

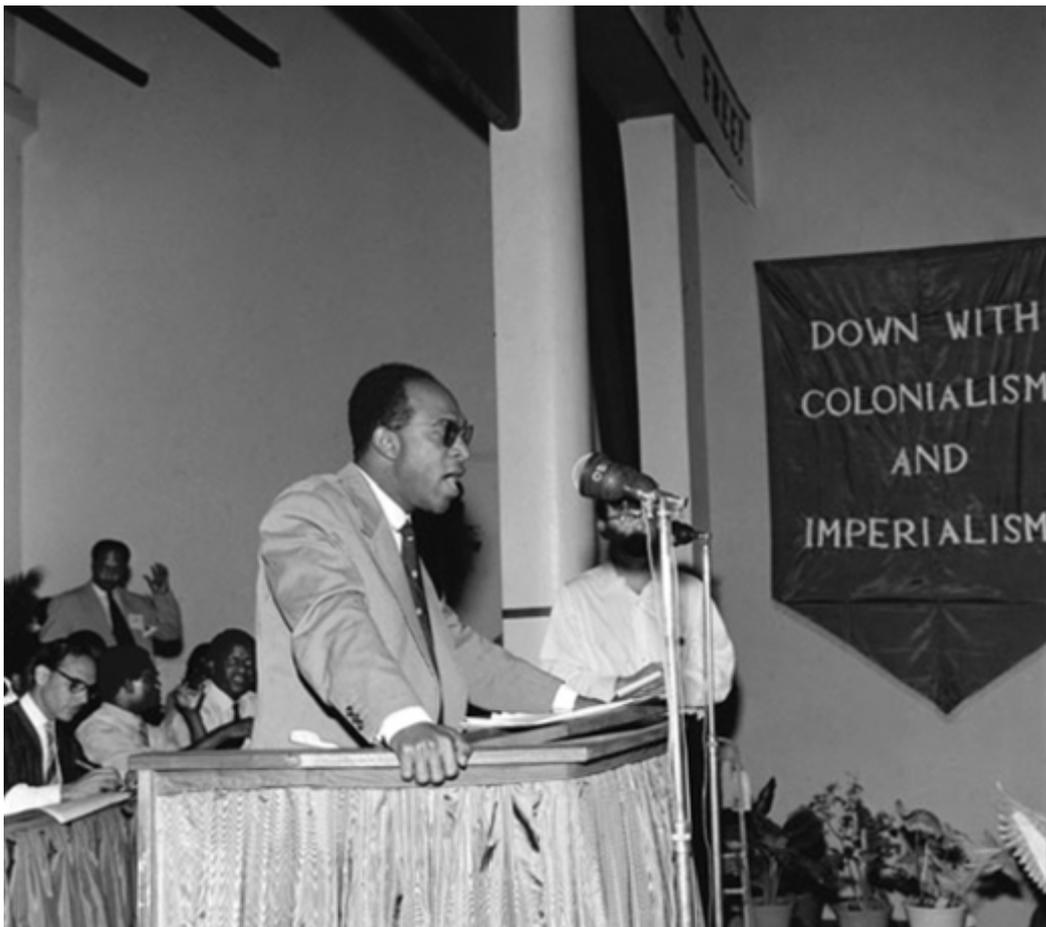
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Where Life Is Seized

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Écrits sur l'aliénation et la liberté by [Frantz Fanon](#), edited by [Robert Young](#) and [Jean Khalfa](#)
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Author of the anti-racist jeremiad *Black Skin, White Masks*; spokesman for the Algerian Revolution and author of *The Wretched of the Earth*, the 'bible' of decolonisation; inspiration to Third World revolutionaries from the refugee camps of Palestine to the back streets of Tehran and Beirut, Harlem and Oakland; founder, avant la lettre, of post-colonialism; hero to the alienated *banlieusards* of France, who feel as if the Battle of Algiers never ended, but simply moved to the *cités*: Frantz Fanon has been remembered in a lot of ways, but almost all of them have foregrounded his advocacy of resistance, especially violent resistance.



Fanon speaking in Accra in 1958

Fanon was not a pacifist, but the emphasis on his belief in violence – or ‘terrorism’, as his adversaries would say – has obscured the radical humanism that lies at the heart of his work. In her 1970 study, *On Violence*, addressed in part to Fanon’s student admirers, Hannah Arendt pointed out that both his followers and his detractors seemed to have read only the first chapter – also entitled ‘On Violence’ – of *The Wretched of the Earth*. There Fanon described how violence could serve as a ‘cleansing force’ for the colonised, liberating them not only from their colonial masters, but from their inferiority complex. Decolonisation, he suggested, was nothing less than the ‘creation of new men’ – a notion much in vogue among 1960s revolutionaries, from Che Guevara to Malcolm X. *The Wretched of the Earth* has few of the autobiographical, elegiac cadences of his first book, *Black Skin, White Masks*, but explores the same relationship between racism, colonialism, mental illness and freedom. Crucially, it ends with a harrowing account of the mental disorders Fanon encountered as a psychiatrist during the Algerian War of Independence. The argumentative force of this closing chapter, and its position in the book, throw doubt on the first chapter. Violence was never Fanon’s remedy for the Third World; it was a rite of passage for colonised communities and individuals who had become mentally ill, in his view, as a result of the settler-colonial project, itself saturated with violence and racism. Like Walter Benjamin, Fanon believed that for the oppressed, the “state of emergency” in which we live is not the exception but the rule’, and that his revolutionary duty was to help ‘bring about a real state of emergency’. Fanon’s clinical work was the practice that underpinned his political thought. He was only slightly exaggerating when he estimated that there were ‘more than ten million men to treat’ in Algeria. For Fanon, colonialism was a perversity. The coloniser and the colonised were locked together – and constructed – by a fatal dialectic. There could be no reciprocity, only war between the two, until the latter achieved freedom.

The pursuit of freedom lies at the heart of *Écrits sur l’aliénation et la liberté*, an immense new volume of Fanon’s uncollected writings that includes his youthful literary efforts, psychiatric notes and papers, articles on Algeria and Third World liberation struggles and correspondence with his publisher, François Maspero. As the editors, Jean Khalifa and Robert Young, note, this body of writing – unfinished, restless, often agonised – reflects Fanon’s search for ‘freedom as dis-alienation’, itself a response to his experience of what Sartre called ‘extreme situations’: the battlefields of the Second World War, the asylums of North Africa, clandestine anti-colonial work.

Fanon was born in 1925 in Fort-de-France, the capital of Martinique, the fifth of eight children. His father, Félix, a customs inspector, was a descendant of free black cocoa farmers. His mother, Eléanoro, a shopkeeper, was the illegitimate daughter of a mixed-race couple, and appears to have had ancestors in Alsace (which accounts for the name Frantz). The *békés*, descendants of the white creole elite, owned most of the land in Martinique, a former slave colony based on sugar production, but Fanon had little contact with them. He attended the prestigious Lycée Victor Schoelcher, where his teacher was the poet Aimé Césaire, who had won praise in Paris from André Breton for his 1939 poem ‘Notebook of a Return to My Native Land’. Césaire was one of the founders of the Négritude movement, which Fanon admired for its anti-colonialism, but its appeal to racial authenticity troubled him: he thought of himself

as a son of the French Revolution rather than as an African, and the struggles in the colonies as a sequel to the storming of the Bastille. 'Je suis français' were the first three words he learned to spell.

