

# E-Content

## POSTCOLONIAL & NEW WRITINGS

Semester: III

Lecture 4

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Session 2020-2021



**GALGOTIAS  
UNIVERSITY**

(Established under Galgotias University Uttar Pradesh Act No. 14 of 2011)

## COURSE CONTENT UNIT-I

### Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of The Earth*: Summary Lecture 4

#### Topics to be Covered

- *The Wretched of The Earth*: Summary
- Influences and key themes
- Colonialism
- Chapter 1, "On Violence,"
- Chapter 2, "Grandeur and Weakness of Spontaneity"
- Chapter 3, "The Trials and Tribulations of National Consciousness"
- Chapter 4, "On National Culture"
- Chapter 5, "Colonial War and Mental Disorders"

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### Revision

- The post/colonial writers explore and interrogate the key issues that lie at the heart of postcolonialism: cross-cultural understanding, social justice, and the ongoing development of a global community.
- Postcolonial literature often addresses the problems and consequences of the decolonization of a country, especially questions relating to the political and cultural independence of formerly subjugated people, and themes such as racialism and colonialism.
- Postcolonial literature represents all these conditions and comes from various sources and inspiration. It includes works such as Samuel Beckett's *Murphy*, Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, TayebSalih's *Season of Migration to the North*, Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, J.M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*, Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient*, ArundhatiRoy's *The God of Small Things*, NoVioletBulawayo's *We Need New Names*, ZadieSmith's *White Teeth*, and IngoloMbue's *Behold the Dreamers*, among many others. Shakespeare's *Othello*, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *The Tempest* have been taken as key texts for the application of postcolonial modes of analysis.
- This suggests that postcolonial literature is a broad term that encompasses literatures by people from the erstwhile colonial world, as well as from the various minority diasporas that live in the west. Post colonialism has also been a term used to reinterpret western canonical literature from a variety of fresh and diverse perspectives

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- *The Wretched of the Earth* is Frantz Fanon's seminal discussion of decolonization in Africa, especially Algeria.
- Over the course of five chapters, Fanon covers a wide range of topics, including patterns in how the colonized overthrow the colonist, how newly independent countries form national and cultural consciousness, and the overall effect of colonialism on the psychology of men and women in colonized countries.
- Fanon's discussion is both theoretical and journalistic. That is, he both reports on events in the recent history of decolonization, and theorizes what these events mean or could mean philosophically.
- Through critiques of nationalism and of imperialism, Fanon presents a discussion of personal and societal mental health, a discussion of how the use of language (vocabulary) is applied to the establishment of imperialist identities, such as colonizer and colonized, to teach and psychologically mold the native and the colonist into their respective roles as slave and master and a discussion of the role of the intellectual in a revolution.
- Fanon proposes that revolutionaries should seek the help of the lumpenproletariat (is a term used primarily by Marxist theorists to describe the underclass devoid of class consciousness.[1] Coined by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in the 1840s, they used it to refer to the unthinking lower strata of society exploited by reactionary and counter-revolutionary forces) to provide the force required to effect the expulsion of the colonists. In traditional Marxist theory, the lumpenproletariat are the lowest, most degraded stratum of the proletariat—especially criminals, vagrants and the unemployed—people who lack the class consciousness to participate in the anti-colonial revolution.

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### Influences and key themes

- Fanon uses Marxist theory, psychology, critical race theory, and global political economy in order to give an account of the colonized subject, the problem of nationalism, and the path to liberation
- Shows how colonized peoples also experience double consciousness (DuBois)
- Similarity of double consciousness between people of color in US & colonized people historically suggests connections between racism in US & colonialism internationally
- DuBois makes same argument in “Souls of White Folk”

### The Wretched of the Earth

- Fanon defines and explains colonialism and decolonization from a political, philosophical, historical, and socio-cultural perspective
- Defines colonialism and its constructs, the psychology of colonialism and its subtle effects on the colonized
- Colonization is a creation of two conflicting societies, one of the colonizer and one of the colonized
- Colonizer & colonized, settler & native, mutually constitutive
- Colonization barbarizes the colonized so that the colonizer can, in good conscience, take everything from the oppressed.

