

**Introduction to
Decolonial Action and Thought
through Frantz Fanon's**

**THE WRETCHED
OF THE EARTH**



edited by La Selva

CONTENTS

x. Preface by La Selva	02
xi. 'Why We Use Violence' Fanon	05
i. What is Decolonization?	07
ii. Settler-Colonial Violence is the Source from which our Anger Originates	08
iii. Authoritarians and Recuperators during Revolutionary Instability vs. Non-compromising Insurrection from Below	10
iv. Recovering our Dignity and Humanity through Decolonial Action	11
v. Let's Abandon All Aspiration Towards Whiteness	12
vi. Closing Scene	16

x. Preface by La Selva

“Each generation must, out of relative obscurity, discover its mission, fulfill it, or betray it.”

Why we Put this Zine Together

We put together these collections of quotations, writings, and speech from thinker and writer Frantz Fanon because of his valuable insights on decolonization and revolutionary insurrection. Fanon’s sharp insights into how we secure liberation from all oppression provides us lessons that still resonate with and apply to our current times—after more than 60 years of their initial writing. This zine is meant to be a resource and introduction to be read and discussed with your friends and loved ones, and we hope that holding space for Fanon’s insights with others will help to multiply the desires for decolonization that Fanon—and many before him—have given their lives in trying to secure our total freedom.

Why read Fanon?

Frantz Fanon’s context in the Algerian Revolution provides us with ways to think about how new forms of decolonial movements and autonomous organizing can transform struggles to unsettle colonized lands. In the so-called Americas, modernity has shaped the forms of oppression experienced in these occupied territories, but the lineage of lessons from decolonial struggles that Fanon wrote and thought about can inform and shape resistance to American colonialism, especially since he wrote from an intersecting position of both black and indigenous struggles.

In particular, by reading Fanon, we can point to the ways in which his analysis of decolonization is analogous to autonomous and anarchist tendencies. In Fanon's texts, we can see the themes of insurrection (defined as non-compromising and permanent conflictuality against all authority), the centrality of creating dignity through community self-defense in the face of colonial violence, and the intimate connection between affinity and action. Fanon teaches us that, while decolonization requires violence and violence is the only tool available for the dispossessed, the emphasis on violence is not a fetishization of violence itself. Fanon understood his experiences in colonial society through analogy via his psychiatric and therapeutic understandings: anti-colonial violence was (at the individual psychic level) like a necessary form of transformative shock, whilst anti-colonial struggle (and the new collective form of life that it prompted) formed the basis of a social reconstructive therapy. Thus, at bottom, we can see that anti-colonial self-defense functions as the affirmation of direct action as blueprint for liberation, while liberatory decolonial actions are made possible in the first place through the intentional cultivation of relationships and affinities, all of which concurrently uphold our autonomous lives and dignity in the process.

What you will find in this zine

In this collection of insights that Fanon offers to us, we drew primarily from his book "The Wretched of the Earth" (written in 1963), and specifically from a section in the book titled 'Concerning Violence', as well as the conclusion from this book. The first subsection in this zine that you will find— 'Why We Use Violence'— is taken from a speech that Fanon gave to the Accra Positive Action Conference in April 1960 that provides a clear guidance for beginning to think about the central questions of "why" and "how" we fight to get free. The four sections after 'Why We Use Violence' provide an elaboration of the processes and dynamic of decolonization that Fanon derived from his experiences and thoughts

on the Algerian struggle for decolonization (all text drawn from “The Wretched of the Earth”). Finally, the subsection titled Let’s Abandon all Aspiration towards Whiteness elaborates on Fanon’s final thoughts on suspending desire for colonial models (such as the nation-state, capitalism, eurocentrism, etc.) and searching for new, non-oppressive, and non-hierarchical forms of life.

* Note on the quotations/passages: all masculine pronouns in Fanon’s text have been changed to gender neutral pronouns/ language— because gender is colonial and this text is anti-colonial— however, this is not always the case with the use of the word “Man” in the section called Let’s Abandon all Aspiration towards Whiteness and checking out Sylvia Wynter’s discussions on “Man” and the “Human” can help explain why this choice was made. There have also been a few parentheses added throughout where some context to certain quotations may be missing.