After the fall of France in 1940, Admiral Georges Robert, high commissioner for the French West Indies – known to locals as Tan Robé – threw in his lot with Pétain. Two French warships were blockaded in the harbour at Fort-de-France, leaving several thousand white French sailors idle. For the next three years they behaved like an occupying force. Fanon's elders adopted a wait-and-see attitude: why get mixed up in a white man's war? Fanon, however, insisted that 'whenever human dignity and freedom are at stake, it involves us.' In 1943 he made his way to Dominica, paying for his passage with cloth he had stolen from his father, to enlist in De Gaulle's army. He was too late: soon after his arrival in Dominica, Tan Robé surrendered to the Allied forces, and Fanon was sent home. But when the USS *Oregon* left Fort-de-France in March 1944, he was on board, with a thousand black volunteers and not a single *béké*. During training at a camp in Morocco, he discovered a world of fraternity without equality: white soldiers were at the top of a strict racial hierarchy, with the *tirailleurs sénégalais* at the bottom, and West Indians like himself occupying an ambiguous middle ground. When his unit passed through Algeria he caught a glimpse of the country he was to make his own a decade later; in Oran he was shocked to see Arab children fighting over leftovers in a garbage bin.

Not long after landing in southern France, Fanon was wounded in the chest by a mortar round. He was decorated; the citation was signed by Colonel Raoul Salan, who would be one of the leaders of the French Algerian putsch in 1961. Fanon took little pride in this honour. He felt, he told his parents, that he had come to Europe to 'defend an obsolete ideal'. 'Never say: he died for the good cause ... They are hiding a lot of things from us.' He was embittered by his encounters with peasants who couldn't be persuaded to fight the Germans and showed little appreciation for those who did.

He returned to Martinique to finish his baccalauréat, took part in Césaire's campaign for a seat in the French parliament (on the Communist ticket) and set sail again for France in 1946 to study medicine. He flirted with the idea of becoming a surgeon, but dissection put him off, so he chose psychiatry. Lyon in the first months was grim and unwelcoming, particularly for a young West Indian, one of only thirty black students in a class of four hundred. A housing shortage meant that he had to room in a former brothel requisitioned by the Ministry of Education. He helped set up the anti-colonial Overseas Students' Association, and moved in Communist Party circles, but he was more of a literary intellectual than a militant, a devotee of journals such as *Les Temps modernes*, *Esprit* and *Présence Africaine*; drawn to existentialism and phenomenology by Merleau-Ponty, whose lectures he attended; gripped by the engagé theatre of Sartre and Camus, and the novels of Richard Wright and Chester Himes. He was also reading Jaspers, Nietzsche, Hegel, Bergson, Bachelard and Lacan – the 'logician of madness', he called him, partly in jest. He dreaded the 'larval, stocky, obsolete life that awaits me once I've finished my studies. I don't want "marriage", children, a home, the family table.'

Fanon explored these feelings of antinomian revolt in a trilogy of plays, two of which are reprinted here. (The third, 'La Conspiration', has been lost.) As the editors point out, Fanon's youthful protagonists are driven by his own obsessions: 'the self-transformation of consciousness and the pursuit of dis-alienation'. In his 1948 play *L'Oeil se noie* ('The Eye Drowns'), two brothers vie for the affection of a young woman. 'There is you and me and we sleep on a bed of wild flowers,' Lucien, a sensualist, tells Ginette, while his brother François, a delirious visionary, offers to show her 'the doors of the Absolute/where life is seized'. The characters in his 1949 play *Les Mains parallèles* (the title was a nod to Sartre's *Les Mains sales*) are possessed by a feverish sense that language itself has become depleted, fatally severed from the real, as they struggle to reach 'the other side of the emaciated Word'. To Young, there is a whiff of Nietzsche's vitalism in these plays: the exaltation of individual will and action, the creative destruction of inherited values. The dialogue – highly formal, yet pulsing with erotic metaphors – owes everything to Césaire.

It is Césaire with a white mask, however: the question of race is nowhere mentioned. In spite of his experiences during the war, Fanon still identified himself primarily as a Frenchman, and therefore more white than black. He moved in an almost entirely white world in Lyon, but with his looks, his playful intelligence and his talent on the dance floor, he never lacked for partners. He had a daughter, Mireille, with a French woman – the relationship collapsed soon after – and in 1949 married another, Marie-Josèphe Dublé, with whom he had a son. Josie was the daughter of left-wing trade unionists, who embraced their new son-in-law. She remained his life companion and closest interlocutor, taking dictation while Fanon composed his thoughts, pacing back and forth as if delivering a lecture. In *Frantz Fanon: A Portrait* (2000), Alice Cherki, a Jewish-Algerian who was one of his interns in Algeria, argues that this method of composition gave his writing 'the rhythm of a body in motion and the cadences of the breathing voice'.

Outside the home he shared with Josie, Fanon's efforts to wish race away proved impossible. Before settling in Lyon, Fanon had tended to see himself as a Frenchman of Caribbean origin; the 'real' blacks, as he saw it, were Africans like the *tirailleurs sénégalais*, whom he used to make fun of as a child in Martinique and later fought alongside in the war. As a student in France, he experienced a devastating shock when a little boy saw him pass by and cried out: 'Look, maman, a Negro, I'm afraid!' The experience of seeing himself being seen – of being fixed by that boy's gaze – provided him with the primal scene of his first book, *Black Skin, White Masks*. It was hardly an isolated incident. Life in Lyon, even at its most apparently pleasant, was a series of what we now call micro-aggressions, from patronising compliments on his French, as if it weren't his native tongue, to well-meaning praise of his mind. Always in the background was the implication that, as one of his friends said, he was 'basically white': being articulate and clever were apparently not 'black' traits.

Blacks, he discovered, were not alone in their predicament. Lyon was home to a small, isolated community of North African workers, mostly Algerians, crowded into flats on the rue Moncey. Many complained of unexplained pains. Their psychosomatic distress had been classified as an imaginary illness, the 'North African syndrome', and attributed to cerebral and cultural defects. For his colleagues, Fanon noted, 'the North African is a simulator, a liar,

a malingerer, a sluggard, a thief.’ His own work suggested the opposite: ‘Threatened in his affectivity, threatened in his social activity, threatened in his membership in the community, the North African combines all the conditions that make a man sick.’ Racial marginalisation was a danger to mental health, and the medical profession was reproducing its effects. Fanon published his findings in 1952 in a powerful essay for *Esprit*.

