



The Wretched of the Earth

Frantz Fanon , Jean-Paul Sartre (Preface) , Richard Philcox (Translation) , Homi K. Bhabha (Foreword)

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A distinguished psychiatrist from Martinique who took part in the Algerian Nationalist Movement, Frantz Fanon was one of the most important theorists of revolutionary struggle, colonialism, and racial difference in history. Fanon's masterwork is a classic alongside Edward Said's *Orientalism* or The Autobiography of Malcolm X, and it is now available in a new translation that updates its language for a new generation of readers. *The Wretched of the Earth* is a brilliant analysis of the psychology of the colonized and their path to liberation. Bearing singular insight into the rage and frustration of colonized peoples, and the role of violence in effecting historical change, the book incisively attacks the twin perils of postindependence colonial politics: the disenfranchisement of the masses by the elites on the one hand, and intertribal and interfaith animosities on the other. Fanon's analysis, a veritable handbook of social reorganization for leaders of emerging nations, has been reflected all too clearly in the corruption and violence that has plagued present-day Africa. *The Wretched of the Earth* has had a major impact on civil rights, anticolonialism, and black consciousness movements around the world, and this bold new translation by Richard Philcox reaffirms it as a landmark."

The Wretched of the Earth Details

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ka?yap says

A psychological exploration of the oppressed and the oppressor. Analyzing the evolution of the native, he provides extraordinary insights into revolutionary change. Fanon was no champion of violence, he simply embraced the truth and portrayed the reality of a situation and the unfolding dialectic. He accurately describes the pitfalls of a postcolonial state, where the national bourgeoisie would turn into a profiteering caste, too glad to accept the dividends the formal colonial state hands out to it. This is very true of the Indian bourgeoisie who were very unconscious of their revolutionary role and demobilised the masses. For Fanon, only a radical democracy that involves the complete mobilisation and rising the consciousness of the masses can save a post-colonial society from the "caste of profiteers", military dictatorships and from the nation getting torn apart from tribal and religious differences. In countries where the urban proletariat were a minute faction, he was a champion of the peasant class and the lumpenproletariat as the revolutionary classes.

At the end, he provides a list of wartime psychological case studies in harrowing detail. In the powerful conclusion, his ultimate message was of humanity. His warnings against the path of aping the west, against the obsession with the notion of catching up with the west.

" European lifestyles should not tempt us to go astray. In European lifestyles and technology I see a constant denial of man, an avalanche of murders."

How accurately he describes the "United States of America where the flaws, sickness, and inhumanity of Europe have reached frightening proportions". This is exactly what Gandhi feared too, that India would go on a path of trying to emulate western consumerism. In a world where there are limited resources, what

happens when India tries to follow the unsustainable path of emulating the western levels of accumulation and consumption? Especially considering the fact that all the riches of the west were the result of the plundering of the third world. When India decided to follow the American path, the result is exactly what we see today, one very small section of the population extremely rich and a huge section of the population extremely poor.

He wanted the third world to be the champion of new humanism. In today's world where massive inequalities have been built up consciously, deliberately and systematically, where large sections of population live in a de-humanised condition, Fanon's passionate message is very important to address the urgent need of radical redistribution of wealth and the means of production.

Mohamed Ibrahim says

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Hadrian says

When we revolt, it is not for a particular culture. We revolt simply, because for many reasons, we can no longer breathe.

This is one of those big important books which affected lots of peoples' thinking and influenced nearly everything written after it on the subject, which makes it very difficult to say anything new about it. That said, I'll write down my reactions anyway.

Aside from the incisive writing style, the other main point a reader might notice how much Fanon manages to cram into three hundred pages.

There are meditations on the use of violence by the oppressor to the oppressed and vice versa; the psychology of the racist and the target of racism; on what is necessary to create a new culture unencumbered by the shackles of colonial dictation; on the role of native intellectuals who have cozied up to the colonizer; and the pitfalls of any revolutionary state after the colonizer is thrown out. Mainly, how to prevent economic conflicts and tribal/religious divisions from tearing a new nation apart.

There's an especially part (mentioned in Colin's review) on the abuse of psychology as a tool for racism. This is informed by Fanon's own expertise as a psychiatrist, and is a useful tool for understanding how racism can disguise itself in scientific language. For a contemporary example, anybody who brings up IQ scores as the sole determining factor in a discussion about poverty.

Not everything he says here will match up with experiences today. That's expected. His life as a black man in colonial Martinique and in the Algerian War will be not quite the same as a black man today. That's historical context. Still, he says so much that is important and worth knowing that it is necessary to read him - as a tool for understanding psychology or a different personal perspective.