About Fanon

Frantz Fanon (born in 1925) was a psychiatrist and writer from the French colony of Martinique in the Southeast region of the Caribbean islands. He grew up in a middle-class Black family, and, as he grew older, was torn between the assimilationism of Martinique’s middle class and the preoccupation with racial identity that the Negritude Movement promoted. Fanon left the colony in 1943, at the age of 18, to fight with the Free French forces in the last days of World War II. He decided to stay in France after the war to study psychiatry and medicine at university in Lyons—it was there where he encountered new forms of anti-Black racism. In 1953, after a stint in Paris, he accepted a position as chief of staff for a psychiatric ward at a hospital in Algeria (in northern Africa), where only a year later, the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) uprising had begun against the brutal French colonial occupation of Algeria. At this point, he had then fully devoted himself to the cause of Algerian autonomy until the end of his life. Fanon spent ten months of his last year of life writing the book for which he would be most remembered, *Les Damnés de la Terre* (The Wretched of the Earth), and died of leukemia in the state of Maryland in 1961.

xi. 'Why We Use Violence' Accra, April 1996

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

“I do not want, you may well understand, to proceed today to a critique of the colonial system. I do not intend as a colonized person, speaking to colonized people, to demonstrate that the colonial state is an abnormal, inhuman and reprehensible state. It would be grotesque on my part to want to convince you of the unacceptable nature of colonial oppression.

However, I would like to focus my reflections on the violence integral to colonial oppression. The colonial regime is a regime instituted by violence. It is always by force that the colonial regime is established. It is against the will of the people that other peoples more advanced in the techniques of destruction or numerically more powerful have prevailed.

I say that such a system established by violence can logically only be faithful to itself, and its duration in time depends on the continuation of violence... Colonialism, however, is not satisfied by this violence against the present. The colonized people are presented ideologically as a people arrested in their evolution, impervious to reason, incapable of directing their own affairs, requiring the permanent presence of an external ruling power. The history of the colonized peoples is transformed into meaningless unrest, and as a result, one has the impression that for these people humanity began with the arrival of those brave settlers.

Violence in everyday behaviour, violence against the past that is emptied of all substance, violence against the future, for the colonial regime presents itself as necessarily eternal. We see, therefore, that the colonized people, caught in a web of a three-dimensional violence,

a meeting point of multiple, diverse, repeated, cumulative violences, are soon logically confronted by the problem of ending the colonial regime by any means necessary.

This violence of the colonial regime is not just lived on the level of the soul, but also that of the muscles, of the blood. This violence that wills itself to be violent, which becomes more and more boundless, irreparably provokes the birth of an internal violence in the colonized people and a just anger is born that seeks to express itself.

The role of the political party that takes the destinies of this people into its hands is to curtail this violence and to channel it by providing it with a peaceful platform and a constructive basis, since for the human spirit which contemplates the unfolding of history and which tries to stay on the ground of the universal, violence must first be fought with the language of truth and of reason.

... the achievement of the Algerian revolution is precisely to have culminated in a grandiose way and to have caused a mutation of the instinct of self-preservation into value and truth.

In certain colonies, the violence of the colonized is the last gesture of the hunted person... In 1954, the Algerian people took up arms because at that point the colonial prison became so oppressive that it was no longer tolerable, because the hunt was definitely on for Algerians in the streets and in the countryside and because, finally, it was no longer a question for the Algerian of giving a meaning to their life but rather of giving one to their death.

No, the violence of the Algerian people is neither a hatred of peace nor a rejection of human relations, nor a conviction that only war can put an end to the colonial regime in Algeria.

The Algerian people have chosen the unique solution that was left to them and this choice will hold firm for us.”

i. What is Decolonization?

“... decolonization is always a violent phenomenon”.

“Decolonization, which sets out to change the order of the world, is, obviously, a program of complete disorder. But it cannot come as a result of magical practices, nor of a natural shock, nor of a friendly misunderstanding...”

