



## *Fanon and the Iraqi Other* **Unmasking the Illusions of Colonialism**

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**Abstract:** This conversation with Frantz Fanon on the topics of native otherness in colonialist discourse and the possibility of effacing this illusory rhetoric begins with a discussion of the American public discourse in its present state, and transport this framework to the time of Frantz Fanon and the Algerian Revolution. The intent is not to draw a concrete, line-item comparison between contemporary U.S. foreign policy and media and that of 1950s France, but rather to explore through loose correlations the potential for an overarching theory which comprehends the relationship between states' power elite and populations, and the indigenous populations of occupied foreign territory, as a story which has repeated itself extensively throughout the history of modernity. The decision to mention the ongoing occupation of Iraq in this article's title and introduction and scantily within can be considered in this context as an invitation to suspend the sort of logistic-heavy and (thereby) restricted thinking behind such popular inquiries as *Is Iraq the New Vietnam?*, and focus rather on a general comprehension of democratic state apparatus as it portrays foreign oppression to a domestic population that retains the power to influence state policy through popular mandate.

*In the capitalist countries a multitude of moral teachers, counselors and "bewilderers" separate the exploited from those in power. In the colonial countries, on the contrary, the policeman and the soldier, by their immediate presence and their frequent and direct action maintain contact with the native and advise him by means of rifle butts and napalm not to budge. It is obvious here that the agents of government speak the language of pure force. The intermediary does not lighten the oppression, nor seek to hide the domination; he shows them up and puts them into practice with the clear con-*

*science of an upholder of the peace, yet he is the bringer of violence into the home and into the mind of the native.*

—Frantz Fanon (*Wretched* 38)

While America's continuously deteriorating imperial misadventure in Iraq serves as an ideal backdrop for a discussion of the work of Frantz Fanon, the high profile afforded by the worldwide press to this particular instance of invasion and occupation should be understood to reflect the unusual grandeur and hubris with which otherwise standard policy has been pursued, not the isolated revival and application of long-

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abandoned colonialist notions. State policy in its most violent and inhumane implementation must not be excused as aberration from the norm, but understood as a glimpse of the power configuration in its most explicit terms, and a disclosure of the means to which it is willing to resort in order to keep this relationship functioning to its benefit. As in the supposedly exceptional abuses at Abu Ghraib Prison, where the brutalization and sexualized humiliation of indigenous Arabs at the hands of American forces was not a departure from state policy but rather a poetic metaphor capturing its essence, the continuing occupation of Iraq and devastation of its people is a story not exclusive to its time and place, but the latest chapter in the bloody history of colonialist policy—the spirit of which has survived its supposed abandonment and remained central to global capitalism.

This conversation with Frantz Fanon on the topics of native otherness in colonialist discourse and the possibility of effacing this illusory rhetoric will begin with a discussion of the American public discourse in its present state, and transport this framework to the time of Frantz Fanon and the Algerian Revolution. The intent is not to draw a concrete, line-item comparison between contemporary U.S. foreign policy and media and that of 1950s France, but rather to explore through loose correlations the potential for an overarching theory which comprehends the relationship between states' power elite and populations, and the indigenous populations of occupied foreign territory, as a story which has repeated itself extensively throughout the history of modernity. It is in this spirit that "oppression" and "colonialism" and their derivatives will be used interchangeably, as the techniques of modern power in the U.S. are contrasted with French colonialism through the eyes of Frantz Fanon. The decision to mention the ongoing occupation of Iraq in this article's title and introduction and scantily within can be

considered in this context as an invitation to suspend the sort of logistic-heavy and (thereby) restricted thinking behind such popular inquiries as *Is Iraq the New Vietnam?*, and focus rather on a general comprehension of democratic state apparatus as it portrays foreign oppression to a domestic population that retains the power to influence state policy through popular mandate.

