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The Wretched of the Earth as Interrogation-Machine: Nation, Religion, and Race in Fanon's Decolonization Manifesto

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ABSTRACT: Taking as our point of departure the final line of Frantz Fanon's first book, *Black Skins, White Masks* (1952) "– Oh my body, always make me a man who questions! –" we examine how Fanon's posthumously published *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) may be treated as a kind of "interrogation-machine." Rather than approach this work as either transparently expressing the intentions of its author ("the text as body") or as a surface sliding across meanings that can be assembled in any number of ways ("the text as machine"), we read three key episodes in *The Wretched of the Earth* as posing questions in ways that exceed the answers Fanon himself offers – a prose poem by Guinea writer Fodéba Keïta; Fanon's treatment of the radical potential of Islam through his correspondence with Iranian sociologist Ali Shariati; and the responses of his patients to the trauma of torture. In highlighting these interlocutors, who tend to be neglected by most commentators on Fanon, we conclude that the text functions as a kind of "manifesto" appealing to different audiences in the tradition of Marx and Engels, both colonized and colonizer. We also consider how Fanon's call for a "new humanism" speaks to our own crises of virulent state-nationalism, religious fundamentalism, and institutionalized racism.

KEYWORDS: Fanon, colonialism, national liberation, Islam, racism, resentment

Introduction: The WE-Machine

On the day of Frantz Omar Fanon's (1925-1961) death, the French police confiscated copies of *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) from Paris bookshops (Bhabha 2004, viii). *The Wretched of the Earth*, published at the very end of Fanon's life, reads like it ought to be read aloud posthumously to the masses to inspire revolution. The text in the first instance is a "decolonization manifesto" for the Algerians, Fanon's primary interlocutors, challenging them to see through the fight against the French colonizers. But it is also addressed to all oppressed peoples suffering the violence of colonialism, and thus could be applicable in other times and places as well. Anyone who reads this work can hear the urgency in Fanon's voice, perhaps because it was literally written in his dying days as he battled leukemia. In fact, much of it was dictated to his wife as he lay on his deathbed, so that his writing often takes on "the rhythm of a body in motion and the cadences of the breathing voice" (Cherki 2006, 14). Less a prophecy or a program as is often assumed, *The Wretched of the Earth* is Fanon's final call to action to the colonized people of the world. Perhaps it is for this reason that French authorities, in the middle of the Algerian War (1954-1962) and on the day of Fanon's death, feared the intensity of his message resonating in the ears of the colonized.

As a Black man, revolutionary fighter, Marxist, and psychologist, Fanon does not just address 20th century colonialism in *The Wretched of the Earth*. He also speaks to the ways the social catastrophes of racism, land seizures, capitalist crises, and mental illnesses emerging from colonialism are interconnected. These injustices are based on complex institutional structures and informal networks which require analysis if one is to make sense of the whole. Fanon does more than just examine the individual threads; he explicates the construction and unravelling of the entire web. Though it is a text written primarily to Algeria, where Fanon fought as a revolutionary against the French, Fanon did not live to see Algeria liberated from the colonizers, or to witness the full impact of his words on the Algerian people or other colonized peoples to whom it addressed. In both its medium and its message Fanon's text is arguably something other and even greater than what he could have anticipated. As a work that continues to inspire activists committed to fighting against global systems of injustice, it also captivates scholars who hope to understand the complexity of the social issues that he speaks to, above all those that concern the role of revolutionary violence and the relevance of Marxist analytical categories in making sense of that violence. Here we focus on three distinct yet deeply interconnected strands of this text that have received varying degrees of attention and have troubled later readers: national liberation, religiously inspired revolution, and racialized resentment. These themes are activated in and through the text through the ways in which Fanon interrogates and is interrogated by interlocutors who are often overlooked in readings of this text, respectively: the Guinean writer and politician Fodéba Keïta; the Iranian sociologist and revolutionary Ali Shariati; and two anonymous psychiatric patients, a French torturer and his Algerian victim. In approaching the text from the perspective of these figures and with these general issues in mind, we are interested in the answers Fanon provided in response to his own situation as well as in the questions he poses to our times.

We treat the text of *The Wretched of the Earth* as an "interrogation-machine," that is, as a work that continues to ask questions long after the person who first posed them and the people to whom they were addressed have passed on. By this we do not mean to ignore the ways in which Fanon's unique embodied voice speaks through this text to his intended readers; rather, we approach the text in a way that remains open to receiving its message while also rethinking its many meanings for ourselves. To clarify this point, it is useful to note the distinction Paul de Man makes in *Allegories of Reading* between "text as machine" and "text as body" (De Man 1979, 298). De Man contrasts *the body of the text* on the one hand, where meaning is presumably fixed by the intentions of the author or the referents of its words, with *the machinations of the text* on the other, where meaning may slide across multiple surfaces of signification and be reassembled in multiple ways as it is operated on by readers. Rather than oppose these ways of approaching a text, we envision *The Wretched of the Earth* as an assemblage of "body-text-machine." That is, since Fanon's own embodied condition in dictating and writing this text itself bears witness to its fragmentary design as in part a posthumous work, such an assemblage poses questions to a variety of actual and anticipated readers situated across many possible and practical contexts. We follow Charles Barbour in his reading of Marx by treating Fanon's influential final work not just as the last testament of a dying man and a dying colonialism, but also as a living work that others can dismantle and recompose for other times and circumstances (Barbour 2012, 10-12; Kemple 2022, 17-18).

