

## CHAPTER VI

### Fanon and the Wretched of the Earth

#### **Background**

It is his final work, Wretched of the Earth, for which Fanon is most (in)famous. The title is taken from the first line of the *Internationale* in French. Written in the last months of his life in 1961, he drew on what was probably the substance of his lectures to FLN cadre on the Tunisian border. Fanon's concerns develop in a much more concrete direction. The philosophical basis in Hegel's master and slave dialectic is still evident. He traces the breakdown of the Manichean colonial situation, understood as violence incarnate, by way of a series of answers to the political questions confronting the Algerian revolution. He defends a notion of revolutionary violence in Algeria based on the need for slaves to fight for their liberty to gain recognition and self-determination - both national and personal. He defends this by tracing changes in consciousness based on a 'spontaneously revolutionary peasantry' gradually educated by party militants and organised around a political program. He warns of the dangers of the emergence of a colonial bourgeoisie who will be 'good for nothing' and of the limits of nationalism that does not move to a broader political and social consciousness.

The year 1961 was a crucial one for the Algerian struggle. In January a referendum was held on self-determination. In April there was a military coup in Algiers as fears grew among the *colons* that Algeria would be returned to the Arabs. The coup collapsed by the end of the month and on May 20, ceasefire talks began at Evian, amid growing tensions within the FLN. These talks would collapse by the end of July though their resumption in February the following year would see Algeria granted independence. As the long and bitter war was ending, Fanon, who was dying of leukaemia, penned his final work. It was a final effort to push the struggle, deadlocked in negotiations, to a close.

Internationally too, 1961, was an important year. Fifteen African states had become independent in the previous year, partly in the wake of the Algerian struggle. In 1960, the Congo 'collapsed' and the counter-revolution showed its teeth. Fanon was in the Congo as the representative of the *Gouvernement Provisoire de la République Algérienne* and futilely tried to rally other African states behind Patrice Lumumba, whose murder was announced as Fanon began to write. It is in this context that Fanon commented that 'I am under the impression that I have been very, or even too vehement, in my descriptions. The reason is that I feel the whole project is at stake' (Zahar 1974: xviii).

#### **Outline of Wretched of the Earth**

In this final work Fanon explores the role of violence in the anti-colonial struggle and traces the movement of consciousness that this brings about. After examining this spontaneous violence he looks at its limitations through a systematic analysis of the struggle, tracing the differences in consciousness between the leadership and the masses. He examines the limitations of national consciousness and sounds a warning about the emerging 'native' bourgeoisie. It is important to note how Fanon's argument develops over the first three chapters, which need to be read together, not as separate arguments. In the second half of the book he develops his ideas about the

importance of a national culture and finally returns to his clinical work to demonstrate the dehumanising effects of participating in the struggle for independence.

### **The Manichean Delirium**

Fanon opens with the observation that ‘decolonisation is always a violent phenomenon’ amounting to the replacement of one species by another (p. 27). Force, violence and exploitation are the basis of colonisation from the beginning. To end it the native must be ready for violence at any time.

For Fanon:

Decolonisation is the veritable creation of new men. But this creation owes nothing of its legitimacy to any supernatural power; the ‘thing’ which has been colonised becomes man during the same process by which it frees itself (p. 28).

The colonial world is divided in two. There are separate schools; police and army barracks mark the boundary. In capitalist countries the population is separated from those in power and the powerful resort to more ideological means of control. In the colonies the natives are in more direct contact with the repressive apparatus. Force and violence are not hidden; but are inside the head and home of every native. There are geographical divisions. The areas of wealth and poverty in cities are clearly defined, representing the innate superiority of one set of inhabitants. The superior race in this case is marked out by the fact that they are not just wealthy but *foreign*. The violence of the coloniser is drummed into the natives; it destroys their culture but will ultimately be claimed by them. All this creates a Manichean situation. The geographical separation, differences in wealth and power serve to ground the idea that the native is not just a threat but the ‘essence of evil’. They represent not alternative values but anti-values. The native is reduced to the level of an animal (pp. 29-32).

Over time congresses are held on Western values, colonial intellectuals promote these. For the majority of the population the violence that secures such values makes a mockery of them. The colonial intellectuals develop links to the metropolitan bourgeoisie, with whom it discusses values. The majority of the population eschew the abstract universalism of the intellectuals for a concrete morality based on bread and land, and an end to colonial rule and its violence. The intellectuals seek ‘peaceful co-existence’ but the majority of the people including the settlers are not interested. The native makes radical demands; the intellectuals give good reasons for watering them down (for example, we need their expertise).

In an armed struggle such compromises are less common. Warfare drives the intellectuals into bases closer to the people, who seek to destroy the colonial superstructure. Western values are made concrete. As the people organise, solidarity triumphs over the intellectual’s individualism. If the struggle is not sufficiently broadened the intellectuals will organise the looting of national resources, as they are assimilated to Western values due to their close contacts with the metropolitan bourgeoisie.

In the Manichean situation the natives seek to remove the settler to obtain bread and land. The settlers for their part ‘make history and is conscious of making it’ (p. 40). They are a historic force - “we created this land and if we leave you will be back to the Middle Ages” they say. The French nation is a historical force (and beneficiary of colonialism) while the ‘natives’ are immobilised and

exploited. This immobilisation creates aggression that manifests in crime and tribal warfare. The settler creates a system of security for themselves that provokes resistance by showing who is the 'master.'

