

ment, offered this explanation of his theology of revolution:

The Church takes on a morbid and conciliatory attitude of charity from the rich to the poor. It preaches resignation to oppression imposed by the established order, an order allegedly sanctified by God. It calls for collaboration, emphasizes the supernatural and ignores human effort. We Buena-ventura priests, all authentic Christians, absolutely reject this position.

Our only interest is to be the servants of the Colombia people in the revolutionary process. Our service requires authenticity. We are convinced that it is necessary to destroy an order established to protect the few, and to help create a new order that can protect everyone. The masses must participate in their liberating movement.

Again we return to the Latin American Church's insistence on liberation as the means of fulfilling man's human potential, but dialogue is required on many aspects of implementation. There is dialogue within the Latin American Church concerning the implementation of liberation in accord with the Medellin guidelines. But priests derogatorily referred to as "rebels" in the U.S. should be more realistically recognized as one element in the many-faceted dialogic process. There is a danger that the judgment of these priests may become obscured by revolutionary romanticism, but it must be stressed that they see themselves as acting within the proper context of the priesthood.

The criteria for judgment of the post-Medellin Latin American Church should be its success or failure in creating the "new man" who can transform his society in accord with Gospel message. The world-wide influence and inspiration generated by the Latin American Church depends upon this factor.

But this is not a judgment which the U.S. Church can make in sacrosanct isolation. Those who judge are also subject to judgment. The U.S. Church is seeking credibility with both domestic and international disenfranchised people who share a Third World identity and voice a common demand for liberation. They will not be silenced and their judgment will be exceedingly harsh if the membership of the U.S. Church does not open its ears and hearts and respond in a manner befitting the Christians they claim to be.

We cannot have a new world unless we are willing to become "new men." How many people have to choke to death on misery fostered by our avarice and apathy before we will admit our guilt? When will we start becoming "new men" willing and able to cooperate in the construction of world society which reflects our shared identity as children of God?

FRANTZ FANON AND COLONIZED MAN

Charif Guelle writes of Fanon, the West Indian who left France for Algeria and Africa, that his "grasp of the French Algerian colonial reality and the way he drew upon it to understand the whole nexus of the colonizer-colonized relationship may be considered to be Fanon's most significant contribution to the body of doctrines on revolution and social analysis." The article appeared in full in the January-February issue of Africa Today. Its author, formerly Algerian Ambassador to the U.S., is presently at the Institute of Policy Studies in Washington.

Algeria at war, this was the context in which Fanon rose to eminence; a setting characterized by racial hate and violence, terror and officially sanctioned torture. It was a context which finally shattered the exasperating myth that the presence of French culture insured socially and politically humane values.

It was in the spring of 1957 in Tunis that, as an F.L.N. cadre in charge of information and propaganda, I met Frantz Fanon for the first time. What happened to Fanon was what had happened to almost all intellectuals I knew—he fled French Algeria to join the F.L.N. That for him was the only way to be consistent with his personal history.

Today, twelve years later, Fanon is dead. But we can still hope to understand what made his total commitment to Revolution so unswerving and try, through the story of the man, to understand the writer, and through understanding the writer to discover the Revolutionary.

Although the details of our first meeting have grown dim in my memory, it seems to me that, by recapturing the flavor of this past, I can shed much light on a man who would hardly have acceded to some of the recent characterizations of his writings. Yet, that he has had his share of such simplistic interpretations as the symbol of revolution, the apostle of violence, is testimonial to the meaning and relevance of his theory on revolution.

Whatever the distortions of these analyses, one thing is certain: Fanon's theories on revolution enjoyed such varied appropriation because they speak directly and profoundly to the contradictions of our present world. One of the great ironies is that while he goes recognized with great reluctance in his own Africa, no man has been so accommodated to and

integrated within the political cultures of so many different countries. Today, particularly in the U.S., the new generation of black and white militants find in Fanon's works and in his life what their elders have been most reluctant to acknowledge: a validation of the concept of revolutionary action. And because he brings no tranquility, but rather a merciless and systematic questioning of the traditionally accepted values of the Western man himself, Fanon has become one of the most disturbing presences in the midst of modern, affluent America.