To illustrate our approach, we imagine the text somewhat anachronistically as a kind of program (platform) or set of applications (apps) displayed on a modern-day hand-held communication device (such as a cell-phone for messaging and texting). That is, the text operates through reading-and-writing-bodies that transmit messages across other devices and over a wide range of thinking-feeling-acting bodies. The "machinations" of the text appeal to affects, as in its references to nationalist aspirations, religious passions, and feelings of resentment, even as they resonate with the intellect, through philosophical citations, historical claims, and political arguments. Less a mechanism for one-to-one messaging between networked yet isolated individuals (on the model of an iPhone), the text of *The Wretched of the Earth* might be called a *WE-Machine*, a medium for posing new questions relating to other occasions, and a means of calling for collective action while addressing multiple groups in many contexts.[1] Such questions ultimately exceed the intentions of the author or the text's anticipated readers, and sometimes reach beyond the manifest meanings of their referents or interpretations of their recipients. Just as Fanon concludes his first book, *Black Skin, White Masks,* with a "final prayer: O my body, always make me a man who questions!," so we begin by approaching his last book, *The Wretched of the Earth*, as an *interrogation-machine* that challenges today's readers to find applications to the global issues we continue to face concerning nation, religion, and race (Fanon 2008, 206).

The Question of National Liberation

For many readers, the question of nationalism is itself one of the most questionable aspects of Fanon's argument in *The Wretched of the Earth* (Lazarus 1999; Neocosmos 2011; Zeiny 2020). As he emphasizes in the chapter "On National Culture," which originated as a paper presented at the Second Congress of Black Writers and Artists in Rome in 1959, to the extent that literary and intellectual culture expresses the restless aspirations of a people, "they will necessarily lead to the discovery and advancement of *universalizing values*":

> Far then from distancing it from other nations, national liberation puts the nation on the stage of history. It is at the heart of national consciousness that *international consciousness* establishes itself and thrives. (Fanon 2004, 180)

As Fanon states in the opening sentence of *The Wretched of the Earth*, national liberation is among other things another name – a metonym – for decolonization, which he insists is "always a violent phenomenon [*un phénomène violent*]" (Fanon 2004, 1). At stake in this struggle is not just the means of decolonization employed in local settings but also its ends as a globalizing movement, an emancipatory aspiration, and a cosmopolitan ideal. Even as he considers the relationship of cultural means to political ends, Fanon's reflections also pose another question to those who read him in other times and places: can pre-colonial customs, structures of feeling, and political norms potentially inspire post-colonial national culture and transnational struggles?

Following Marx and Engels in *The Communist Manifesto*, Fanon notes that nationalism is a modern product of globalized trade networks and capitalist processes of exploitation as well as a cornerstone of international solidarity and cosmopolitan culture. He juxtaposes his conception of an anti-colonial and nationalist bourgeoisie, which reproduces and expands inequalities between core and peripheral countries while exacerbating uneven and underdevelopment, with what may be called the "nationalist internationalism" of an anti-colonial alliance and militant insurgency (Lazarus 1999, 162). The former "nationalism of the bourgeoisie" is primarily concerned with reproducing local social hierarchies and exploiting the international division of labour in the pursuit of capital accumulation, and in the interests of its own private enrichment as a social class or as a means of reinforcing state power and consolidating social order through public mechanisms of party representation. By contrast, the latter "universalist nationalism" of allied intellectuals and activists from diverse social strata entails perpetually interrogating the misadventures of state political processes, and thus raising questions about the meaning of popular culture for an emerging independent nation. This "nationalism from within and below" evokes questions about whether nationalist movements of resistance can survive globalization; whether local customs will be forced to retreat into chauvinism and nativism; or whether national culture may furnish the motivation for liberation struggles.

Fanon's challenging argument implicitly responds to the argument that Marx and Engels make in *The Communist Manifesto* about whether national identities are destined to disappear:

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[1] Writing on the traditional, ancestral, and stolen Indigenous lands known as Canada and across two generations, we wish to acknowledge the shifting and contested character of this collective "WE." Since we began collaborating on this piece in the early days of the global pandemic, the designation "WE" has also taken on the connotation of Canadian-style humanitarian colonialism in the form of the WE Charity Scandal (Canadaland 2021).

> National differences and antagonisms between peoples are daily vanishing more and more with the development of the bourgeoisie, with freedom of trade, the world market, uniformity in industrial production and in corresponding conditions of existence. (Marx and Engels 2004, 79)

Fanon revises this classic thesis by "slightly stretching" Marxist terminology to address the colonial realities of the second half of the 20th century, especially in Africa and specifically in Algeria (Fanon 2004, 5). Rather than noting the political tactics and strategies of oppositional national parties, as Marx and Engels (2004, 93-94) do in the final section of the *Manifesto,* Fanon addresses these familiar interlocutors in the text by examining what he calls "the trials and tribulations [*les m*ésaventures] of the national consciousness," with equal concern for its regressive tendencies and its progressive possibilities.