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The reality of America's role in the world, and the larger reality of global capitalism, have been obscured, mystified, and misrepresented to such an extent that the citizens of this supposedly democratic nation have a minimal grasp of the system in which they are dually complicit and ensnared. An examination of any American war since (at the very least) the Industrial Revolution reveals that policymakers and their cohorts in the press intentionally tailored distorted and often completely fabricated arguments to the general public with hopes of inspiring support for the war, and from the perspective of this article, this can be understood to mean that policymakers felt that public support based upon the truth of the matter would have been insufficient to inspire a public mandate for war making.

We find the American people, as understood by the power elite, to be unconvinced that the economic interest of the U.S. ruling class is sufficient cause for foreign intervention. If this were not the case, the myriad justifications for invading Iraq, in all their flagrant superficiality, would have been unnecessary, and a simple discussion of geopolitics and *stability* in areas of *vital interest* would have sufficed. While establishment voices advocating the *manufacture of consent* argue for this mystification on the grounds that the average citizen lacks the expertise to properly decide such vital matters of national interest, this perspective treats the ef-

fect of a successful propaganda structure as justification for the existence of propaganda, ignoring the deliberateness of public ignorance in the civic realm, and attempting to bewilder with circular reasoning.

Further, the technological advances of the "Information Age," in spite of the totalitarian threat they pose, threaten mere *omission* as a tool of state propaganda; the reality of global capitalist policy will soon be available for all to see, live and in color, and the challenge falls on the oppressive state to define this insuppressible reality in friendly terms, as its existence can no longer be concealed. Whether through satellite television or the Internet, the images of horror so famously associated with the American public's distaste for the war in Vietnam (and calculatingly suppressed in conflicts since) have already begun to reintroduce themselves to a mainstream audience, and while these populist outlets lack the rhetorical strength of the establishment press discussed below, the power of these images is such that words are not required to elicit strong emotional reaction. This growing threat to state illusions requires of the state a mastery of the national discourse, the framing of discussion within a priori structures from which no effective dissent may be drawn, propaganda in the grand tradition which has kept "free" populations in the dark since the inception of democratic participation. Since images of grisly death and wholesale misery will prove increasingly insuppressible, the burden on the state will become the definition of these events, and especially the definition of the human cost of foreign policy objectives.

When state policy entails death and misery of foreign populations, the aim of state propaganda becomes the inferiorization<sup>1</sup> of a victimized population dismissed as unreasoning, fanatical, incapable of self-rule, and above all, completely foreign and dissimilar from the Western citizen. Their

plight becomes an excusable *externality* of warfare—a life to which they are all too accustomed, we are told—and their behavior is explained independent of the power dynamic beneath which they have been made to suffer; a perspective from which actions easily explained by the presence of this dynamic are mystified. The relationship appears before the citizenry of the powerful state masked and misrepresented in terms friendly to the power and flattering of its policy. An oppressor easily identified as such by the oppressed becomes something entirely different in the eyes of its domestic citizenry, who theoretically possess the power to shape and reform state behavior should it be found reprehensible.

To transcend this framework—the illusory world of the oppressor—is to operate outside the comfortably configured universe of establishment discourse, in which benevolence and *right* are presupposed, and his existence is assured. In the case of foreign oppression, the human face of the victim and his existence is a secret that threatens the whole structure of exploitation. The discovery of coherence in the native's actions, leading to the discovery of the native's human struggle, poses a threat to the dynamic the seriousness of which can be illustrated by the sheer size and scope of the apparatus in place to keep this bottle corked tightly. To overcome the abstraction, depersonalization, mystification, and sheer inferiorization of the foreign native is to comprehend the power structure behind the colonialist's illusions, laying the manifestations of an economy of exploitation and misery bare, for the citizenry of the United States and similar democracies to fully comprehend as action taken in their name and drawn from their consent.