The 'native' society becomes more and more immobilised. The libido of the group re-emerges in myths and spirits. These myths integrate one into the group and hold one in place as zombies are worse than the settlers. Fanon notes that 'we perceive that all is settled by a permanent confrontation on the phantasmic plane' (p. 43). These fears give rise eventually to concrete action in the struggle for freedom.

In the colonial world the natives develop a hyper-sensitivity that leads to ecstatic dances and possession that channel the violence. Within the sacred circle a pantomime of the desire for liberation is played out with great energy. In the case of possession the personality is surrendered to the spirits and calm is restored to the village. In the struggle for freedom these practices are left behind, with his back to the wall ('or more precisely, the electrode at his genitals' as Fanon puts it) there can be no retreat into fantasy. Face to face with colonialism the new generation grows up in an atmosphere of violence and rejects the spiritual retreatism. 'The native discovers reality and transforms it into the pattern of his customs, into the practice of violence and into his plan for freedom' (p. 45). Fanon goes on:

We have seen that this same violence, though kept very much on the surface all through the colonial period, yet turns in the void. We have also seen that it is canalised by the emotional outlets of dance and possession by spirits; we have now seen how it is exhausted in fratricidal combats. Now the problem is to lay hold of this violence which is changing direction. When formerly it was appeased by myths and exercised its talents in finding fresh ways of committing mass suicide, now new conditions will make possible a completely new line of action (pp. 45-6).

What forces emerge that re-focus the violence of the colonised? First, there is the emergence of political parties and commercial and intellectual elites. The nationalist parties 'proclaim abstract principles but refrain from issuing definite commands'. Their aim is not to overthrow the system but to achieve more power; thus they remain pacifists. Such parties are composed of the urban middle class (workers, teachers, artisans, shopkeepers) who profit from the colonial set-up and direct their demands to increase wages or other reforms. For this group their aggression is channelled into serving their individual interests. 'Thus there is very easily brought into being a class of enfranchised slaves, or slaves who are individually free' (pp. 46-7).

For the rest they do not want to compete with the settlers but to replace them. The nationalists ignore the peasants, when Fanon argues:

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 him there is no compromise, no possible coming to terms; colonisation and decolonisation are simply a question of relative strength...Colonialism is not a thinking machine, nor a body endowed with reasoning faculties. It is violence in its natural state, and will only yield when confronted with greater violence (pp. 47-8).

As the struggle intensifies, the formerly inactive colonialist bourgeoisie emerges with the new idea - non-violence. This shows that the colonial intellectual and economic elite recognise that they have common interests with the imperial bourgeoisie. They seek to come to terms around the conference table before the masses take matters 'too far'. The threat of mass action is brandished at the

conference table as a threat - "we can stop the slaughter if you give us power". Leaders distance themselves from acts of violence. Many of these nationalists see the use of violent methods in the face of colonial power as suicidal. While the balance of material forces on the ground is crucial one also, Fanon argues, needs to locate the fight in the international context:

The native's guerilla warfare, would be of no value as opposed to other means of violence if it did not form a new element in the world-wide process of competition between trusts and monopolies (p. 51).

This includes the growing need of capital to create not just new sources of raw material in the colonies but also new markets. Military occupation and decimation of colonial population restricts this growth. The colonised are not alone; progressives in all countries support the struggle. Also there is inter-imperialist competition that seeks 'peaceful' solutions rather than increasing repression.

Nationalist parties seek 'reasonable' solutions, they organise actions but limited ones designed to pressure the colonisers but after independence there is no substantial change. The colonialist bourgeoisie draws on religion to help the masses 'turn the other cheek'. Nevertheless, the elite ('those slaves set free' as Fanon calls them) try to shame the coloniser into concessions with the appalling state of the masses. 'They brandish the danger of "mass mobilisation" as the crucial weapon which would bring about as if by magic the "end of the colonial regime"' (p. 52-3). The real militants see through the farce and find themselves isolated, left to the police or otherwise forced to leave the cities. On making contact with the rural masses they find them ready to struggle.

Before going further Fanon returns to the political parties whose speeches 'give a name to the nation' and give a shape to peasants' demands. However, the program is vague and sets out 'minimum requirements.' Nevertheless, they stir up ferment and make the natives dream of a 'postcolonial' order. Meetings grow larger, the police hem them in, the natives want action; the political parties 'multiply their appeals to the Left for calm. While on the Right they scan the horizon, trying to make out the liberal intentions of colonialism' (pp. 53-4).

There are two causes for the end of colonisation - the violent struggle of the people or the action of neighbouring people that pressure the colonial regime. Colonised people are not alone. The atmosphere of violence is widespread - Dien Bien Phu is not just a Vietnamese victory. Victories see colonial powers rush to decolonise, to disarm the people and shift the liberation movement to the Right.