Fanon’s research, as much as his own experiences of racism, informed *Black Skin, White Masks*, his great study of the ‘lived experience of the black man’, earlier mistranslated as ‘the fact of blackness’: for Fanon blackness was not a fact so much as a racist phantasmagoria. The book is a dazzling work of bricolage, combining psychiatry, phenomenology, sociology, literary criticism and sudden eruptions of poetry (his debt to Césaire remained profound). Published in the same year as Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*, the book proposes ‘nothing short of the liberation of the man of colour’ not only from white supremacy, but from any restrictive conception of Négritude: ‘The Negro is not. Anymore than the white man.’ Fanon’s argument – that the ‘Negro’ was a creation of the racist imagination – was adapted from Sartre’s 1946 essay *Anti-Semite and Jew*, which argued that the idea of ‘the Jew’ as the other was an invention of the anti-Semite. Racism had created a shared pathology, a shadow dance in which ‘the Negro enslaved by his inferiority, the white man enslaved by his superiority alike, behave in accordance with a neurotic orientation.’ Much of *Black Skin, White Masks* is devoted to a forensic analysis of the psychological injuries of racism, particularly the ‘shame and self-contempt’ it spreads among its victims. Even a relatively privileged, ‘assimilated’ black man like himself was ‘damned’: ‘When people like me, they tell me it is in spite of my colour. When they dislike me, they point out that it is not because of my colour. Either way, I am locked into the infernal circle.’

But how was he to liberate himself from this infernal circle and – as Ta-Nehisi Coates would later put it in *Between the World and Me* – ‘live free in this black body’? Fanon was briefly drawn to the racial romanticism of the Senegalese poet Léopold Senghor, another figure in the Négritude movement, who claimed that ‘emotion is completely Negro as reason is Greek’: ‘I wade in the irrational. Up to the neck in the irrational. And now how my voice vibrates!’ When he read Sartre’s ‘Black Orpheus’, an introduction to a 1948 anthology of Négritude poets, he was taken aback by the condescension: Sartre defended black consciousness as an ‘anti-racist racism’, but downgraded it to a ‘weak moment in a dialectical movement’ towards a society free of race and class oppression. Yet by the end of *Black Skin, White Masks* Fanon has come to agree. The ‘only solution’, he declares, is to ‘rise above this absurd drama that others have staged around me’ and ‘reach out for the universal’, the ‘creation of a human world ... of reciprocal recognitions’, rather than seeking refuge in some ‘materialised Tower of the Past’. If anyone is making that leap, he adds, it is not the Négritude poets, but the Vietnamese rebels in Indochina, who are taking their destiny into their own hands.

Fanon submitted the manuscript of *Black Skin, White Masks* as his medical thesis, but it was rejected. Instead he wrote a 75-page thesis on Friedrich’s Ataxia, a hereditary neurological condition often accompanied by psychiatric symptoms. Fanon’s most reliable biographers – Cherki and the British historian David Macey, whose book also appeared in 2000 – have tended to dismiss the dissertation, but Young and Khalifa make a strong case for its

importance. In the very last line of *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon wrote: 'O my body, make of me always a man who always questions!' In his thesis, reprinted here in its entirety, we see him cutting through the compartmentalising assumptions of his profession: the 'systematic indifference' of neurologists towards the 'psychiatric symptom', the rigid opposition of mind and body, physical and mental. He is not yet prepared to call for a politicised psychiatry, but he insists on seeing 'the human being ... as a whole, an indissoluble unity', and on the need to investigate what Marcel Mauss called the 'total social fact' – the intricate web of relations, institutions and beliefs that forms social reality. The mentally-ill person, he writes, is above all an 'alienated individual' who 'no longer finds his place among men', and needs to be reintegrated into 'the heart of the group'.

These ideas were very much in tune with the theories of the man who became Fanon's mentor at the psychiatric hospital of Saint-Alban-sur-Limagnole in the Massif Central. Like Fanon, François Tosquelles was both a doctor and a resistance fighter, having led the Spanish Republican Army's psychiatric services before crossing the Pyrenees in 1939. Under Tosquelles's leadership, Saint-Alban had become a sanctuary for partisans and left-wing intellectuals, including the poet Paul Eluard and the historian of science Georges Canguilhem. Tosquelles pioneered 'institutional' or 'social' therapy, which tried to turn the hospital into a recognisable microcosm of the world outside. The idea underlying social therapy – and Fanon's thesis – was that patients were socially as well as clinically alienated, and that their care depended on the creation of a structure that relieved their isolation by involving them in group activities. Fanon spent 15 months at Saint-Alban, and observed there for the first time patients playing a part in their own recovery.

In 1953 he took up a post at Blida-Joinville, an enormous, overcrowded psychiatric hospital about 40 kilometres south of Algiers. He was responsible for 187 patients: 165 European women and 22 Muslim men. According to Cherki, he found some of them tied to their beds, others to trees in the park. They lived in segregated quarters, the women in one pavilion and the men in another: a mirror of what Fanon would later describe as the 'compartmentalised world' of colonialism. The hospital's former director, Antoine Porot, the founder of the Algiers School of colonial ethno-psychiatry, had justified this segregation on the grounds of 'divergent moral or social conceptions'. Several of Fanon's colleagues shared Porot's view that Algerians were essentially different from Europeans, suffering from primitive brain development that made them childlike and lazy, as well as impulsive, violent and untrustworthy. Fanon wrote to a former colleague at Saint-Alban that at meetings 'everyone is already tired, as if they sensed the vanity of any dialogue. It seems that this is specifically North African and that in no time at all I'll be knackered too.'

As a West Indian atheist who was neither a Muslim 'native' nor a white European, Fanon stood at a lonely remove from both the staff and the residents at Blida. He was also a colonial administrator, as Macey observes, occupying 'the traditional position of the black citizen from an "old colony" with a civilising mission to perform among the North African or black African subjects of a "new colony"'. Since he spoke no Arabic or Berber, he relied on interpreters with his Muslim patients. His closest friends in Algeria would be left-wing European militants, many of them Jews.

To instil a sense of community among the staff – and perhaps to break out of his solitude – Fanon created a weekly newsletter called *Notre Journal*. Young and Khalifa include a number of Fanon's contributions, which throw light on his efforts to 'dis-alienate' the practice of psychiatry. In one, he warns that 'every time we abandon an attitude of understanding and adopt an attitude of punishment, we are making a mistake.' In another, he defines the 'modern hero' as 'someone who carries out his task each day with conscience and love'. In a striking article published in April 1954, he questions the spatial isolation of the modern asylum:

Future generations will wonder with interest what motive could have led us to build psychiatric hospitals far from the centre. Several patients have already asked me: Doctor, will we hear the Easter bells? ... Whatever our religion, daily life is set to the rhythm of a number of sounds and the church bells represent an important element in this symphony ... Easter arrives, and the bells will die without being reborn, for they have never existed at the psychiatric hospital of Blida. The psychiatric hospital of Blida will continue to live in silence. A silence without bells.

Restoring the symphonic order of everyday life was the goal of social therapy, and Fanon pursued it with vigilance, introducing basket-weaving, a theatre, ball games and other activities. It was a great success with the European women, but a 'total failure' with the Muslim men. The older European doctors weren't surprised: 'You don't know them, when you've been in the hospital for 15 years like us, then you'll understand.' But Fanon, to his credit, refused to 'understand'. He suspected that the failure lay in his use of 'imported methods', and that he might achieve different results if he could provide his Muslim patients with forms of sociality that resembled their lives outside. Working with a team of Algerian nurses, he established a *café maure*, a traditional tea house where men drink coffee and play cards, and later an Oriental salon for the hospital's small group of Muslim women. Arab musicians and storytellers came to perform, and Muslim festivals were celebrated for the first time in the hospital's history. Once their cultural practices were recognised, Blida's Muslim community emerged from its slumbers. Fanon's adversaries at the hospital called him the 'Arab Doctor' behind his back.