The extent to which the American me-

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<sup>1</sup> Doubtlessly, *dehumanization* is the most desirable outcome, but the multiculturalism of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century West has made this much more difficult than it was in more homogenous days past.

dia accurately reflects the affairs of the world forms the limits of the general consuming public's understanding. "The mass media become the authority, at any given moment for what is true and what is false, what is reality and what is fantasy, what is important and what is trivial," writes former UC Berkeley Dean of Media Studies Ben Bagdikian (xvii). This power falls into the sole hands of the state in a totalitarian society, as dissent is simply forbidden by law and the state media is the only permitted source of information. In a democracy like the United States, the press is cherished as a safeguard against such tyranny, and the American press touts its civic necessity to all who listen. However, behind the illusion of a vibrant marketplace of ideas, the American public discourse is set within parameters more familiar to a totalitarian government than participatory democracy. Constraints on discussion in the media, what Noam Chomsky calls *the bounds of the expressible*, are defined by a small, elite class of the wealthiest and most powerful people in the nation, as concerned with preserving their power as any solitary despot (*Illusions* 65).

Within the boundaries of the business perspective, democracy is simulated without risking the threat true public participation poses to the concentration of power and wealth in as few hands as their preponderance exists today. "Where the powerful are in disagreement, there will be a certain diversity of tactical judgments on how to attain generally shared aims, reflected in media debate" (Chomsky, *Consent* lx). Americans concerned with civic responsibility can perform the rituals of democratic life: read the newspaper (especially the nation's "paper of record," *The New York Times*), vote in every election, write concerned letters to congressmen about what are believed to be issues central to the existence of the democracy,<sup>2</sup> all within the framework of simulated democracy organized by the specialized class that actually

runs things. The issue of whether the powerful ought to be that way will never pass this model, and no serious discussion of reform that threatens the American elite or the means by which its wealth is sustained will ever find its way into the mainstream press. This is not for want of entertainment value or populist appeals, but sheer inexpressibility from the business perspective of America's corporate owners of the news and establishment-minded (or merely employment-minded) newspeople.

The assumption that this power of definition is abused is not a "conspiracy theory," but rather a logical consideration of the industry's capitalist nature.<sup>3</sup> As media critic Eric Alterman soberly concludes: "To ignore the power of the money at stake to determine the content of the news in the decisions of these executives—given the role money seems to play in every other aspect of society—is indefensibly childish and naïve" (27). Further—even in spite of the near-monopoly of news that has developed in the United States since the early 1980s, including the famous figure of six parent companies in possession of the vast majority of news outlets—the phenomena is nothing new, but merely the most sophisti-

<sup>2</sup> So-called "wedge issues" serve as more than divisive agents between political poles; such emotionally charged issues as the legality of abortion or the legal status of gay couples take the forefront in political discourse because they are of little consequence to the power arrangement and therefore may be discussed and shouted about until participants are blue in the face. As long as discussion of such issues remains that of individualized and isolated instances occurring in a vacuum, and does not examine the overarching structure of exploitation/repression with which they are inextricably tied, it meets the standards of the bounds of the expressible and provides useful diversion of otherwise dangerous activist elements of society.

<sup>3</sup> The assertions of Chomsky, Heman, and others have been vindicated by events prior to and since the publication of *Manufacturing Consent*, which posited the "Propaganda Model" against which the argument furthered in this article can be tested and has been with predictable vindication.

cated, consolidated, and subsequently, conspicuous stage in a legacy of thought control in Western society. Writes Chomsky:

An alternative conception of democracy is that the public must be barred from managing their own affairs and the means of information must be kept narrowly and rigidly controlled. That may sound like an odd conception of democracy, but its important to understand that it is the prevailing conception...[and] has long been, not just in operation, but in theory. (*Media Control* 10)

He traces this notion back to the writing of Walter Lippmann, and his model for a *spectator democracy* in which a “specialized class” serves to “analyze, execute, make decisions, and run things in the political, economic, and ideological systems,” while the vast majority of citizens, what Lippmann called “the bewildered herd” is kept away from the real decision-making and occasionally empowered through largely symbolic democratic exercises (*Media Control* 16-17). The “specialized class” is that of the wealthiest and most powerful in Western capitalism. In this model, media outlets are granted relatively free reign in dealing with issues inconsequential to the interests of the specialized class, but “when their most sensitive economic interests are at stake, the parent corporations seldom refrain from using their power over public information...Most say they would never use it. But even if sincere...they ignore history; when certain central interests are at stake, available power will always be used” (Bagdikian xxiii, 6). This does not reflect any remarkable professional or ethical failings of these individual companies, but rather the fact of capitalism in America. The complex constellation of wealth/power to which American media is beholden defines

a clear perspective, and its reification in the sensibilities of a majority of Americans is an objective that has proven attainable if not already attained.

