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Frantz Fanon: A Portrait



Synopsis

"Fanon was consummately incapable of telling the story of himself. He lived in the immediacy of the moment, with an intensity that embodied everything he evoked. Fanon's discourse pertained to a present tense that was unburdened by its narrative past. The little we knew about his personal life had been gleaned from passing allusions, brief glimpses that vanished as quickly as they appeared. . . . Fanon had a profound talent for life; he was a man who wanted to be the subject and actor of his own life, and it was for this reason that he was so engaging and disarming." —Alice Cherki, from the Introduction

Frantz Fanon (1925–1961) was born in Martinique, and in 1943 left to fight in Europe with Free French forces. After 1945 he studied medicine and psychiatry in Lyons and began to write. His first analysis of the effects of racism and postcolonialism, *Black Skin, White Masks*, appeared in 1952 and would become a foundational text for the liberation movements of the 1960s and later for postcolonial studies. In 1952 he moved to Algeria and practiced at the Blida-Joinville psychiatric hospital in French Algeria until 1957. From that year he worked full time for the Algerian independence movement, including a brief appointment as the movement's ambassador in Ghana. One of Fanon's few surviving contemporaries, Alice Cherki worked closely with Fanon at the psychiatric hospital in Blida and then later for the Algerian cause in Tunisia. This book is a record of "an epoch, a life, and a body of work often viewed as inadmissible." Cherki offers a unique assessment of Fanon's complex personality, illuminating both his psychiatric practice and of which she says, "Fanon possessed a tremendous intuition about the unconscious and a great erudition in psychoanalytic theory" and the sources of his political activism, of his intellectual career as a pivot of the quickly changing world. Given the continuing relevance of Fanon's insights into the enduring legacy of colonialism on the psyches of the colonized, this compelling and personal account of his life and work will be required reading for anyone interested in the consequences of empire.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"This is a book of interest and importance, and it comes at a moment when events have arguably made Fanon a contemporary thinker. Students of Fanon will surely want to read it, as will those comparing anti-colonial struggles around the globe." [— Benjamin Claude Brower, Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History](#)

"I was happy to read Alice Cherki's portrait of Frantz Fanon. Her book is a joy because it is clear and generous. Cherki has succeeded in giving this intellectual the place he merits in history and space. She is right to insist on the fact that Fanon was never an apologist of violence or a revolutionary, but a 'thinker of violence.'" [— Tahar Ben Jelloun](#)

"I was absolutely engrossed by Alice Cherki's recounting of her collegial relationship with Frantz Fanon. What a powerful portrait it is! We learn that Fanon was an extremely private person, offering little insight into his personal life even to Jean-Paul Sartre, a man he greatly admired. This well-written and at times haunting volume gives us a glimpse into the evolution of a revolutionary. Cherki reassures us that Fanon was indeed a man of conviction and integrity who cared deeply for his patients and espoused a philosophy of human freedom from a tender age." [— T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, Vanderbilt University](#)

"Fanon possessed a spirit that arced between two diodes: action and rejection. That vital arc would burn, over its rectifications, a path of distinct splendor. Alice Cherki guides us [—](#) rather, she compels us [—](#) through the currents that forged Fanon's life and the ascendant lucidity of his thought. With the precision of a scholar, the scruple of a psychoanalyst, and the candor of a personal friend, Cherki offers an unprecedented account of a formidable intellect." [— Patrick Ehlen, author of Frantz Fanon: A Spiritual Biography](#)

"At a time when Fanon's study of human alienation and anticolonial revolt appears to be taking on a new concreteness, Alice Cherki's book is most welcome. With a freshness not always found in academic studies, Cherki creates a moving portrait that provides a much-needed insight into the man, as well as a rich contextualization for his thinking and activity. Based on her own working relationship with Fanon in the critical period of the Algerian Revolution, Cherki provides perceptive readings of Fanon, as well as of the politics and personalities of the Algerian liberation struggle. Fanon is brought to life in Cherki's sympathetic yet critical book not only as a powerful intellect and complex personality but also as a passionate individual engaged in the radical project of human

freedom." – Nigel C. Gibson, author of *Fanon: The Postcolonial Imagination* "This is a book that was waiting to be written, and, thanks to Nadia Benabid's excellent translation of these candid reflections of Alice Cherki, a fellow anticolonialist who was also a student, friend, and then colleague of Frantz Fanon, it comes to us with breathtaking grace and poignancy. This is a remarkable, must-read text for anyone interested in the context in which Fanon's brilliant reflections on the psychodynamics of colonialism and racism emerged, and it is of equal interest to anyone interested in how such social diagnoses continue to bear on the present." – Lewis Gordon, author of *Fanon and the Crisis of European Man* and President of the Caribbean Philosophical Association

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A detailed portrait of the man, the doctor, and the revolutionary. Fanon's strengths and his weaknesses are put on display by a person who knew him, a friend and former colleague.

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