Fanon is especially critical of the mentality of the national petty bourgeoisie, which pursues trade rather than industry; is easily distracted by local disputes at the expense of transnational struggles; and acts in its own self-interest rather than for the advancement of popular movements. At best, this nationalist bourgeoisie treats the party as an instrument in the hands of the government, and at worst, as an intelligence agency to pacify the masses or a police force to impose order on insurgents. Against this nationalist strategy, Fanon asserts that "the party is an instrument in the hands of the people, the vigorous spokesperson and the incorruptible defender of the masses" (Fanon 2004, 127, 130). Drawing explicitly on his experiences as a member of the Front de la Libération Nationale (FLN) in Algeria from 1956 to 1961, Fanon optimistically characterizes the political mission of the party as a pedagogical project for opening up the minds of citizens to the wider world, especially the peasants and lumpenproletarians who may be more inclined to spontaneous revolt than their co-opted counterparts among the urban working classes: "The meeting of the local cell or the committee meeting is a liturgical act. … At every meeting the brain multiplies the association of ideas and the eye discovers a wider human panorama" (Fanon 2004, 136). In effect, Fanon's text moves beyond providing a critical assessment of anti-colonial treatises and pro-capitalist tracts, as Marx and Engels do in their review of "socialist and communist literature," by invoking practical models for political awakening and by articulating a social imaginary and educational programs for socio-economic transformation (Marx and Engels 2004, 83-92).

To illustrate how these dilemmas of national culture play out quite literally on the "historical stage" of anti-colonial liberation, Fanon quotes a long passage from Guinea poet and politician Keïta Fodéba's "African Dawn" (*Aube Africaine*, 1957), a prose poem interrupted by guitar, kora, and balafon music that "interprets the rhythmic images of [Keïta's] country from a revolutionary perspective" (Fanon 2004, 163). The title alludes to "the combat between day and night" which punctuates the sequence of events experienced by the main character of the story, Naman, a peasant farmer who is awoken one morning by young girls chanting verses from the Koran. Naman is then called to the palaver tree by the elders, who decide he must follow the district guard to fight a war for the whites in Europe. The poem ends on the morning his wife Kadia learns he has been shot and killed in Dakar in a dispute between African soldiers and their white chiefs, at the very moment when his return home is announced. The climax of the story occurs some years before when the villagers learn that Naman has been taken prisoner by the Germans:

> The elders held counsel and decided that henceforth Naman was authorized to dance the Douga, the sacred dance of the vulture, reserved for those who had performed an exceptional feat. … Kadia found consolation in seeing her husband raised to the dignity of a national hero. (Keita in Fanon 2004, 166)

Without commenting explicitly on the historical event that Keïta's dramatic poem commemorates (the mutiny and massacre of colonial infantry (*tirailleurs*) at Thiaroye-sur-Mer in Senegal in 1944), Fanon focuses instead on its "pedagogical value" as both an intellectual exercise and a political treatise, if not also as an affective tract to stir people's emotions by inciting them to act (Fanon 2004, 167). He reads it as an allegory of national liberation in which all colonized subjects will recognize themselves, particularly people like Naman who have been conscripted to defend the liberty and civilization of the colonists and then used by them to break up the independence movement.

When we note that Keïta was himself executed several years later by Guinea President Sékou Touré, whom Fanon quotes approvingly in this context for calling on artists and intellectuals to commit themselves completely "to join with the people to make this revolution," then we might feel compelled to question Fanon's assertion that "national consciousness is the highest form of culture" (Fanon 2004, 145, 179; see Lazarus 1999, 180). To be sure, Fanon himself interrogates such nationalist misadventures from many perspectives throughout *The Wretched of the Earth*. He observes, for example, "how easy it is for young independent countries to switch back from nation to ethnic group and from state to tribe – a regression which is so terribly detrimental and prejudicial to the development of the nation and national unity" (Fanon 2004, 97). His emphasis on artistic, emotional, and intellectual culture as a possible foundation for national liberation is therefore not simply a modernist declaration of the death of "aboriginal society," which he presents as an artifact of colonialism, but rather the reverse side of this, in that "in the colonies the economic infrastructure is also a superstructure" (Fanon 2004, 5; Lazarus 1999, 172). In other words, in contrast to the metropole, the political and cultural superstructures of colonial society are integrated into the system's economic infrastructure. As Marx argues in the final chapter of *Capital*, titled "The Modern Theory of Colonization," in the colonies the dependence of workers and subjects on the conditions of capitalist settlement (*Ansiedlung*) does not appear as a law of nature, as it does in the "civilized" countries, but instead "must be created by artificial means" (Marx 1976, 934, 937). These instruments of colonial power include political coercion and ideological persuasion exercised by occupying authorities, which are vulnerable to resistance and subversion by colonized people when they break the lines of transmission between the national economy and global capital. As Marx and Engels and later Fanon acknowledge, the expression of discontent and revolt may come not just from the urban proletariat and rural peasantry but also from the lumpenproletariat and "the wretched of the earth" more broadly, as each of these classes draws upon emerging revolutionary or even older religious resources of struggle (Marx and Engels 2004, 72; Fanon 2004, 81).

The Question of Religious Revolution

While Fanon's endorsement of national culture in *The Wretched of the Earth* remains one of the most contested aspects of his "decolonization manifesto," his argument is further complicated when we consider religion as a form of culture with a possible political role in the project of decolonization. If nationalism runs the risk of creating further divisions and antagonisms both within and between nations, an endorsement of religion becomes even more questionable in the colonial contexts that Fanon speaks to, as well as in those he invokes only implicitly or not at all. Fanon views a revival of pride in national culture as a potentially effective strategy to combat the national degradation that occurs when the colonizer attempts "to convince the indigenous population it [will] save them from darkness" (Fanon 2004, 149). The colonizer sees native culture, traditions, language, and religion as belonging to an age of darkness, as a kind of "barbarism" that must therefore be enlightened (Fanon 2004, 149). Often overlooked in Fanon's endorsement of national culture is his corresponding appreciation for pre-colonial religious customs and ritualism potentially counteracting colonial occupation and its devastating effects on the social, economic, and cultural infrastructure of subjugated peoples, especially Islam in the Arab world.