The interest of the corporate parents of American media in pursuing and supporting a specific agenda abroad, through the nation’s foreign policy apparatus, is very real and can scarcely be understated. “The media giants, advertising agencies, and great multinational corporations have a joint and close interest in a favorable climate of investment in the Third World,” writes Noam Chomsky, “and their interconnections and relationships with the government in these policies are symbiotic” (*Consent* 14). The power elite of the United States have a tremendous stake in the nation’s foreign policy, and when adventures abroad are seen as beneficial to the nation’s economic interests, it can be expected that elite support will set the agenda for the corporate press. When the country goes to war in pursuit of these interests, “media not only suspend critical judgment and investigative zeal, they compete to find ways of putting the newly established truths in a supportive light” furthers Chomsky. “Themes and facts...incompatible with the now institutionalized theme are suppressed or ignored” (*Consent* 34).

This simplification and fabrication of geopolitical affairs are most often juxtaposed with an intense expression of nationalism, the socially acceptable derivative of racism, cultural chauvinism, and xenophobia. “The goal of such nationalist rhetoric” as is seen in the current public discourse, Chris Hedges writes, “is to invoke pity for one’s own. The goal is to show the community that what they hold sacred is under threat. The enemy, we are told, seeks to destroy religious and cultural life, the very identity of the group or state” (15). It is hard to imagine citizens convinced of such a pretext disapproving of any sort of violent remedy. And this is far from the exceptional activity of a few renegade corporate bosses;

rather it is often the nonactivity of the business perspective in observance.

This *business perspective* sanctifies capitalism and ordains aggressive war. The complexities of international relations are presented in simple, patriotic terms, as a populace flattered by entitlement and exceptionalism is obliged to protect what its told are its interests and character. American citizens are encouraged to consider the information available to them and form independent perspectives, though this poses no real threat to the established order and the attainment of its ends, as the concentration of money and power in U.S. society is safeguarded “through selection of topics, distribution of concerns, framing of issues, filtering out information, emphasis and tone, and by keeping debate within the bounds of acceptable premises” (Chomsky *Consent* 298).

The American flag pin on the television news anchor’s lapel summarizes this wonderfully; no departure from emotional patriotic rhetoric and the definition of events handed down by the power elite can be realistically expected. So-touted “objectivity” in this context must be understood to operate from premises established by reactionary patriotism. As Dan Rather candidly admitted: “Look, I’m an American...And when my country is at war, I want my country to win, whatever the definition of ‘win’ may be. Now I can’t and don’t argue that that is coverage without a prejudice. About that I am prejudiced” (Alterman 278). It bears reminding that these are not the words of someone widely considered a polemical right-wing jingo, but a journalist most commonly identified as sympathetic to leftist causes. In such anecdotes we find that the “liberal/conservative” dichotomy so exhaustingly flouted in the press, much like the discussion to which it is applied, says nothing for adherence to the bounds of the expressible, which are presupposed into the configuration. Writes Edward Said:

While it is certainly true that the media is far better equipped to deal with caricature and sensation than with the slower processes of culture and society, the deeper reasoning for these misconceptions is the imperial dynamic, and above all its separating, essentializing, dominating, and reactive tendencies. (*Culture* 37)

This imperial dynamic demands the benevolence of its actions as a priori to discussion, and *its separating, essentializing, dominating, and reactive tendencies* are turned most urgently against the gravest threat to the oppressor’s illusions: the native, *the Other*; the living contradiction of the simplification and fabrication that fuels oppressive foreign policy of democratic states.