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My purpose, therefore, is to analyze the process through which Fanon tried to shape a new theory of revolution, that is to say, of life. For beyond the strange images of apocalyptic violence the reading of his work conjures up, Fanon was primarily concerned with the question of alienation and rationality in the universe and the condition of the colonized man.

Through his life as a West Indian in France and his experiences in Algeria, Fanon discovered the fragility of a Europe which had lost its conscience; and in the excesses and injustices which attended that loss he saw the disintegration of a whole social order. His writings are inseparable from the political conflicts and intellectual debate that have been part of France's postwar history. The 80,000 Algerians slaughtered on May 8, 1945 at Guelma and Setif, the colonial expedition of Madagascar, the war of Indochina, the systematic repression of nationalist movements in French West Africa, in Morocco, in Tunisia, the arrest and deportation of the Sultan of Morocco and Tunisian leader Bourguiba: this is the sweep of events against which Fanon's theories and perspectives must be measured.

His grasp of the French Algerian colonial reality and the way he drew upon it to understand the whole nexus of the colonizer-colonized relationship may be considered to be Fanon's most significant contribution to the body of doctrines on revolution and social analysis. As one of the most perceptive analysts of the Algerian Revolution, which he saw as the first modern social revolution in Africa and the Arab world, Fanon articulated to generations who were attempting to find their way out, the validity of the national liberation struggle as a means of rediscovering themselves.

Because Fanon detested his epoch, its culture, its social and political institutions, and found the means to convey his disgust in an angry, unconventional poetico-political style, it is very tempting to dismiss as "subjective," even "paranoid," his sweeping indictment of European culture. All the more so because his burning African prose, his political language freed

from the tyranny of classical French rhetoric, and his verdict seemed both presumptuous and outrageous to people who had always contended that, like the Church, "outside the West there was no salvation."

Certainly the various assessments that have been made of Fanon's revolutionary rhetoric would lead one to give disproportionate emphasis to the function and potency of violence as a disruptive element to the detriment of all those integrative positive factors which Fanon viewed as essential to any authentic revolutionary experience. This is so because he was first embraced by the devil's advocates who saw in his indictment of the West a vindication of their own nihilistic vision of a world and a culture in decomposition. In his message of violence they saw a concrete and valuable methodology to be followed in order to escape the growing irrelevance of their own society.

Decades ago, St. Exupery had shouted the hatred he felt for his times. He went to Africa in order to escape his alienation. Similarly, in attempting to define his relation to Western society, Fanon was confronted with the dilemma that the discovery of his blackness signified: namely, that in a white world, in the colonized world, to be accepted as a human being one had to be white, a colonizer.

Like St. Exupery, Fanon travelled the same road. He left France for Algeria and Africa hoping to leave behind isolation and loneliness, too. But beyond this, he was driven by a sense of revolutionary responsibility. His years as a doctor, as a psychiatrist in Blida, the City of Roses, had made Fanon too empirical to be totally poetic and yet, he remained too reflective to be solely the political activist. In Fanon, the revolutionary and the poet pass imperceptibly into each other. This is so because the thought is universal in influence as the problems that he has analyzed are universal in scope. This explains at once the universality of his frame of thought. In this manner perhaps one might suggest that Fanon provided an opening through which the world of the damned of the earth, the starving men, the humanity of the ghettos and shanty towns, have pervaded Europe's and America's consciousness, thus accelerating the process of communication and interaction.

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Only in Algeria at war, in his commitment to the Algerian Revolution, could Fanon liberate himself from the cultural orbit of a Europe which had systematically denied him his own identity. The active comradeship of struggle abolished the terrible differences of color. Algeria and her Revolution helped him free himself of that terrible burden that someone once called "the privilege of freedom" which white society

manages to impose upon colonized intellectuals while at the same time indulging freely in the exploitation of their people.

