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While Reading Violence

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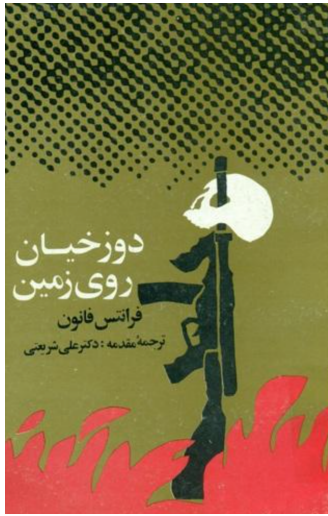
## While Reading Violence

1

Silkscreen cover with a text made by the manual type setting method, which used to be the normal way of publishing books in the 70s in Iran. This white title is probably made by the silk screen as part of the cover image. Even though the name of the writer and translator in black ink is definitely printed by the typesetting method. The writer's and translator's names are not perfectly horizontal which gives the feeling that the appearance of the book is not important. Even a hand out containing the same text would work well. The Farsi translation of the book's title can be read in two ways: *The wretched which moved on the earth*; or *The wretched of the earth*. Splitting the title into two lines makes this misreading even more possible.

The fire appears to be originally illustrated by either collaging paper cut outs or painted with red colour. It's not easy to guess! The green background might be the colour of paper. And then the white, black and red print, in that order. As I remember it, you start from lighter colours in silk screen printing. The black dots at the top of the cover have bled into each other, illustrating the density of the smoke in the air. Black dots are getting smaller as you get closer to the middle of the image where the skull is hardly breathing.

A black gun, illustrated with simple painted black spots. The gun pieces are painted with a tiny space between them, looking a bit organic in the way that bones are joined together. With two hands in the air and a skull pointing its heads up to nowhere, the gun looks like a blind walking dead behind the fire collage. Like in a theatre scene.



Frantz Fanon's classic analysis of colonialism and decolonization, *The Wretched of the Earth* was first published in 1961 in France with a preface by Jean-Paul Sartre. Reading *The Wretched of the Earth* is entering the world where blood splashes in every page, the world is darker than ever and things are bad. A terrifying journey that I suppose no one wants to take, but is inevitable, as Fanon argues.

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While going through this book, your chair gradually turns into a therapy couch which pushes you to the end of the dark and leaves you as what he describes; a painful and difficult, “living haunt” of contradictions, risking becoming insurmountable, explosive, with painful and tense muscles, in addition to a vague promise: If you get out of there you are something else. You become a free man.

*“When the native is confronted with the colonial order of things, he finds he is in a state of permanent tension. The settler's world is a hostile world, which spurns the native, but at the same time it is a world of which he is envious.”* (Concerning Violence /41-/ The Wretched of the Earth)

*The first thing which the native learns is to stay in his place, and not to go beyond certain limits. This is why the dreams of the native are always of muscular prowess; his dreams are of action and of aggression. I dream I am jumping, swimming, running, climbing; I dream that I burst out laughing, that I span a river in one stride, or that I am followed by a flood of motorcars which never catch up with me.”* (Concerning Violence /40-/The Wretched of the Earth)

The book starts with dissecting the native’s condition finding and pointing out the existing force of violence living inside the body and spirit of the colonised. Arguing that this urge, force and violence (which should be directed to fight back and interrupt the colonial

<sup>1</sup> Image: cover of The book , Wretched of the Earth(دوزخیان روی زمین)\_republished 1989 Tehran

world) is not necessarily coming from the cause that the native lives in a more poor condition and wants to demonstrate against it. But instead he claims that the main force for fighting back is rooted in the fundamental and problematic contradictions of colonialism. Discussing that this inevitable explosive violence is rooted in the unbearable psychological contradictions of colonised people.

By emphasising the psychological complexity of colonialism he is gradually tying his words to the soul and body of its reader. Going through the revolutionary lines one after the other, constantly referring to the tense muscles and physical pain, reading becomes an extreme performative activity.

The therapeutic mood which is developing through the book is not a big surprise, keeping in mind that Fanon was specialised in psychiatry and he was assigned to a hospital in Algeria during the uprising against the French in 1960. Going further, in this psychoanalysis of the colonised and its condition the book turns in to a kind of horror story written by and about a revolutionary psychiatrist. The text starts to distance the reader from its theoretical aspects, leaving the reader constantly wishing that it was fictional. <sup>2</sup>



He continues with explaining the necessity of the armed and violent resistance, the revolution, its consequences, complexities and difficulties. The necessity of the national culture and the conditions of the native intellectual. In the last chapter before conclusion “Colonial War and Mental Disorder” we unexpectedly end up inside a real psychiatric hospital. In this chapter Fanon is not only analysing his scientific works on the mental disorders caused or following the colonial war but he also takes us inside a real psychiatric hospital he worked in. A hospital with real patients and documented details of different cases.

