

04. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*

February 2012

[Quotations refer to new/old translations, respectively]

Key points

- American and European racial systems
- Two species
- Colonialism and the scramble for Africa
- Decolonization, postcolonialism, and Fanon
- Role of violence

I. American and European racial systems

A. In his final *Autobiography*, Du Bois argues that the basis of racial ideologies (white supremacy, Black nationalism, etc.) in the **United States** is **slavery** and the **extermination** of Indians. The basis of racial ideologies in **Europe**, on the other hand, is **imperialism**: the domination of Africa and Asia by European nations. (And **anti-Semitism**.)

B. Thus, there are **two different sources** for white supremacist and resistance ideologies, because the American and European racial systems are different.

1. In the **United States**, slavery was enforced primarily by working-class members of the dominant race. As a result, all whites enjoyed a status superior to all those defined as not white.

2. In the European variety, the oppressed are not “reduced to one level,” 175. Class and other social distinctions among the oppressed race are recognized by the oppressor under colonialism. You can have middle class Black people, for example (usually defined as “Colored” or “mulatto”), in positions of power in colonies like Jamaica, Kenya, or Cuba. In the European colonial system of race, a poor white may actually find him or herself below the social status of a powerful not-white (except for in the mother country).

C. There are **two key concepts in chapter 1**, the notion that colonialism creates “**two species**” and the argument that **liberation requires violence**.

II. Two species of colonialism

A. The two species

1. **Q:** Why are colonized and colonist (native and settler) two different species for Fanon?

2. **Q:** What does Fanon mean when he writes, “It is the colonist who *fabricated* and *continues to fabricate* the colonized subject” (2)? [or: “For it is the settler who has brought the native into existence and who perpetuates his existence” (36).] How does colonialism “fabricate” or create the native?

3. Fanon’s analysis is similar to Du Bois’s “two worlds” thesis and Marx’s “two hostile camps” thesis.

4. “The colonized world is a world divided in two” (3). [“The colonial world is a world cut in two.” 38] It is divided into two worlds, the colonizer and the colonized.

5. The **frontier** between them is the policeman and the soldier. They police the borders and keep the colonized world from invading the colonizers’. 3/38

6. These **two worlds produce two different “species”** of humans.

7. **Read** 5/39-40.

B. Fanon’s **conception of race** is very similar to Du Bois’s: your race or “species” depends on which “world” you belong to.

1. If you belong to the colonizers’ world, you belong to a “superior” race, if you belong to the colonized world, you are of an inferior race.

2. **Race is defined by status**, by which world you are assigned to, not by biology. “The cause is effect: You are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich” (5). [“The cause is the consequence; you are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich.” 40]

C. In the same way that colonialism creates two species of human beings, **decolonization will also create new humans**. 2/36

1. **Q:** What does he mean by this?

2. Humans are a **product of the social systems** they live in. If you change the system you change the person: her interests, her consciousness, even her “human nature.” Classic materialist analysis.

3. Further, he argues that the colonized only becomes fully human by struggling for their freedom.

4. Given that this struggle is necessarily violent, ironically **the colonized only becomes human through violence**. We’ll come back to this in a second.

5. Fanon’s point is that under colonialism the colonized is less than human. He/she is an animal. The **goal of the colonized**, then, is to **become human**.

D. **Decolonization is achieved through the destruction of one world**, one “species.” Decolonization implies the **abolition of the colonist**: “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” (6). [“The destruction of the colonial world is no more and no less that [sic] the abolition of one zone, its burial in the depths of the earth or its expulsion from the country.” 41]

1. This is your “abolition of the white world” argument precisely.

2. Further, he also argues that **the colonist/native is an “anti-citizen,”** just like Bf for Roediger. Natives are not merely excluded from civilization nor do they lack civilized values, they are “the negation of values” (6). “He is, let us dare to admit, the enemy of values, and in this sense he is the absolute evil.” 41

E. But colonialism doesn’t just divide humanity into native/colonized and settler/colonist. **It also unites people**. It takes disparate people and unites them as “natives.” It unites them on a national or racial basis. 10/46

III. Colonialism and “the scramble for Africa”

A. **Colonialism:** A system of foreign rule over a society by another power for the purpose of extracting that society’s wealth. The purpose of colonialism is to find new markets, extract raw materials, exploit cheap labor, and compete with rival industrialized nations (by excluding them from the profits to be reaped from certain colonies). It establishes a monopoly relationship between the mother country and the colony. It’s an economic *and* a political relationship of domination of industrialized nations over non-industrial societies. **Colonialism brought capitalism to the rest of the world.** [From dictionary: “control by one power over a dependent area or people.”]

B. **Imperialism:** The core political idea of imperialism, according to Arendt, is the **principle of unlimited political expansion**, or “expansion for expansion’s sake.” Just as a capitalist economy must constantly expand, the logic of imperialism argues that **the political regime must constantly expand** as well. It’s an economic framework imposed on politics. E.g., the British Empire. Arendt, *Origins*, 125

1. From dictionary: “the policy, practice, or advocacy of extending the power and dominion of a nation esp. by direct territorial acquisitions or by gaining indirect control over the political or economic life of other areas.”

2. **European imperialism established colonial relations** between European and African and Asian nations. [Is this the distinction between the two? what about the diff between empires and imperialism?]

3. At a certain point, European capitalists ran into limits to their ability to expand economically within their own states. The only solution was to expand the reach of these states. In this way, **imperialism drew capitalists into politics**, because economic expansion required political expansion.

