

FRANTZ FANON. *The Wretched of the Earth*. NEW YORK: GROVE PRESS. 2004.
251 PAGES.

Reviewed by Justin G. McCollum

Specifically dedicated to the Algerians seeking independence from France in the 1960s, *The Wretched of the Earth* is Frantz Fanon's manifesto on decolonization. Fanon exposes the problems of certain paths to decolonization taken by countries in Latin America. In most of these countries, the national bourgeoisie merely replace the metropolis bourgeoisie and remain dependent on foreign markets and capital after the country is "freed." The masses of the newly created state, however, are unaffected.

In the first section of the book, Fanon argues that the solution to these recurrent problems of decolonization can only be realized through a violent uprising of the masses. Fanon arrives at this conclusion by defining colonial society as a Manichaeian, or compartmentalized, society—a world divided in two. The good is pitted against the bad; the white against the dark; the rich against the poor; the indigenous against the foreigner; the ruling class against the others; evil "niggers" and "towel-heads" against humane whites.

This lurking division of the population creates a tension that cannot be ignored. True decolonization, therefore, will eradicate this devilish dichotomy and create a society where "the last shall be first" (2–5). How-

ever, because colonialism is only made possible through extreme violence and intimidation, Fanon reasons that violence is the only language that a colonialist society understands: “colonialism is not a machine capable of thinking, a body endowed with reason. It is naked violence and only gives in when confronted with greater violence” (23).

Fanon ridicules the notion of formal independence granted through peaceful handovers and more moderate means. Negotiation is no substitute for capitulation, and does not bring about effective decolonization. Fanon makes the Gramscian observation that the only elements of colonization that change as a result of the negotiating table are formalities. For example, Gabon gained a black, national-bourgeois president who is now received as the guest of the president of French Republic; but within Gabon the status quo realized under French colonialism continues (26–28).

Fanon’s disdain for the national bourgeoisie arises from his realization that their primary goal of decolonization is not fundamentally altering the political system and improving the situation of the majority. Rather, they wish to gain access to the wealth and social status that had previously been commandeered by the colonists. They wish to drain the peasant masses and natural resources for their selfish benefit just as the colonizers did (53).

The national bourgeoisie, defined by its European-based education and culture, is credited with founding the political parties, which give rise to the country’s future leaders and those that negotiate the terms of decolonization with the colonist country. However, the relative social and economic comfort of the national bourgeoisie prevents them from supporting a violent insurrection (which might alter their cozy scenario). In fact, “once a party has achieved national unanimity and has emerged as the sole negotiator, the occupier begins his maneuvering and delays negotiations as long as possible” in order to “whittle away” the party’s demands (73). Consequently, the party must purge itself of extremists who make the granting of concessions difficult (73).

The result of such a path to decolonization is simply a cloaked form of the former colonialism. Prior to decolonization, the “mother country” realizes the inevitability of “freedom,” and thus drains most of the “capital and technicians and encircling the young nation with an apparatus of economic pressure” (54). The young, independent nation, therefore, is obliged to keep the economic channels established by the colonial regime (56). The national

bourgeoisie, in their incomplete and inorganic state, do not have the means to provide either capital or sophisticated economic guidance to the new country, and must therefore rely on colonial financiers' loans and advice, which all aim at forcing the new nation to remain dependent on its former colonizer just as it was during the colonial period (56–60).

The desire to end this dependence on the colonial powers leads the new country to attempt the impossible and rapidly develop an idealistic, organic, nationalist form of capitalism that is thoroughly diversified for the purpose of economic and political stability. The result is either a dictator deluded by dreams of autarky (53), or an iron-fisted authoritarian dictator determined to preserve the status quo (72).

Additionally, Fanon sees that after colonization the national bourgeoisie fill the posts once reserved for colonists from within their party ranks. Thus, the party becomes a “screen between the masses and the leadership” (115), and party radicals are neglected as the “party itself becomes an administration and the militants fall back into line and adopt the hollow title of citizen” (116).

It is only through a violent insurrection aimed at destroying everything touched by colonialism that a new species of man will be created. The religious and tribal divisions created and exacerbated by the colonists will deteriorate as the urgency of unity is realized by the masses. The individualism espoused by the colonists will succumb to the quest of the colonized for communalism. It is through this struggle that a new national culture will be defined—not a culture defined by European norms; nor a culture that harkens back to indigenous traditions of pre-colonial times—for this culture is forever lost, reactionary, and has been ruined and degraded in the psyche of the colonized through the phenomena of colonial racism and exceptionalism. The colonized must move forward.

Adopting Marxian terms, Fanon's revolutionary theory warns that the lumpenproletariat, Marx's definition for the lowest levels of society (e.g., landless peasants), must not be neglected in favor of the industrial proletariat. In fact, it is the proletariat who has benefited from colonialism, has deep connections to the national bourgeoisie, and is relatively well off. Rather, it is the “lumpenproletariat, this cohort of starving men, divorced from tribe and clan, [which] constitutes one of the most spontaneously and radically revolutionary forces of a colonized people” (81). Furthermore,

if the lumpenproletariat is neglected by the nationalist movement, its absence of social and political consciousness will be taken advantage of by the colonists and the class will be turned against any newly independent government (81–83). The revolutionaries must embrace the lumpenproletariat and furnish them not only with arms, but, above all, with a revolutionary education provided by Gramscianesque “peasant-intellectuals” (138).

Fanon’s work is well received and highly recommended to those who wish to gain a better understanding of the neo-colonial and bourgeois nature of contemporary politics in the post-colonial era. He reveals that it is only through viewing history from the perspective of the colonized that their current plights can be understood. It is hard, even for a citizen of the United States, to argue with his revolutionary approach based on violence, education, egalitarianism, and opportunity. Unless greed gives way to altruism in global politics, it seems the wretched of the earth will only become truly free through the use of force.