

December 24, 1958

Contribution of Algeria to the Construction of Africa

Citation:

"Contribution of Algeria to the Construction of Africa", December 24, 1958, Wilson Center Digital Archive, El Moudjahid 34 (24 December 1958), 9. Contributed, translated, and annotated by Cyrus Schayegh.

<https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/291043>

Summary:

Born on the Caribbean island of Martinique, a French colony, Frantz Fanon (1925-1961) fought with the Free French Army in 1943-1944 in North Africa and Europe. In 1945, he was repatriated. After shortly working for Aimé Césaire (1913-2008), a famous politician and author who helped found the négritude movement in Francophone literature, he moved to France to study psychiatry. In 1952 he wrote the first text that would make him a worldwide leading postcolonial thinker; originally his dissertation, *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Black Skin, White Masks) analyzed colonial conditions' mental effects on colonized subjects. (Another text, for which he would become even more famous, was the 1961 *Les Damnés de la Terre* [The Wretched of the Earth].)

In 1953, Fanon agreed to become the head of the psychiatric hospital at Blida-Joinville, in French Algeria, for principally professional reasons—but got involved with Algeria's Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) mere months after it started the war of independence in November 1954. His hospital treated both FLN fighters and Frenchmen and -women, including security personnel whose violent counter-insurgency work, including torture, had destabilized them. In 1956 he resigned, and in early 1957 fled to neighboring Tunisia, which had become independent in 1956. Moving up the FLN's civilian command structure, he helped run its principal organ, *El Moudjahid*, and in 1958 became the ambassador to Ghana of the FLN's Provisional Algerian Government.

In 1957 Ghana had become the second British African colony, after Sudan, to gain independence. Its leader, Kwame Nkrumah (1909-1972, r. 1952/1957-1966), was a known pan-Africanist who continued efforts reaching back into the late 1800s, including the Fifth Pan-African Congress that he had co-organized in 1945 in Manchester. He believed true independence was possible only if African countries unite their energies. To this effect, his government inter alia organized conferences. The earliest one, the first Conference on Independent African States, took place in Ghana's capital of Accra in April 1958; Ghanaian, Liberian, Ethiopian, Moroccan, Tunisian, Libyan, Sudanese, and Egyptian/United Arab Republic (UAR) delegates inter alia emphasized that they form one African family, whether they are Arabs or sub-Saharan Africans. Moreover, as Jeffrey Ahlman has shown in "The Algerian Question in Nkrumah's Ghana, 1958-1960: Debating

‘Violence’ and ‘Non-Violence’ in African Decolonization” (2010), when the FLN arrived at the conference and, with UAR support, asked to be heard and accepted as Algeria’s voice, Nkrumah felt forced to consent. He did so although he was advocating decolonization by nonviolent means, which had worked in Ghana that, unlike French Algeria, was not a settler colony and not unified with the metropole. Differences between the FLN’s approach and Nkrumah’s, which was shared by some other Africans like the Kenyan Tom Mboya (1930-1969), showed also in the December 1958 First All-African People’s Conference (AAPC), to which the FLN was invited.

The text printed here is an English translation of the rendering, in El Moudjahid, of Fanon’s talk, in French, to the AAPC. It framed Algeria’s violent decolonization experience as the model for Africa. The AAPC indeed was an important landmark in African discussions about the means of decolonization, and it was after this conference that Fanon became influential also outside the FLN.

Original Language:

French

Contents:

Translation - English

Contribution of Algeria to the Construction of Africa

[...]

Dr. Fanon, « Le combat solidaire des pays africains »

This conference, which gives us the opportunity to meet and to outline our varied concrete situations, marks an important date in the fight against colonial domination.

During our work, we need to try to launch dynamic forms of combat that can bypass the maneuvers of an adversary who without any doubt does not completely and simply want to withdraw from Africa.

The fundamental characteristic of the African liberation movement is that it is situated squarely on an international level. The thing is that Africa lives bent under the foreigner's yoke, and the interests of imperialism obey to an organic solidarity.

Sure, there are major contradictions between the colonial power, but one must never forget that exploiting those has to remain tactical, and never alter the strategy of liberating the continent. One must accept and search tactical alliances with colonial powers whose interests are opposed in order to weaken them, but at the same time be careful that those alliances won't contaminate our doctrinal positions.

Every African has to get engaged in the liberation of the continent and, to be very concrete, has in person to respond to the call of this or that territory.

Every African party has to develop the African consciousness of its people.

Confronted as we are with the implacable imperialist objectives, we believe it is impossible to arrange ourselves politically with particular colonialist powers. If this error becomes enrooted in the overall strategy of [our] struggle, we will witness a reconfiguration of the colonial system or a change of its physiognomy or a magical camouflage operation, and the imperialist mortgage remains kicking and alive on the African continent.

The national will in today's Africa has to be doubled up by the will to liberate [all of] Africa. Every propaganda, every slogan, every appeal to the masses has to include [a well-placed^[ii]] reference to the fight (*combat*) for the liberation of Africa.

An Algerian cannot be truly Algerian if he does not feel in his innermost self the indescribable drama that is unfolding in Rhodesia or Angola.

The anti-colonialism of an African, even one who is already independent, cannot only be a moral positioning. Each African is an anticolonial soldier, and we know well that in some circumstances, taking up arms is not a choice. African anti-colonialism is an fighting anti-colonialism (*anti-colonialisme de combat*) and not a part of ethnic conscience—the Belgian, English, and French colonialists have to get used to see in each African a relentless enemy of their domination of Africa.

Fighting for now more than four years against an army of almost a million soldiers, the Algerian has strengthened at one and the same time his national conscience and the African dimension of his existence.

The innermost essence of the African colonial edifice as a whole feels the repercussions of the Algerian War, and France's political innovations in the rest of Africa have emerged under the pressure of the Algerian War. To be more precise, the "loi cadre" and the recent community of states were proposed because at specific moments [France] anticipated the start of an armed front in the territories under French domination.

The Algerian people fights for the liberation of Africa and contributes, with the other people, to chasing colonialism from our continent. Africa is at war against colonialism, and it is impatient. The African countries have to move towards a joint fight (*doivent s'engager dans la voie d'une association de combat*), for the enemy is powerful and strong, and is still very able to maneuver. The African countries need to unite because imperialism itself is consolidating its positions, demonstrating new faces and new forms of long-term continuity.

^[ii] The typed French text is not clear here; hence, the brackets.