*Case No.2-Paranoid delusions and suicidal behaviour disguised as "terrorist act" in a young twenty-two-year-old Algerian*

*Patient was referred to the hospital by the French judiciary authorities following a medical and legal examination by French psychiatrists practicing in Algeria.*

*The patient was emaciated and in a state of confusion. His body was covered in echymoses and he was unable to absorb any food owing to two fractures of the jaw. For over two weeks the patient was fed intravenously.* (Colonial war and mental disorders /219-/The Wretched of the Earth)

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<sup>2</sup> Image : illustration from the book *Farsi Literature 2* \_ ( ادبیات فارسی ۲ ) 1996 Iran \_Reprinted in Iran 2013

*People who undergo torture:*

1) *Those who know something*

2) *Those who know nothing*

1) *Those who know something are very rarely seen in hospital centres. Evidently, it may be common knowledge that such-and-such a patriot has been tortured in the French prisons, but you never meet him as a patient.*

2) *On the contrary, those who know nothing come very frequently to consult us. We are not here speaking of Algerians taken prisoner during a general arresting or a round-up: they do not come to see us as patients either. We are speaking expressly of those Algerians who do not belong to any organisation, who are arrested and brought to police quarters or to farms used as centres of interrogation in order to be tortured there.* (Colonial war and mental disorders /226-/The Wretched of the Earth)

In this chapter, while reading these cases out of curiosity and anxiety I started thinking: Who are his audiences really? Who is he talking to? Who was he thinking of when he was sharpening his knife? As he has been constantly zooming in and out. Some parts of the book are written in a very simple manner, like a political statement, like he is talking to the peasants (as he names them). In the other part he is talking of complex political strategies after and during decolonisation. It feels like he has been fearing that someone will hide this research from his readers. So he puts all the horrifying details of the mental disorders into the book before the last chapter, before the conclusion is made. All the cases from the war which he claims is inevitable. He has been running with you and after you in every page to take you to this impasse.

He goes on to the last chapter: "conclusion". He doesn't sound that harsh anymore. He knows his patients are angry, scared and vulnerable. Now you are at the end of the book. He is behind you in the impasse. You turn back. There he is looking at the eyes of its reader in a kind but stubborn way. Violently reminding you of the necessity of facing the brutal reality that he was building around all the way here.

*Come, then, comrades; it would be as well to decide at once to change our ways. We must shake off the heavy darkness in which we were plunged, and leave it behind. The new day which is already at hand must find us firm, prudent, and resolute. We must leave our dreams and abandon our old beliefs and friendships from the time before life began.* (conclusion/251-/The Wretched of the Earth)

## Violence

*“Perhaps we have not sufficiently demonstrated that colonialism is not simply content to impose its rule upon the **present** and the **future** of a **dominated** country. Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its **grip** and emptying the native's **brain** of all form and content. By a kind of **perverted** logic, it turns to the **past** of the **oppressed** people, and **distorts, disfigures, and destroys** it. This work of devaluing pre-colonial history takes on a dialectical significance today. (On National Culture/169-/The Wretched of the Earth)*

*In such a situation the claims of the native intellectual are not a luxury but a necessity in any coherent program. The native intellectual who takes up **arms** to defend his nation's legitimacy and who wants to bring proofs to **bear out** that legitimacy, who is willing to **strip himself naked** to study the history of his body, is **obliged to dissect** the heart of his people.”(On National Culture/170-/The Wretched of the Earth)*

In the chapter “national culture”; where he is talking of the role and the conditions of the native intellectual artist and writer, Fanon is making it clear, emphasising that there is no place out of this colonial struggle for the native intellectual, writer or artist. Fanon explains three phases of a harsh evolutionary psychological process of consciousness which needs to be accomplished by the colonised intellectual to be able to join the revolution of people.

In this part Fanon is exclusively talking to the native intellectuals and artists. He is clearly pointing out a different kind of violence. He is talking about a violence which one can use against oneself.

A violence which is coming from me to me? Or as he has claimed in the previous chapter, the violence which is caused as a result of colonialism? In both ways he is introducing each specific reader to a very specific kind of violence. The kind that even if it is not totally different from the violent resistance that he talked about earlier, it is also not exactly similar. As this kind of violence can easily become kind of a suicidal act.

The main subject of violence here is not the other, is not the settler or anything or anyone other than the native intellectual itself. If he was talking to us from the beginning all the way through the book and he was waking up, pointing out, or even provoking a force of hatred and violent force, now he is bringing them all together and pushing us to use it against ourselves. From now on the book is not only legitimising or excusing the necessity of violent resistance, but it is also becoming a violent object. It hurts. It is violence.