The incorporation of the native, especially the native actively resisting oppressive policy, into the oppressor’s version of events is essential, as the clichés of Western democracy—freedom, equality, dignity, self-determination, and so forth—can be readily drawn by detractors of U.S. foreign policy to paint the dynamic as something (to use the timeless chestnut of nationalistic rhetoric that has perhaps slain more dissenting arguments than appeal to reason) inherently *un-American*. To prevent this comparison, which threatens to portray foreign resistance movements more in the vein of the “Founding Fathers” of American lore than bloodthirsty terrorists, it is necessary to obscure the humanity of the native, the coherence of her actions, and the similarity of his basic human existence to that of the American.

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The story of an outmatched resistance movement facing a torturous oppressor bent on the destruction of national identity and exploitation of a peoples’ land and re-

sources is not the likely case that the oppressive power would bring before the court of public opinion back home; such imagery calls to mind the familiar lore central to the histories of most states and cultures, and this is hardly flattering to the means and ends of oppressive foreign policy. Frantz Fanon understood this, and writing from the thick of the Algerian Revolution, during which French occupation of Algeria became fiercely resisted by Algerians united around a renewed national identity, he described the rhetorical constellation upon which the physical power dynamic rested:

Because for 130 years the French national consciousness has been conditioned by one simple basic principle—Algeria *is* France—we today find ourselves up against *instinctive, passionate, anti-historical reactions*, as a moment when a large proportion of the French people rationally realizes that its interest can best be served by putting an end to the war and recognizing an independent Algerian State. (*African Revolution* 85; italics added)

The issue of legitimate claim to territory or action in such a conflict is essential, as opposing forces battle to label the other the *aggressor*—a title central to the double-peak of modern warfare in which peace is sought by all yet war persists. Fanon understood the ability of powerful interests to define the national discourse, and even so to the disadvantage of the oppressive nation's citizenry.

This passage also illustrates what must be established firmly before this discussion may proceed: Despite the popularity Frantz Fanon attained in advocating the uprising of the oppressed as the only means by which their emancipation could be achieved, this is a realistic assessment rather than an absolutist claim. Fanon's nu-

merous appeals to the French Left throughout his essays published in *Toward the African Revolution* suggest<sup>4</sup> that he was perfectly aware that oppressive policy can cease due to pressure from within the offending state, but he was certainly not counting on this to happen and advocated fiercely against the Algerian people entrusting their destiny to anyone besides themselves, and especially to the colonialist power.

This pessimism can be attributed largely in part to the success in France of what we have called *the bounds of the expressible* in loading the national discourse in such a way that it could never produce dissent sufficient to contradict the colonialist government's most basic tenets. Writes Fanon in *A Dying Colonialism*:

The method of presenting the Algerian as a prey fought over with equal ferocity by Islam and France with its western culture reveals the whole approach of the occupier, his philosophy, and his policy...[The occupier] presents in a simplified and pejorative way the system of values by means of which the colonized person resists his innumerable offensives. What is in fact the assertion of a distinct identity, concern with keeping intact a few

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<sup>4</sup> Scholarship on this matter is hardly unanimous, as the most demonstrative writing to this effect, published in *Toward the African Revolution*, was originally written anonymously for *El Moudjahid*, a radical publication supportive of the Algerian Revolution, and the sincerity of Fanon's writing under these circumstances has been the cause of much speculation. Herein, however, these sentiments are taken at face value. Fanon writes in *The Wretched of the Earth*: "All the elements of a solution to the great problems of humanity have, at different times, existed in European thought. But the action of European men has not carried out the mission which fell to them..." (314). Here we find a variation of this theme, in which the potential of European intellectuals to effect change is lamented as unrealized, yet existent.

shreds of national existence, is attributed to religious, magical, fanatical behavior (41).