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### Decolonization

- The Wretched of the Earth served as the handbook for political leaders faced with decolonization
- Decolonization is not simply the removal of colonial structures, but especially, the deconstruction of colonial legacies in the mindset of formerly colonized peoples
- psychological dimensions of colonialism
- To end colonization, first the colonized must see the myth that has been placed on him

### Colonialism

- Colonialism is the establishment, maintenance, acquisition and expansion of colonies in one territory by people from another territory.
- Ideological basis of colonialism is racism/white supremacy.
- collection of cultural images and themes by which colonized people came to be known by the colonial power

### “Concerning Violence”

- Fanon offers a raw depiction of both the colonizer and the colonized, describing colonialism as a source of violence rather than reacting violently against resistors which had been the common view.
- Describing how the two mutually constitute each other, Fanon shows how the violence of colonization both breeds and constrains violence within the colonized, simultaneously enabling their colonization and providing the very power through which the colonized might liberate themselves.
- Such liberation is only possible, he claims, through revolutionary violence.

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### Chapter 1, "On Violence,"

- In Chapter 1, "On Violence," Fanon introduces the colonial world as one that is divided into the colonist and the colonized. These identities are created by the colonist in order to assert his own superiority.
- The colonist maintains this hierarchy through violence by police and soldiers, and in turn, it is only through violence that the colonized can re-assert their own humanity.
- Decolonization is a violent process not only of overthrowing a colonial government, but of freeing the colonized from the mindset imposed upon them.
- But in time, as violence awakens the masses to the injustices of colonialism, more and more fight back and soon the colonized people as a whole begin to fight colonialism.
- It is a detailed explanation of violence in relation to both the colonial world and the process of decolonization. Fanon begins with the premise that decolonization is, by definition, a violent process without exception. The object of that process is the eventual replacement of one group of humans with another, and that process is only complete when the transition is total.
- This conception of decolonization is based on Fanon's construction of the colonial world. Through his observations, he concluded that all colonial structures are actually nested societies which are not complementary. He uses Aristotelian logic in that the colony followed the "principle of reciprocal exclusivity". [1] Based on this conclusion, Fanon characterizes the assessment of the native population by the settler class as dehumanizing.
- The settlers literally do not see the natives as members of the same species. The natives are incapable of ethics and thereby are the embodiment of absolute evil (p. 32) as opposed to the Christian settlers who are forces of good. This is a crucial point for Fanon because it explains two phenomena that occur in the colonial world. The first is the idea that decolonization is the replacement of one population by another, and the second is that since the native knows that they are not animals, they immediately develop a feeling of rebellion against the

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### Colonialism is built on force

- Barracks & police stations mark the frontiers of the divided colonial world
- In the colonies, the policeman and the soldier are the official, instituted go-betweens, the spokesmen of the settler and his rule of oppression
- In capitalist societies, institutions such as the educational system serve to create around the exploited an atmosphere of submission and of inhibition which lightens task of policing considerably
- In the colonial countries, by contrast, policeman and soldier, by their immediate presence and their frequent and direct action maintain contact with the native, using 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 conscience of an upholder of the peace; yet he is the bringer of violence into the home and into the mind of the native...”



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### Chapter 2, “Grandeur and Weakness of Spontaneity”

▪ In the previous chapter, Fanon argued that violence by the colonized against the colonist is the seed of decolonization. It releases a desire for liberation on the part of the people. But at first, this violence is spontaneous and sporadic. There may be an uprising in a village here and a village there, but it is not wholly unified or organized as a movement. In this chapter, then, Fanon turns to how the colonized begin to organize themselves in the early stages of an anticolonial revolution.

▪ Fanon begins by considering the “colonized intellectuals,” those who were educated in urban areas and therefore influenced by Western ideas they have learned there. Colonized intellectuals have, for instance, learned about political parties in countries like England and France, and their first idea for mobilizing the colonized masses is thus to form a nationalist political party of their own. But this approach is flawed from the beginning, Fanon argues. First of all, modeling an anticolonial movement on colonial politics is a bad start. Why mimic the Western influence you are trying to overthrow? Second, these parties, because founded by intellectuals in urban areas, usually only address the issues faced by a “metropolitan elite” and therefore do not inspire those in rural areas or outside the cities. Unfortunately, it is in these rural areas where the majority of the colonized live.