4. **The contradiction of imperialism:** it requires **expansion without limits**, yet its political form, the nation-state, is **inherently limited** in territory and power. Thus, the nation-state is compelled to conquer and rule over new territory. But this inevitably rouses the **national consciousness** of the conquered peoples, as we’ve seen in Fanon. Thus, **imperialism inevitably breeds nationalism**, and nationalist resistance movements. *Origins*, 127

C. **Brief history of colonialism in Africa** (from Davidson, *Modern Africa*, 4-)

1. European-African relations were defined by **the slave trade** from the mid-15th century until the mid-19th century (approx 1440-1880). In this time, approximately 12 million Africans were taken into bondage; ten million survived the middle passage and into slavery. As the slave trade declined and finally ended, European powers lost interest in exporting African labor to the Americas and now wanted to use African labor in Africa itself.

2. Britain, France, Germany, Belgium, Portugal, Italy, and Spain all wanted to control Africa and began invading it in the 19th c..

3. In 1884-85, these European powers met in Berlin and agreed to divide up Africa without fighting each other. They literally took a map and divided Africa up into various “**spheres of interest.**” Each European nation had exclusive access to its sphere as long as it could conquer it. This conquest took about 15 years. By 1901, only Ethiopia and Liberia remained independent (Ethiopia would be invaded by Italy and Mussolini in 1935.)

4. By 1914, Europe held roughly 85% of the earth as colonies, protectorates, dependencies, dominions, and commonwealths. (Mills, *Racial Contract*, 29)

5. The time after this period of conquest was the period of **colonial rule**, lasting from 60-90 years.

D. **Effects of colonialism**

1. **Arbitrary borders:** The European powers arbitrarily carved up Africa into about fifty colonies, and the borders generally didn't take into account the interests or convenience of Africans and their patterns of life. Threw some peoples together with little in common in terms of language and customs, while splitting others apart. Just imagine if the borders of Europe were arbitrarily redrawn. Also think of other places where the redrawing of borders through domination has created problems today: USSR, ex-Yugoslavia, Iraq, etc. (Davidson 11, 31)

2. **Modern tribalism:** The invention of chief, strongmen, and whole tribes for the purpose of colonial rule. Took old leadership positions and leaders and refitted them for colonial rule, or made up new leadership structures entirely, if necessary. Key issue was, as Davidson points out “How could these unknown ‘tribes’ [of Africans] be controlled as cheaply as possible?” Want to get maximum docility-utility. (Davidson 69-74)

3. Exacerbating **ethnic tensions:** On the one hand, colonialists created new groupings of people to rule them, but on the other hand they also ruled by **pitting groupings against each other.** “Divide and rule” tactic. One way was through ethnic tensions. Eg. Hutu and Tutsi in Burundi and Rwanda, and how Belgians privileged Tutsi minority and had them rule over Hutu majority viciously, creating new antagonisms between the ethnic groups. (Davidson 73)

4. **Corruption** and rule of strong men.

a. **Strong men:** Colonial regimes often used existing local rulers as middlemen between themselves and the people in order to rule. When colonialism ended, these strongmen took power for themselves.

b. Strongmen ruled through a **system of sanctions and rewards.**

c. Such a system is highly prone to **corruption.**

5. **The wealth of Europe.** The standard of living in Europe is due, in part, to the wealth acquired from Africa and Asia through colonialism.

a. **Read** 53, 58.

6. **Neocolonialism:** New colonialism. African countries have their political independence, but remain economically dependent on 1st World countries' interests. Africa still under control of the West, but now the control is indirect and mostly economic. IMF, World Bank, international investment, handing over power to middle-class interests in Africa who will safeguard the interests of European economic interests, etc.

III. Decolonization, postcolonialism, and Fanon

A. Africans struggled for independence from day one. The period of **decolonization**, or independence from European rule, began in 1952 when Egypt became independent from Britain and ended in 1990, when Namibia became independent from South Africa. (Or could say 1994, when apartheid was overthrown in South Africa.) Algeria, where Fanon was living and working as a member of the FLN, won its independence from France in 1962 (*Wretched* was published in 1961).

B. Postcolonialism

1. *Wretched* is frequently referred to as one of the founding texts of **postcolonial theory**.

2. **Postcolonialism:** The period after formal independence but in which the former colonies are politically independent but economically and culturally (especially the intelligentsia) dependent on the West.

3. **Postcoloniality:** the condition of a relatively small, Western-trained intellectual elite in the former colonized nations who “mediate the trade in cultural commodities of world capitalism at the periphery.” (Appiah, *In My Father's House*, 240)

a. Postcolonialism is the condition of being caught between the West and the colony.

b. It's like **double consciousness** in this aspect: Am I of my home country or am I Western? Can I be both? OR: What does it mean to be both?

4. Fanon answers this dilemma by resolutely **rejecting both the West and his homeland** (Martinique) for a new identity: Algerian, African, and a **new universal identity**.

C. Decolonization for Fanon

1. Decolonization for Fanon, remember, is the **violent “substitution” of one species** of human being by another. 1/35

2. There are **two key elements** of this definition, the notion of two “species” of humans, which we've discussed, and the role of violence.