'A revolutionary attitude was indispensable,' he concluded in a paper about this experiment written with Jacques Azoulay, an Algerian-Jewish colleague, 'since we needed to move from a position where the supremacy of Western culture was assumed, to a cultural relativism ... We had to try and seize the North African social fact.' His curiosity about Algeria led him far outside the hospital gates. Deep in the *bled* of Kabylia, the Berber heartland, he attended late night ceremonies where hysterics were healed in 'cathartic crises', and learned of women using 'white magic' to render unfaithful husbands impotent. He discovered a more tolerant attitude towards mental illness: Algerians blamed madness on genies, not on the sufferer. In his writings on these practices, Fanon never used the word 'superstition'. Yet even as he insisted on the specificity of North African culture, he was careful to avoid the essentialism of

the Algiers School. Like the characters in his plays, he wanted to pierce the frozen, apparently 'natural' surface of reality, and uncover the ferment beneath it. He was fascinated, for example, by the refusal of Algerian suspects to confess to crimes when presented with overwhelming evidence of their guilt. French 'experts' had attributed this to a 'propensity to lie'. But for Fanon, it suggested that their 'often profound submission' to French rule 'should not be confused with an acceptance of this power'. The 'North African syndrome' was not an expression of cultural difference, but a masked form of resistance.

Fanon and Azoulay published their paper in October 1954. A month later, the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) carried out its first attacks, launching a war of independence that would last for nearly eight years. It was a small organisation that had grown out of a split in the banned Movement for the Triumph of Democratic Liberties (MTLD), a group led by the founding father of modern Algerian nationalism, Messali Hadj. In its first communiqué the FLN called for immediate and unconditional independence – the 'restoration of the Algerian state, sovereign, democratic and social, within a framework provided by Islamic principles' – and declared that it would not lay down arms until this objective was achieved. It had been nine years since the French army, aided by settlers, massacred thousands of Algerians in the towns of Sétif and Guelma, where nationalist riots had broken out on V-Day; the prospects of reconciliation between Muslims and Europeans had never seemed dimmer. Still, few Algerian Muslims in 1954 were prepared to undertake an armed struggle, and scarcely any had heard of the FLN. Winning over the Muslim majority to their cause and, not least, persuading them that they had a chance against one of the world's most powerful militaries, required no small effort and no little coercion. Their case would be partly made for them by massive French repression: the razing of entire villages, the forced relocation of more than two million to 'regroupment' camps, widespread torture, and thousands of summary executions and disappearances; as many as 300,000 Algerians died during the war. Fanon, however, needed little convincing. When the rebels contacted him in early 1955, he had already chosen his side; according to Macey, his first thought was to join them in the maquis.

Fanon took great risks to help the rebels, allowing FLN meetings to be held at the hospital, treating fighters at the day clinic, forbidding the police from entering with their guns loaded. According to Simone de Beauvoir, he taught fighters how to control their body language before planting bombs or throwing grenades, so as not to alert the police. At the same time, he was treating French servicemen who were involved in torturing suspected rebels. He did not hand over their names to the FLN for they, too, were victims of a colonial system whose dirty work they were required to perform. Outside his residence in Blida, Fanon discovered one former torturer suffering from a panic attack. The patient, a police officer, told him that he had just seen an Algerian he had tortured at the hospital. His victim had recognised him, and then tried to commit suicide, afraid that his torturer had come to the hospital to take him back to the station for further interrogations.

In the famous chapter on violence in *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon would stress the psychologically empowering effects of armed struggle on the colonised: 'It rids the colonised of his inferiority complex, of his contemplative or despairing attitudes. It makes him intrepid, rehabilitates him in his own eyes.' Yet he also bore witness to the uglier side of the resistance,

and recorded its psychological toll on the colonised. One fighter told him that he had slit the throat of a European woman in revenge for his mother's killing by a soldier; he expressed no contrition, but said that whenever he thought of his mother, his victim appeared in her place, asking for her blood back. Then there were the two Algerian boys, a 13-year-old and a 14-year-old, who killed their best friend, the son of settlers. 'The Europeans want to kill all the Arabs,' one of them explained: 'We can't kill the grown-ups, but we can kill someone like him because he's our age.'

In September 1956, Fanon flew to Paris to attend the First World Conference of Black Writers and Artists, organised by the journal *Présence Africaine*. In his speech, he argued that the defence of 'Western values' had superseded biological racism in the arsenal of imperialism. He had France's *mission civilisatrice* in Algeria in mind: though he barely alluded to the independence struggle, he insisted that a dialogue between Western and non-Western cultures would not be possible until colonialism was ended. That time had yet to arrive, however, and on 30 September, just after his return to Blida, a group of women militants in Algiers slipped through checkpoints in the Casbah and planted bombs at the Milk Bar, the Cafeteria on the rue Michelet and the Air France terminal. The attacks, which killed three people and injured dozens, were carried out in retaliation for a bombing in the Casbah by shadowy elements in the French police: more than seventy people had died. The Battle of Algiers had begun, and Raoul Salan, who authorised Fanon's medal of honour, was promoted to commander-in-chief of the army.

Fearing his cover would be blown, Fanon resigned in December. 'If psychiatry is the medical technique that aims to enable man no longer to be a stranger to his environment,' he wrote, 'I owe it to myself to affirm that the Arab, permanently an alien in his own country, lives in a state of absolute depersonalisation ... What is the status of Algeria? A systematised dehumanisation.' A month later, he was expelled. Before he left, he had a brief meeting with Abane Ramdane, an FLN leader from Kabylia who had powerfully shaped his vision of the Algerian struggle. Ramdane, sometimes described as the Robespierre of the Algerian revolution, was a kindred spirit: a hardliner opposed to negotiation prior to France's recognition of independence, and a genuine moderniser with progressive, republican values.

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In 1957 Fanon flew to Tunis, after passing through Paris – his last visit to France. He divided his time between the Manouba Clinic, where he resumed his psychiatric practice, and the offices of *El Moudjahid*, the FLN's French-language newspaper, which he helped edit. As the Front's media spokesman in Tunis, he cut a glamorous figure: a handsome man of mysterious origin, with intense eyes and immaculately tailored tweed suits. Living in an independent Arab country sympathetic to Algeria's struggle, Fanon no longer had to conceal his loyalties. Yet, paradoxically, he learned to tread even more carefully than in Blida. For all its claims to unity, the FLN was rife with factional tensions, and Fanon – a non-Muslim black man who spoke no Arabic – was a vulnerable outsider. He had no official position in the leadership. His most powerful ally in the movement was Ramdane, the leader of the 'interior', but Fanon was

now on the other side of the border, working for the FLN's 'external' forces, who saw Ramdane as a threat to their interests.