Paul says

This book is angry passionate, but written with great clarity and purpose. It is the classic critique of colonialism from the Marxist left with a powerful introduction by Sartre. It is written before Vietnam, before the changes in the sixties and by an eminent psychiatrist enmeshed in the struggle for freedom in Algeria. Fanon examines nationalism, imperialism and the colonial inheritance and manages to turn the traditional definition of the lumpenproletariat on its head.

There are significant problems with the book; which are clear now. This is a very male book. The struggle is by men and the book is, on the surface, for men. When Fanon talks about intellectuals he refers to them as men. This was the zeitgeist of the left at the time, before feminism made an impact. It would be written differently today.

The chapters about psychiatric disorders is very good and the descriptions gut wrenching; although many of the symptoms described would today be identified as post traumatic stress disorder.

What this book really does of course is give you a sense of colonialism in Africa; the devastation and injustice. The opening of the book caused great controversy; "decolonization is always a violent phenomenon". People since have argued that the chapter on the necessity of violence is powerful, of course, but exaggerated and a bit over the top. Written in the heat of conflict. However, what we forgot is that the original colonization was much more violent and horrific. It can hardly be expected that at the end of empire and colonization people wave their colonial masters goodbye with a cheery "Thanks for all the fun!" Fanon understood this very well. It is a lesson we still have not learnt and we are still making the same mistakes with very similar results.

Alex says

Deep in the bowels of libraries, past the celebrity memoirs and adventure stories, tattered in the stacks, there are dark things: books that are actively, overtly dangerous. Here's one now.

Frantz Fanon's 1961 classic *The Wretched of the Earth* is about violence; it champions violence. It's a manual on how to be violent. Fanon is a genius, so it's seductive. It's like *The Prince* for African revolutionaries: concerned not with your bourgeois "morals" but with results. Here, let's summarize it with a Game of Thrones gif. (That's what the kids are doing, right?)

This is a little bit of an oversimplification, some recent defenders say. Fanon (France FAN-un, less difficult than I thought it would be) isn't advocating violence for violence's sake; he wouldn't choose violence if he thought there was another option. He just thinks nonviolence is absurd. He sees violence as an inevitable response to colonialism, which is by definition violent. It's not that he's rooting for it; it's that he sees it. "The exploited realize that their liberation implies using every means available, and force is the first."

And yet. When someone writes as eloquently and convincingly that violence is the first option, he is championing it. "Decolonization reeks of red-hot cannonballs and bloody knives," he says. "For the last can be the first only after a murderous and decisive confrontation between the two protagonists."

Mandela in South Africa would show, decades after Fanon's death in 1961, that nonviolence can (sort of) work*. Fanon was dismissive of leaders like Mandela. "The unpreparedness of the educated classes, the lack of practical links between them and the mass of the people, their laziness, and, let it be said, their cowardice at the decisive moment of the struggle will give rise to tragic mishaps," he said, inaccurately. He was all prole, all the time. "In the colonial countries only the peasantry is revolutionary. It has nothing to lose and everything to gain. The underprivileged and starving peasant is the exploited who very soon realizes that only violence pays." But peasant-led revolutions have not always worked out super well either.

Fanon, who fought for the native Front de Libération Nationale in Algeria's revolution, knew first-hand how quickly violence turns on itself. He found himself accusing the French of massacring 300 civilians in 1957; his own FLN was in fact responsible. It's unclear whether he knew that at the time. When you plunge your hands into blood, they get bloody.

Jean-Paul Sartre, a supporter who wrote the preface to this book, says it baldly:

"Get this into your head: if violence were only a thing of the future, if exploitation and oppression never existed on earth, perhaps displays of nonviolence might relieve the conflict. But if the entire regime, even your nonviolent thoughts, is governed by a thousand-year old oppression, your passiveness serves no other purpose but to put you on the side of the oppressors."

This is not true, but it describes a truth. Some people, faced with violence, will respond with violence. It's okay to get all judgey about that, as long as you were even more judgey about the original violence. If you weren't pissed off about that, you should ask yourself which side you're on.

The west is in stasis today. Worse, it's deteriorating. Inequality and the wealth gaps keep increasing year after year after year, yet neoliberalism is as strong as ever. The 1% are there to stay and no one can do much about it. For us, people of the underdeveloped world, then, the question has stopped being *how best to catch*

up with the west? and has instead become *how best to avoid its fate, and create a better world and a better future?* That's not an easy question to answer of course but one thing is clear, to move forward we need to decolonize and remove the shackles of neocolonialism choking us, once and for all. To do that, however, we have to realize three things.