IV. The role of violence

A. Sum up the two species [put on board]

2 species created by colonialism

—> Colonist/settler (is human, has values)

—> Colonized/native (less than human, negation of values)

B. Liberation through violence

1. “The colonized man liberates himself in and through violence” (44). [“The colonized man finds his freedom in and through violence.” 86]

2. **Q:** Why? Why is decolonization “always a violent event”? 1/35

3. The colonized **only becomes fully human** by struggling for their freedom.

4. This struggle is necessarily violent, because **colonialism is violent**.

5. **Read 2-3/36-37.**

6. Decolonization is a thorough challenge to colonialism (p. 2 new translation), the “complete calling in question of the colonial situation” (37 old). It **rejects colonialism entirely**.

a. If you have a **stake in a system**, if you want to preserve some aspects of it, then you negotiate with it, you bargain with it, you seek to reform it. You don’t seek to destroy it. Hence, your resistance will be **nonviolent**.

b. But if you have **no stake** in the system, you have no desire to preserve it. **You want to destroy it**, and this necessarily implies violence.

7. Given this, the colonized ironically only **become human through violence**.

8. **Q:** Does this sound paradoxical? Does it make sense?

C. **Q:** Why does the peasantry lead the struggle rather than the educated class in the cities?

1. Urban, bourgeois, nationalist elites act only in their interests. They organize political parties in order to win reforms that would benefit only them. Same goes with the urban working class, or proletariat.

2. The **peasantry is the true revolutionary class**. They are the only class with nothing to lose and everything to gain (23/61) (i.e. the only class with nothing to lose but their chains.) They thus have no desire to compromise with colonialism. They want to take the settlers’ place (their farm, their property, etc.), not bargain with them.

D. Thus, **the peasantry resorts to violence**, because it seeks to destroy colonialism, not reform it or preserve their privileges within it.

1. **Q:** Why not seek nonviolent change? What’s wrong with the ideology of nonviolence, according to Fanon?

2. Its function is to **tame the masses**. It seeks to replace the colonial bourgeoisie with a national bourgeoisie, not to put the peasantry in power. Both elites may hate each other, but they fear the masses the most. 23-24/61-62

3. Violence is the only form of political action open to the peasantry, and the only form of political action that the colonizer fears, because it leaves no room for compromise. **Only violence utterly destroys colonialism**.

E. The value of violence

1. **Violence unifies.** It brings the colonized together. All who have committed violence against the colonial regime can no longer turn back to it or seek the way of reform. They are now permanent enemies of the regime, and they unite with other enemies regardless of tribe, ethnicity, etc. 51/94

2. **Violence cleanses.** Violence empowers the native and eliminates his inferiority complex. 51/94 It makes him fearless and “restores his self-confidence.” 51/94

a. **Q:** Do folks agree? Can violence empower a person?

b. What about the violent slave who strikes back at her master? Can this be justified?

3. **Violence is democratic.** When the masses engage in revolutionary violence, they are taking responsibility for liberating themselves and their land rather than waiting for some “savior” to do it for them. 51/94

a. **Read** 51-52/94.

F. In sum: **Read** 96/147.

1. **Q:** Is Fanon right about the liberatory use of violence?

2. **Q:** Does violence still have a liberatory use in the post-9/11 era? Has 9/11 made Americans blind to—or overly optimistic about—the democratic potential of violence?

3. Yet as we will see, Fanon was also **seriously distraught by the torture** inflicted by the French and the Algerians. How is it that he could **exalt violence and cringe from it** at the same time?

V. Biography of Fanon

[from www.emory.edu/ENGLISH/Bahri/Fanon.html]

A. **Algeria** was invaded by the French in 1830 and finally capitulated in 1848. The French declared Algeria to literally be a part of France.

1. In 1954 the National Liberation Front began a war for independence against France. The French put it down in 1957, and the FLN became a guerilla army.

2. The uprising gained strength, and by 1962 Algeria had become an independent country.

B. Fanon was **born in 1925** to a middle class family in the French colony of **Martinique**, in the West Indies.

1. He fought with the Free French in World War II, and then stayed in Lyon, France to study medicine and psychiatry.

2. In 1953 Fanon **moved to Algeria** (which was still a French colony) to become Head of the Psychiatry Dept. at the Blida-Joinville Hospital.

3. He helped reform patient care there and desegregated the hospital wards.

C. In 1954 the **war against colonialism** broke out. Many of Fanon’s patients (both Algerians and French) told him horrible stories of torture and torment, some of which appear in *Wretched*.

1. In 1956 Fanon resigned from the hospital and **joined the FLN** (National Liberation Front) to work for Algeria’s independence.

2. He fled to Tunisia and worked as a movement psychiatrist, journalist, and helped establish a southern supply route for the Algerian army.

3. He became the provisional Algerian government's ambassador to Ghana. There, he developed leukemia. He refused to rest, writing *Wretched* in ten months.

4. He finally sought treatment in the United States (Bethesda, MD), but he died there on 12/6/1961. His body was returned to Algeria, where it was buried with honors.

VI. Fanon's emerging critique of Western values

A. **Q:** What is the role of Western values in this "two worlds" situation?

1. They are **used to police the native** rather than enlighten or liberate him.

2. That is why **the colonized masses reject Western values** when they struggle to decolonize. They see Western values as a source of oppression rather than liberation.

3. **Q:** Sound familiar to criticisms of American/Western power today?

4. This suggests a possible **critique of secularism**. What if secularism is a colonial product that serves the interests of elites in these societies, often at the expense of its poor? If so, then it should be no surprise that postcolonial peoples are rejecting secularism. Indeed, Yin Min Kyi argues, we should encourage such a rejection because doing so enables Westerners to rethink the relation between religion and politics as well.