Although his overall attitude towards religion remains guarded and even hostile at times, the careful reader can discern that Fanon is at times direct in expressing his appreciation of Islam as a form of national culture, and thus of political resistance. (Slisli 2008) He writes, for example, that in the Arab world "the struggle for national liberation was linked to a cultural phenomenon commonly known as the awakening of Islam. The passion displayed by contemporary Arab authors in reminding their people of the great chapters of Arab history is in response to the lies of the occupier" (Fanon 2004, 151). The value of an Islamic revival for Fanon lies in combating the spiritual degradation that colonial realities have imposed on the Arab colonies, convincing the people that their religion is backwards, an arrogance that is still evident today in the resurgence of Islamophobia in the global war on terror and beyond. With its open-ended multi-dimensional presentation of the religious sources of "national culture," *The Wretched of the Earth* invites contemporary readers to consider aspects of social phenomena that he himself does not give much attention to, but which provoke new questions and ideas for us today (Farahzad 2017).

This interpretive challenge is precisely what Fanon's contemporary Ali Shariati, the Iranian sociologist, Muslim intellectual, and anti-imperialist revolutionary, takes up in his reading of *The Wretched of the Earth*. Shariati is often credited as the ideologue of the Iranian Revolution of 1979 in presenting Shi'a Islam as a revolutionary religion promoting anti-Shah sentiments (Abrahamian 1982, 24-28; Bayat 2017). Shariati's political education was largely inspired by a skeptical view of Marx's critique of capitalism and colonialism. He was also Fanon's peer and spent his years studying at the Sorbonne while active in support of the Algerian War at the same time as Fanon was working with the FLN (Abrahamian 1982, 24-28). Shariati's interest in translating *The Wretched of the Earth* into Farsi for an Iranian audience was certainly in part an attempt to make this decolonization manifesto applicable to a country that had never been explicitly colonized but was rather targeted by western imperialism.[2] Translations *of The Wretched of the Earth* into other languages themselves constitute a mechanism through which the text comes to be used by activists in creating a "multiplicity of ideological interpretations" which respond to and provoke specific actions and affects (Farahzad 2017, 130). Shariati is among those social theorists who have used this text as a point of departure for their own teachings and practical programs, in part by adapting it to address questions of progress, knowledge, and belief posed by Islam (Byrd and Miri 2017).

Shariati is perhaps best known for arguing that reviving Islam as a social justice philosophy and "internationalist ideal" can combat the cultural degradation and sense of inferiority imposed on natives living in colonial and imperial situations (Rahnema 1998, 25). Though certainly idealistic about Islam's subversive potential, and decidedly more optimistic about the political prospects of revolutionary movements than Fanon, Shariati's hope for an Islamic revival is based on economic analyses and political principles that align with Fanon's appreciation for "the awakening of Islam" in the Arab world as a form of national culture (Fanon 2004, 151). In an exchange of letters the year *The Wretched of the Earth* was published, Fanon offers explicit support for Shariati's belief that revolution may be inspired by religious sensibilities, noting that the world of Islam – understood as both a philosophy and a people – has "fought against the west and colonialism more than all Asia and all Africa," and that western colonialism has "inflicted serious wounds on [Islam's] body and soul" (Fanon 2018, 668). Fanon partially endorses Shariati's aspiration that Islam can re-inspire Muslim people who have been oppressed and humiliated for centuries by the western conviction that Islam is inherently a barbaric, backwards, and violent religion. Though wary of the oppressive, sectarian, and regressive ways that an Islamic revival may manifest itself, he tells Shariati that it is "incumbent" on him and like-minded scholars to develop Islamic principles of social justice and to "*breathe this spirit* into the weary body of the Muslim orient" (Fanon 2018, 669).

Despite Fanon's support for Shariati's aspirations in these letters, he still expresses reservations that Islam may be too limiting as a political philosophy to serve an anti-oppressive cause insofar as religious sentiments hold an emancipated future hostage to conservative traditions: "I think that reviving sectarian and religious mindsets could impede this necessary [global] unification – already difficult to attain – and divert that nation yet to come … from its ideal future, bringing it instead closer to its past"(Fanon 2018,

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[2] As Fahahzad points out, the extent of Shariati's involvement in the translation of *The Wretched of the Earth* is contested, although he was certainly engaging with the works of Fanon for an Iranian audience (see also Rahnema 1998).

669). He goes on to express his skepticism towards the idea that inward spiritual exploration of the self may provide a means for liberation, since such an individual path may instead detract from the collective project of creating a universal philosophy that could unite oppressed people throughout the world (Shatz 2017). These reservations shed light on *The Wretched of the Earth* on the eve of its publication as a purposely open-ended text designed to resonate with colonized people in multiple contexts. Certainly, Islam may be useful in the Muslim colonies in igniting and reinvigorating the confidence the colonizer has tried to degrade, but Fanon's text is even more concerned to support global solidarity articulated through universal concepts that are not limited to any one religious group or nation.

Fanon's nuanced view of the revolutionary potential of Islam as proposed by Shariati is grounded in his overriding concerns with political strategy and tactics, and in this regard, it is congruent with Marx's own understanding of religion. The young Marx's notorious characterization of religion as the "opium of the people" has become emblematic of the Marxist disregard and disdain for all forms of religious expression (Marx 1975, 244). Taken from "A Contribution to a Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*: Introduction" (1844), this catchphrase on its own seems to emphasize the numbing, addictive, and escapist qualities of religion while obscuring any critical appreciation of its revolutionary potential (not to mention its historical resonance for Marx in the colonial context of the first Opium War). In the preceding lines that are often passed over, however, Marx highlights his positive appreciation for the critical and emotional sources of religious beliefs and practices: "Religious suffering is at one and the same time the expression of real suffering and a *protest* against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the *heart of a heartless world* and the *soul of soulless* conditions" (Marx 1975, 244; emphasis in the original). Rather than rejecting all religious expression as devoid of any liberatory potential, he sees religion as a form of protest against injustice, and as the "heart and soul" (*Gemüt und Geist*) of a heartless and soulless world.