What were the motives behind Fanon's commitment to the Algerian Revolution? Certainly one was the seriousness with which he conceived of his duties as a healer. In a letter of resignation to the resident French Minister in Algeria in 1956 he wrote:

"Although the objective conditions under which psychiatry is practiced in Algeria constituted a challenge to common sense, it appeared to me that an effort should be made to attenuate the viciousness of a system of which the doctrinal foundations are a daily defiance of an authentically human outlook . . . I have spared neither my efforts nor my enthusiasm . . . But what can a man's enthusiasm and devotion achieve if everyday reality is a tissue of lies, of cowardice, of contempt for man?"

"What is the status of Algeria? A systemized dehumanization.

"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 man were raised to the status of legislative principles.

"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 non-viable society, a society that needs to be replaced.

"It is the duty of the citizen to say this. No professional morality, no class solidarity, no desire to wash the family linen in private, can have a prior claim. No pseudo-national mystification can prevail against the requirement of reason." . . .

Fanon stands out today as a prophetic precursor of the contemporary New Left—a man who not only attempted to provide a new theory of revolution, but who dedicated his life to fighting the anti-colonial revolution. More forcefully than any other in the past decade, Fanon anticipated and expressed the atmosphere of revolutionary violence and furor that has come to be associated with the sudden emergence of the Third World on the international scene. And being true to his own situation as he shaped these perceptions, he articulated the one obligation that all colonized men feel: to assume the responsibility for their own liberation in such a way that courting death on one's own terms becomes the ultimate gesture of self-affirmation and existence. This is why neither liberals in the classic sense of the term, nor Communists have been very happy about Fanon.

The attraction of revolutionary action is that it explodes the myth of liberalism. It emanates from disillusionment with such Western values as "dispassion-

ate discussion" and makes compromise a synonym for capitulation. The Liberation Movements in the Third World, the war in Vietnam, the demands of the black revolutionaries, the attempts by big powers at institutionalizing relations of dependence and exploitation with the smaller nations, these are some of the causes for the appeal of Fanon's revolutionary doctrine, a search for new forms of political action. People have come to realize that social injustice, racism, and political oppression are inherent to a certain type of socio-economic structure and that the dogma of independence and economic progress and development should no longer be assumed to be the basis of social equality and the recognition of the citizen's rights to participation.

Reading Fanon, one also finds uncompromising integrity and heroism. By being brutally honest, he transcends the humiliation which history has imposed upon the colored man. Indeed, it was Fanon's need to rid himself of this false shame which first impelled him to take refuge in negritude until he realized that only a communion with a broader humanity could end the mutilation which the colored man had suffered. This impulse to "reach out for the universal" in spite of his glorification of violence and revolution, never ceases to haunt Fanon. And it is this larger concern for the "quality of man," for the liberation of all men from the constraints of privilege as well as servitude which can be said to be the essence of Fanon's message. It is this theme, the definition of the colonized man, i.e. the contradiction between what society takes him to be and his own conception of what his personal identity is, that gives the dimension of tragedy to Fanon's quest for identity. In his book *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon advocates the total and complete espousal of violence by the colonized, the colored, to affirm his own identity and emerge as a man.

Yet *The Wretched of the Earth* is above all an expression of his deep belief in the capacity of man to humanize the universe. This expression of his determination to transcend the historical circumstances responsible for his mutilation, which makes us share his belief in an age where values are in a state of almost total collapse, constitutes perhaps the most remarkable of Fanon's achievements, both as a revolutionary and as a healer.

It is obvious that there are strong elements of mysticism in Fanon's belief in revolutionary violence. Take, for instance, his passionate faith that the distance to civilization can be covered through the act of revolution. He perceived through the colonial darkness that had engulfed Africa a bright ray of hope offering salvation to the world. He committed himself

uncompromisingly to revolution as the only therapeutic that could cure the cancer of exploitation, racism, and hatred.