B. **Individualism** is replaced with **communal values**: village assemblies, people's committees, solidarity.

1. **Read** 11-12 ["Henceforward, the interests of one will be the interests of all, for in concrete fact *everyone* will be discovered by the troops, *everyone* will be massacred—or *everyone* will be saved." 47] Nice

C. **Truth** (or reason) is revealed to be **political, not objective**. Those who are in power define what is truth. The colonists' "truth," then, must be rejected and whatever furthers the destruction of the colonizers' world is the "truth." 50

1. **Read** 14

2. **Truth is a problem**, for Fanon: "For the colonized subject, objectivity is always directed against him." 37/77

x. Stuff skipped from "Concerning Violence"

x. The role of the native intellectual

x. The mass psychology of the native: why he acts aggressively toward other natives rather than the colonizer, the function of the supernatural and dance, etc. Under colonization, violence is channeled elsewhere other than against colonialism.

Chapter 2, Grandeur and Weakness of Spontaneity

Key points

- The revolutionary process
- Strengths and weaknesses of spontaneity
- Anticipating neocolonialism [move or skip?]

I. “The last shall be first”

A. Matthew 20:16, “So the last will be first and the first last. For many are called, but few are chosen.”

1. **Q:** “The last shall be first” is the basic demand of the colonized. 2, 10 / 37, 46
What does that mean?

2. Only those with no stake whatsoever in the colonial system will have the courage and the will to overthrow it. And it will happen violently.

B. The chapter on “Spontaneity” is about the revolutionary process in colonized nations. Fanon’s analysis of anti-colonial revolution revises Marx’s theory of revolution

C. The **proletariat as the universal class**

1. For Marx, revolution comes from the most oppressed sector of society, the industrial working class.

2. **Read** Introduction to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right (p. 38 in Simon, p. 186 in volume 3 of Collected Works): “Where, then, is the *positive* possibility of a German emancipation? *Answer:* In the formulation of a class with *radical chains*, a class of civil society which is not a class of civil society, an estate which is the dissolution of all estates, a sphere which has a universal character by its universal suffering and claims no *particular right* because no *particular wrong*, but *wrong generally*, is perpetuated against it; which can invoke no *historical*, but only *human*, title; which does not stand in any one-sided antithesis to the consequences but in all-round antithesis to the premises of German statehood; a sphere, finally, which cannot emancipate itself without emancipating itself from all other spheres of society and thereby emancipating all other spheres of society, which, in a word, is the *complete loss* of man and hence can win itself only through the *complete re-winning of man*. This dissolution of society as a particular estate is the *proletariat*.”

a. **Q:** What does Marx mean by **radical chains**? (The prole has nothing to lose but their oppression)

b. **Q:** What does it mean to be a **universal class**? (no class beneath them to dominate)

3. **Q:** Why is the peasantry and the “lumpenproletariat” the universal class for Fanon rather than the proletariat, as Marx argues?

D. The **revolutionary process** (in **Europe**) according to **Marx**

1. Rise of capitalism and the industrial system
2. Exploitation and immiseration of the proletariat
3. Development of revolutionary class consciousness among the wc
4. Revolution
5. Seizure of state power from the capitalists
6. Dictatorship of the proletariat
7. Withering away of the state
8. Stateless society/communism

E. The **revolutionary process** (in **Europe's colonies**) according to **Fanon**

1. Invasion of colonists; establishment of colonial regime
2. Economic development in the colonial cities but not the countryside
Cities: rise of relatively privileged national elites, intellectuals, working class
Countryside: exploitation and immiseration of the peasantry
3. Development of a reformist or even reactionary consciousness among the urban classes—they have something to lose from the fall of colonialism
4. Development of a revolutionary consciousness among the peasantry, who have nothing to lose but their chains
5. Emergence of spontaneous, violent uprisings in the countryside
6. A group of urban revolutionaries goes to the countryside and organizes the spontaneous rebellions.
7. From peasant rebellion to revolutionary war; uprising moves to the cities
8. Revolution, decolonization

F. **The limitations of political parties and trade unions**

1. **Political parties** are a **foreign mode of organization** imported into the colonized countries and their resistance movement.
 - a. Their main weakness is that **they seek to organize the city** (the urban working class, civil servants, intellectuals) **but not the peasantry**. The parties try to organize one percent of the population and ignore the other.
 - b. The political parties don't organize the countryside because **they fear the rural masses**. They fear the violence, the spontaneity, of these rebellions. They don't denounce them because they help in their struggle against colonialism, but they don't try to organize the spontaneous rebellions. 70-71/116-117
 - c. Parties try to **channel the rural violence** towards reform and the interests of the urban, bourgeois nationalist elite rather than in the interests of the peasantry. 59-62
2. The **trade unions make the same mistake**. Based on a Western model of trade unionism (i.e. emphasis on the factories in the cities, strikes as key weapons, etc.), they fail to recognize the revolutionary potential of the countryside, and keep the peasantry at arms' length. 75/121
3. The **rank-and-file** of the parties and unions **is always more radical**, while the leadership seeks to restrain it and negotiate with the bosses. Tensions between them grow.

4. Further, **these urban groups** are not thoroughly revolutionary in their outlook because **they have something to lose other than their chains** if colonialism were to fall.

a. As a result, they tend to fight to improve their living conditions (which are already relatively privileged compared to the peasantry) rather than to decolonize completely. The peasantry therefore doesn't support them because the unions are trying to improve the privileged status of its members rather than transform society.

b. Thus, **town and country are divided**; one is totally against the colonial regime, the other ambivalent toward it. The **peasantry is the only truly revolutionary class** in the colonized nation, and their spontaneous uprisings are the only truly revolutionary force.