Shariati's interest in the revolutionary politics of Islam may have drawn inspiration from the mystical and even lyrical tone that Marx sometimes assumes in describing how capitalist exploitation has hollowed out the world's spirit, despite his reservations about the atheistic underpinnings of Marxism. In the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, for instance, Marx writes that capitalist society "estranges man's own body from him, as it does external nature and his *spiritual essence,*" echoing Shariati's critical views on the soul-destroying character of western imperialism (Marx 2016, 52). Despite these affinities, outside Iran Shariati's critical view of Marxism has partly been shaped by the popularity of his posthumously published book *Marxism and Other Western Fallacies: An Islamic Critique*. The credibility of this book as an authentic representation of Shariati's ideas and the accuracy of the English translation are disputed among scholars (Abrahamian 1982). As the title suggests, Shariati makes the case against Marxism as a flawed form of liberatory humanism and advocates for Islam as an alternative philosophy. He argues that western philosophies of humanism, including Marxism, are based on ancient Greek myths in which the gods are depicted as man's first oppressor. To illustrate this point, he cites the myth of Prometheus who steals divine fire – understood both literally as a civilizing technology and metaphorically as an image of wisdom – to give to humans and is then punished by the gods. Within this classic story, the competitiveness, opposition, and jealousy of the Greek gods towards humans stand in stark juxtaposition to their role in fostering enlightenment and emancipation (Shariati 1980, 18).

Shariati is concerned with how this anti-theistic assumption has been internalized in the west, especially in political philosophies like Marxism, arguing that "the modern mind can hardly accept [religion] as a progressive, liberating force" (Shariati 1980, 49). But for Shariati, eastern religions like Islam imagine a very different relationship between humanity and God, one that western progressive scholars misrecognize in dismissing the emancipatory potential of any religion. He contrasts the Greek myth, where the gods punish Prometheus for giving the gift of wisdom to humanity, to the Islamic story of Iblis, where God damns a divine being who had resided in the highest ranks of heaven alongside angels for refusing to bow to the feet of Aadam (Shariati 1980, 18). Since Aadam is the first human from whom all of humanity descends, from an Islamic perspective God arguably places humans at a higher rank than even some divine entities. For Shariati, Islam reminds believers of their spiritual importance and relative ranking in the cosmos. For the oppressed soul and for "*les damnés de la terre*" (Fanon's phrase), this realization can be liberating, and may offer inspiration for combatting the moral degradation and social injustices suffered at the hands of colonizers operating in service of an imperialist system.

Although to varying degrees Fanon, Shariati, and Marx express considerable optimism regarding the revolutionary potential of a religious revival, Fanon is especially emphatic in issuing a warning that religion can impede universal projects of liberation. In this regard, Shariati's visionary claim that "Islam addresses economic welfare and social justice as principles of its social order" seems to ignore the history of political abuses justified by orthodox religious beliefs (Shariati 1980, 73). Despite his confidence in the emancipatory message of Islam, toward the end of *Marxism and Other Western Fallacies*, Shariati himself articulates a more cautious approach in arguing that the future he envisions is "neither predestined nor prefabricated. Instead, it remains to be built" (Shariati 1980, 96). Shariati is aware that even if Islam may potentially deliver or inspire movements for social justice, it has been and continues to be pressed into the service of repressive political agendas. Where Shariati reminds us of the lessons that a religion like Islam may potentially teach for liberatory politics, *The Wretched of the Earth* offers us a place to begin this inquiry and to examine its implications. Intellectuals and activists who hope to understand inequalities and combat injustices may find in that text a warning against the dangers of religious and sectarian politics, as well as inspiration in fighting for justice.

The Question of Racial Resentment

"At certain moments," Fanon writes in the conclusion to *Black Skin, White Masks*, "the black man is locked in his body" (Fanon 2008, 200). If an analysis of the revolutionary potential of religion and culture offers insight into the dynamics of colonized nationhood and popular struggles, then the psychology of political passions and the embodied relationship between racism, colonialism, and capitalism are for Fanon keys to unlocking the consciousness or soul (*psyche*) of the colonized individual (Appiah 2022). Max Silverman describes *Black Skin, White Masks* as a text that interrogates how "the economic, political, and ideological power of the West to *colonize the minds and bodies of others* was being challenged by new discourses and struggles of liberation by the victims of that power" (Silverman 2005, 2). Fanon offers "an intellectual critique and an existential project, an exposé of the ideological apparatus of colonialism and a passionate cry from deep within a body alienated by that system and in search of liberation from it" (Silverman 2005, 3). An analysis of colonial institutions is paired with an inquiry into the oppressed body/psyche/person. Fanon's opening question, "What does the black man *want*?," indicates the urgently personal and racialized nature of the colonized's demand for decolonization (Fanon 2008, xii).

As Homi Bhabha argues, "in privileging the psychic dimension [Fanon] changes not only what we understand by a *political* demand but transforms the very means by which we recognize and identify its *human* agency" (Bhabha 1986, 115). But Fanon is not so much privileging the psychic dimension as much as he is illustrating its *inherent* political nature.