Fanon combined a mystical belief in some sort of inevitable revolutionary development of history with a confidence in the creativity of the colonized masses. He believed that the Third World represented the future; and he reflected that only through political violence, revolutionary violence, could socialism, not as a theory but as a new way of life, as a faith, as a civilization, be constructed.

The point that Fanon attempts to make is that the colonized man is such by social definition and not by blood. In other words, he penetrates the racial mythology of Western society and culture by pointing out that the colonized, the nigger, the whog are only social and political realities: creations of the white colonizer. And by the simple act of asserting the value of his existence, Fanon asserted his right to challenge directly the institutions that had denied him his rights.

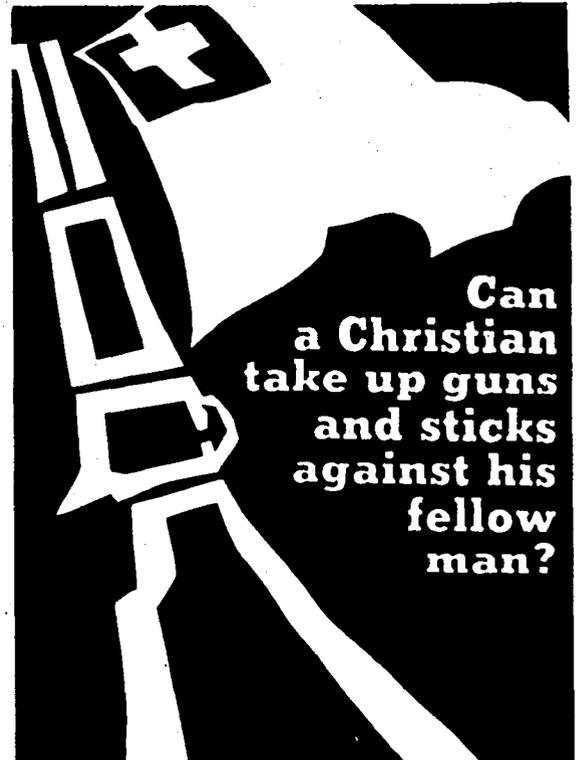
In a vicious article, Joseph Alsop in the *Washington Post* of February 21, 1969 describes Fanon's book *The Wretched of the Earth* as "a passionate paean of race hatred" and suggests that Fanon died literally in the arms of the CIA and that his end in view of the current mythology must be accounted more ironical than that of Guevara's ludicrously romanticized end.

Is that the image, the image of an anguished man, dying on a hospital bed with a CIA operative as his sole companion, the final message we carry away? Naturally not! For even though he was expecting death from leukemia he found the energy to seek communion with the wretched, brutalized sub-proletariat: "the hordes of starving men . . . the pimps, the hooligans, the unemployed, and the petty criminals . . . The prostitutes and all the helpless dregs of humanity, all who turn in circles between suicide and madness."

Fanon was acutely aware that a society, a culture which accommodates itself to the partition of the human race into rich and poor, white and colored, into young and old, and to a tacit agreement that those who wield power will choose either to refuse their humanity to those without power or destroy them physically, that society creates within its own structure conditions that will inevitably lead to its death. That is why he stood for reconciliation. He knew what the alternative would mean, namely that only through total violence carried to its ultimate conclusion—global war—could that irremediable contradiction be resolved.

Therefore to Fanon, revolution meant, in the final analysis, regeneration. It reasserts the membership of the colonized man, of the damned of the earth, within

the human family by providing a method whereby that membership can be realized. Beyond his conflicts and excesses, his loyalties and enmities, his hate and love, beyond the simplistic formulations of both his disciples and critics, Fanon was a man who attempted and succeeded in setting an example of lucidity, courage, and compassion. He accepted the challenge of revolutionary commitment, but without succumbing to either smugness or self-righteousness. He acted without betraying that "something which he had seen before his death," not simply the mystery of violence, but the brotherhood of man.



Can
a Christian
take up guns
and sticks
against his
fellow
man?

UnYoung
UnColored
UnPoor

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