Returning to the atmosphere of violence, despite its different forms (tribal, criminal) the natives eventually come to recognise their enemy. What is it that turns the violence from atmosphere to action? Firstly there are increased tensions, large rallies, more police. Colonists parade their military forces, arrest nationalist leaders, but this time the crowds do not draw back. Their aggression is reinforced. Some event then serves as a trigger (for example, the Sétif massacre in Algeria) which provokes widespread repression. This time, however, national consciousness is not pushed back but advances. The nationalist party leaders (and their pacific intentions) are overtaken by events. Without leaders the masses surge forward spontaneously directing their violence against the colonial system. Colonialism looks for leaders to release and negotiate with; on the condition that they restore order, independence will be granted. Thus nationalist parties are aware of the power of violence but seek to relax the tensions not meet force with force.

'What is the real nature of this violence?' We have seen how the oppressed masses intuit the need for violence but why this means? Fanon argues that it is because it forms the slogan of a political

party. This apparent folly succeeds because the international situation - the role of Moscow and pressure from the working class in the metropole makes long-term occupation by troops unviable. Natives come to believe they are entitled to all the modern world has to offer; independence is often disappointing. The role of the nationalist parties having once accused the masses of passivity; is to explain they are 'going too fast'. Violence simmers away as national reconstruction 'continues within the framework of cut-throat competition between capitalism and socialism' (pp. 57-9). This competition gives all struggles an international dimension especially in the context of Cold War. Liberated countries live in an atmosphere of violence - fear of imperialists, or violent opposition at home. The diplomacy of newly independent countries is more radical, clear about the need for 'bread and land' at home and the fight against capitalism abroad. With the support of socialist countries the colonised nations rush the citadel. The North Americans support 'self determination' in their role of patron of international capitalism. Thus the Cold War context makes the nationalist violence of the colonised a serious threat (although simple comparison of the armed forces might make it seem less so). The 'peaceful co-existence' of the two blocs feeds the anti-colonial violence. Armed movements of colonial people and minorities threaten the imperialists as they brandish their missiles at each other. It is between the violence of the colonised and the 'peaceful violence' of the two blocs that there is room to manoeuvre.

In single combat between native and settler, Fanon argues there is an open struggle:

The existence of an armed struggle shows that the people are decided to trust violent methods only. He of whom *they* have never stopped saying that the only language he 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 colonialists understands nothing but force. The colonial regime owes it legitimacy to force and at no time tries to hide this aspect of things (pp. 65-6).

The native of whom it was said 'only understands force' turns to force as the solution. The settler turns to repression and native reacts in kind. In this way 'the colonised man finds his freedom in and through violence' (p. 68). For Fanon:

The violence of the colonial regime and the counter-violence of the native balance each other and respond to each other in an extraordinary reciprocal homogeneity...From the moment that the native has chosen the methods of counter-violence, police reprisals automatically call forth reprisals on the side of the nationalists. However the results are not equivalent, for machine-gunning from aeroplanes and bombardments from the fleet go far beyond in horror and magnitude any answer the natives can make. This recurring terror demystifies once and for all the most estranged members of the colonised race (pp. 69-70).

That the colonial situation is one of oppression, force and exploitation is clear to all sides. To the claim that 'all natives are the same' the natives claim all settlers are the same, now each represents absolute evil for the other. Violence is the basis of mobilising the people as a whole, out of their lethargy they make a common cause and overcome colonial divisions. Violence unifies the people and at an individual level is 'detoxifying' (pp. 73-4).<sup>1</sup>

Having recovered their sense of being a subject by overthrowing the master by force Fanon argues that this makes the people aware of the collectivist nature of their project and less likely to fall prey

---

<sup>1</sup> The standard English translation of '*la violence desintoxique*' as 'violence is a cleansing force' is inadequate.

to demagogic ‘liberators’. However, they see that there are dangers. In the colonised countries political leaders call on people to ‘fight’ to develop their country and ‘catch up’ with the West. Fanon argues that this is a misconception. The West’s history is different. Their nations formed at the point in which the bourgeoisie concentrated wealth in their hands and allowed industrialisation and the setting up of a world market. In the colonised countries not only is the infrastructure weak but the people are poor. European opulence is based on slavery and colonial exploitation. That is why the colonial powers can say - since you want independence ‘take it and starve.’ The alternative is to sign a treaty so that ‘the former dominated country becomes an economically dependent country’. What is needed is not for the people to show ‘we can do it to’ by girding their loins, but a redistribution of wealth.

However, before departing the colonial regime has institutionalised economic structures wherein a section of the ‘people’ stands to gain. A redistribution of wealth is seen as economically irresponsible. The new leaders call for the people to work hard for the good of the ‘nation’. The issue, Fanon notes, is not hard work but the conditions in which it takes place. In the same way that the Europeans called for reparations from the Germans after World War Two so any aid must be accepted not with gratitude but as ‘just reparations’ for years of exploitation. While finance capital will hesitate to commit itself to developing the Third World, there are limits to exploitation. Capitalism needs markets and when these are saturated the effect in the capitalist core will rouse the European working class to action (pp. 77-82).