Here we see how the illusory world of the oppressive power is constructed. A portrayal of the Algerian resistance movement independent of French power interests could have threatened to shift public opinion, which overwhelmingly supported the suppression of the rebellion from the premise that it was a defensive war in the interest of protecting French land. Stories of sacrifice, loss, and courage in defense of a noble cause and against a brutish oppressor would have surely called to mind integral components of French national heritage with which all could identify, and not to the benefit of the oppressor. The mere idea of an Algerian *national existence* would have to be drawn from outside the bounds of the expressible, as officially sanctioned discourse hinged on the undisputed premise that the land and its inhabitants were undeniably of French possession, and this was quite deliberate, as Fanon understood. Further, this contrast—the limited discourse of the oppressor and the living negation of its negations—illustrates the explosive potential of contradiction in unmasking the illusions of an oppressive dynamic.

As the repressed national culture did not exist in the French definition of events, the behavior of the rebellious Algerians had to be explained independent of such a phenomenon and flattering of the oppressor's illusory world. Solidarity, cultural renewal, militarism, and the willingness of the natives to die in this struggle—all easily explained by the presence of an oppressive force suffocating an oppressed national entity—were detached from their obvious catalyst and served to the French public as whole. "Exoticism is one of the forms of this simplification" writes Fanon. "It allows no cultural confrontation. There is on the one hand a culture in which qualities of dynamism, of growth, of depth can be recog-

nized. And against this, we find characteristics, curiosities, things, never a structure" (*African Revolution* 35). The isolation of individual phenomena, such as the willingness of the native to face death in confronting the oppressor—perfectly reasonable and perhaps laudable in the context of an existential struggle for the survival of a national identity, or even life itself—is used to portray the native population as tragically inept and inherently incongruent with civil life. This also promises that no threat is posed to the designs of the colonialist; the absence of a coherent *structure* acting in opposition to the colonialist's ensures that the native's actions never betray the existence of an alternative to the oppressive dynamic, which of course would violate the sacred a priori of the colonialist's undisputed presence and necessity.

Deprived in presentation of the obvious catalysts, events speak to the backwardness, inferiority, and most importantly, dissimilarity of the Algerians to the French. This is of vital importance to the oppressive democratic power, whose population must be kept in reasonable accord with state policy, and whose convenient rhetoric of human rights and equality can be turned against its own policy should the safeguards against an accurate public understanding of the power dynamic fail. "It is not possible to enslave men without logically making them inferior through and through" writes Fanon (*African Revolution* 40). The racism that often compliments this reduction is to be understood in the same context. "Race prejudice [in the colonial context] in fact obeys a flawless logic" writes Fanon. "A country that lives, draws its substance from the exploitation of other peoples, makes those peoples inferior. Race prejudice applied to those peoples is normal" (*African Revolution* 41). Fanon focuses much of "Concerning Violence" on the imagery of the colonial world as a Manichean "world divided into compartments, world



cut in two...inhabited by two different species," and in this creation of the exploitative master who has set the native apart from himself, "what parcels out the world is to begin with the fact of belonging to a given race, a given species" (*Wretched* 40). "The settler and the native are old acquaintances" writes Fanon, "[f]or it is the settler who has brought the native into existence and who perpetuates his existence" (36). This construction works toward the oppression of the native, but offers in its superficiality a vulnerability that increases as contradictory perspectives emerge.

Confronting the negation of the native's humanity sought by the oppressor's carefully crafted discourse with the fact of its undeniable existence is not the mere consideration of the biological reality that the body of the wealthy Westerner and that of the impoverished "Third World" native are those of the same species. This point has long been reluctantly conceded by the Western power elite, as justification for oppressive foreign policy has shifted from the biological inequality found in the junk science of social Darwinism and its predecessors, to the cultural/behavioral inequality found in what Edward Said dubbed in his post-9/11 introduction to *Orientalism* "shabby screeds bearing screaming headlines about Islam and terror, Islam exposed, the Arab threat, and the Muslim menace" authored by unqualified and dubiously motivated "political polemicists" working in the Orientalist tradition (xx). In the same way that the slave trade, perfectly logical in the context of global capitalism, was soured by the discovery of the African as a human whose familiarity could no longer be ignored, so too may the policies of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century colonialist find themselves felled by an irreversible glimpse of the native drawn from outside the bounds in which inhumanity ensures continued exploitation.