5. The **proletariat is conservative**, the **peasantry radical**—exactly the opposite situation than Marx described in Europe.

II. Spontaneity: its strengths and weaknesses

A. **Q:** What is spontaneity for Fanon? What are its strengths and weaknesses in anti-colonialist struggle?

1. Spontaneity refers to **spontaneous movements against colonialism by the peasantry**. They are spontaneous because they are not organized or led by any party or trade union but emerge spontaneously from the people themselves.

2. These spontaneous rebellions are the heart of anti-colonial resistance, not the urban movements.

B. Strengths of spontaneity

1. At first, spontaneity is the only truly radical, honest expression of rebellion against the colonial regime. The initial objective is just to fight against colonialism, to overthrow it. There is no program other than that. In this stage of the struggle, spontaneity is very useful. 82-83/131

2. Radical: against colonialism totally. Not reformist in any way.

C. Limits of spontaneity

1. But these spontaneous rebellions occur in local communities only. They are **not connected to a national movement** against colonialism.

2. **Spontaneity alone cannot produce national consciousness.**

3. This requires organization. **This requires politics.** At some point, the rebellion needs to **connect all these spontaneous local rebellions** with each other and to give the struggle direction and focus. It is also a **military necessity** at a certain point. Localized rebellions alone can't topple the colonial military.

4. **Organization (politics) must replace spontaneity** if the struggle is to take on a national rather than local character.

a. This happens when some urban revolutionaries finally go into the countryside to work with the rural masses. 78/126

b. Winning the countryside isn't enough; a successful decolonization movement will need to take the cities, too. But the peasant revolution comes to the towns, not the other way around.

5. Thus, at a certain point it is necessary to go **from spontaneity to politics**, from **peasant rebellion to revolutionary war**.

a. The first urban group that joins them is the **lumpenproletariat**.

b. **Q:** What is the lumpenproletariat?

c. **The “scum” of the city:** petty criminals, unemployed, pimps, prostitutes, drug abusers, etc. They include people of the shantytowns, former peasants who moved to the city but who haven’t been able to “find a bone to gnaw in the colonial system.” They also have nothing to lose but their chains, so they become a radical force (81/129). **The last shall go first.**

D. A **national movement** provides organization, direction, military discipline, and political education for the masses. It’s not enough to be against a system, one needs to understand that system and to understand how to participate in a new one.

1. The **psychological counteroffensive** of the colonizer, 89-92/140-43. The colonist grants the colonized some standing (“Sir,” “Mister,” etc.), recognizing the humanity of the native somewhat. The masses must not be deceived by this.

2. This is why **political education** is necessary. Otherwise, the people will be duped by the colonist.

3. **Read 92.** [“All this taking stock of the situation, this enlightening of consciousness, and this advance in the knowledge of the history of societies are only possible within the framework of an organization, and inside the structure of a people.” 143]

E. As the struggle progresses and as political education proceeds, the **Manicheanism diminishes** (Black/white, Arab/Christian, colonizer/colonized), and things get more complex. 93-95/144-47

1. **Read 95/146**

2. The people are becoming more “mature.”

3. **Q:** Who does this sound like? [Kant]

4. **Q:** What makes them more mature?

5. They are becoming more universalist: they think in terms of those who share their politics rather than in terms of race, religion, or ethnicity. What you believe and do makes you a comrade, not who you are.

6. **Q:** Is this evidence of Fanon’s modernism?

7. Fanon has gone from being French to being Algerian to being African (which equals being human).

III. Anticipating neocolonialism [move or skip?]

A. **Q:** Why does Fanon oppose any attempt by newly independent nation states to follow the European model of economic development?

1. **European economic development depended on colonialism.** “Europe’s well-being and progress were built with the sweat and corpses of blacks, Arabs, Indians, and Asians. This we are determined never to forget” (53). [“The well-being and the progress of Europe have been built up with the sweat and the dead bodies of Negroes, Arabs, Indians, and the yellow races. We have decided not to overlook this any longer.” 96]

2. Newly independent nations can’t build their wealth on the exploitation of others. They **need to find a new way.**

B. After colonialism

1. After a country is granted political independence, its economy is still in a shambles and its people still in poverty. The task after independence, then, is the **redistribution of wealth.** 55/98

2. This can’t be done by the independent nation alone. It requires **reparations** from the European colonizers. **Europe owes its colonies.** 58-59/102-103

3. Otherwise, what you get is **neocolonialism**, i.e. when a former colony is politically independent but still economically dependent on the mother country.

4. Fanon argues that the **development of the third world** is the key to the future of the world. The **Cold War** is not as important as the liberation of the colonized. 61/105

5. **Q:** Does this make sense after 9/11?