### **The Delirium Clears**

In Chapter Two of Wretched of the Earth entitled ‘Spontaneity: Its Strengths and Weaknesses’, Fanon goes on to look at the relations between the national leaders and the masses. He notes the time lag in consciousness, between the leaders and the rank and file, especially over the issue of violence. The main limitation of the nationalist parties is their over-reliance on the urban working class (skilled workers and public servants) who represent scarcely one per cent of the population and who are ‘pampered’. The nationalist parties are based on relatively well-off sections of the population centred in urban areas, and they combine this with a ‘deep distrust towards the people of the rural areas’. Peasants are seen as beholden to old customs and superstitions, as inert. ‘The rising class of native traders and wholesalers needs the disappearance of these prohibitions and barriers in order to develop’. These rural elements come to resist not so much the coloniser but the modern urban ideas of the nationalists. The nationalists take on the Western perception that peasants are a ‘brake’ on the revolution as they are petty bourgeois. In the colonies Fanon argues this is not true, the defence of their traditions from the coloniser disciplines them. They are collectivists while workers are individualists (pp. 88-90).

The national parties do not organise the peasants as a living mass. They ‘parachute’ organisers into the villages, who ignore traditions, ridicule the chiefs and alienate the people, who often collaborate with police to remove them. This only confirms the ‘analysis’ that peasants are backward and crystallises the distrust. Nevertheless, the rural population plays a key role, after years of repression there are spontaneous explosions in the countryside. This provokes more repression including setting up gangs of *lumpen* elements (p. 91). The nationalist parties make no attempt to organise or educate the peasants and the rural and urban movements remain separate. The leaders distance themselves from such outbreaks of ‘irrationalism’. This rural/urban hostility remains after independence. The response is usually to centralise power and impose solutions which even if progressive only reinforce the hostility; dictatorship is not far away.

Colonial powers foster divisions and seek moderate elements for negotiations. The party expels 'extremists'. Like nationalist parties the trade unions copy the mother country but despite their striking force they restrict themselves to urban areas. After independence there is no 'national' program so worker demands are seen as scandalous by peasants (p. 97). Fanon argues that there is need for a social program for the whole nation but trade unions fail to link up with the spontaneous revolutionary peasantry.

If the revolutionary intellectuals and party militants ask more radical questions about the direction of the revolution, this can provoke a split. Illegal and legal tendencies develop with the former driven out to the countryside. Here they make contact with the 'revolutionary' peasantry who protects them (pp. 100-1). They find peasants ready for violent action and are now able to educate them. The nationalist party opposes armed struggle as futile but they are more and more isolated. Eventually though, the revolutionaries must enter the cities. Approaches to old Left comrades fail and Fanon sees the *lumpenproletariat* as the agent of change in the cities.

The first spontaneous uprisings in the countryside have the simple aim of removing the foreigners. Local actions are uncoordinated at first but gradually solidarity and communications develop. The limitations of local actions become apparent when the colonialist offensive squashes localised resistance. There is then a turn to guerilla warfare. This form of struggle is distinctly national. As guerillas travel the country, regional and clan alliances alter. Now the colonised pursues the settler, nevertheless, to sustain such a people's war requires a raising of consciousness. There arises the need for a central authority and a standing army as well as political education of the rank and file. As this point the peasant revolt becomes a revolutionary war. The coloniser's response is to make concessions, foster tradition divisions and recruit *lumpen* elements to sow division. To counter these tactics, education becomes a 'historic need' as 'revenge cannot sustain a war of liberation'; hatred alone cannot draw up a program. The aim is to eventually force the enemy to recognise that it is in their interests to grant independence (pp. 110-3) and this means people must see that concessions only come about by force, and that the colonisers' concessions are both forced out of them and only superficial.

All this requires organisation based 'inside the structure of the people', the transformation of traditional institutions and education with a focus on who operates in the national interest. Nationalism becomes social and economic awareness and the earlier Manicheism breaks up (p. 114). Militants begin to see that in breaking down colonial oppression they are building up a new system of exploitation. At first this is disorienting:

The people find out that iniquitous fact of exploitation can wear a black face or an Arab one; and they raise the cry of 'treason!' But the cry is mistaken; and the mistake must be corrected. The treason is not national, it is social. The people must be taught to cry 'Stop thief!' (p. 115).

It turns out that not all settlers are alike, nor are all 'natives' allies. As the Manichean pattern breaks down those formerly seen as another 'species' are no longer all the same. 'Consciousness slowly dawns upon truths that are only partial, limited and unstable.' All this is a slow and complex process, with ebbs and flows. The leaders must be subtle; admit their errors, build up a militant fighting organisation.

Fanon concludes:

Violence alone, violence committed by the people, violence organised and educated by its leaders, makes it possible for the masses to understand social truths and gives the key to them. Without that struggle, without that knowledge of that practice of action, there's nothing but a fancy dress parade and the blare of trumpets (p. 117).

Without the struggle, Fanon maintains, there are a few reforms at the top and the mass of people still living in the Middle Ages.

### **'Postcolonial' Struggles**

In Chapter Three 'The Pitfalls of National Consciousness' Fanon completes his class analysis of the national liberation movement and the vicissitudes of consciousness and conflict that accompany it. The focus now is on the post-independence dynamics.

Fanon argues that national consciousness; while it may express the aspirations of a people for liberation can easily become an empty shell. This is not merely due to weaknesses left behind by the colonialists but is indigenous. The problem lies in the weaknesses of the national middle class who are not able to replace the colonialist bourgeoisie. They call out for help from the mother country seeking to garner the benefits the colonisers once kept to themselves: 'its innermost vocation seems to be to keep in the running and be part of the racket'.