"There are those who talk of a so-called Asiatic attitude toward death," writes

Fanon, of the attempts of his time at applying the mystification we have discussed to the guerillas of the Vietnam War. "But these basement philosophers cannot convince anyone...The Vietnamese who die before the firing squads are not hoping that their sacrifice will bring about the reappearance of a past. It is for the sake of the present and of the future that they are willing to die" (*Black Skin* 227). Translucence of this sort is breathed into the phenomenon of cultural renewal in the face of oppression, written off by the colonialist as a sign of fanaticism, or backward devotion to the past. Writes Fanon:

Well before the political or fighting phase of the national movement, an attentive spectator can thus feel and see the manifestations of new vigor and feel the approaching conflict. He will note unusual forms of expression and themes which are fresh and imbued with a power...no longer that of invocation, but rather of the assembling of the people, a summoning together for a precise purpose (*Wretched* 243).

Infatuation with the fledgling cause, also drawn upon by the colonialist to fit the oppressor's definition of native life, springs to life when imbued with its human reality. Writes Fanon:

Sometimes people wonder that the native, rather than give his wife a dress, buys instead a transistor radio. There is no reason to be astonished. The natives are convinced that their fate is in the balance, here and now. They live in the atmosphere of doomsday, and they consider that nothing out to be let pass unnoticed (*Wretched* 81).

Such immersion and dedication to the

native's newly invigorated national identity is sought as further evidence of the undesirable traits with which the colonialist wishes to saddle the resistant population. Writes Fanon:

The passion with which native intellectuals defend the existence of their national culture may be a source of amazement; but those who condemn this exaggerated passion are strangely apt to forget that their own psyche and their own selves are conveniently sheltered behind a French or German culture which has given full proof of its existence and which is uncontested (*Wretched* 209).

Finally (though examples are numerous<sup>5</sup> and may extend to nearly every facet of the colonialist's illusory construct of native life), the resort to violence is drawn upon as justification for what is portrayed as the colonialist's *response* to native *hostility*, through a disavowal of the reality of the cause and effect relationship of violence in the colonial situation. Writes Fanon:

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 colonialist understands nothing but force. The colonial regime

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<sup>5</sup> The transformation of a native population through its struggle against colonialism is a topic central to Fanon's *A Dying Colonialism*, which offers studies of individual phenomena, and more generally, to all of Fanon's writing, especially "On Violence."

owes its legitimacy to force and at no time tries to hide this aspect of things (*Wretched* 84).

The colonialist's definition of events contains the means of its own destruction, as the reality it seeks to obscure speaks to its superficiality when allowed to shine through.

Such is the language, drawn from outside the bounds of the expressible in the discourse defined by the colonialist, which disarms this superficial framework with the human proof of what it seeks to negate. Definition from outside these bounds provides a human face for the native and the behavior of the native population. Every negating mechanism of the colonialist's definition of the native becomes a positive tool asserting humanity and coherence in the struggle against oppression. The revival of long-abandoned customs, resurgences of religious fanaticism, and a renewed national identity is no longer the behavior of a backward people obsessed with the past, but the calculated organization of resistance with what little resources the oppressive power has not yet suppressed, intent not on reliving the past but ensuring the future. The willingness of these militants to die is no longer a marker of their unreason or primitive attitude, but is a badge of honor, much in the way that it has been throughout the history of Western warfare. The native, it is discovered, is quite human and as aware as the oppressor that the struggle at hand is a matter of life and death, not of individuals, but of a people.

When the human face of the native can no longer be kept secret, the reality of the power dynamic beneath which an entire population has been made to suffer emerges, and the essence of the responsible power becomes clear for its citizenry to face. "Colonialism is not a type of individual relations" writes Fanon "but the conquest of a national territory and the