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

Key points

- how Fanon revises Marx
- limits of spontaneity recap
- from national to social/political consciousness

I. Summing up last lecture and today

A. How Fanon revises Marx

1. The **two hostile camps** are settler/colonist and native/colonized, not bourgeoisie and proletariat.
2. The colonized peasant is the **universal class**, not the urban proletariat. The proletariat in colonized countries is conservative rather than revolutionary because it enjoys a relatively privileged position compared to the peasantry.
3. **Read** 64/108-109.
4. **Revolution begins in the countryside** and spreads to the cities, not vice versa.
5. The **lumpenproletariat** is also a revolutionary class, not a reactionary one.
6. The **colonized middle class** is incapable of fulfilling the historic role of the bourgeoisie. We’ll discuss this more in a moment. The colonized bourgeoisie **never developed the ethics** of thrift, accumulation, and investment that the European bourgeoisie did. **It’s parasitic rather than innovative.** Bourgeois rule is thus not a path to liberal democracy and industrialism, much less socialism. Instead, underdeveloped nations must skip the stage of bourgeois rule and go **directly from colonialism to socialism** and popular rule.
7. **Spontaneity** is necessary in the beginning stages of the revolution but must then be **replaced by organization** (politics). The task is to move from local to national consciousness, spontaneity to organization, and rebellion to revolution. The requires **political education** and **revolutionary leadership**.
8. **Western values** are to be replaced rather than fulfilled by revolutionary struggle

B. Summing up the argument of the “Trials and Tribulations of National Consciousness” chapter

1. **Q:** What are the trials and tribulations of national consciousness?
2. **Nationalism is a revolutionary force** in the struggle against colonialism. It is absolutely necessary to provide the political unity required to overcome the colonizer. 143-144/204
3. However, **it is a reactionary force** once decolonization has been achieved.
4. The task after decolonization is to go **from national to political and social consciousness.** 142/203

II. Trials and tribulations of national consciousness

A. These pitfalls exist *after* the overthrow of the colonialists. Keep that in mind.

B. **Nationalism is a revolutionary force** in the struggle against colonialism. It is absolutely necessary to provide the political unity required to overcome the colonizer. Without it, demands for social justice can devolve into tribalism.

C. However, **it is a reactionary force** once decolonization has been achieved.

1. Nationalism can't build a unified, stable, economically productive nation.

Instead, it leads the nation into **tribal, racial, ethnic, or religious conflicts**.

2. **Q:** Why?

D. Because nationalism is fundamentally a **middle class ideology**. Even worse, it's the ideology of a very weak and **underdeveloped middle class**. It's a class with little economic or political power. Instead, it consists of university-educated civil servants, intellectuals, etc., not businesspeople or factory owners or bankers or politicians.

1. In these ways, it's very different from the European bourgeoisie, who fought the aristocracy from a position of economic and political strength.

2. But like the European bourgeoisie, the colonized middle class also tends to act in its own interests rather than the interests of all the colonized, even though it pretends to. **It masks its class biases** behind a veil of national unity.

3. **Q:** How might we read this chapter as a **veiled critique** of the FLN, as Albert Memmi suggests (p. 35)?

a. Ultimately, this book is a **critique of nationalism**, yet the anti-colonial movement in **Algeria was resolutely nationalist** (and thus middle class, Fanon would suggest) throughout its entire struggle, and later victory.

b. The FLN, we could read this chapter as suggesting, is **heading down the path of false middle class national consciousness** rather than developing a true humanist consciousness.

4. The leaders of most nationalist movements in Africa, including the FLN, were middle class persons, for the most part, who were **fighting in the interests of their class**. This class wanted independence, but didn't think the masses of Africans were capable of participating in self-rule, and so they tried to limit the power of the masses instead of expand it.

a. Compare with Chinese intellectuals' opinions of workers and peasants during the 1989 democracy movement, French revolution, etc.)

b. This led to a certain **distrust of democracy** by the poor, and in tensions between middle class movements and movements of the poor in Africa.

c. The **tensions between fundamentalists and the secular ruling parties** (e.g. the FLN in Algeria) have come to dominate politics throughout the Middle East (Egypt, Algeria, Syria). This tension is in part a product of the middle class ideology of colonized elites..

E. The national middle class and neocolonialism

1. Because it's so weak, this middle class should join with the people and put its education and skills at their disposal. Unfortunately, it doesn't do this. 98-99/150

2. Nor does it attempt to become like a European bourgeoisie and industrialize. Instead, it continues to rely on the export of raw materials as the basis of the nation's economy, and on corruption.

3. Thus, the national bourgeoisie creates **neocolonialism** rather than economic independence and political freedom. It creates a nation that is politically independent but economically dependent on the former colonial power.

4. Thus, the **national middle class is incapable of developing** properly. It adopts all the worst habits of a bourgeoisie (decadence, etc.) but none of its good habits (invention, entrepreneurial spirit, the desire to improve efficiency, etc.). Hence, it is incapable of fulfilling the historical role of the bourgeoisie: creating the material conditions that will pave the way for the rule of the working class.

5. **Read** 119, 120/175.

F. Without any material basis for its power (i.e. without an economic base), it turns to **racism and chauvinism**: demanding that foreigners leave the nation so that natives can take their jobs, burning their shops, etc.

1. **Q:** Can you think of any examples of this today?

1. Think of Zimbabwe or anti-Chinese attacks in Indonesia today.

2. This racism and chauvinism **trickles down to the masses**, and nationalism quickly goes **from a unifying force to a balkanizing one**. 104-105/157

3. **Read** 105/158

4. Members of the new nation now spend their time in anti-foreigner attacks, chauvinism, and tribalism rather than building the nation.

5. Thus nationalism, when it is led by the middle class, ironically and inevitably leads to tribalism and racism and religious rivalry.

6. **Read** 106/159-160

G. Thus, while nationalism can overthrow colonialism, it can't create a stable and productive nation. Instead, it leads to **neocolonialism** and the rise of **dictatorships**: Mobutu in the Congo, Mugabe in Zimbabwe, Amin in Uganda, etc.

H. **Q:** Is Fanon blaming the victims of colonialism for the difficulties any postcolonial regime would face?

III. From national to political and social consciousness

A. **African unity**, then, cannot come from the middle class but only **from the masses**. These masses quickly get fed up with the new regime. Black cops beating them down are little better than white cops.