Fanon goes on that 'in an under-developed country an authentic national middle-class ought to consider as its bounden duty to betray the calling that fate has marked out for it, and to put itself to school with the people'. They have no post-independence plan or program and very little economic knowledge upon which to base one. While they once mobilised the masses they now seek nationalisation. Not as the transfer power to the people but 'to them, nationalisation quite simply means the transfer into native hands of those unfair advantages which are a legacy of the colonial period' (pp. 122-4). They continue to serve as intermediaries. The comprador bourgeoisie has the typical spirit of bourgeois indulgence without the dynamism. Landed interests also want nationalisation of land and demand concessions from the state without increasing productivity.

The bourgeoisie calls for nationalisation and for Africanisation; they demand the positions once held by whites. Nationalism passes to chauvinism and racism; Arabs are played off against Africans, nation against nation. In this the colonial bourgeoisie reflects the crudities of the Europeans. Their narrow nationalism and racism lacks even a minimum of humanist content, while the Western bourgeoisie is racist it is strong enough to disguise this with proclamations of the dignity of humanity. Nationalist parties play at parliament but are always ready with the big stick to jostle the masses.

Usually a charismatic leader is needed, one with credentials in the struggle, one who has the trust and confidence of the masses. His new role will be to stabilise the regime and the control of the bourgeoisie. He becomes 'the general president of that company of profiteers impatient for their returns which constitute the national bourgeoisie' (p. 134). The new leader acts as a brake on consciousness, he demands exertions from the masses in the name of the nation, which now represents bourgeois interests. He preaches about the glory of the past struggle and the escape from colonialism, for the masses nothing much has changed. Instead of the party being a 'mouthpiece for the people' it disintegrates into a bureaucracy.



Fanon notes that:

Now it is that the attitude taken up by certain militants during the struggle for liberation is seen to be justified, for the fact that in the thick of the fight more than a few militants asked the leaders to formulate a dogma, to set out their objectives and to draw up a programme. But under the pretext of safeguarding national unity, the leaders categorically refuse to attempt such a task (p. 137).

The militants are asked to retire, to take positions in the bureaucracy. 'The party becomes a means of private advancement' (p. 138).

This leads Fanon to the conclusion that the bourgeoisie should not be allowed to take root:

The theoretical question that for the last fifty years has been raised whenever the history of under-developed countries is under discussion - whether or not the bourgeois phase can be skipped - ought to be answered in the field of revolutionary action, and not by logic. The bourgeois phase in under-developed countries can only justify itself in so far as the national bourgeoisie has sufficient economic and technical strength to build up a bourgeois society, to create the conditions necessary for the development of a large-scale proletariat, to mechanise agriculture and finally to make possible the existence of an authentic national culture (p. 141).

The rising 'native' bourgeoisie must be opposed, not because it slows down development, but because it is 'good for nothing.' Fanon continues:

In fact the bourgeois phase in the history of under-developed countries is a completely useless phase. When this caste has vanished, devoured by its own contradictions, it will be seen that nothing new has happened since independence was proclaimed, and that everything must be started again from scratch. The changeover will not take place at the level of the structures set up by the bourgeoisie during its reign, since that caste has done nothing more than take over unchanged the legacy of the economy, the thought and the institutions left by the colonialists (p. 142).

Numerically the bourgeoisie is weak but gives the appearance of strength as it takes its place in the towns. It really serves as an intermediary for the foreign bourgeoisie to whom it looks for guidance and for contracts. Fanon argues that instead of allowing them to take over where the colonists left off other measures need to be taken:

If the government wants to bring the country out of its stagnation set it well on the road towards development and progress, it must first and foremost nationalise the middle-man's trading sector...Nationalising the intermediary sector means organising wholesale and retail co-operatives on a democratic basis; it also means decentralising these co-operatives by getting the mass of the people interested in the ordering of public affairs (p. 144-5).

This requires political education of the masses; not the mere selling of government policy directives delivered from the top. The colonial bourgeoisie 'have not yet the cynicism nor the unruffled calm' of their western counterparts, and thus relies more on demagoguery, on treating the masses as children. The party tends to fall in behind the administration and provides a disciplining measure and a barometer. 'The militant is turned into an informer.' The party that formerly mobilised the masses now demobilises them. In some places the national party falls back from representing the totality into sectional interests, not just bourgeois but sometimes there is a 'tribalising of the central authority'. From pan-African and pan-Islamic views, even national unity dissolves into regional or factional disputes (pp. 146-7).

The party's true role should be, not as a tool of government, but as a tool of the people. It needs to help the country 'develop not only its towns but also the brains of its inhabitants' (p. 148). To do this the party must be decentralised; leaders should avoid the capital. The regional head of the party need not be the region's administrative head. One needs to keep rural areas viable to stop urban drift and the massive growth of unemployment. For Fanon the party needs to draw the masses into action 'For the people, the party is not an authority, but an organism through which they as the people exercise their authority and express their will...' (p. 149).

You can easily prove that the masses can be managed from above but language need not be used to keep the masses ignorant, but to educate them and to learn from them (p. 151). During the war of national liberation the FLN experienced this. If shopkeepers tried to profit from shortages, rational planning was introduced. After this if hoarding occurred, fines were introduced that went into village development or the business was confiscated and the owner paid an allowance. From this the people learned the laws of economics.