First, that clinging desperately to the past isn't the way to defeat neocolonialism. Rather, the way to do it is to allow our own cultures to grow organically through the people and their struggles for liberation. But that won't happen until we get rid of the reactionary elements preventing our cultures from evolving, so until we do that we will just keep following the vicious reactionary cycle that always brings us back to fundamentalism and authoritarianism, and thus forever remain stagnating.

Second, that we won't achieve true democracy until we raise the political consciousness of the people. And that this is not an impossible task to realize. The view that if we were given democracy we'd just return to tribalism is an orientalist and disgustingly racist idea that has no scientific basis whatever. The common people are not stupid, they just lack the proper political education.

Third, that our bourgeoisie, unlike its western counterpart, is impotent. It lacks the pioneering inventiveness that marked the bourgeoisie of the developed world and allowed it to be so dominant (a consequence of the ruthlessness of the colonialist bourgeoisie that leaves a young bourgeoisie little to no room to compete). This impotence, this incapacity to innovate, prevents it from fulfilling its historic role as bourgeoisie, and so it ends up being no more than an agent, a conveyor belt for the developed world. This undeveloped bourgeoisie, instead of obsessing over immediate, but unproductive, profits, should aim for long-term development that serves the country and the people, and eventually the bourgeoisie as well. But of course, the bourgeoisie being bourgeois, will never do that. The way forward for an underdeveloped country, therefore, is by stopping this useless and harmful bourgeoisie and the fascist state protecting it.

Once we achieve those three goals (ie, removing the reactionary elements from our cultures, raising the political consciousness of the people, and eliminating the useless bourgeoisie) we will be able to destroy the neocolonialism suffocating us and move past it, and who knows maybe we will succeed in creating a true democracy before even europe is able to.

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Colin says

My favorite part of this book was the chapter called "On Colonialism and Psychoanalysis" where Fanon talks about how psychology can be used to colonize and control people, and details how the French scientific

community criminalized and pathologized Algerian people through psychology to further colonialism and racism. These concepts are central to radical disability activism and Disability Studies today, and Fanon originally published "Wretched of the Earth" in 1961.

I had a hard time with the completely masculinist lens of Fanon's conception of "the colonized subject." A good example of this was the psychological sketch of a man who was, in Fanon's theory, traumatized by colonization and manifested this by becoming impotent because his wife had been raped. The sketch actually ended with the guy being quoted as saying "why did she have to tell me about it" and Fanon's focus was the guy's impotence, with no exploration of this woman's (or any other woman's) experience of rape and other violence connected with colonization. I also found the theory to be pretty dense and hard to get through.

It's a pivotal historical work, written in the context of armed struggle at a particular point in history. It was good to read it because the theory has influenced many people whose work I like, such as Augusto Boal or David Roediger, and it's interesting to be able to pinpoint that influence more easily now.

Aubrey says

Fans of Conrad, Morrison, Friere. Lovers of Things Fall Apart, Les Misérables, The Hunger Games. Definers of postcolonialism, social justice, revolution. Members of the military, political parties, life itself.

Think on the lies you live by.

The parameters do not matter. Neither do your excuses. If you are for peace, you are for it completely, or you are not for it at all. If you condone violence in any amount, the memorial, the dramatizations, the history of your people, you condone it all. When it comes to crimes against humanity, there is no compartmentalization.

A country colonizes another. The colonizer breaks down the people, breaks down the culture, and bleeds the country dry. The colonized develops a pecking order, a few imbibing the parasitic infection to an extraordinary degree while the rest succumb to violence, starvation, madness. The colonizer manipulates these unavoidable results of unholy oppression into an argument, a Western science proving the natural degeneracy of the colonized, this concept of 'science' having as much truth to it as this concept of 'Western.' Better to call it 'Atlantic', the northeastern corner countries of this seascape infecting every other country within reach.

The native must realize that colonialism never gives anything away for nothing.

*Nor will we acquiesce in the help for underdeveloped countries being a program of "sisters of charity." This help should be the ratification of a double realization: the realization by the colonized peoples that **it is their due**, and the realization by the capitalist powers that in fact **they must pay**.*

Independence! Independence? Independence is the colonial country making certain concessions to certain people in return for certain benefits. Independence is those colonized souls, infected with Atlantic ideologies and addicted to a level of life standards, choosing the bourgeois over their country as a whole, assuming a well paying part of the colonizers' remaining structure and descending into depraved senility accordingly.