oppression of a people: that is all. It is not a type of human behavior or a pattern of relations between individuals" (*African Revolution* 81). Once it is allowed that the victims of this policy are people not unlike the Western citizen, trapped in a situation regulating their activity, and acting much in the way that anyone would understandably and perhaps even laudably behave, this definition may confront the illusory world of the oppressive power. The human face of this relationship hardly flatters the oppressor, and the presence of this power becomes visibly what it has known itself to be all along. Writes Fanon: "The colonial situation is first of all a military conquest continued and reinforced by a civil and police administration. In Algeria, as in every colony, the foreign oppressor looks upon the native as a marking limit to his dignity and defines himself as constituting an irreducible negation of the colonized country's national existence" (*African Revolution* 81). The dynamic no longer appears as anything but the mere oppression of human by human. The invasion of a foreign land by a power bent on exploiting its resources and occupying its territory by whatever means attain this end. The inferiorization of the native is discovered to be a normative expression of a power with as much respect for human life and dignity as the maintenance of authority requires, and no more. It is from this point, at which the human reality of a simple relationship is understood, that the power dynamic may appear free from deliberate mystification.

It is through the same revelation that demystifies the power dynamic at hand that we may discover an explicit portrait of the power configuration. When confronted with the human face of the native and the coherence of his actions, the colonialist's illusions appear at best incomplete and farcical, and the deliberateness of its construction suggests the calculated concealment of the most tangible manifestations of this power. The dynamic now appears as a sim-

ple relationship of imposed domination and forced subordination, and the most extreme means by which the relationship is kept intact emerge as in sharp congruence with the entire structure, which can no longer disassociate itself with individual tales of horror. "Torture" writes Fanon, "is inherent in the whole colonial configuration" (*African Revolution* 64). Not only is torture perfectly logical in the context of a native population whose dehumanization is the normative expression of the oppressive power, but it fits nicely among the various other tools in the colonialist's economy of exploitation and misery, which now stands bare before all willing to see.

Fanon despised the lie amongst the intellectuals of France at his time that the most sensational means by which the end of the power relationship is pursued can be excused as unfamiliar aberration independent of the dynamic they enforce; "[t]he most serious abdication of the French intellectuals is having tolerated this lie" he writes. "The passion for truth and justice cannot, without challenge, accept such fraud" (*African Revolution* 67). "Torture in Algeria" writes Fanon, "is not an accident, or an error, or a fault. Colonialism cannot be understood without the possibility of torturing, violating, or massacring." Torture, rather, "is an expression and a means of the occupant-occupied relationship" (*African Revolution* 66). The same standard can be applied to the agents of the oppressive order, whose actions typify the dynamic that they populate. Writes Fanon:

The police agent who tortures an Algerian infringes no law. His act fits into the framework of the colonialist institution. By torturing, he manifests an exemplary loyalty to the system. And indeed the French soldiers can hardly do otherwise without condemning French domination. Every Frenchman in Algeria must behave like a torturer.

Wanting to remain in Algeria, there is no other solution for France than the maintenance of a permanent military occupation and of a powerful police structure. (*African Revolution* 71)

When the illusions of the colonialist stand unmasked before its democratic citizens, talk of accountability is inescapable. “One cannot both be in favor of the maintenance of French domination in Algeria and opposed to the means that this maintenance requires” writes Fanon (*African Revolution* 66). For a democratic society, this implication is far-reaching.

This is all not to say that the discovery of the human face of the native in foreign oppression will mark history as a definitive event, nor that it promises anything in the way of improving the dire state of today’s global scene. (While the possibility of this realization spurring a universal understanding of shared subordination between the native and democratic citizen—entirely within the realm of possibilities, even to Fanon<sup>6</sup>—is tantalizing to say the least, such a theory may follow but is not pursued here.) It is entirely possible that the manufacture of consent as it has worked toward mystifying the power dynamic of 21<sup>st</sup> Century colonialism is no longer necessary, and that the humanity of the native is and will be acknowledged by those who continue to support exploitative policy. However, what is sought here is the disarming of the oppressors’ illusions in order for the citizens of these supposed democracies to make policy decisions free from deliberate manipulation.

Should the sort of policy we have examined be chosen by a wholly cognizant populace, so be it. Fanon had much to say about the action that should follow.

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<sup>6</sup> See: “The Algerian War and Man’s Liberation” in *Toward the African Revolution*.

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