The people come to realise everything depends on them, production increases. In this way the Algerians developed a consciousness of what belongs to them in a national sense. How was this achieved? In Algeria 'the test of force was inevitable; but in other countries through political action.' This democracy takes time and experience. The settlers once complained that natives were lazy now the ruling class takes up the same cry; and calls for more sacrifices. The militants need to educate people to see through this (pp. 155-7). Fanon continues:

Now political education means the opening of minds, awakening them, and allowing the birth of their intelligence; as Césaire said it is to 'invent souls', 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 relies on them. The duty of those at the head of the movement is to have the masses behind them...Only those underdeveloped countries led by revolutionary elites who have come up from the people can today allow the entry of the masses upon the scene of history. But, we must repeat, it is absolutely necessary to oppose vigorously and definitively the birth of a national bourgeoisie and a privileged caste (pp. 157-9).

To this end, young people need enlightening. 'Women will have exactly the same place as men, not in the clauses of the constitution but in the life of every day: in the factory, at school and in the parliament' (p. 161). The army should be used as a service that unites the nation lest it 'goes into politics'. National service should be civil not just military. The people's militia needs to be strengthened so the nation fights and works together.

Fanon finishes his sketch with a warning:

Nationalism is not a political doctrine nor a programme. If you really wish your country to avoid regression, or at best halts and uncertainties, a rapid step must be taken from national consciousness to political and social consciousness. The nation does not exist except in a programme which has been worked out by revolutionary leaders and taken up with full understanding and enthusiasm by the masses (pp. 161-2).

## The Dialectical Struggle over Culture

In Chapter Four of Wretched of the Earth entitled 'On National Culture' Fanon analyses the struggle over culture in the colonial context. In the early stage of the colonial struggle the colonialists try to disarm the nationalists by economic aid but it is soon evident that this reduces profits and creates discontent at 'home'. When this fails there is a return to the old tactics of force but apart from economic exploitation and the use of force the struggle against oppression takes place at the level of culture. The colonising power is not content with control of the present; it also wants to control the past. Colonialism destroys the present and distorts the past so that colonisation appears like the entry of light into a dark world. This buttresses their claim that if they left; the country would fall (back) into barbarism. Thus the rediscovery of a 'native' culture is a necessity for any political program (p. 170-1).

The colonialist attacks the absence of 'native' cultures, denying the existence of culture on the whole continent. This denigration of African or Arab culture means the intellectual's response is the search for a 'black' culture or Arab culture rather than a national one. This results in a racialising of their claims and in the creation of *Negritude* or Pan-Islamic revivals. Fanon argues, this is a 'blind alley' as it implies that all blacks have something in common 'in so far as they were defined in relation to the whites.' The limits of this lay in the fact that 'every culture is first and foremost national' (p. 171-4).

The recovery of the past provides a framework for the politicians, but for intellectuals they occupy a contradictory position between two cultures. Even though the West is rejected as the struggle heats up, it is difficult for intellectuals to reject it wholly. When the intellectual returns to the people, the customs and traditions they have unearthed turn out to be banal or exotic rather than authentic. They ape the aspects of the image the colonialists have of them; exaggerate them. This can cause the settlers quite a scandal. The colonial intellectual is labelled as falling back into 'the ways of niggers'.

Again Fanon returns to his idea of three phases, this time applied to native writers. The first response (after physical resistance is eliminated) is the assimilation of the culture of the occupying power, in which they mirror the trends of the mother country. The second is a process of immersion in 'native' culture. They are in the culture but not of it; cut off from the people they recall the past and the old legends. Finally there is a 'fighting phase'. Instead of being absorbed by the people and valorising their customs; they emerge as an 'awakener of the people.' There emerges a fighting, revolutionary and national literature.

Fighting on the cultural front alone is not enough, spreading out your cultural treasures seems both exotic and banal. The occupiers show no desire to leave on that account. 'Custom is always the deterioration of culture' and customs, more or less exotic, are what the intellectual has been collecting. However,

The native intellectual nevertheless sooner or later will realise that you do not show proof of your nation from its culture but that you substantiate its existence in the fight which the people wage against the forces of occupation (p. 179).

At first, artists seek the truth of the nation in the traditions of the past not in actual events. In the final stage, when the struggle is taken up to the colonialists 'the significance of tradition changes' (p. 180). The search for a national art and literature in the past, forgets that the customs are a defence against colonialism and that an authentic national work of art must deal with a changing

reality. The authentic poet must clearly see the people and they cannot do this if they do not realise how estranged they are from them. Their reality must be interpreted from a revolutionary viewpoint. Fanon uses Keita Fodeba's poetry to illustrate. Poetry (such as Fodeba's 'African Ballets') is not 'merely an intellectual advance, but a political advance'. The past is not a repository of a timeless authentic truth but should be used 'with the intention of opening the future, as an invitation to action and a basis for hope' (p. 187).

Fanon begins to explain his idea of culture:

To fight for a national culture means in the first place to fight for the liberation of the nation, the material key-stone which makes the building of a culture possible. There is no other fight for culture that can develop apart from popular struggle (pp. 187-8).