Fanon's contributions to *El Moudjahid*, many of them reprinted here, are unsigned but easily recognisable. Though careful to pay lip service to the piety of Algerian Muslims, he described their struggle as the 'beginning of a new life, a new history' that would bring about 'the dissolution of all the chains of the past'. In a notorious three-part series, he excoriated the 'beautiful souls' of the French left who denounced torture but refused to support the FLN because of its attacks on civilians; at one point he suggested that because Algeria was a settler colony, every French person was complicit and therefore a legitimate target. The pieces sparked a row in Paris: one journalist speculated that their author must be 'a recent intellectual convert to the FLN' with 'a taste for verbal outrages and psychological striptease'. Fanon's revolutionary zeal often had to be toned down; his reference to 'a nation as perverted as France' was cut before it went to press. His colleagues on *El Moudjahid* were pragmatic nationalists, seeking to intensify the divisions in France over Algeria, not to condemn France tout court. Unlike Fanon they didn't have to prove that they were Algerians. There is no doubting the sincerity of Fanon's writing for *El Moudjadid*: he tended to gravitate to the most militant positions, and he had an old account to settle with the French intelligentsia. But his fervour also made clear his longing to be accepted as an Algerian. According to the historian Mohammed Harbi, a left-wing FLN official who crossed paths (and swords) with Fanon in Tunis, Fanon 'had a very strong need to belong'.

If he had any doubts about the FLN's methods, he kept them to himself. His first public statement in Tunis, made at a press conference in May 1957, was a response to a massacre of some three hundred civilians that the FLN had carried out in a hamlet outside Melouza in southern Kabylia, a stronghold of the rival Algerian National Movement, led by Messali Hadj. Fanon denounced the 'foul machinations over Melouza', insinuating that the French army was responsible. Whether or not he knew what really happened at Melouza, it may not have mattered to him: as he wrote later, 'truth is whatever hastens the disintegration of the colonial regime.'

A year after the Melouza massacre, *El Moudjahid's* front page announced that Fanon's friend Abane Ramdane had died 'on the field of honour'. In fact, Ramdane had been dead for five months, and he was not killed on the battlefield. His erstwhile comrades had lured him to a villa in Morocco, where he was strangled. The external leadership had long wanted to seize control of the revolution, and Ramdane, the figurehead of the internal struggle, stood in the way. Real power now lay with the external elements of the FLN and the so-called army of the frontiers. Fanon, who was close enough to the intelligence services to know the truth of his friend's murder, said nothing. Shaken, he made his peace with the army of the frontiers, both for the sake of the revolution – the military leadership, in Tunisia and Morocco, was increasingly the dominant force – and to protect himself: according to Harbi, his name was on a list of those to be executed in the event of an internal challenge to the FLN leadership.

He was scarcely more secure in his position at the Manouba Clinic, where he began to introduce social therapy. The clinic's director, Dr Ben Soltan, took an immediate dislike to Dr

Fares, Fanon's nom de guerre; he called him 'the Negro' and plotted his destruction. After Fanon went over his head to request more funds for occupational therapy, Soltan accused him of being a Zionist spy – Israel was discreetly involved in the war against the liberation movement, and had joined France and Britain in the invasion of Suez – and of mistreating Arab patients on Israeli orders. The proof? Fanon's denunciation of anti-Semitism in *Black Skin, White Masks*, and his close friendships with two Tunisian-Jewish doctors. Dr Fares managed to hold on to his position, but redirected his energies to the Hôpital Charles-Nicolle, where he created Africa's first psychiatric day clinic, with the support of the local authorities.

Fanon was proud of his work at the Neuropsychiatric Day Centre. In his papers on its work – written with his colleague Charles Geronimi, a pied-noir psychiatrist who also joined the FLN in Tunis – he sounds much like the cheerful reformer at Blida. Psychiatric care, he declared, had been stripped of its 'carceral' character now that mentally-ill patients could spend the day at the centre and return home in the evening to their families. As in Blida, a number of his patients were traumatised veterans of the maquis, and in his lectures at the University of Tunis Fanon tested out his evolving ideas about mental illness and colonialism. One of his students was the Tunisian sociologist Lilia Ben Salem, whose class notes Young and Khalfa reprint. 'His personality fascinated us,' Ben Salem recalls: 'He was authoritarian ... distant, passionate and fascinating; we asked him questions but he had a tendency to deliver monologues, reflecting out loud. It was not only the doctor expressing himself but above all the philosopher, the psychologist, the sociologist.' He improvised on the repressive function of colonial psychiatry, black-on-black violence in the novels of Chester Himes, the poetry of Césaire, the ubiquity of killing and suicide in blues lyrics.

Yet he seems to have been most at ease when he was writing – or, rather, dictating to Josie or his secretary. His first book on the Algerian struggle, *L'An V de la révolution algérienne* (translated as *A Dying Colonialism*), was composed over three weeks in the spring of 1959. It is a passionate account of a national awakening, as well as a document of the utopian hopes it aroused in the author, who had come to think of himself as an Algerian after three years in Blida. His keenest interest here is the psychological impact of revolt on an oppressed people, their transformation into historical subjects. Thanks to the revolution, he writes, the 'tense immobility of the dominated society' has given way to 'awareness, movement, creation', freeing the colonised from 'that familiar tinge of resignation that specialists in underdeveloped countries describe under the heading of *fatalism*'. (Cherki suggests that he had 'an uncanny ability of moving from flesh to word, and showing how "bodily tensions" evolve into consciousness'.) The struggle for independence, he argued, was a challenge to both French rule and Algerian traditions, from the belief in djinn to the 'values governing sexual relations'. Apparent reassertions of tradition, such as the embrace of the *haïk* by Algerian women, were in fact politicised expressions of defiance. If women were covering themselves, it was because 'the occupier was bent on unveiling Algeria.' Female partisans who removed the veil to pass as Europeans and carry out attacks were, in his view, achieving 'a new dialectic of the body and of the world'. In *L'An V*, Fanon proposed a nationalism of the will, rather than of ethnicity or religion. The European minority were welcome to join the struggle so long as they repudiated their status as colonisers. 'What we Algerians want is to

discover the man behind the coloniser ... We want an Algeria open to all.' He praised European 'democrats' who refused to give up the names of their comrades under torture, and described Jews in the FLN as the 'eyes and ears of the revolution'. Fanon's independent Algeria would be a multi-ethnic republic, the collective creation of all those who threw themselves into the struggle.

This turned out to be wishful thinking, born in large part from Fanon's ecstatic experience of the 'interior' in Blida. Women in the maquis would undergo a painful infringement of their rights after independence; the pied noirs would flee en masse to France, along with Algeria's Jews. Those who envisaged a multi-ethnic Algeria were always a distinct minority, and their numbers diminished with every pied-noir or army atrocity. The single consensual demand inside the FLN – aside from independence itself – was the re-establishment of Algeria's Islamic and Arab identity, which France had spent more than a century repressing in a quixotic attempt to make Algeria French. Fanon was correct that the attempt to 'emancipate' Muslim women by pressuring them to remove their veils had only made the veil more popular; what he failed (or refused) to see was that influential sectors of the nationalist movement were keen to reinforce religious conservatism. Left-wing elements in the FLN were furious that Algerian patriarchy had, in Harbi's words, 'found in Fanon a mouthpiece who presented its behaviour as progressive'.