B. Thus, underdeveloped countries must reject bourgeois rule. They must **skip the stage of bourgeois rule** in Marx's model and go directly from colonialism to socialism and popular rule. **The middle class is the enemy** of the nation. Any revolutionary party of the people needs to recognize that and prevent it from coming to power.

C. The task after decolonization is to go **from national to political and social consciousness**. 142/203

1. **Read** 142/203.
2. **Q:** What does this mean?
3. In other words, **nationalism needs to be transformed into humanism**.
4. **Read** 143-44/204.

D. **Cooperatives and decentralized political institutions**

1. Achieving political/social consciousness requires a **program**: an economic program, a program regarding class relations, etc.

2. The first step is to create wholesale and retail **cooperatives** organized on a democratic basis. These cooperatives need to be **decentralized** “by involving the masses in the management of public affairs.” 123-24/180

3. **Q:** Sound familiar? [Du Bois]

4. Power needs to be decentralized and **moved away from the cities**, especially the colonial capital. The countryside should be privileged, not the cities. “We must decentralize to the utmost.” 138/197-98

5. The revolutionary party must rest on the principle that the people are capable of governing themselves.

6. **Q:** Fanon is very much a defender of small-scale, bottom-up, participatory democracy (e.g. 135-136/194-195). How does the democratic spirit of this chapter compare to the chapter on violence? Are they compatible?

E. All this requires **political education**: teaching people how to govern themselves. 138/197

1. **Q:** Is this a democratic or a paternalistic program? Is there an us/them or Party/people tone to Fanon’s argument, in which the party “serves” the masses but still remains distinct from them (and holds real power)? 197

2. Sounds a lot like Mao’s mass line ideology.

x. **Stuff skipped from this chapter**

x. The role of the political party in an underdeveloped country. 180-89

Chapter 5, “Colonial War and Mental Disorders”

Key points

- Roundtable Q’s
- Political and social consciousness
- Colonial wars and mental disorders
- Leaving Europe
- Fanon’s critique of modern ideals

I. Summing up Fanon on “political and social consciousness”

A. **Q:** If the goal of a decolonization struggle is to go from nationalism to humanism (143-144/204), what does Fanon mean by “humanism”? Isn’t the call for humanism an appeal to modern ideals?

B. **Q:** What is Fanon’s plan for wholesale and retail cooperatives and decentralized political institutions?

1. [\[see p. 12-13 notes for answer\]](#)

2. **Q:** What does this sound like? [\[Du Bois’s self-seg plan\]](#)

3. **Q:** Does this plan reflect Western notions of democracy and socialism or is it modeled on indigenous African forms?

4. **Q:** If the latter, is Fanon’s humanism a distinctly “African humanism” or a “humanism of the colonized” instead of a Western humanism? What’s the difference?

5. **Q:** Similarly, is Du Bois’s plan for Black cooperatives a distinctly Black humanism?

II. “Colonial War and Mental Disorders” chapter (pp. 181-206/249-279)

A. The crisis of identity

1. **Colonialism produces innumerable mental disorders**, among the colonized and colonizers alike.

2. The basic source of these disorders is that colonialism forces the native to ask: **“Who am I in reality?”** 182/250

B. This sense of psychic self-doubt produces **the colonized personality**. It also inevitably leads to various **neuroses and psychoses**.

1. Most psychiatrists would say that these ailments are the product of the patient’s personal circumstances, but Fanon argues that these ailments are **the product of the patient’s political and social circumstances**. In other words, we need to look at social systems to understand human behavior and mental illness, not just the particular history of the patient (family life, childhood experiences, work-related stress, etc.).

2. **Q:** Does this bear any resemblance to Du Bois’s notion of double consciousness?

3. This pathology is particularly acute **before there is armed resistance** to colonization (182-183/250-251). This fits with Fanon’s thesis that only **violence** can restore the colonized person’s humanity.

C. **Q:** Does this chapter disturb Fanon's argument about the restorative effects of violence?

1. He says at the beginning of the book that the colonized finds freedom through violence, yet violence doesn't do that in this chapter. It plays a much more **ambiguous role**, even after the struggle against colonialism has begun.

2. Violence **liberates some** (the "traitor") but **imprisons others** (the guy who stabbed the colonist's wife).

III. Leaving this Europe

A. Leaving Europe

1. **Read** 235-236/311-312.

2. **Q:** What does Fanon mean when he says we must "leave this Europe"?

3. "When I look for man in European lifestyles and technology I see a constant denial of man, an avalanche of murders" (236). ["When I search for Man in the technique and the style of Europe, I see only a succession of negations of man, and an avalanche of murders." 312]

4. **Q:** Is he right? Then what are we to do?

B. A new direction

1. Fanon says that rather than imitating Europe, the Third World must initiate its own path of advancement. Fanon wants humanity take a **new, non-European path to freedom and enlightenment**, one not tainted with colonialism, holocausts, totalitarianism, and atomic bombs.

2. **Q:** What is this "new direction" (236/313) that humanity must take?

3. It seeks to "invent a man in full, something which Europe has been incapable of achieving" (236). ["create the whole man, whom Europe has been incapable of bringing to triumphant birth." 313]

4. **Q:** What does this mean?

5. The only people who can forge this path are **the wretched of the earth**, the colonized peasantry. The European working class won't break with Europe and its disorders, so they offer no hope as a group. 237/313

C. Is Europe still in Fanon?

1. **Read** Gilroy, *Against Race* 71, if time.