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### Chapter 3, “The Trials and Tribulations of National Consciousness”

- In this chapter, Fanon continues his roughly historical progression through the anticolonial fight. We have seen that violence erupts in the rural areas, shifting the fight against colonialism away from an urban emphasis on political or labor parties. But now the question becomes how the urban and rural areas can be united into a single “national consciousness.” That is, once the colonists have lost their power, weakened by the insurrection, how does a nation form to replace them and centralize power by and for the newly liberated people?
- Fanon begins his discussion with the “national bourgeoisie.” The bourgeoisie is the class of people in a society that controls the economy and means of production. Under colonialism, there was a “colonial bourgeoisie” full of the elite colonists who controlled the colony. Once colonialism is overthrown, there is a “national bourgeoisie” made up of the formerly colonized elite. That is, the colonized people who had the most power under colonialism take over power from the colonial regime once it is overthrown. But this new ruling class is an “underdeveloped bourgeoisie,” Fanon says. It does not have strong industries or a long enough history to really know how to control the economy. In turn, they cannot truly nationalize the economy. Instead, they primarily serve as intermediaries. They merely ship resources from the country to Europe. In turn, the economy looks pretty much the same as it did under colonialism; the only difference is who benefits from exploiting the masses.
- In doing so, the country will also leave behind the bourgeoisie that had formerly tried to fill in the power vacuum left by the colonists. The country will begin to see that, in fact, the bourgeoisie serves no purpose. They are merely “gang leaders” and “petty traders,” selling the country back to Europe just like the colonists did. Once this class or “caste” has been eliminated, Fanon argues, “swallowed up by its own contradictions, it will be clear to everyone that no progress has been made since independence and that everything has to be started over again from scratch.” People can move toward democracy once they are educated and rationally deliberating, instead of simply seeking power and being swayed by tribal and religious rivalries.

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### Chapter 4, “On National Culture”

- This chapter, which was first presented as a paper at the Second Congress of Black Writers and Artists in Rome in 1959, is in some ways a continuation of the previous chapter. That chapter was about how a nation can form politically to replace the colonists after independence. This chapter asks, relatedly: how can a national culture form after independence? Colonialism destroys and perverts culture, for instance teaching the colonized to consider their past as unworthy or evil. What can the colonized do to assert or reclaim or newly produce culture after this kind of brainwashing ?
- Fanon begins by considering the “colonized intellectual,” someone who has been educated by the colonist but reacts against him. The intellectual’s strategy is to counter the demeaning force of colonized culture by “racializing” culture, for instance advocating for a “Negro literature” or “Negro art” that unites all of Africa. This is what is sometimes called the “Négritude” movement. For Fanon, this is too reactive of an approach. It basically argues with colonists on their own terms. Colonists lump all of Africa into one group, ignoring differences of tribe or ethnicity and the rich cultural histories different places have. Now, intellectuals more or less do the same thing, but instead say all of Africa is the source of good values, rather than bad ones.
- According to Fanon, “the colonized intellectual is responsible not to his national culture, but to the nation as whole, whose culture is, after all, but one aspect.” In other words, the intellectual has first to fight for the liberation of the nation, and then culture will follow because it will have a national context in which to grow. It is the revolutionary action that produces culture, not culture that produces revolution. “National culture is the collective thought process of a people to describe, justify, and extol the actions whereby they have joined forces and remained strong,” writes Fanon. “National culture in the underdeveloped countries, therefore, must lie at the very heart of the liberation struggle these countries are waging.

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### Chapter 5, “Colonial War and Mental Disorders“

■ In this final chapter, Fanon turns to the psychology of colonialism—more specifically, the kinds of psychological disorder colonialism produces. Fanon foreshadowed this line of inquiry in Chapter 1, where he argues that the colonist creates the identities of colonist and colonized, and in turn instills in the colonized an entire subjectivity of submission and inferiority. He also talked about how colonialism represses men’s “muscular power,” their violent desire for freedom. In this chapter, he goes further in discussing the great variety of psychological disturbances the colonized can experience, and he also discusses how colonialism psychologically damages the colonists, too.