Delving into the past is not sufficient to counter the coloniser's attempt to falsify history. One must work in the popular struggles. Fanon goes on:

A national culture is not a folklore, nor an abstract populism that believes it can discover the people's true nature. It is not made up of the inert dregs of gratuitous actions, that is to say actions which are less and less attached to the ever-present reality of the people. A national culture is the whole body of efforts made by a people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify and praise the action through which that people has created itself and keeps itself in existence (p. 188).

African nations have a common destiny in having a common oppressor in imperialism but their cultures do not have a common destiny. There are no campaigns to set up black republics and Fanon, looking at the rhetoric of black nationalists, identifies the key issue:

The problem is to get to know the place that these men mean to give their people, the kind of social relations that they decide to set up and the conception that they have of the future of humanity. It is this that counts; everything else is mystification, signifying nothing (p. 189).

In 1959, Africans met and all spoke of 'unity' but now in the United Nations they give support to France against Algeria. It is not poetry and folklore that constitute a culture but the people's struggles around culture that give it substance. No one can truly support African culture unless they support the creation of conditions necessary for the existence of that culture namely the liberation of the continent.

The second part of the chapter subtitled 'Reciprocal Bases of National Culture and the Fight for Freedom' is a copy of his statement to the Second Congress of Black Artists and Writers in Rome, 1959. Colonial domination as a total system obliterates the national culture and enslaves the people. Fanon refers to his earlier speech 'Racism and Culture' showing how mummification replaces the native culture's dynamism. Every effort is made to force the colonised to admit the inferiority of their culture, the non-existence of their nation and their biological inferiority. The mass of people maintain their traditions while the intellectual absorbs the culture of the occupying power and criticises his own (p. 190).

Increasingly the culture is contested. The coloniser sees the retreat into tradition as resistance, but it is not a real solution, and as time goes on, culture is reduced to emaciated habits and styles of dress. The negation of culture breeds hostility in the natives and as they rise to combativity, national consciousness returns albeit dimly. There are new movements from poetic tragedy to novels of passion and critique. Gradually the 'native' intellectual moves from addressing the oppressor to addressing natives. The lament first makes the indictment; then it makes an appeal. In the period

that follows, the words of command are heard (p. 191-3). As the struggle heats up, a national literature, a 'literature of combat' emerges. It is a literature of combat:

because it moulds the national consciousness, giving it form and contours and flinging open before it new and boundless horizons; it is a literature of combat because it assumes responsibility, and because it is the will to liberty expressed in terms of time and space (p. 193).

At the level of oral tradition, the stories of the people are taken up and re-worked by the story tellers. No longer simply stories of the past, the traditions come to life and the communities sit and listen. Other handicrafts become more innovative. New colours and styles appear, for example Negro blues become new styles of jazz. These new expressions show a maturing of national consciousness and with it the need for independence (p. 196).

Fanon then asks 'what are the relations between struggle and culture?'

We believe that the conscious and organised undertaking by a colonised people to re-establish the sovereignty of that nation constitutes the most complete and obvious cultural manifestation that exists (p. 197).

Culture develops not just by reinventing the old culture but the struggle for freedom aims at a new set of social relations that changes the form and content of the culture. 'After the conflict there is not only the disappearance of colonialism but also the disappearance of the colonised man' (p. 197).

Fanon closes with some criticisms of those who say that the world has moved beyond national claims to universal human ones. He says that it is a mistake to try and skip the national phase of consciousness. It is a dialectic of the universal and the particular. Consciousness of one's self is a guarantee of communication, not an ending of it. 'National consciousness, which is not nationalism, is the only thing that will give us an international dimension'. The task is nation building and this will create universalising values. 'It is at the heart of national consciousness that international consciousness lives and grows. And this two-fold emerging is ultimately the only source of all culture' (pp. 198-9).

### **The Drawbacks of Violence: Clinical Notes**

In this final chapter entitled 'Colonial War and Mental Disorders' Fanon returns to psychiatry. He views the Algerian war as a source of mental illness. Drawing upon his experiences in Algeria and Tunisia he looks at the types of mental effects caused by the war. As he says: 'colonialism in its essence was already taking on the aspect of a fertile purveyor for psychiatric hospitals' (p. 203).

Fanon argues that it must be remembered that colonisation is more than domination. The Germans defeated the French in the war without destroying their humanity:

In Algeria there is not simply the domination but the decision to the letter not to occupy anything more than the sum total of the land. The Algerians, the veiled women, the palm-trees and the camels make up the landscape, the *natural* background to the human presence of the French (p. 204).

Fanon labels the psychiatric cases as ‘reactionary psychoses’, noting also that these can arise not just in response to a particular event but as an effect of the ‘pitiless atmosphere’ of the Algerian war:

For colonialism has not simply depersonalised the individual it has colonised; this depersonalisation is equally felt in the collective sphere, on the level of social structures. The colonised people find that they are reduced to a body of individuals who only find cohesion when in the presence of the colonising nation (p. 238).

In the first series of cases Fanon describes the impotence of an Algerian man upon discovering that his wife was raped by French troops. She is disgraced and writes to him telling him to forget her. While he remained immersed in FLN activities he became increasingly anxious and unable to function sexually. While he and his wife were not close and he feels repelled by what happened to her, he realised that she had been raped while protecting him and the network. This made him see her in a new light. After counselling he became politically active again and decided that after the war he will return to his wife.