“Decolonization is the meeting of two forces, opposed to each other by their very nature, which in fact owe their originality to that sort of substantification which results from and is nourished by the situation in the colonies”.

“Decolonization never takes place unnoticed, for it influences individuals and modifies them fundamentally. It transforms spectators crushed with their inessentiality into privileged actors, with the grandiose glare of history’s floodlights upon them. It brings a natural rhythm into existence, introduced by new people, and with it a new language and a new humanity.”

“In decolonization, there is therefore the need of a complete calling in question of the colonial situation. If we wish to describe it precisely, we might find it in the well- known words:

‘The last shall be first and the first last.’

Decolonization is the putting into practice of this sentence. That is why, if we try to describe it, all decolonization is successful.”

“The naked truth of decolonization evokes for us the searing bullets and bloodstained knives which emanate from it. / For if the last shall be first, this will only come to pass after a murderous and decisive

struggle between the two protagonists.”

“The settler’s work is to make even the dreams of liberty impossible for the native. **The native’s work is to imagine all possible methods for destroying the settler.**”

ii. Settler-Colonial Violence is the Source from which our Rage Originates

“The violence which has ruled over the ordering of the colonial world, which has ceaselessly drummed the rhythm for the destruction of native social forms and broken up without reserve the systems of reference of the economy, the customs of dress and external life, that same violence will be claimed and taken over by the native at the moment when, deciding to embody history in his own person, he surges into the forbidden quarters. To wreck the colonial world is henceforth a mental picture of action which is clear, very easy to understand and which may be assumed by each one of the individuals which constitute the colonized people.”

“The native’s challenge to the colonial world is not a rational confrontation of points of view... It is not enough for the settler to delimit physically, that is to say with the help of the army and the police force, the place of the native. As if to show the totalitarian character of colonial exploitation the settler paints the native as a sort of quintessence of evil. Native society is not simply described as a society lacking in values. It is not enough of the colonist to affirm that those values have disappeared from, or still better never existed in, the colonial world. The native is declared insensible to ethics; the native represents not only the absence of values, but also the negation of values. The native is, let us dare to admit, the enemy of values, and in this sense the native is absolute evil. The native is the

corrosive element, destroying all that comes near them; the native is the deforming element, disfiguring all that has to do with beauty or morality; the native is the depository of maleficent powers, the unconscious and irretrievable instrument of blind forces.”

“In all armed struggles, there exists what we might call the point of no return. Almost always it is marked off by a huge and all-inclusive repression which engulfs all sectors of the colonized people.”

“The repressions [from colonial state violence], far from calling a halt to the forward rush of national consciousness, urge it on. Mass slaughter in the colonies at a certain state of the embryonic development of consciousness increases that consciousness, for the hecatombs are an indication that between oppressors and oppressed everything can be solved by force. It must be remarked here that the political parties have not called for armed insurrection, and have made no preparations for such an insurrection. All these repressive measures, all those actions which are a result of fear are not within the leader’s intentions: they are overtaken by events.” (72)

“We have seen that it is the intuition of the colonized masses that their liberation must, and can only, be achieved by force.”

“The existence of an armed struggle shows that the people are decided to trust to violent methods only. **The native of whom they have never stopped saying that the only language the native understands is that of force, decides to give utterance by force. In fact, as always, the settler has shown him the way he should take if he is to become free. The argument the native chooses has been furnished by the settler, and by an ironic turning of the tables it is the native who now affirms that the colonialist understands nothing but force. The colonial regime owes its legitimacy to force and at no time tries to hide this aspect of things.**”

iii. Authoritarians and Recuperators Desire Order during Revolutionary Instability— let's invoke a Non-compromising Insurrection from Below

“The elite will attach a fundamental importance to organization, so much so that the fetish of organization will often take precedence over a reasoned study of colonial society. **The notion of the party is a notion imported from the [colonial] country.** This instrument of modern political warfare is thrown down just as it is, without the slightest modification, upon real life with all its infinite variations and lack of balance, where slavery, serfdom, barter, a skilled working class, and high finance exist side by side.”

