

# E-Content

## POSTCOLONIAL & NEW WRITINGS

Semester: III

Lecture 8

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## COURSE CONTENT UNIT-I

### *The Wretched of the Earth: Critical Appreciation* Lecture 8

#### Topics to be Covered

- Critical Examination of the text
- The Wretched of the Earth Symbols, Allegory and Motifs
- The Wretched of the Earth Metaphors and Simile
- Image of the Lumpenproletariat
- The Wretched of the Earth Irony
- The Wretched of the Earth Imagery

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### To Revise

Fanon engaged the fundamental issues of his day: language, affect, sexuality, gender, race and racism, religion, social formation, time, and many others. His impact was immediate upon arrival in Algeria, where in 1953 he was appointed to a position in psychiatry at Bilda-Joinville Hospital. His participation in the Algerian revolutionary struggle shifted his thinking from theorizations of blackness to a wider, more ambitious theory of colonialism, anti-colonial struggle, and visions for a postcolonial culture and society. Fanon published in academic journals and revolutionary newspapers, translating his radical vision of anti-colonial struggle and decolonization for a variety of audiences and geographies, whether as a young academic in Paris, a member of the Algeria National Liberation Front (FLN), Ambassador to Ghana for the Algerian provisional government, or revolutionary participant at conferences across Africa.

*The Wretched of the Earth* by Frantz Fanon is a discussion of colonization, decolonization, and movements to remove colonizers from colonized areas. While there aren't characters as there would be in a fictional work, Fanon does discuss people he treated in Algeria while he worked there and they were under colonial rule. He does not fully give the name of each person involved, instead identifying them by a series and an initial.

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### ***The Wretched of the Earth Analysis ( Critical Appreciation )***

- In Fanon's vision, the colonized, the proletariat of the world, are the damned or wretched of the earth. As a black psychiatrist who chose to become an Algerian citizen, Fanon invented a collective therapy that he believed would save a race of the damned. That therapy is based on the premise that the black man will remain enslaved until he has successfully struggled for and achieved his political freedom.
- More permanent in its effects than strikes, boycotts, or demonstrations, the armed insurrection of the Algerian people, according to Fanon, would bring about the total transformation of a colony into a community free of any psychological, emotional, or legal subjection; within that society, the colonized would be fully human. Fanon further argues that the entire structure of the Algerian family would change. Relationships between parents and children or between husbands and wives would lose their restrictive, traditional character; Arabic would lose its religious exclusivism, and French would become domesticated. Violence would create a new spiritual unity which would prepare the country for the enormous task of national postwar reconstruction.
- The year 1960 marked independence for Algeria. This, for Fanon and for many Africans, however, was considered a false independence, one granted by France to nationalist leaders who still remained her dependents.

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- The reluctance of the new African nations to assume the burdens of their revolutionary duty stemmed, according to Fanon, from a lack of understanding of the fundamental nature of the political world. The African elites had no ideological foundation beyond a simple nationalism. In his final work, Fanon offered them an alternative.
- The French title of his book, *Les Damnés de la terre* (the damned of the earth), taken from the first line of the *Internationale*, is more richly connotative than its English translation. The wretched of the earth elicit pity, but the damned are beyond hope. The fate of the wretched can be improved by charity, but the damned must be resurrected. In imagery which critics say links him with Arthur Rimbaud and Jean Genet, the damned are the rat pack, the prostitutes and pimps, the brutal peasants, who invade the city through the sewers. When the city goes up in flames, the damned are purified in its fire.
- Fanon's discussion of violence combines a psychoanalytic tradition with a Marxist one, but a Marxism revised to encompass a colonial world where the relations of production are themselves a superstructure rooted in the relations of colonialism. In Fanon's view, in the beginning colonization is imposed through violence. The violent reaction it generates among the members of the colonized, however, is then turned inward, taking the form of muscular tension, heightened criminality within their own community, and tribal wars. Hope lies in the redirection of this internalized aggression onto external objects, utilizing this energy for a destruction which purges and purifies. The most powerful reservoir of violence is to be found not in the cities, themselves artificial constructs of colonialism, but in the country among the peasants, the true revolutionaries.

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### Analysis

- Fanon's book, "The Wretched of the Earth" like Foucault's "Discipline and Punish" question the basic assumptions that underlie society. Both books writers come from vastly different perspectives and this shapes what both authors see as the technologies that keep the populace in line.
- Foucault coming out of the French intellectual class sees technologies as prisons, family, mental institutions, and other institutions and cultural traits of French society. In contrast Frantz Fanon (1925-1961) born in Martinique into a lower middle class family of mixed race ancestry and receiving a conventional colonial education sees the technologies of control as being the white colonists of the third world. Fanon at first was an assimilationist thinking colonists and colonized should try to build a future together. But quickly Fanon's assimilationist illusions were destroyed by the gaze of metropolitan racism both in France and in the colonized world. He responded to the shattering of his neo-colonial identity, his white mask, with his first book, Black Skin, White Mask, written in 1952 at the age of twenty-seven and originally titled "An Essay for the Desalination of Blacks." Fanon defined the colonial relationship as one of the non-recognition of the colonizer's humanity, his subject hood, by the colonizer in order to justify his exploitation.
- Fanon's next novel, "The Wretched Of The Earth" views the colonized world from the perspective of the colonized. Like Foucault's questioning of a disciplinary society Fanon questions the basic assumptions of colonialism. He questions whether violence is a tactic that should be employed to eliminate colonialism