> And then we were given the occasion to confront the white gaze. An unusual weight descended on us. … In the white world, the man of color encounters difficulties in elaborating his body schema. … I cast an objective gaze over myself, discovered my blackness, my ethnic features; deafened by cannibalism, backwardness, fetishism, racial stigmas. … I transported myself … far, very far from myself, and gave myself up as an object. What did this mean to me? Peeling, stripping my skin, causing a hemorrhage that

> left congealed black blood all over my body. (Fanon 2008, 90, 92)

The Wretched of the Earth builds on this earlier work's central question – "What does the black man *want*? –" in its more detailed depiction of colonial conditions that diminish and destroy the self-worth of Black people and their experiences under the gaze of white colonizers. In each book, Fanon illuminates a psycho-social dimension (seeing in "the white man's eyes" what racist colonialism has wrought) and the real, bloody wound of occupation ("a hemorrhage that left congealed black blood all over my body").

The later work turns these psychological judgements about inner life outward toward a political analysis of the Algerian War of Independence. In the final chapter, "Colonial War and Mental Disorders," Fanon provides graphic descriptions of French attempts to "colonize the minds and bodies" of others in the form of notes from his psychiatric practice. Here, he details several medical cases involving civilians, revolutionary fighters, and colonial officers. Understanding these fragmentary notes requires a perspective from readers that appreciates both the material *and* psychic violence inflicted on the oppressed. Rather than recentering psychology on individual suffering, Fanon sees his own work as a psychiatrist as a radical *political* intervention that acknowledges and draws upon resentment as a valid and indispensable anti-colonial response. The politics of resentment offers an approach to psychic trauma that engages with racism, colonialism, and capitalism in rethinking the potentialities of revolutionary struggle.

Throughout *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon describes how the colonized population is dehumanized intellectually, morally, and emotionally by the colonizer: "The colonist is not content with stating that the colonized world has lost its values or worse never possessed any. The 'native' is declared impervious to ethics, representing not only the absence of values but the negation of values" (Fanon 2004, 6). At the same time, the traditions of the native or indigenous culture are supposedly evidence of "innate depravity" (Fanon 2004, 7). Confronted with "a systematized negation of the other, a frenzied determination to deny the other any attribute of humanity," this process of internalized colonialism compels the colonized to ask themselves "Who am I in reality?" (Fanon 2004, 182). Colonial occupation is experienced corporeally and psychically, as "a constant and considerable stream of mental symptoms are direct sequels of this oppression" (Fanon 2004, 182). As Fanon argues in his essay "Racism and Culture", "racism that aspires to be rational, individual, genotypically and phenotypically determined, becomes transformed into cultural racism. The object of racism is no longer the individual man but a certain form of existing" (Fanon 1967, 32). Racism is not incidental to but rather constitutive of the culture of the colonizer, since denigrating the colonized helps "authenticate" the superiority of the colonizer by enforcing the double culture of a "Manichean world" (Fanon 2004, 6). But the colonized are not passive, Fanon insists, if the drive for decolonization "exists in a raw, repressed, and reckless state in the lives and consciousness of the colonized men and women" (Fanon 2004, 1). His distinction between "lives" and "consciousness" is another way of referring to the outer and inner living conditions that structure existence for the colonized.

Bhabha's assertion that Fanon prioritizes the psychological dimension of colonialism, at least in *Black Skin, White Masks*, can be challenged by examining a case from the chapter on "Colonial War and Mental Disorders" that illustrates the interweaving of the psychic and the political. In Series A, Case #4, Fanon reports that a French officer, identified as "A", is suffering from "behavioral problems" (Fanon 2004, 194). Officer A tells Fanon that his military duties included interrogating Algerian fighters who "never wanted to confess anything" (Fanon 2004, 194). He reports hearing screams every night and stuffing his ears with cotton to drown out the noise, asserting that the prisoners' screams were humorous at first but then disturbed him:

> Today I can tell just which stage the interrogation has reached by the sound of the screams. The guy who has been punched twice and given a blow behind the ear has a certain way of talking, screaming, and saying that he is innocent. After

> he has been hanging by his wrists for two hours, his voice changes. After the bathtub, a different voice… But it's after the electricity that it becomes unbearable. You'd think he was going to die… Of course there are those who don't scream… But they imagine we are going to kill them immediately. But we're not interested in killing them. What we want is information. We first try and get them to scream, and sooner or later they give in… Mind you, we'd prefer not to. But they don't make things easy for us. Now I can hear those screams at home. Especially the screams of the ones who died at the police headquarters. Doctor, I'm sick of this job. If you can cure me, I'll request a transfer to France. If they refuse, I'll resign. (Fanon 2004, 195)

The officer, A, is treated at home. One day, with Fanon running late, the officer decides to visit the hospital, and when Fanon arrives, he finds him collapsed under a tree. A tells Fanon that he encountered one of Fanon's other patients, an Algerian suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder whom A had once personally tortured (Fanon 2004, 196). The chance meeting elicited "a wave of anxiety and terror" in A, and the Algerian was found trying to commit suicide in a hospital bathroom, convinced the officer had come to take him to police headquarters. Following several more appointments, A's condition improved, and he was cleared of any illness. But the Algerian could not shake the idea that he was being pursued, no matter how hard the hospital staff tried to convince him that he was not going to be arrested and tortured.