How could Fanon have paid so little attention to the re-assertion of Islam in Algeria's independence struggle? Mostefa Lacheraf, a former FLN cadre turned historian, claims that he was a 'prisoner of European attitudes'. Others have argued that he couched his positions in a secular idiom in order to appeal to the European left. But Fanon's letter to the Iranian writer Ali Shariati, which Young and Khalifa include, suggests a different answer. Shariati, who went on to become a champion of revolutionary Shiism and a major influence on the Islamic left in Iran, was a student in Paris when he first read Fanon. He wrote expressing his admiration, while advancing his own ideas about the revolutionary potential of Islam in anti-colonial struggles. Fanon was sceptical. If Négritude was a 'great black mirage', Islam was a green one, a 'withdrawal into oneself' disguised as liberation from 'alienation and depersonalisation'. The content of Algerian nationalism would have to be an invention, not a recovery of lost traditions or – as Shariati would later put it – 'a return to the self'. Fanon remained a Sartrean, committed to advancing Algeria's liberation as a universalist project.

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By the time *L'An V* appeared, Fanon had been pushed aside as the FLN's media spokesman in Tunis. His replacement was the information minister of the newly formed Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic (GPRA), M'hammed Yazid, a suave diplomat with strong ties to the French left. Fanon became a travelling ambassador and in March 1960 was appointed to Accra as the FLN's permanent representative. Libya supplied him with a 'vrai faux passeport' that identified him as Omar Ibrahim Fanon. (French intelligence wasn't fooled: Fanon the Libyan would dodge at least two attempts on his life.) He took to his new assignment with characteristic zeal. An Algerian, he insisted, 'cannot be a true Algerian, if he

does not feel in his core the indescribable tragedy that is unfolding in the two Rhodesias or in Angola’.

Algeria’s liberation, he wrote in *El Moudjahid*, would be ‘an African victory’, a ‘step in the realisation of a free and happy humanity’. Like another doctor turned revolutionary, Che Guevara, Fanon saw Algeria’s war of decolonisation as a model for all of Africa and first made his case – against the more conciliatory positions of the host, Ghana’s leader Kwame Nkrumah – at the 1958 All-African People’s Conference in Accra, where he led the FLN delegation and gave an electrifying speech advocating armed struggle as a uniquely effective route to national liberation. Few of Africa’s leaders were prepared to sign up. Most were cultural nationalists like Senegal’s president Léopold Senghor, who advocated African unity while accepting French interference in defence and economic policy – and siding with France at the UN against Algerian independence. Fanon was infuriated by having to argue the merits of the Algerian cause to Africans, and in one speech he nearly burst into tears.

Africa, Fanon believed, needed unyielding militants like his friend Ramdane; he was impressed by Sékou Touré, the ruthless dictator of Guinea, and once confessed that he had a ‘horror of weaknesses’: Touré appeared to have none. Fanon’s closest allies at the conference in Accra were Patrice Lumumba, soon to be the first prime minister of independent Congo, and Félix Moumié, a revolutionary from Cameroon. In September 1960, Lumumba was overthrown in a Belgian-sponsored coup, a prelude to his assassination; two months later, Moumié was poisoned in Geneva. ‘Aggressive, violent, full of anger, in love with his country, hating cowards’, Fanon wrote of his murdered friend: ‘austere, hard, incorruptible’. In Accra Fanon also befriended the Angolan guerrilla leader Holden Roberto, whom he mistook for a tribune of the oppressed rural masses and favoured over the urban Marxists of the MPLA; Roberto was a tribal chieftain, with ties to the CIA and a well-deserved reputation for cruelty.

In November 1960, hard on the heels of Moumié’s death, Fanon undertook a daring reconnaissance mission. The aim was to open a southern front on the border with Mali, so arms and munitions could be transported from Bamako across the Sahara. He was accompanied by an eight-man commando led by a man called Chawki, a major in the Algerian Army of National Liberation (ALN). They flew from Accra to Monrovia, where they planned to pick up a connecting flight to Conakry. On arriving they were told that the plane was full and that they would have to wait for an Air France flight the following day. Suspecting a trap by French intelligence, they drove two thousand kilometres into Mali; later they learned that the plane had been diverted to Côte d’Ivoire and searched by French forces. (Fanon was sure that the plot had been orchestrated with the knowledge of Félix Houphouët-Boigny, Côte d’Ivoire’s first president.) The drive to Mali took them through tropical forest, savannah and desert. Fanon was beguiled; in his notes on the journey, he sounds like a man possessed. ‘With one ear glued to the red earth you can hear very distinctly the sound of rusty chains, groans of distress,’ he wrote. The gravest threat to Africa’s future was not colonialism but the ‘great appetites’ of post-colonial elites, and their ‘absence of ideology’. It was his mission, Fanon believed, to ‘stir up the Saharan population, infiltrate to the Algerian high plateaus ... Subdue the desert, deny it, assemble Africa, create the continent.’ Unlike Algeria, Africa could not create itself; it needed the help of foreign revolutionaries with energy and

vision. He was calling for a revolutionary vanguard, but his rhetoric of conquest was not far from that of colonialism.

The reconnaissance mission came to nothing: the southern Sahara had never been an important combat zone for the FLN, and there was little trust between the Algerians and the desert tribes. Reading Fanon's account, one senses that his African hallucinations were born of a growing desperation. This desperation was not only political, but physical. He had lost weight in Mali, and when he returned to Tunis in December he was diagnosed with leukaemia. Claude Lanzmann, who met him shortly afterwards in Tunis, remembers him as 'already so suffused with death that it gave his every word the power both of prophecy and of the last words of a dying man'. Fanon pleaded with the FLN to send him back to Algeria. He wanted to die on the field of honour, and he missed the fighters of the interior, whom he described to Lanzmann as 'peasant-warrior-philosophers'.

The request was denied. Still, he made himself useful to the soldiers in Tunisia. At an army post he gave lectures on the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, devoting special attention to Sartre's analysis of 'fraternity-terror', the feelings of brotherhood that grow out of a shared experience of external threat. He had experienced this in Blida and with Major Chawki in the desert, and he saw it again in the soldiers of the ALN. Many were from rural backgrounds, uncompromising people of the sort he trusted to maintain the integrity of the revolution throughout the Third World. It was to these soldiers that he addressed his last and most influential book, *The Wretched of the Earth*, dictated in haste as his condition deteriorated.

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In *The Wretched of the Earth* Fanon characterised decolonisation as an inherently violent process, a zero-sum struggle between coloniser and colonised. Albert Memmi, a Tunisian-Jewish psychologist, had made a similar argument in his *Portrait du colonisé*, published in 1957 with a preface by Sartre. But Fanon dramatised it with unprecedented force. Europe, he writes, 'is literally the creation of the Third World ... built with the sweat and corpses of blacks, Arabs, Indians and Asians. This we are determined never to forget.' His colonial world is polarised, with a 'sluggish, sated' sector, 'its belly ... permanently full of good things', and a 'famished sector, hungry for bread, meat, shoes, coal and light ... a sector of niggers, a sector of towel-heads'. The clash is due not to misunderstanding or mutual ignorance, but to the fact that they are 'old acquaintances': 'The colonised man is an envious man. The colonist is aware of this as he catches the furtive glance, and constantly on his guard, realises bitterly that: "They want to take our place." Robbed of their land and dignity, 'reduced to the state of an animal', the colonised sublimate their defeat in religion, in 'muscular dreams, dreams of action, dreams of aggressive vitality', and in violence against their own people, until they rise up against their masters and begin gradually to 'decipher social reality'. At first, the colonised adopt 'the primitive Manichaeism of the coloniser – black versus white, Arab versus Infidel'. Eventually, however, they 'realise ... that some blacks can be whiter than the whites, and that the prospect of a national flag or independence does not automatically result in certain segments of the population giving up their privileges and their interests.' The war of national

liberation, in other words, must transcend ‘racism, hatred, resentment and “the legitimate desire for revenge”’, and evolve into a social revolution.

