

E-Content

POSTCOLONIAL & NEW WRITINGS

Semester: III

Lecture 5

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COURSE CONTENT UNIT-I

Frantz Fanon's The Wretched of Earth: Theory Lecture 5.

Topics to be Covered

- Franz Fanon The Wretched of the Earth “Concerning Violence,” and “On National Culture”
- Orientalism
- The Wretched of the Earth: Colonialism& Decolonialism.

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Revision : Franz Fanon The Wretched of the Earth

“Concerning Violence,” and “On National Culture,”

- 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”
- **Postcolonial theory:** a set of theories in social science and literature that address the legacy of colonial rule and the struggle for political and cultural independence of peoples formerly subjugated in colonial empires • Besides Fanon’s work, Edward Saïd's Orientalism (1978) is seminal book in the field • Saïd analyzed the works of the Western canon, exploring how they both absorbed and helped to shape a societal fantasy of European racial superiority • Inspired by Foucault, postcolonial theory emphasizes discourse, which joins power and knowledge

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Orientalism:

- Said took term Orientalism, used in the West neutrally to describe the study and artistic depiction of the Orient, and subverted it to mean a constructed binary division of the world into the Orient and the Occident
- East/West binary is key in postcolonial theory
- Said argued that the Occident could not exist without the Orient, and vice versa
- Occident & Orient, East & West, are mutually constitutive
- Concept of the 'East' was created by the 'West,' suppressing the ability of the 'Orient' to express themselves]
- Western depictions of 'Orient' construct an inferior world, of backwardness, irrationality, and wildness
- The 'West' identify themselves as the opposite: a superior world, that's progressive, rational, and civil

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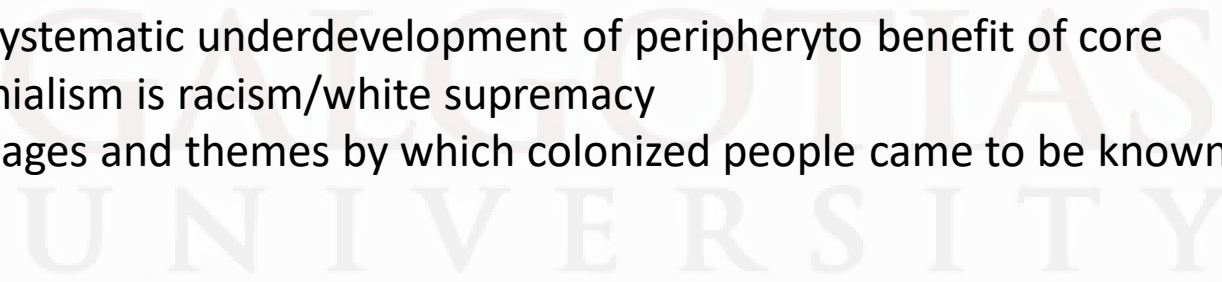
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The Wretched of the Earth :

- 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.

Colonialism :

- Colonialism is the establishment, maintenance, acquisition and expansion of colonies in one territory by people from another territory .
- Colonialism represents systematic underdevelopment of periphery to benefit of core
- 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.



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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.

“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.

“On National Culture” :

- Fanon’s critique of nationalism and imperialism also develops to cover areas such as mental health and the role of intellectuals in revolutionary situations
- Fanon explains in great detail that revolutionary groups should look to the lumpenproletariat for the force needed to expel colonists .
- The lumpenproletariat in traditional Marxist theories are considered the lowest, most degraded stratum of the proletariat, especially criminals, vagrants, and the unemployed, who lacked class consciousness.