Cases like these exemplify how the colonial system impresses itself on both the colonizer and the colonized, who experience a violence that is directly tied to the power and position of the colonizer. In identifying how the relationship takes a toll on both occupier and occupied, Fanon sheds light on the political nature of the psychological condition of each. The officer's nightmares stem from his torture of Algerian nationalists. He has learned a language, "the certain way of talking" exhibited by prisoners during the interrogation. For the officer, the goal was to extract *information*, that is, strategically relevant facts. The screams of those who refused to give anything up ricochet inside the officer's head years later. Once cured, he promises to return to France, either through transfer or resignation, leaving the colony to resettle in the motherland. The officer can trade in his role as occupier rooted in another place, believing his nightmares are tied to the land he occupies and can be left behind. He is anxious to have these demons exorcised because occupation haunts the minds and bodies of those who constitute the past, present, and future of the colonial "first confrontation, [which is] colored by violence [and] cohabitation" (Fanon 2004, 194). Cohabitation is the key to the colonial situation; when A meets a former prisoner and this situation is made present and palpable, his reaction is frenzied panic. He thinks the Algerian wants revenge and seeks shelter under a tree while the Algerian tries to kill himself in a hospital bathroom fearing he will again be tortured. These respective reactions speak to the political undercurrent driving the psychic reality experienced by both men; in this moment of distress, where both parties are made to confront their place in the colonial situation, the officer can collapse under a tree because *it is his tree*. The patient believes he will be kidnapped once more and chooses death over an unbearable torture. The colony belongs to the colonizer, and his trauma is *validated* by virtue of his occupation of the land. In his role as doctor, Fanon infers that the encounter may have spurred his patient's rehabilitation. The officer has survived the meeting; the screams keeping him up at night could not claim him, and he can move on confident of his safety. But the Algerian, who is being treated in a colonial hospital in his occupied homeland, is even more on edge, convinced he will be arrested and tortured once again.

In the colonial context the political milieu cannot be divorced from the psychological. The "post" in post-traumatic stress for the Algerian in Fanon's case study is only meaningful if understood as the period following the initial violence of occupation, and thus as the political and psychological future of that event; it should not signify an end. The political struggle of decolonization is psychologized and pathologized, couched in medical language yet intimately imbricated in power relations. As a psychiatrist, Fanon acts as mediator between two subjects, both of whom are suffering (according to the classification of the case study) from "severe reactive disorders" (Fanon 2004, 185). Fanon's post-traumatic politics rely in part on an analysis of the "reactive disorder" of resentment, or what may be characterized as the psychic build-up of resistance in the mind, body, and soul of the oppressed. Resentment is intimately linked with trauma, where the experience of extreme violence during torture is manifested in a chance meeting years later. The torture of Algerian freedom fighters is emblematic of the violence inflicted by colonial forces on the native population, and the fact that it engenders a confrontation long after the initial event (the actual torture) has ended speaks to the pervasiveness of colonial violence.

Glen Coulthard's *Red Skin, White Masks* offers a re-reading of Fanon's first book in light of *The Wretched of the Earth* in a way that presents a powerful case for the reappraisal of psycho-political and racial resentment in subsequent colonial struggles. Coulthard's aim is to rebuke the contemporary politics of recognition and reconciliation through a critique of the Canadian government's treatment of its Indigenous population. He takes aim at "the global industry" that promotes "forgiveness" and "reconciliation" as a prerequisite to "resolving the deleterious social impacts of intrastate violence, mass atrocity, and historical injustice" (Coulthard 2014, 106). Rather than recognizing historical atrocities and offering or accepting state apologies, Coulthard argues for a reassessment of *the politics of resentment*. Following Thomas Brudholm's analysis of the emotional dynamics of genocide (Brudholm 2008), he posits that there is no clear moral dividing-line between those who come to terms with experiences of violence and oppression and embrace the reconciliatory stance, on the one hand, and those who harbour feelings of anger and resentment, on the other (Coulthard 2014, 108). "Coming to terms" with the experience of violence *requires* an engagement with feelings of animus towards those structures that have sought and succeeded in causing immense pain. Resentment is not simply a crude expression of one's injured self, but also a necessary step towards a more complete subjecthood. Extending Brudholm's analysis of "the *aftermath* of mass atrocities," Coulthard argues that the colonial state allocates "the abuses of settler colonization to the dustbins of history and/or purposely disentangles processes of reconciliation from questions of settler coloniality as such" (Coulthard 2014, 108). In short, reconciliation obscures settler-colonial history by promoting a kind of "conceptual revisionism" in which those who do not forgive and forget are resentful because they cannot "move on" from the past and embrace the present (Coulthard 2014, 109).

Coulthard's insight regarding the false temporal progression "from resentment to reconciliation" proposed by the state is central to his reading of Fanon's insights into internalized colonialism. As a feeling of "bitter indignation at having been treated unfairly," resentment has "an in-built *political* component" insofar as it arises in response to "maltreatment, or injustice" (Coulthard 2014, 110). Internalized colonialism is the process by which the native population is socialized to accept a state of violently imposed inequality as hegemonic, and thus as the prevailing common sense (Coulthard 2014, 113). In other words, colonialism needs subjects "that acquiesce to the forms of power that have been imposed on them," and so submit in less ostentatious ways that are (in Fanon's words) "more subtle, less bloody" (Coulthard 2014, 112-113, quoting Fanon 2004, 27). Not satisfied with occupying land, the colonizer invades consciousness, impeding both political sovereignty and individual autonomy. While Fanon's comments on the dreams of the colonized exemplify the workings of internalized colonialism, the reactive feelings born of this situation do not have to be self-destructive and injurious; they can also be weaponized against the colonizer through the "*externalization* of that which was previously *internalized*: a purging of the so-called "inferiority complex" of the colonized subject" (Coulthard 2014, 114). Fanon describes the breakdown of the psychological and economic structure that maintains this "Manichean world" of the colonial subject:

> The colonized subject, degraded, impoverished, and abused, begins to look at the colonist's world of 'lights and paved roads' with envy, contempt, and resentment. The colonized begin to desire what has been denied them: land, freedom, and dignity. (Coulthard 2014, 113)

The colonized are reinvigorated through the recognition of an *external* force as the source of their immiseration, embracing cultural traditions denigrated by the occupying force and actively agitating for decolonization. Therefore, "the emergence of reactive emotions like anger and resentment can indicate a breakdown of colonial subjection and thus open up the possibility of developing alternative subjectivities and anticolonial practices" (Coulthard 2014, 115). In a similar vein, Achille Mbembe has recently described what he calls the "struggle … to convert the economy of hatred and the desire for vengeance into a political economy" (Mbembe 2019, 152). In other words, there is a sense in which the reactive drive towards revenge must be disciplined into a constructive project, and the build-up of resentment within the colonized subject must be directed in a productive way that sustains the revolutionary struggle.[3] Such acts of defiance and resistance demonstrate the power of resentment to turn anger towards the oppressor, but in a way that gestures towards a movement of decolonization and recognizes a righteous rage. Resentment acknowledges dispossession, and this in itself is revolutionary.

Conclusion: A New Humanism for New Struggles?

If *The Wretched of the Earth* can be read as a living "interrogation-machine" for today and not just as a relic of a dying and defeated colonialism, as we have argued here, then we must consider not just the questions it poses and the answers it provides – in particular, about nationhood, religion, and race – but also *what and whom it interrogates*. As Jean-Paul Sartre boldly states in his infamous "Preface" to this work, which Fanon himself asked him to write, "the Third World discovers *itself* and speaks to *itself* through this voice" (Fanon 2004, xlvi). And yet Fanon's words are not just spoken but also written in the colonial language, which suggests that he must participate in "assuming a culture and bearing the weight of a civilization," as he acknowledges in the opening pages of *Black Skin, White Masks* (Fanon 2008, 2). Sartre is therefore quick to point out that Fanon is addressing the colonized world as well: "Fanon speaks out loud and clear. We Europeans can hear him" (Fanon 2004, xlvii). Just as the question for Fanon is not simply whether to reject the colonial language and write in a local dialect (such as the Creole of his native Martinique), those of us who read him today in English translation or in any other language must struggle to find in this text a resource for our own questions and aspirations. As a work that speaks back to the colonial metropole in its own languages, it provokes a kind of "reverse tutelage" in the lessons of anti-colonial dissent (Gopal 2019). As Esmaeil Zeiny asks in a recent essay on Fanon's attention to the power of the written word, "Can't a 'fighting literature' or a 'national literature' address both the colonized and the colonizers?" (Zeiny 2020, 302).

We have argued that *The Wretched of the Earth* is a manifesto, a handbook for decolonization on the level of a society-shifting revolution, and a kind of *vade mecum* or hand-held device for recognizing the everyday violences of colonialism for the individual and communicating ways of resisting them. Fanon's interlocutors, from Marx and Engels in the European past to Keïta and Shariati in the global present along with his future readers like Coulthard and Mbembe, are each provoked to make use of this text in a decolonizing project that is political as well as psychological. He notes repeatedly that both the land and the minds of the native population must be occupied if the colonizing force is to be effective: "Imperialism … sows seeds of decay here and there that must be mercilessly rooted from our land and from our minds" (Fanon 2004, 181). Suggesting that national culture, religious beliefs, and psychic resentment can advance political consciousness, Fanon acknowledges that these cannot bring change on their own, although they remain necessary to the process of decolonization and essential in forging ties of solidarity within struggles against racism and capitalism.

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[3] Coulthard notes instances of weaponized resentment on the part of Indigenous people in Canada, such as the Oka Crisis of 1990, when the Mohawks of Kanesatake erected barricades to block development on their land. (Coulthard 2014, 116). More recently, barricades were set up all across Canada in solidarity with the Wet'suwet'en People resisting colonial development on their traditional land (see MacCharles and Ballingal 2020).

In writing about movements for national liberation, Fanon famously calls for a "new humanism" that "is written into the objectives and methods of the struggle" (Fanon 2004, 178). Military barracks and ideological frameworks are targets of this struggle with the aim of questioning the humanism of the colonizer while, importantly, *recognizing the colonized as human*. Fanon's new humanism remains especially relevant today in a tumultuous moment rocked with protests against police brutality amidst a pandemic that has laid bare the cruel economic realities of colonial capitalism. Without appropriating the language of Indigenous activists in North and South America, Africa, and Asia, many activists and critics are expressing their resentment toward a system of racialized inequality that has caused pain, suffering, and trauma to millions of marginalized people. Fanon reminds us that taking up the call for a new humanism that actively addresses the sources of these violences requires mobilizing "every level of society" (Fanon 2004, 178). His argument is echoed in Shariati's warning that a new humanism addressing social inequalities and political injustices will not be handed to us; in Keïta's hope for an "African Dawn"; and even in his patients' desire to be released from their rage and guilt. Fanon's parting message to revolutionaries, activists, and scholars is to continue to interrogate, to probe, to question. As a decolonial revolutionary and psychiatrist, he used the record of colonial torture to uncover the deeper logics of violence and trauma at play in the settler-native relationship, in effect, to interrogate the interrogators. By building on Fanon's commitment to interrogating material, social, and textual conditions, intellectuals and activists may move closer to producing the transformative social change needed for a more just society.

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