Colonial Persistence

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In the past few years, specifically, thanks to the demands of Black Lives Matter global movement, many architecture schools, programs, instructors, directors, chairs, and deans have promised their students, alumni, and employees to 'decolonise' their curriculum. They created ad-hoc committees, drafted antiracist reports and anticolonial protocols, organised townhalls to address systemic racism and white supremacy, established strategic lines and positions, admitted and hired specific profiles, and made their promised commitment public through official statements and speeches, which were published on their webpages. Yet, the colonial persists more than ever. Its persistence cannot be more explicit since October 2023, and the relentless Israeli war on Gaza. Its persistence is unquestioned by various universities and colleges who have censored, repressed, harassed, bulled, threatened, suspended, and sued Palestinian and pro-Palestinian students and employees. The colonial persists within institutions that, on the one hand, promised to create a more 'diverse', 'equal', and 'inclusive' educational environment, and on the other hand, have postponed or stopped their transactional promise to question 'The Colonial Order of Things'.[1]

As Frantz Omar Fanon (1925–1961), anticolonial psychiatrist and political philosopher from the French colony of Martinique (today a French department), argued in his seminal 1961 book *Les damnées de la terre* (*The Wretched of the Earth*): 'The colonial world is a Manichean world.'[2] A world that has been historically, and is being continuously, permeated and marked by violent activities of war, occupation, exploitation, dispossession, destruction and strategic construction. A world that is segregated into compartments and characterised by a strict division between

1 See, for example, Samia Henni, 'The Colonial Order of Things', in *Architheses reader: Critical Positions in Search of Postmodernity, 1971–1976*, ed. by Gabrielle Schaad and Torsten Lange (Triest Verlag für Architektur, 2021), pp. 389–403; Samia Henni, 'Colonial Ramifications', *E-Flux Architecture, History/ Theory*, gta Institute, ETH Zurich, 31 October 2018 <https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/history-theory/225180/colonial-ramifications>.

2 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. by R. Philcox (Grove Press, 2004), p. 41.

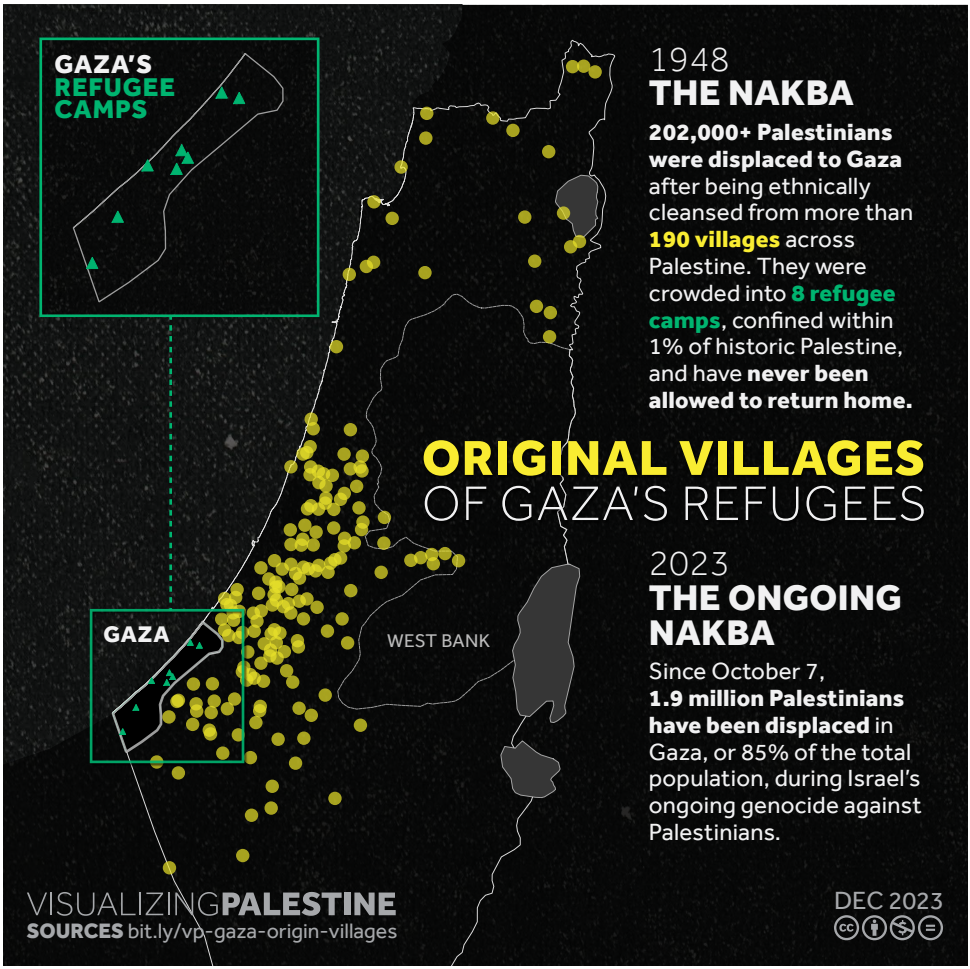


Fig. 1. Original Villages of Gaza's Refugees, *Visualizing Palestine*, 2023 <https://visualizingpalestine.org/visual/original-villages-of-gazas-refugees/>.