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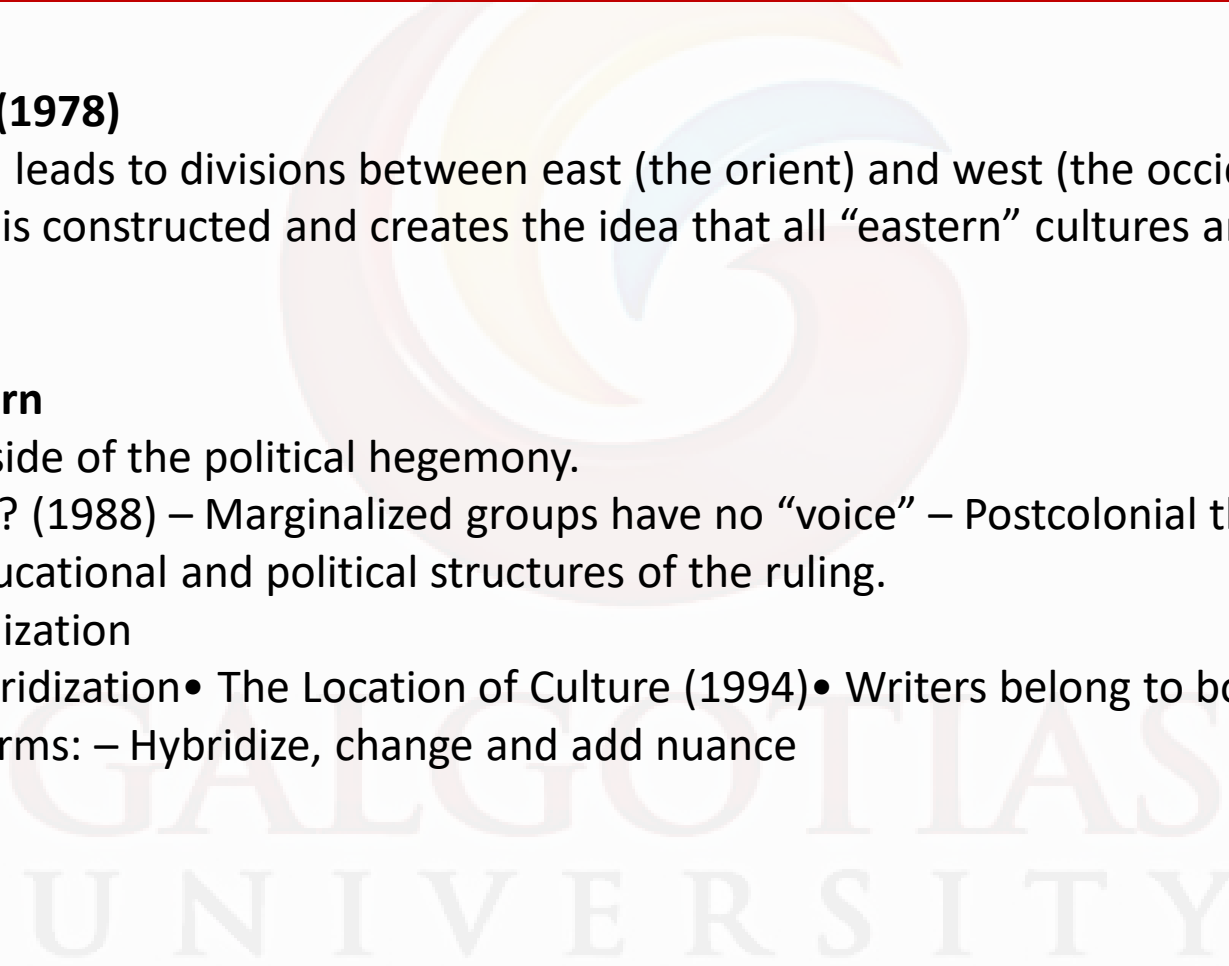
Theories at a Glance:

Edward Said – Orientalism (1978)

- The study of orientalism leads to divisions between east (the orient) and west (the occident).
- The image of the orient is constructed and creates the idea that all “eastern” cultures are fundamentally similar to each other.