“The peasantry is systematically disregarded for the most part by the propaganda put out by the nationalist parties. **And it is clear that in the colonial countries the peasants alone are revolutionary, for they have nothing to lose and everything to gain.** The starving peasant, outside the class system, is the first among the exploited to discover that only violence pays.

For them there is no compromise, no possible coming to terms; colonization and decolonization are simply a question of relative strength. The exploited person sees that their liberation implies the use of all means, and that of force first and foremost.

When in 1956, after the capitulation of Monsieur Guy Mollet to the settlers in Algeria, the Front de Liberation Nationale, in a famous leaflet, stated that **colonialism only loosens its hold when the knife is at its throat**, no Algerian really found these terms too violent. The leaflet only expressed what every Algerian felt at heart: colonialism is not a thinking machine, nor a body endowed with reasoning faculties. It is violence in its natural state, and it will only yield when confronted with greater violence.

At the decisive moment, the colonialist bourgeoisie, which up till then has remained inactive, comes into the field. It introduces that new idea which is in proper parlance a creation of the colonial situation: non-violence.

In its simplest form this non-violence signifies to the intellectual and economic elite of the colonized country that the bourgeoisie has the same interests as they and that it is therefore urgent and indispensable to come to terms for the public good.”

“This idea of compromise is very important in the phenomenon of colonization, for it is very far from being a simple one. Compromise involves the colonial system and the young nationalist bourgeoisie at one and the same time. The partisans of the colonial system discover that the masses may destroy everything. Blow-up bridges, ravaged farms, repressions, and fighting harshly [to] disrupt the economy. **Compromise is equally attractive to the nationalist bourgeoisie, who since they are not clearly aware of the possible consequences of the rising storm, are genuinely afraid of being swept away by this huge hurricane...**”

“In certain circumstances, the political party political machine may remain intact. But as a result of the colonialist repression and of the spontaneous reaction of the people, the parties find themselves out-distanced by their militants. The violence of the masses is vigorously pitted against the military forces of the occupying power, and the situation deteriorates and comes to a head. Those leaders who are free remain, therefore, on the touchline. They have suddenly become useless, with their bureaucracy and their reasonable demands; yet we see them, far removed from events, attempting the crowing imposture—that of ‘speaking in the name of the silenced nation’.

As a general rule, colonialism welcomes this godsend with open arms, transforms these ‘blind mouths’ into spokesmen, and in two minutes ends them with independence, on condition that they restore order.”

iv. Recovering our Dignity through Decolonial Action

“For a colonized people the most essential value, because the most concrete, is first and foremost the land: the land which will bring them bread and, above all, dignity.”

“Decolonization is the veritable creation of new people. But this creation owes nothing of its legitimacy to any supernatural power; the ‘thing’ which has been colonized becomes a person during the same process by which they free them-self.”

“But it so happens that for the colonized people this violence, because it constitutes their only work, invests their characters with positive and creative qualities. **The practice of violence binds them together as a whole, since each individual forms a violent link in the great chain, a part of the great organism of violence which has surged upward in reaction to the settler’s violence in the beginning... The armed struggle mobilizes the people; that is to say, it throws them in one way and in one direction.**”

“At the level of individuals, violence is a cleansing force. It frees the native from their inferiority complex and from their despair and inaction; it makes them fearless and restores their self-respect. Even if the armed struggle has been symbolic and the nation is demobilized through a rapid movement of decolonization, **the people have the time to see that the liberation has been the business of each and all and that the leader has no special merit.** From thence comes that type of aggressive reticence with regard to the machinery of protocol which young governments quickly show. **When the people have taken violent part in the national liberation they will allow no one to set themselves up as ‘liberators’.** They show themselves to be jealous of the results of their

action and take good care not to place their future, their destiny, or the fate of their country in the hands of a living god. Yesterday they were completely irresponsible; today they mean to understand everything and make all decisions. **Illuminated by violence, the consciousness of the people rebels against any pacification.** From now on the demagogues, the opportunists, and the magicians have a difficult task. The action which has thrown them into a hand-to-hand struggle confers upon the masses a voracious taste for the concrete. The attempt at mystification becomes, in the long run, practically impossible.” (94-95)