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### Criticism

- Some theorists working in postcolonial studies have criticized Fanon's commitment to the nation as reflective of an essentialist and authoritarian tendency in his writing. In response to "On National Culture", Christopher L. Miller, professor of African American studies and French at Yale University, faults Fanon for viewing the nation as the unquestioned site of anti-colonial resistance, since national borders were imposed on African peoples during the Scramble for Africa.[9]:48 According to Miller, the lack of attention to the imposition and artificiality of national borders in Africa overlooks the cultural and linguistic differences of each country that make theorizing a unified national culture, as Fanon does, problematic. Miller also criticizes Fanon for following much of "post-Enlightenment Western thought" by treating particular or local histories as subordinate to the universal or global struggle of the nation.
- Neil Lazarus, professor at Warwick University, has suggested that Fanon's "On National Culture" overemphasizes a sense of unified political consciousness onto the peasantry in their struggle to overthrow colonial systems of power. In particular, Lazarus argues that the idea of a 'national consciousness' does not align with the history of the Algerian Revolution, in which Fanon was highly involved, since when the country gained independence in 1962 after an 8-year liberation war, the population was largely demobilized.[8]:78 In Lazarus' view, the peasant militancy in Fanon's analysis becomes the exact justification for his theory, yet does not necessarily exist in the material sense.
- In the foreword to the 2004 edition of Wretched of the Earth, Homi K. Bhabha also pointed to some of the dangers of Fanon's analysis in "On National Culture". He wrote that Fanon's dedication to a national consciousness can be read as a "deeply troubling" demand for cultural homogeneity and the collapse of difference.



## COURSE CONTENT UNIT-I

### **The Wretched of the Earth Symbols, Allegory and Motifs**

#### **Rifle Butts and Napalm (Symbol)**

In a passage early in *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon describes how the colonists originally maintain their power:

"In capitalist countries a multitude of sermonizers, counselors, and "confusion-mongers" intervene between the exploited and the authorities. In colonial regions, however, the proximity and frequent, direct intervention by the police and the military ensure the colonized are kept under close scrutiny, and contained by rifle butts and napalm." (4)

- Here, "rifle butts and napalm" are a symbol of all the violence that colonists use. Guns and bombs aren't the only way the colonists subjugate the colonized, but they are a powerful image of all the violence that intimidates and controls the colonized.

#### **Sleeping Beauty (Allegory)**

- At the end of Chapter 1, Fanon talks about how the working classes in Europe must support the decolonizing effort:
- "This colossal task, which consists of reintroducing man into the world, man in his totality, will be achieved with the crucial help of the European masses who would do well to confess that they have often rallied behind the position of our common masters on colonial issues. In order to do this, the European masses must first of all decide to wake up, put on their thinking caps and stop playing the irresponsible game of Sleeping Beauty."



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### **The Wretched of the Earth Metaphors and Simile**

#### **Language of Violence (Metaphor)**

In Chapter 1, Fanon talks vividly about how the colonial government subjugates the colonized. In this passage, he describes the police and soldiers who keep the colonized in check:

"We have seen how the government's agent uses a language of pure violence. The agent does not alleviate oppression or mask domination. He displays and demonstrates them with the clear conscience of the law enforcer, and brings violence into the homes and minds of the colonized subject."

This is a metaphor because violence is not actually a "language" in the same way that, say, English and French are. But the government communicates through violence in the same way it communicates through language. Through violence, it tells the colonized to stay submissive.

#### **Revolution like a Wildfire (Simile)**

In Chapter 2, Fanon discusses how violence erupts spontaneously in rural areas, where men learn to fight back against colonialism and rediscover their own agency. He then uses this simile:

"But the flames have been lit and like an epidemic, spread like wildfire throughout the country."

In fact, there are two similes here. First, violence spreads like an "epidemic"; then it spreads like a "wildfire." In both cases, violence cannot be contained. Once it shows up in one village, it will spread to another because it is contagious and a force of nature. In this way, the colonist cannot stop the anticolonial insurrection.

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### The Adopted Intellectual (Simile)

- In Chapter 4, Fanon is discussing the role and experience of the colonized intellectual—those Africans who, usually in metropolitan areas, come into contact with European elites and are educated alongside them. He uses this simile to describe the early experience of the intellectual:

"Like adopted children who only stop investigating their new family environment once their psyche has formed a minimum core of reassurance, the colonized intellectual will endeavor to make European culture his own." (156)

- Equating culture with family, Fanon vividly brings home how the intellectual may at first be complicit in colonialism. He has been “adopted” by European culture, and this provides him a sense of belonging in an otherwise alienating world. But eventually, the intellectual must leave behind this comfort in order to confront the brutal reality of colonialism.