The arguments in *The Wretched of the Earth*, particularly in its romantic claims about the ‘revolutionary spontaneity’ of the peasantry, were deeply influenced by Fanon’s relationship with the ALN. In fact, Algeria had never had a significant peasant movement, and its peasants could hardly play a revolutionary role when more than two million of them had been herded into camps. But the rural utopia was, as Harbi notes, a ‘credo of the army’, which depicted itself as the defender of Algeria’s peasantry. When Harbi told Fanon he was projecting his political desires onto a rural world he scarcely understood, ‘Fanon pouted, as if to say there could be little interest in anything that seemed to him to come from an orthodox Marxism.’ Like many of his comrades, Fanon distrusted Marxism because of the French Communist Party’s chequered record on independence, notably its vote, in 1955, in favour of ‘special powers’ to suppress the rebellion. The FLN forced the party’s Algerian members to dissolve their cause in the insurgency, or be treated as the enemy. Fanon dismissed the working class as ‘the kernel of the colonised people most pampered by the colonial regime’.

Fanon persuaded himself that unlike the proletariat, the peasantry and the lumpenproletariat were incorruptible because they had nothing to lose. Ironically his odes to the peasantry – ‘the truth in their very being’, ‘the true voice of the country’ – would underwrite the nostalgic ‘return to the self’ that he had always dreaded. Houari Boumediene, the leader of the external forces in Tunisia and later Algeria’s president, saw Fanon as ‘a modest man who wanted to learn and understand, but ... didn’t know the first thing about Algeria’s peasants’. Yet Boumediene grasped the usefulness of Fanon’s position. Like his arguments about the veil, Fanon’s celebration of peasant wisdom provided the army with – in Harbi’s words – a ‘rationalisation of Algerian conservatism’, and a valuable populist card to play in its power struggles with the urbane, middle-class diplomats of the GPRA, and the Marxists within the FLN.

The same was true of Fanon’s claim that ‘violence alone’ would lead to victory. By the late 1950s, the FLN understood that it could never defeat the French army, and that there would eventually be a negotiated settlement. International opinion became a critical battlefield, and the principal ‘fighters’ were the FLN’s external representatives: as the historian Matthew Connelly has argued, the war was as much a ‘diplomatic revolution’ as a military challenge. But the heroic myth of armed struggle, which Fanon did much to burnish, allowed the soldiers of the ALN to present themselves as the real victors, and impose themselves as the country’s rightful rulers.

In an 1841 essay endorsing the ‘pacification’ of Algeria, Tocqueville wrote: ‘Men in France whom I respect, but with whom I do not agree, find it wrong that we burn harvests, that we empty silos, and finally that we seize unarmed men, women and children ... These, in my view, are unfortunate necessities, but ones to which any people that wants to wage war on the Arabs is obliged to submit.’ Fanon, who believed that what had been removed by force should be taken back by force, did little more than turn Tocqueville on his head. Living on borrowed time, he was determined to reveal the path towards a thoroughgoing decolonisation, a

rupture with the past rather than a mere transfer of power from the colonial authorities to the native bourgeoisie he reviled for its lack of vision, its opportunism, its infatuation with Europe. In Accra he had come to despair of Africa's prospects unless the Algerian model of national liberation – as he conceived it – was adopted. The utopian, exhortatory themes of *The Wretched of the Earth* – the faith in the peasantry and the lumpenproletariat; the therapeutic virtues of violence; and the creation of a new humanism, a truly emancipated Third World – must be handled with care. Cited as liturgy by Fanon's admirers, ridiculed as delusional messianism by detractors, they were a typically Nietzschean expression of will, in defiant counterpoint to his anxieties about the post-colonial order.

Those anxieties were largely vindicated. *The Wretched of the Earth* is prophetic, but not for the reasons Fanon would have wished. For all that he meant his book to be a manifesto for the coming revolution, he was aware of the potential pitfalls of decolonisation. While he defended anti-colonial violence as a necessary response to the 'exhibitionist' violence of the colonial system, he also predicted that 'for many years to come we shall be bandaging the countless and sometimes indelible wounds inflicted on our people by the colonialist onslaught.' As Arendt pointed out, Fanon's vision of a comradeship under arms going on to drive a social revolution was questionable: solidarity of this kind, she wrote, 'can be actualised only under conditions of immediate danger to life and limb' and tends to wither in peacetime, as it did after independence. The taste of power provided by violent revolt was fleeting; the suffering and trauma of national liberation wars would cast a long shadow. Fanon himself had seen that anti-colonial violence was driven not only by a noble desire for justice, but by darker impulses, including the dream of 'becoming the persecutor'.

Leaders of post-colonial states were sure to entrench themselves by appealing to 'ultranationalism, chauvinism and racism': here Fanon anticipated the era of Mobutu and Mugabe. He warned, too, that the native bourgeoisie in Africa would promote a folkloric form of 'black culture' in an attempt to 'reunite with a people in a past where they no longer exist', forgetting that by definition "Negroes" are in the process of disappearing' with the destruction of white rule. But the native bourgeoisie does not inspire confidence: disfigured by colonialism, it has become 'an acquisitive, voracious and petty caste, dominated by a small-time racketeer mentality'. Like Naipaul's 'mimic men', the African bourgeois is not so much 'a replica of Europe but rather its caricature'.

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One of the earliest readers of Fanon's manuscript was his hero, Sartre. Fanon first contacted him in the spring of 1961 through his publisher, François Maspero, to ask for a preface: 'Tell him that every time I sit down at my desk, I think of him.' In late July 1961, they met for the first time in Rome, where they were joined by Beauvoir and Lanzmann. Just a few days before, defenders of Algérie française had set off a bomb outside the apartment Sartre shared with his mother on the rue Bonaparte: Sartre had signed the 'Manifesto of the 121', a declaration of civil disobedience in protest against the Algerian War. Fanon and Sartre's first conversation lasted from lunch until 2 a.m., when Beauvoir announced that Sartre needed to sleep. Fanon was indignant. 'I don't like people who spare themselves,' he said. Turning to

Lanzmann, he joked that he would ‘pay 20,000 francs a day to speak with Sartre from morning till night for two weeks’. Over the next few days, Fanon spoke about his life and the Algerian struggle in what Lanzmann calls a ‘prophetic trance’. He revealed himself as the author of the unsigned attack on the French left in *El Moudjahid*, and urged Sartre to renounce writing until Algeria was liberated. ‘We have rights over you,’ he said: ‘How can you continue to live normally, to write?’ He was scornful of the picturesque trattoria where they took him to eat. The pleasures of the Old World meant nothing to him.

