

Fanon, Franz. *Concerning Violence*. Translated by Constance Farrington. London: Penguin Books, 1965.

Franz Fanon (1925-1961) was a psychiatrist and revolutionary Marxist philosopher. Fanon served in the Algerian National Liberation Front, in their efforts to drive the French from Algeria. Fanon influenced post-colonial studies. His works have spurred anti-colonial national liberation movements for decades.

1. **Concerning Violence.** Every decolonization is violent. Decolonization replaces one racial group of men with another. It is messy, violent, and inverts the existing social order. A native rebel exercises absolute violence. So do his opponents. The neat, ordered settler's town confronts the ugly, fragmented native village. Because of the fundamentally racial structure of the conflict, Marxists must analyze afresh, superceding Marx. Foreigners, whatever they do upon arriving in a colony, remain foreigners. The settler demeans the native, deeming him a repository of evils, of raw animality. The colonizers and their imported religion are human and pure. The African colony is Manichean in its absolute dualism.

When the disparaged native finds his humanity, he readies weapons for the coming violence. Empowered natives vomit up Western values. The native recognizes himself as the settler's equal. As equals, natives prepare ambushes to drive the pests from the land. European values crumble. Individualism, with its treatment of others as means, falls to brother, sister, friend. In the process, native intellectuals, still in the grip of Western values, use the new structures to raid the nation's wealth. They mouth the raging of the people, but use those voices for personal gain. They suggest refinements and niceties. The people are clearer: bread and land. Nothing else. In colonial circumstances, truth is instrumental. What is true is what troubles the settler and boosts the native.

The habits of thought and action during the colonial period project into process of decolonization. Even then, natives are oppressed. Their freedoms are pushed into their hours of dreaming, during which they are able and active. But their dreams remain dreams of colonialism, with themselves as the settlers. So, even the cowed native harbors the will to rebel. It waits a moment of settler inattention. Colonial forces create a stifling control, but the native keeps tensing his muscles. His tension erupts in little spurts of intertribal bloodshed, by which the native avoids the larger question, that of armed insurrection against the settlers. The repression creates in the native psyche a belief in fate and evil spirits, ever so much more potent than settlers. The native concludes that fighting on this mythic plane is the real battle, not that with the colonial powers. This keeps the emotionality of the native to the fore, indulging wild dances, dances aimed to exorcise settler power. Eventually, the native villages abandon the dances for guns. The dancing seems an impossibly distant past.

When should decolonization occur? What form should it take? First, there are reformist elites. They talk violence, but practice reform. Ultimately, these elites seek assimilation to the colonial world, but with more native power in that structure. This is not decolonization. The native rebel does not want a farm alongside the settler. He wants the settler's farm.

Violence alone ends colonialism. The settler leaves fearing death. One cannot negotiate with settlers. Theirs is raw violence, and must be met with superior force. Those who call for compromise and peaceful transitions have never really broken with colonialism. The half-hearted rebels worry about lack of weapons. Guerrilla bands have driven back modern armies, as when Spain faced Napoleon's forces. Other forces play as well. Capitalists want markets, not subjection. If military dominance precludes transfer of goods, the military must go. No colonial military will destroy a market. Political parties appease the roiling mass. They shape, but fail to specify, what the people want. For all their talk, the state perseveres.

New nations emerge from armed rebellion or from outside forces making colonization impossible. When natives get the gist of rebellion, colonialists flee. They seek to leave a native-run government fashioned after themselves. But the native forces mass. There are signs: lack of talk, black looks, nervous tittering. Finally, the lid blows off. Gun

fire. There is a blow-out. Colonials cannot just round up the mass leaders. The native go berserk, and when the leaders are released, colonial governments must negotiate with their former prisoners. So, violence is effective. It provokes a violent response, or it engenders efforts to reduce the underlying tensions. Rebel natives win their freedoms in Africa. No European government is willing to muster the sort of standing army necessary to repress native uprisings. Most rebels imagine that independence will bring them material prosperity previously denied them by the colonizing people. They are wrong. The colonial war is often replaced by a capitalist-communist war. Thus, their conflict becomes international.

So, after the colonial period, the violence goes on. Leaders continue aggression, fighting different opponents. They are rude. Westerners come to investigate, and find that the natives are not doing well without them. The reports appear pre-printed; only the pictures are added. Press “objectivity” always injures the native cause. The third world applauds when Khrushchev bangs his shoe at the United Nations; it is the capitalists’ due. Only the socialist countries support the natives in colonial uprisings. The United States talks supportively, but really seeks only to deter communist propaganda. Capitalism, above all, hates nationalist wars. It is bad for business. The natives are freeing themselves, but have not yet established replacement cultures. Former colonies seek neutrality in the East-West confrontation. They hope to get aid from both sides. Bombastic native leaders arise. The Americans and Soviets vie for their “neutral” allegiances. Fanon calls all this “facile internationalism.”

Settlers teach natives violence. Settlers kill wantonly. Natives learn. Native militants earn their stripes by killing settlers. Fanon cites a dialogue from Cesaire. In it, a “good” native finds violence, and returns to murder the colonial who deemed him “good.” Native violence grows in proportion to colonial resistance and repression. Still, natives lack the war resources of colonials. The slaughters are disproportionate. Colonial justice is only for colonists. In the last seven years, no Frenchman has been indicted for killing an Algerian. The colonial war solidifies both colonists and natives. Native violence seeks to erase all the old tribes, forming a nation. It makes the people immune to demagogues and magicians.

VIOLENCE IN THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

New under-developed nations throw themselves into development. They imagine “catching up” to be a function of hard work. This is unreasonable. Under-developed countries lack social and physical infrastructure, beset by poverty and dearth of professionals. The withdrawing colonial power says to the new native nation, Take your independence and starve in it. The West grew rich on the backs of its slave nations. The West must redistribute its wealth, making the underdeveloped nations richer, or violence will spread.

Third World countries need to rethink everything. But economic conditions prohibit that. They continue the colonial pattern, for lack of alternatives. Europe’s wealth is the Third World’s riches. Natives made Europe. But when colonials leave, they take their money with them. They refuse to reinvest unless the native nation is as stable as Europe, which is impossible. So, capital has no outlet. It freezes in Europe, unproductive. The Third World markets dry up. A crisis of capitalism ensues. The West must end the Cold War and invest in the Third World. The Third World does not want Europe’s money. It wants Europe to raise mankind, all men everywhere, to success. Europe: Wake Up!

2. **Conclusion.** The West careens between nuclear and spiritual catastrophes. The under-developed nations should decline to follow Europe. The Third World can become something vital and fresh, something un-European. European thought leads to demeaning mankind and murder. A better path beckons in the question, How can we collaborate toward a better future? Europe began as a spiritual adventure, but has retrenched in self-referential narcissism. European insights deserve recollection; so do their horrid crimes against mankind, against the human spirit. We must return to the question of man afresh. We must increase our human connections. We natives do not need to catch up with Europe. They are going nowhere. We can bring into history a new version of man. We must do so.