■ Fanon concludes the chapter with another theoretical discussion, this time in response to colonial scholars who have argued that colonized peoples are, by definition, degenerate and prone to violence. This was part of the colonial division of the world into black and white, good and evil. But Fanon argues that any perceived difference in tendency toward violence on the part of the colonized must be understood not as innate to their nature but produced in response to the violence they themselves have experienced.

■ In turn, overthrowing colonialism will also liberate Algerians from the mental disorders they experience. By detailing the many disorders people experience under colonialism, Fanon makes an argument for decolonization as not only a liberation of a nation but also a liberation of individual psyches—a cure for pathology.

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### To Conclude

- ***The Wretched of the Earth*** is Frantz Fanon’s seminal discussion of decolonization in Africa, especially Algeria. Over the course of five chapters, Fanon covers a wide range of topics, including patterns in how the colonized overthrow the colonist, how newly independent countries form national and cultural consciousness, and the overall effect of colonialism on the psychology of men and women in colonized countries. Fanon’s discussion is both theoretical and journalistic. That is, he both reports on events in the recent history of decolonization, and theorizes what these events mean or could mean philosophically.
- After independence, the formerly colonized intellectual—the cultural class—fights for “the recognition of a national culture and its right to exist.” Colonial racism has long since assumed that black nations are devoid of culture and intellect, and the colonized intellectual toils tirelessly to prove this isn’t true. The colonized intellectual turns to past pre-colonial culture and reclaims black culture on a “continental scale.” They advocate for the creation and acceptance of “Negro” culture, especially “Negro” literature, which encompasses the entire continent of Africa and all the black individuals of the African diaspora. This “black world” stretches from Africa, to the Caribbean, and through the United States; however, Fanon says, they have little in common other than the fact that they all “[define] themselves in relation to the whites.” Culture, Fanon argues, is national, not continental, and it cannot be combined into one large cultural representation. Furthermore, Fanon asserts, culture is not something that can be isolated to pre-colonial times. Rather, culture is created through the developing national consciousness of a struggling and newly independent nation.

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- Colonialist oppression and the violent struggle for liberation leads to, perhaps not surprisingly, a slew of mental disorders. Fanon, a practicing psychiatrist, includes several case files from former patients he treated during the Algerian War of Independence. Fanon includes assessments and notes from Algerians, as well as Europeans, and he describes the ways in which the colonial situation has negatively affected their mental health and well-being. Fanon's case files range from anxiety, depression, and anorexia, to major psychotic breaks and homicidal tendencies—each case with trauma stemming directly from the French colonization of Algeria and subsequent war. Fanon examines the psychological impact of prolonged brainwashing and excessive torture, especially through electrocution. He touches on the use of truth serum, considers those Algerians sent to internment camps, and even debates the antiquated theory of Algerian criminality as a product of an underdeveloped Algerian brain and nervous system. For Fanon, Algerian criminality is rooted in the same cause as all the other problems plaguing Algeria: the colonial situation.
- •Fanon concludes his book with a call to action. He calls to end all colonialism and neocolonialism once and for all, and urges developing nations not to look to Europe as an example. Another developing nation looked to Europe centuries ago, Fanon warns, and now that nation—the United States of America—is “a monster” where the “flaws, sickness, and inhumanity of Europe have reached frightening proportions.” Developing African nations must not look to the past, or to Europe, but instead should start a new history, with a “new man” and “a new way of thinking.”
- •The Wretched of the Earth is Frantz Fanon's seminal discussion of decolonization in Africa, especially Algeria. Over the course of five chapters, Fanon covers a wide range of topics, including patterns in how the colonized overthrow the colonist, how newly independent countries form national and cultural consciousness, and the overall effect of colonialism on the psychology of men and women in colonized countries. Fanon's discussion is both theoretical and journalistic. That is, he both reports on events in the recent history of decolonization, and theorizes what these events mean or could mean philosophically.

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