Fanon had recently undergone treatment in the Soviet Union, where he was prescribed Myleran, and was experiencing a brief period of remission. But in Beauvoir’s account of the meeting in Rome, he comes across as a haunted man, beset by self-doubt and remorse, full of apocalyptic foreboding. The days after independence would be ‘terrible’, he predicted, estimating that 150,000 would die. (His guess wasn’t far off.) In public, Fanon had upheld the FLN line that Messali Hadj’s MNA were collaborators, but the score-settling among Algerian rebels seemed to horrify him nearly as much as French repression. He considered this aversion to bloodletting a weakness typical of intellectuals and struggled to overcome it: he told Sartre that ‘everything he had written he had written against intellectuals, he had also written against himself.’ He blamed himself for failing to prevent the deaths of Abane and Lumumba, and worried that he might become a wandering ‘professional revolutionary’ unless he put down roots. He insisted that ‘the Algerians were his people’ but also seemed to long for Martinique; Beauvoir sensed that ‘he was upset that he wasn’t active in his native land, and even more that he wasn’t a native Algerian.’ He alluded obliquely to the intrigues inside the FLN. When Beauvoir shook his feverish hand, she felt as if she were ‘touching the passion that consumed it’.

To Sartre, Fanon was more than an intellectual disciple; he was the man of action Sartre never forgave himself for not having been during the Nazi Occupation. ‘The Third World discovers *itself* and speaks to *itself* through this voice,’ he declared in his preface to *The Wretched of the Earth*. How closely was he listening? Sartre addressed himself almost exclusively to the question of violence, which he described with an apocalyptic bravado that Fanon himself held in check. ‘Killing a European is killing two birds with one stone, eliminating in one go oppressor and oppressed, leaving one man dead and the other man free,’ Sartre wrote: ‘For the first time, the survivor feels a *national* soil under his feet.’ Throughout the colonies, he continued, ‘the tribes are dancing and preparing to fight.’ The revolt of the Third World, as depicted by Sartre, was a ‘murderous rampage’. Its targets were indiscriminately chosen and altogether deserving of their fate. Alice Cherki was not alone among Fanon’s friends in seeing Sartre’s preface as a ‘betrayal’ that distorted Fanon’s more nuanced views.

Writing to Fanon in October 1961, Maspero described Sartre’s preface as ‘beautiful, violent and useful (at least for the French)’. Fanon, however, never said a word about it: Sartre was writing for a French audience he had ceased to care about. His principal concern was his readership in the Third World, where his book was ‘feverishly awaited’, he told Maspero. A week after Sartre filed his preface, Fanon was admitted to a hospital in Bethesda, Maryland – this was his only visit to the United States, a country he called ‘a nation of lynchers’. What

shocked him, he wrote to a friend in North Africa, was not 'that I'm dying, but that I'm dying in Washington of leukaemia, considering that I could have died in battle with the enemy three months ago when I knew I had this disease. We are nothing on earth if we are not, first of all, slaves of a cause, the cause of the people, the cause of justice, the cause of liberty.' He died on 6 December, just as his book appeared in Paris, where it was seized from bookshops by the police. In New York, Algerian diplomats gave it as a Christmas gift. Beauvoir saw his picture on the cover of *Jeune Afrique*, 'younger, calmer than I had seen him, and very handsome. His death weighed heavily because he had charged his death with all the intensity of his life.'

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Algeria achieved its independence in July 1962. It would soon become a leader of the Non-Aligned Movement, and play host to the ANC, the PLO, the Black Panthers and other national liberation movements, many of them deeply influenced by Fanon. But over the years independent Algeria – austere, pious, socially conservative – bore less and less resemblance to the country he had fought for. Even if he had lived, it's not clear he would have ever been at home there, anymore than Che was in post-revolutionary Havana. In a fascinating essay published in 1971, Memmi characterised Fanon's life as a thwarted quest to belong. The 'germ of Fanon's tragedy', Memmi argued, was his alienation from Martinique, his homeland. Once the dominated man recognises that he will not be accepted by the dominant society, 'he generally returns to himself, to his people, to his past, sometimes ... with excessive vigour, transfiguring this people and this past to the point of creating counter-myths.' This was what Césaire had done, he suggested, by returning home from the grandes écoles of Paris, inventing Négritude, and becoming his people's representative in the Assemblée Nationale. And perhaps Shariati, by embracing Shiism, or Naipaul, by embracing Hindu nationalism, followed a similar trajectory. Fanon, however, had no desire for home; instead, after realising he could never be fully French, he transferred his fierce identification with the country that had spurned him to Algeria, the country that was battling France for its independence. Once Muslim Algeria proved too 'particularist', it was subsumed by something still larger: the African continent, the Third World and ultimately the dream of 'a totally unprecedented man, in a totally reconstructed world'.

But Fanon never disavowed his Martiniquan roots, or his love of Césaire's writing, from which he drew his images of slave revolt in *The Wretched of the Earth*. Though disappointed that Martinique, under Césaire's leadership, had chosen to remain an overseas department of France, he welcomed its 1959 uprising as the sign of an emerging national consciousness. Memmi's claim that his 'true problem' was 'how to be West Indian' seems comically reductive. Still, he captures something that Fanon's admirers in today's anti-racist movements tend to overlook: his relentless questioning of the 'return to the self'. Memmi's quarrel with Fanon arose out of his own bitter experiences as an anti-colonial militant: disillusioned with Arab nationalism, Memmi had become a Zionist, a believer in his people's special destiny. In his essay on Fanon, he wrote as if primordial ethnic identification – and the contraction of empathy it often entails – were the natural order of things, and Fanon an outlier, if not a failure, for defying it.

The utopian dimensions of Fanon's writing have not aged well. In much of the Third World, the dream of liberation from Europe has been supplanted by the dream of emigration to Europe, where refugees and their children now fight for acceptance rather than independence. Universalism has turned into a debased currency: for all the talk of 'transnationalism', the only two post-national projects on offer are the flat world of globalisation, and the Islamist tabula rasa of the Caliphate: Davos and *Dabiq*. Yet Fanon will not go away so easily. A belief in the purifying properties of violence – in creative destruction – is shared not only by Islamic State, whose spectacular attacks and throat-slittings are a low-tech form of 'shock and awe', but by the architects of drone warfare and 'humanitarian' intervention. The questions Fanon raised about the limits of Western humanism, and the barriers separating the rich and poor worlds, are still pertinent today. The boundaries that separate the West from the rest, and from its internal others, have been redrawn since his death, but they have not disappeared. The coercive 'unveiling' of Muslim women has reappeared in France, where burkini-clad women have been chased off beaches by police and jeering spectators. In the US, the killings of unarmed black people by the police have furnished a grim new genre of reality television, and a reminder of the vulnerability of the black body. The president-elect has surrounded himself with avowed white supremacists. The cities of the liberal West, with their slums and gated enclaves, are nearly as 'compartmentalised' as colonial Algiers. The tragedy of Fanon's 'impossible life', as Memmi called it, was not that he refused to return home, but that his vision of freedom and solidarity lost out to the narrower affiliations of nation, tribe and sect. And that tragedy is not his alone.

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