*“This tearing away, painful and difficult though it may be, is however necessary. If it is not accomplished, there will be serious psycho-affective injuries and the result will be individuals without an anchor, without a horizon, colourless, stateless, rootless--a race of angels.”*(On National Culture/175-/The Wretched of the Earth)

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#### Ambivalence Certainty

What does Fanon mean by violence? What does he mean by violent resistance, who is the subject of this violence?

When I started reading *“The Wretched of the earth”* I was totally amazed by these questions. Listening to the assured and believing voice which knows everything. The certain voice which has the answers. Going further in the book, these questions lost their importance for me. As I started to follow how the subject of this violence is moving and transforming inside the book. The violence which is sometimes visibly showing its face, sometimes hiding, sometimes appearing in the body of the colonised, sometimes the writer, and sometimes the reader. The violence which was performed while I was reading it.

Through an intimate reading experience this assured voice gradually revealed to me the condition of ambivalence, both in Fanon’s voice, and in myself. By analysing and describing the pain of colonial violence and violent resistance in a shockingly honest way, as Sartre describes; *“Fanon hides nothing”*.(Preface/10-/The Wretched of the Earth)

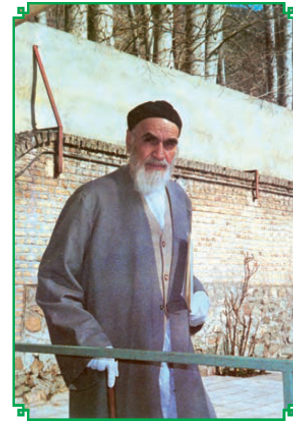
I was listening to him as the psychiatrist, the patient, the colonised and the writer who is depicting the painful texture of this resistance in a very direct and transparent way. He makes me believe his character in all of these roles, as he has truly lived them all. Walking beside him in the colonial world, visiting the mental hospitals and, facing with my own dead body I could gradually imagine looking at Fanon's hands trembling with uncertainty while writing.

5

### “Literature of Resistance”

Reading book is like a car accident. It comes one day to our life unpredictably. Brings stories and memories with itself. It changes things by digging the past, present and future. Not a process of taking in a bunch of pure data, but an active experience which comes with colour, shape, smell and everything.

The first time I heard the name of this book and its writer was fifteen years ago when I was at second year of high school. There was a chapter in our literature book called “Literature of Resistance”. In this chapter we were introduced to a field of literature which depicts the resistance of a nation against internal dictatorship or interfere of the other countries.



اهمیت انتشارات، مثل اهمیت خون‌هایی است که در جبهه‌ها ریخته می‌شود و «مداد العلماء افضل من دماء الشهداء». دماؤ شهدا اگر چه بسیار ارزشمند و سازنده است، لکن قلم‌ها بیشتر می‌توانند سازنده باشند و اصولاً شهدا را قلم‌ها می‌سازند و قلم‌ها هستند که شهیدپرورند.  
امام خمینی رحمه الله علیه

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<sup>3 3</sup> The image is from the opening pages of the high school literature book in Iran. “The importance of publication is equal to the importance of the blood which is lost in the war battlefields. Martyrs are very valuable and constructive, but pen(writers) can be more constructive. Basically pens are creating martyrs and pens are blooming martyrs.” Ayatollah Khomeini ; the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the leader of the 1979 Iranian Revolution.



Giving names and examples of writers and literature works from Latin America, Palestine and Africa. Among Mahmoud Dervish, Ghassan Kanafani, Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Pablo Neruda was also the name of Frantz Fanon and the titles of his important books: *A Dying Colonialism* (which in Farsi was translated as: *The tail end of colonialism*), *The Wretched of the Earth* and *Black Skin, White Masks*. Even though there was no text from him in our school book, judging from those poetic translation of the titles I always thought that they should be kind of a novel or stories about slavery and not practical theories on violent resistance.

Being born ten years after the Islamic revolution of Iran in the home of parents who were not satisfied with the revolution result, I definitely didn't care about what they were teaching us at school. I was taught at home; whatever comes from school is not the real knowledge. The real life is at home and the real knowledge can be found at our library at home. The library which was curated by my parents. What they could afford with their money, knowledge and what they had access to. This 'free limited' library was only big enough to cover one side of our small living-room cube. The collection that my parents were very proud of, so much so that they had made a nice wooden shelf for it by themselves.

Our small private library of knowledge with its couple of illegal films, books, posters and nude paintings on upper shelves had something in common with the one I was given at school. They were both collecting the "Culture of Resistance". Where certainty, beauty, violence, revolution and death is the main discourse of life.

references:

- \* Frantz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth* \_1965 France \_ Reprinted in Great Britain 2001
- \* Farsi Literature 2 \_ (ادبیات فارسی ۲) 1996 Iran \_Reprinted in Iran 2013