Rich is rich and poor is poor, and in times of revolution the contempt of urban academic for rural masses is just as misguided and virulent. The result is a stunted obscenity pandering at the colonizers' ideal; there is no true independence without the *entirety* of the people.

That famous dictatorship, whose supporters believe that it is called for by the historical process and consider it an indispensable prelude to the dawn of independence, in fact symbolizes the decision of the bourgeois caste to govern the underdeveloped country first with the help of the people, but soon against them.

Because it is bereft of ideas, because it lives by its heredity incapacity to think in terms of all the problems of the nation as seen from the point of view of the whole of that nation, the national middle class will have nothing better to do than to take on the role of manager for Western enterprise, and it will in practice set up its country as the brothel of Europe.

White is white and black is black, until you realize it is not a question of racism but an endemic of the comfort of the individual versus the blossoming of the people. What is at stake here is not "What do I have to lose?", but "What am I losing?". The question is not of violence or non-violence, unless you apply it to the whole spectrum of history and look just why exactly we have France and the U.S. and how morality is a pitiful question when put into the context of that next mouthful of bread. Neither is the former colonies catching up to the colonizers the solution, for the latter only exceeds in terms of capacity, in both speed and completeness, for obliteration of other and self.

In the colonial context the settler only ends his work of breaking in the native when the latter admits loudly and intelligibly the supremacy of the white man's values.

The passion with which native intellectuals defend the existence of their national culture may be a source of amazement; but those who condemn this exaggerated passion are strangely apt to forget that their own psyche and their own selves are conveniently sheltered behind a French or German culture which has given full proof of its existence and which is uncontested.

Fact: countries that have progressed beyond Middle Age levels did so through brutal exploitation. Fact: countries that were exploited will return to near Middle Age levels if all colonizer influence is cut off. Fact: the fact that Germany is back on its feet while the 'Third World' continues to exist is not a matter of justice, but international economic dependencies. Fact: 'First World' inhabitants may have more nipples to suck, but that is a matter of luck, not sociocultural fortitude or their health as a human being. Fact: the slogan of the 'Western' world is torture, and torture includes brainwashing.

They find out on the spot that all the piles of speeches on the equality of human beings do not hide the commonplace fact that the seven Frenchmen killed or wounded at Col due Sakamody kindles the indignation of all civilized consciences, whereas the...massacre of whole populations - which had merely called forth the Sakamody ambush as a reprisal - all this is of not the slightest importance.

If your country has never been discredited on all levels of life, you don't understand. If your history has never been castrated and left to desiccate for centuries on end, you don't understand. If your existence has never been deemed by scientific communities to be a degenerate one in need of taming, you don't understand. If you have lived with hope longer than without, you don't understand. If you have given up your right to politically participate on any level due to middling inconvenience or panderings at anarchy, you will never, ever, understand.

To educate the masses politically does not mean, cannot mean, making a political speech. What it means is to try, relentlessly and passionately, to teach the masses that everything depends on them; that if we stagnate it is their responsibility, and that if we go forward it is due to them too, that there is no such thing as a demiurge, that there is no famous man who will take the responsibility for everything, but that the demiurge is the people themselves and the magic hands are finally only the hands of the people.

Everything can be explained to the people, on the single condition that you really want them to understand.

If you don't understand that 'First World' and 'Third World' are labels signifying nothing but a world that likes to pit one lie against the other, if you don't understand the relationship between the oppression abroad and the violence at home, if you are willing to take the amputation of your individual satisfactions from the communal good lying down, you are doomed.

Two centuries ago, a former European colony decided to catch up with Europe. It succeeded so well that the United States of America became a monster, in which the taints, the sickness, and the inhumanity of Europe have grown to appalling dimensions.

A government or a party gets the people it deserves and sooner or later a people gets the government it deserves.

Don't tell me you believe in the future. Tell me why, and how, and just what you are going to do about it.

"In your opinion, what should we have done?"

"I don't know. But you are a child and what is happening concerns grown-up people."

"But they kill children too..."

"That is no reason for killing your friend."

"Well, kill him I did. Now you can do what you like."

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Ahmad Sharabiani says

Les Damnés de la terre = The Wretched of the Earth, Frantz Fanon

The Wretched of the Earth (French: Les Damnés de la Terre) is a 1961 book by Frantz Fanon, in which the author provides a psychiatric and psychologic analysis of the dehumanizing effects of colonization upon the individual and the nation, and discusses the broader social, cultural, and political implications inherent to establishing a social movement for the decolonization of a person and of a people.

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Jafar says

Today Sartre would be sent to Guantanamo for the introduction that he wrote for this book.