the coloniser and colonised people, spaces, and resources. He argued that 'Colonialism is not a thinking machine, nor a body endowed with reasoning faculties. It is violence in its natural state.'[3] Fanon's analysis of colonial violence was informed by his lived experiences in colonised Martinique, France, and colonised Algeria, where he worked as psychiatrist at Blida-Joinville Hospital between 1953 and 1957.[4] For Fanon, violence is both a human (political) and a medical (scientific) notion. He identified at least three categories of violence: offensive colonial violence, defensive anticolonial violence, and violence in the international context — opening up possibilities for fundamental reconsiderations of the world order.[5]

He claimed that in the colonies, the production of the colonial space entailed (and still entails) the destruction of existing lives, buildings, and environments, and thereby the imposition of certain norms of forms of eating, drinking, living, commuting, speaking, working, building, and so on.[6] Whether it was called the 'civilising mission' in the context of nineteenth-century colonisation; 'development' and 'investment' in the context of the twentieth-century Cold War (including the threat of nuclear war); or 'urbicide' and 'scorched-earth' in today's Israel war on

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3 Fanon, p. 61.

4 See, for example, Samia Henni, 'On Frantz Fanon and the Manichean World', *Mousse Magazine,* April 2024 <https://www.moussemagazine.it/magazine/frantz-omar-fanon-samia-henni-2024>.

5 On Fanon's definitions of violence, see 'Concerning Violence' and 'Violence in the International Context', in Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, pp. 35–106. Fanon's approach to violence and its effects is informed by the violence of the colonial world that he experienced and attempted to cure. Sometimes his work has been taken out of context and he was unfairly accused of inciting violence. However, Fanon argued that violence is the 'natural state' of colonial rule and that the colonial space is maintained through violence.

6 See, for example, Paul Rabinow, *French Modern: Norms and Forms of the Social Environment* (University of Chicago Press, 1989); Nezar AlSayyad, *Forms of Dominance on the Architecture and Urbanism of the Colonial Enterprise* (Avebury, 1992); Itohan Osayimwese, *Colonialism and Modern Architecture in Germany*, Culture, Politics, and the Built Environment (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2017); Samia Henni, *Architecture of Counterrevolution: The French Army in Northern Algeria* (gta Verlag, 2017).

Gaza, these spatial practices maintain and reinforce a specific colonial world order. As Fanon argued, the primary encounter between the coloniser and the colonised people and their spaces was marked by violence. He contended: 'Violence in its practice is totalizing and national. As a result, it harbours in its depths the elimination of regionalism and tribalism.'[7] Architectural and spatial examples of this elimination can be found in various territories and lands across the world, including Africa, Asia, Australia, the Americas, and the Middle East. However, Fanon's critique of colonial violence incites a reflection on the relationships between 'postcolonial' studies, 'decolonial' theories, and the imperial neoliberal institutions that offer those studies. Often, the founders and leaders of those universities and colleges supported, financed, and benefited from 'The Colonial Order of Things'. If this contradiction was part of one of the critical masks of colonialist institutions, today it has become ideological and politicised, and therefore, those who teach those classes are often repressed, surveyed, and in many cases, violently harassed, or fired.

Fanon's anticolonial analysis of the Manichean world and colonial violence (both political and scientific) exposes that contradiction and reveals the mechanism of the colonial persistence. This persistence is to be understood transnationally, connecting the construction of colonial infrastructure and spaces built by colonising regimes with the destruction of lives, buildings, and environments in formerly or currently colonised places by those regimes and their allies. Such multiscale and multidirectional understanding must be informed by anticolonial, abolitionist, Indigenous, and other traditions of associating anticolonial practices with aspirations for national liberation, and social, spatial, and environmental justice. For many, those practices are performed daily as a form of existence and survival. For Fanon decolonisation is a historical process that 'cannot be understood, it cannot become intelligible nor clear to itself except in the exact measure that we can discern the

7 Fanon, p. 51.

movements which give it historical form and content'.[8] Those movements are global, strong, loud, consistent, convinced, and committed. Nothing can prevent them or stop them from their quest for and defence of justice, accountability, and dignity.



Fig. 2. Six Wars Old, *Visualizing Palestine*, 2024 <https://visualizingpalestine.org/visual/six-wars-old/>.

8 Fanon, p. 36.