Gyatri Spivak – The Subaltern

- Subaltern – persons outside of the political hegemony.
- Can the Subaltern Speak? (1988) – Marginalized groups have no “voice” – Postcolonial theorists continue to use the language, power, educational and political structures of the ruling.
- Homi K. Bhabha – hybridization
- Homi K. Bhabha and hybridization • The Location of Culture (1994) • Writers belong to both cultures • Postcolonial writers, using colonial forms: – Hybridize, change and add nuance



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What postcolonial critics do?

- Reject the universalism of the western canon
- Examine how western literature represents other cultures
- Reveal how colonization is “covered up”, even justified
- Accept hybrid combining of cultures
- Revalue “otherness” as a site for potential change

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To Conclude

- *The Wretched of the Earth* is Frantz Fanon's seminal 1961 book, originally published in French, about the effects of colonization on the minds of the colonized, and the efforts by the colonized to overthrow the colonizers. It draws from Fanon's own experience as a Black man living in Algeria and witnessing the brutal war for independence from France in the 1950s. The book both narrates these experiences and theorizes them in a larger context of racial and national oppression.
- The book was very much of its time. In a wave of decolonization following World War II, a number of public intellectuals were discussing how colonized people would create new nations after independence. At the same time, the horrors of colonization were still coming to light, and it was important to discuss how the inherent violence of colonialism impacted the psychological makeup of the colonized. Fanon contributed to all these lines of thought. As a Black man, as a witness of war, and as a psychiatrist, he weaved together philosophy, journalism, and psychoanalysis to describe the colonial and postcolonial situation.
- The book is also very much of our own time. It is a classic text in postcolonial theory, and it is still much debated and discussed by scholars of race, nation, and global capitalism. On the 50th anniversary of the book's publication, the influential academic journal *Theory, Culture, and Society* published a special symposium on the book. Political philosophers and psychoanalysts alike contributed to the symposium, suggesting the impact Fanon has had in multiple fields and many different schools of thought.

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Politics and Psychology

- Fanon, a psychiatrist, was especially interested in how colonialism affects the psychological makeup of the colonized. In his understanding, the colonist subjugates the colonized not only economically and politically, but also psychologically, by imposing an inferiority complex on those they subjugate. The colonized also experience psychological problems due to the trauma of violence at the hands of the colonist. As a result, political problems and psychological health are deeply connected. When the colonized experience neuroses, depression, and other disorders, the cure is as much political as it is personal. Colonialism creates the very identities of colonized and colonist, which makes it not only a political regime, but also a psychological one.

Liberation and Consciousness

- Related to the connection between politics and psychology, Fanon argues that decolonization will not only liberate the colonized from exploitation, but will also free his mind. A persistent theme throughout *The Wretched of the Earth* is the different forms of consciousness, or self-awareness, that liberation and independence can bring. Most important, for Fanon, is a national consciousness, or an awareness of oneself as belonging to a free and sovereign nation. Under colonialism, Africans have no nation, because they are controlled by European authority. But in decolonization, Africans are liberated to think of themselves as having control over the conditions of their life. The freeing of their land from colonial control is also a freeing of their minds from submission and subjugation.

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Cycles of Violence

- Violence is a frequent theme in *The Wretched of the Earth*, and Fanon is particularly interested in showing how different forms of violence repeat in colonial and post-colonial history. Colonialism first maintains the authority of the colonist through violence, eliciting submission from the colonized through the police and soldiers. But this means that the colonized can only free themselves by reversing the dynamic and themselves exercising violence against the colonist. The colonized learn violence from the colonist, and then use it against them. At the same time, after independence, the most powerful within the new nation may, like the old colonists, once again use violence to elicit the submission of the rural masses. Thus, the cycle begins again.

Manichaeism

- Manichaeism was a dualistic religious system in early Christianity that split the world into good and evil, light and dark. Fanon uses Manichaeism to refer to the colonist's simplistic, dualistic worldview in which the world is divided into good and evil, white and black, colonist and colonized. But, just like colonial violence, the dichotomy can be reversed. Under decolonization, the colonized begin to think of the colonist as evil in the same way that the colonist used to think of the colonized. Thus, a dualistic worldview is a theme through colonialism and decolonization alike.

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