defines the relationship between the leadership and followership in a truly revolutionary situation:

The duty of those at the head of the movement is to have the masses behind them. Allegiance presupposes awareness and understanding of the mission which has to be fulfilled; in short, an intellectual position, however embryonic. We must not voodoo the people, nor dissolve them in emotion and confusion. Only those underdeveloped countries led by revolutionary elites who have come up from the people can today allow the entry of the masses upon the scene of history.

But, we must repeat, it is absolutely necessary to oppose vigorously and definitively the birth of National bourgeoisie and a privileged caste. To educate the masses politically is to make the nation a reality to each citizen. It is to make the history of the nation part of the personal experience of each of its citizens.

Those who plan for the underdeveloped countries in general and Africa in particular have much to learn by closely studying the works of Frantz Fanon, especially *The Wretched of the Earth*. Fanon provides such profound insights into the questions of racism, colonialism and post-colonial reconstruction that no sensitive person in the modern world can afford to ignore his pronouncements. His life and works constitute one of the great landmarks in the recent history of Africa and the Third World.

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