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### **The Wretched of the Earth Irony**

#### ***Reversals of Force***

One of the ironies of colonialism is how the means by which the colonists tried to control the colonized end up being used against them. At first, the colonists enforce their authority through violence and the threat of violence. This elicits submission from the colonized, who learn they are powerless. But when violence spontaneously erupts in the colonies, and men fight back against the colonists, they learn they were powerful rather than powerless. They start to use violence against the colonists. The irony is that the force used by the colonists ends up getting used against them; the force they used to subdue the colonized has taught the colonized how to fight back.

#### ***Reversals of Manichaeism***

Similar to how violence gets reversed in decolonization, the colonial view of morality also undergoes an ironic reversal. Under colonialism, the colonist divides the world into two. It's a simplistic division between colonist and colonized, white and black, good and evil. Under decolonization, the colonized fight back and split up the world into the freedom fighters and the oppressors. Now the world is still divided into two, but the colonists are the evil ones. The colonized have learned a dualistic division of the world, but have flipped the script.

Under colonialism, the dualistic division of the world also erased the complexity and diversity of the colonized. People from different ethnicities, tribes, and religions were all lumped into this one category: the colonized, dehumanized beast. But now, under decolonization, this big category becomes a threat to colonialism

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### **The Wretched of the Earth Imagery**

#### **Image of Decolonization**

- Early on in *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon provides this “clear image” that every colonized subject has regarding decolonization:

"To blow the colonial world to smithereens is henceforth a clear image within the grasp and imagination of every colonized subject. To dislocate the colonial world does not mean that once the borders have been eliminated there will be a right of way between the two sectors. To destroy the colonial world means nothing less than demolishing the colonist's sector, burying it deep within the earth or banishing it from the territory."

- This vivid image captures both the violence Fanon thinks is necessary in decolonization—where “blowing to smithereens” is both metaphoric and actual—and the desired result of that violence. Colonialism steals the land from the colonized; now, the colonized bury the colonial vision under the land the colonized have reclaimed.

#### **Image of Colonial Dreams**

- Fanon gives a vivid description of the dreams the colonized subject has at night:

"The first thing the colonial subject learns is to remain in his place and not overstep its limits. Hence the dreams of the colonial subject are muscular dreams, dreams of action, dreams of aggressive vitality. I dream I am jumping, swimming, running, and climbing. I dream I burst out laughing, I am leaping across a river and chased by a pack of cars that never catches up with me. During colonization the colonized subject frees himself night after night between nine in the evening and six in the morning."

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### Image of the Lumpenproletariat

- In Chapter 2, Fanon discusses how the national political and labor parties, founded in the cities, do not involve the revolutionary power of the rural masses. For Fanon, the revolution will end up being led, not by these parties, but by those in the country who spontaneously erupt into violence and realize their own political potential for liberation. This is the image he provides of the “lumpenproletariat” who will lead the insurrection:
- "As for the people living in their huts and their dreams, their hearts begin to beat to the new national rhythm and they softly sing unending hymns to the glory of the fighters. The insurrection has already spread throughout the nation. It is now the turn of the parties to be isolated."
- This vivid imagery paints a picture of village life at the same time that it connects the bodies of the villagers to the body of the nation. Their beating hearts become the heart of a free nation. Fanon has a tendency to turn poetic at moments of upheaval and liberation, and this is a strong example of his poetic abilities.

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### To Conclude: The Wretched of the Earth Fanon and Sartre

- The legacy of The Wretched of the Earth is entwined with that of Jean-Paul Sartre, who wrote the introduction to the first edition of the book when it was published in French in 1961. Sartre was an extremely influential philosopher in France, where he championed Marxist causes. Most importantly, Sartre was a key figure in existentialism, a school of philosophical thought that emphasized the actions of men as the basis of philosophy. Existentialism values the freedom of humans to create their own world; it believes the world starts with the free actions of human individuals.
- Sartre's emphasis on violence, however, distorted the readings many had of The Wretched of the Earth. Violence is only one part of the larger decolonizing vision Fanon advocates, and it tends to distract from the other things Fanon says about the importance of culture and national consciousness. In the 1960s, these other facets of Fanon's analysis were often overlooked, and the book was instead embraced by a generation of young activists as a justification of violent protest. For this reason, the eminent philosopher Hannah Arendt attacked the book, arguing against violence. Homi Bhaba paraphrases the situation: "Hannah Arendt's assault on the book in the late sixties was an attempt at staunching the wildfire it spread across university campuses, while she readily acknowledged that it was really Sartre's preface that glorified violence beyond Fanon's words or wishes" .
- Although Sartre's introduction continues to be published in English-language editions of The Wretched of the Earth, it has not been included in French editions since 1967. That was the year that Fanon's widow removed it from publication. Her reasoning was that Sartre had begun to support pro-Zionist movements in Israel, which she thought was in contradiction to many of the anti-colonial philosophies of the book.

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