Other cases include: patients who develop homicidal impulses after they survive mass murders, an FLN militant haunted by dreams of the woman he killed, a European policeman haunted by the screams of those he has tortured and another whose work makes him prone to ‘fits of violent behaviour’ towards his wife and child. These cases were the result of specific instances but others labelled series ‘B’, Fanon sees as less specific. Two teenage Algerian boys kill their European playmate without remorse. Upon interrogation they say that French want to kill all Arabs and this was their response. Another man had accusatory delusions of being labelled a coward or a traitor for his lack of participation in the national struggle. There is a French woman whose father had been killed suffering ‘anxiety psychoses’ as well as general cases of disturbed behaviour in children under ten (bed-wetting, sleeplessness, fear of loud noises).

Series ‘C’ describes some of the psychological effects of torture relating to the method used. Those who undergo general interrogation tend to be nervous and depressed with a loss of appetite and a fear of being alone with a generalised feeling of injustice and indifference to moral arguments. Those who have suffered electrical torture suffer pins and needles, with a feeling as if their head is bursting, apathy and fear of electricity. Those tortured with ‘truth serum’ are anxious and repeat consistently that they did not tell. Their intellect is clouded and they have a phobia of conversation and denial of the truth and falsity of any statement. Those subject to ‘brainwashing’ techniques are made to recite anti-national slogans or construct arguments against the Algerian revolution. They have a fear of collective discussion and find it impossible to explain or defend any position. The final series ‘D’ discusses psycho-somatic responses like stomach ulcers, colic, menstrual problems, hair-whitening and tachycardia. In this group Fanon argues that one set of symptoms namely a generalised contraction with muscular stiffness is specific to Algeria, one patient saying “see I’m already stiff like a dead man.”

After outlaying these cases, Fanon discusses the work of Porot and Corrothers on the psychology of the African.<sup>2</sup> Here he presents his clinical critique of the Algiers School that argued that the ‘the normal African is a “lobotomised European”’ (p. 245). He notes that this school sees the Algerian as a ‘born criminal’ and lazy. Interestingly Fanon does not argue against this on moral grounds as racist but proceeds in realist fashion locating the ‘diagnosis’ in the colonial context. He notes that

---

<sup>2</sup> This section of the book is based on an article Fanon published in 1955 entitled ‘Reflections on Ethnopsychiatry’.

depression is associated with suicide in Europeans but this is not the case with depressed Algerian patients. The Algiers School created a new category 'homicidal melancholia' based on the idea that since Algerians lack an 'inner life' or a conscience they direct their aggression outward, not inwards as Europeans do when depressed. Fanon argues that the reason for the high crime rate among Algerians (he does not deny its existence) is the colonial situation itself. The frustrations of everyday life are directed not at the cause but toward the nearest source of frustration - the local shopkeeper or the wife and children:

The Algerian's criminality, his impulsivity and the violence of his murders are therefore not the consequence of the organisation of his nervous system nor of his characterial originality, but the direct product of the colonial situation (p. 250).

This purpose of explaining all this says Fanon is not to demonstrate the falseness of the Algiers School so much as to 'raise an important theoretical and practical problem':

The important theoretical problem is that it is necessary at all times and in all places to make explicit, to demystify, and to harry the insult to mankind that exists in oneself. There must be no waiting until the nation has produced new men; there must be no waiting until men are imperceptibly transformed by revolutionary processes in perpetual renewal. It is quite true that these two processes are essential. But consciousness must be helped. The application of revolutionary theory, if it is to be completely liberating and particularly fruitful, exacts that nothing unusual should exist. One feels with particular force the necessity to totalise the event, to draw everything after one, to settle everything, to be responsible for everything. Now conscience no longer boggles at going back to the past, or at marking time if it is necessary.

This is why the progress made by a fighting unit over a piece of ground at the end of an ambush does not mean rest, but rather is the signal for consciousness to take another step forward, for everything ought to keep pace together (p. 247).

Initially the Algerians (including interestingly the *colons*) accept the verdict of the colonists, that they are 'hot-blooded' or impetuous. Later they begin to subvert this and use it against the coloniser. With the outbreak of the war criminality declines instead of the colony being like a farmyard pecking order that each person standing over the weaker ones there is a new solidarity.<sup>3</sup>

The final chapter serves as an epilogue. Fanon urges his comrades to forget Europe. 'Let us leave this Europe where they are never done talking of Man, yet murder men everywhere they find them...today we know with what sufferings humanity has paid for every one of their triumphs of the mind' (p. 252). There is no value in catching up to Europe; the USA has followed this path and has come to represent the worst, rather than the best, of Europe.

It is time to forge a new path for a liberated humanity. Europe has failed in the mission that she set herself. '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' (p. 253). Holding four-fifths of the world in slavery, even European workers are beholden to the great spirit of Europe. It falls then to the third world to complete the liberation project. Fanon closes with the words:

For Europe, for ourselves and for humanity, comrades, we must turn over a new leaf, we must work out new concepts, and try and set afoot a new man (p. 255).

---

<sup>3</sup> Here Fanon mentions the wartime scene of children fighting for scraps from soldiers. One is reminded of his definition of 'abnormal' as 'one who begs...'