“The appearance of the settler has meant in the terms of syncretism the death of the aboriginal society, cultural lethargy, and the petrification of individuals. **For the native, life can only spring up again out of the rotting corpse of the settler.**”

v. Let's Abandon All Aspiration Towards Whiteness

“Come, then, comrades; it would be as well to decide at once to change our ways. We must shake off the heavy darkness in which we were plunged, and leave it behind. The new day which is already at hand must find us firm, prudent, and resolute.

We must leave our dreams and abandon our old beliefs and friendships from the time before life began. Let us waste no time in sterile litanies and nauseating mimicry. Leave this Europe where they are never done talking of Man, yet murder people everywhere they find them, at the corner of every one of their own streets, in all the corners of the globe. For centuries they have stifled almost the whole of humanity in the name of a so-called spiritual experience. Look at them today swaying between atomic and spiritual disintegration.

So, my brother, how is it that we do not understand that we

have better things to do than to follow that same Europe? That same Europe where they were never done talking of Man, and where they never stopped proclaiming that they were only anxious for the welfare of Man: today we know with what sufferings humanity has paid for every one of their triumphs of the mind.

Come, then, comrades, the European game has finally ended; we must find something different. We today can do everything, so long as we do not imitate Europe, so long as we are not obsessed by the desire to catch up with Europe.

Europe now lives at such a mad, reckless pace that she has shaken off all guidance and all reason, and she is running headlong into the abyss; we would do well to avoid it with all possible speed.

Yet it is very true that we need a model, and that we want blueprints and examples. For many among us the European model is the most inspiring. We have therefore seen in the preceding pages to what mortifying setbacks such an imitation has led us. European achievements, European techniques, and the European style ought no longer to tempt us and to throw us off our balance.

When I search for Man in the technique and the style of Europe, I see only a succession of negations of man, and an avalanche of murders.

Let us decide not to imitate Europe; let us combine our muscles and our brains in a new direction. Let us try to create the whole man, whom Europe has been incapable of bringing to triumphant birth.

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.

... [we] will also not forget Europe's crimes... and finally, on the

immense scale of humanity, there were racial hatreds, slavery, exploitation, and above all the bloodless genocide which consisted in the setting aside of fifteen thousand millions of people.

So, comrades, let us not pay tribute to Europe by creating states, institutions, and societies which draw their inspiration from her.

Humanity is waiting for something from us other than such an imitation, which would be almost an obscene caricature.

If we want to turn Africa into a new Europe, and America into a new Europe, then let us leave the destiny of our countries to Europeans. They will know how to do it better than the most gifted among us.

But if we want humanity to advance a step further, if we want to bring it up to a different level than that which Europe has shown it, then we must invent and we must make discoveries.

For Europe, for ourselves, and for humanity, comrades, we must turn over a new leaf, we must work out new concepts, and try to set afoot a new people.”



vi. Closing Scene

‘And suddenly, shouts lit up the silence;

We had attacked, we the slaves; we, the dung underfoot, we the animals with patient hooves,

We were running like madmen; shots rang out . . . We were striking. Blood and sweat cooled and refreshed us. We were striking where the shout came from, and the shouts became more strident and a great clamor rose from the east: it was the outhouses burning and the flames flickered sweetly on our cheeks.

Then was the assault made on the master’s house.

They were firing from the windows.

We broke in the doors.

The master’s room was wide open. The master’s room was brilliantly lighted, and the master was there, very calm . . . and our people stopped dead . . . it was the master . . . I went in. “It’s you,” he said, very calm.

It was I, even I, and I told him so, the good slave, the faithful slave, the slave of slaves, and suddenly his eyes were like two cockroaches, frightened in the rainy season . . .

I struck, and the blood spurted; that is the only baptism that I remember today.’

- From Aime Cesaire’s *Les Armes Miraculeuses* [Et les chiens se taisaient].



laselva.blackblogs.org