2. **Read** 237/314.

3. **Q:** Is Fanon's argument such a rejection of modernity after all? It condemns the **actions** of Europe but praises its political **ideals**. Or are actions rather than words **what really counts**, and thus Europe's high ideals are ultimately irrelevant? If European civilization is only found in its literature, shouldn't we consider what Europe does rather than what it says?

4. **Q:** How can Fanon reject Western civilization when his theory is largely based on Marx and Freud? Isn't his notion of humanism essentially Western?

D. Is Martinique still in Fanon?

1. **Q:** Why did Fanon identify with Algeria after he rejected France? Why didn't he try to construct a new, post-colonial Martinician identity?

2. Algeria represents hope for a "new man" for Fanon. But not Martinique.

3. Albert Memmi argues that Fanon sort of disdained Martinique because it was too “French.” It too much identified with the culture of the colonizer, whereas Algeria has made a total break with the oppressor’s culture. They spoke French in Algeria but they killed Frenchmen.

4. When you think about it, isn’t **Fanon’s total identification with Algeria** remarkable? He’s a Black West Indian of Christian background who identifies totally with an Arab ethnic group from North Africa that is explicitly a Muslim movement. He spoke no Arabic when he moved there (though he was learning it).

5. **Q:** Is this some sort of psychological reaction? Or is it simply a reflection of Fanon’s universalism that he can completely identify with a people apparently very different from him, so long as they are moving history toward a new humanism?

6. **Q:** Given the direction that an independent Algeria took, could Fanon have identified with it for long, given his politics? Memmi says he could not.

D. **Modernity as paradox**

1. Perhaps this is **not an either/or issue** (i.e. modernity means liberty or modernity means murder. Perhaps it’s **both**: liberty *and* slavery, progress *and* colonialism, rights *and* total domination, community *and* isolation, equality *and* racial privilege. This is the **paradox of modernity**. It has brought about both the greatest equality and liberty and the most horrific enslavement and slaughter of humanity at the same time.

2. **Read** 238, 239/315

3. **Q:** If this is the modern condition, that of a paradox of freedom and oppression existing simultaneously, what are we to do? How do we break out of the paradox? And does Fanon offer a guide? Do the “wretched of the earth,” i.e. the Third World?

IV. **Fanon’s critique of modern ideals**

A. **The sovereign self**

1. The colonized does not even know **who she is** under colonialism. The native can’t understand himself as autonomous, coherent, self-made, rational, and possessing rights.

2. As Fanon argues in *Black Skin, White Masks*, in striving to become equal to the white man, the black man under colonialism has erroneously **striven to become white**. The black as well as the white worlds have no sense that it is possible to be black *and* human because both associate humanity with whiteness. Hence black skin but white masks. This results in a massive **inferiority complex** and **neuroses**.

3. **Read** 182/250.

4. The colonized person is fragmented. This leads to a society that experiences **vertigo** (a sickening dizziness). Its natural result is **neurosis** and **psychosis** for many.

B. **Progress**

1. One species has progressed, the European colonist, but only at the expense of another species, the colonized. This is not progress of humankind. Modernity

does not represent progress but “an **avalanche of murders.**” (Sound similar to “history explodes”?)

C. **Universalism**

1. Colonialism produces a **Manichean world** of two species, not a universal humanity.

2. To achieve a true universalism the Third World will have to create its own ideals and forget about European ones.

D. **Freedom**

1. Colonialism has meant freedom for some but not others.

2. Further, the freedom of some has **depended on the oppression of others.** Africans suffer so that Europeans may live well.

V. **Roundtable questions**

A. **This time**

1. How does Fanon’s analysis of colonialism and resistance compare to Du Bois’s analysis of white supremacy and resistance to it?
2. What does Fanon mean when he says we must “leave this Europe” (p. 235, p. 311 in older translation)? Do you sympathize with his argument?
3. Fanon is very much a defender of small-scale, bottom-up, participatory democracy (e.g. chapter 3). Is his democratic spirit compatible with his advocacy of violence?
4. How does nationalism (“national consciousness”) and national culture both help and harm the struggle to build a new society after decolonization? Does any of Fanon’s analysis on nationalism, culture, and politics apply to the U.S. today?
5. Consider the psychiatric case studies of mental disorders among the colonized and the colonizers on pp. 185-207 (pp. 254-279 in older translation). How can Western civilization produce mental disorders and individual liberty at the same time?
6. Could *Wretched of the Earth* be a political manifesto for Iraqi or Afghani resistance? (Be sure to use the text to support your answer.)

B. **Next time**

1. Are women part of either of these two species? Where are women in Fanon’s analysis? Is it a problem that they don’t seem to be there?
2. How can Fanon reject Western civilization when his theory is largely based on Western philosophy, especially Marx and Freud?
3. Is it possible for humans to assert their humanity through violence?
4. Fanon argues that “the colonial world is a Manichean world” (41). What does this mean? How does this compare to Du Bois’s analysis of the “two worlds” of race? Is the world still Manichean?
5. Why is violence so central to the decolonization struggle, according to Fanon?
6. If the goal of a decolonization struggle is to go from nationalism to humanism (p. 204), what does Fanon mean by “humanism”? Isn’t the call for humanism an appeal to modern ideals?

7. Does Fanon help us understand the problems of the underdeveloped world today, i.e. after colonialism? Does he help explain the “postcolonial” era?
8. [need a question on “On National Culture” pp. 206-218] How do emerging African nations build a “national culture” and how is this different from European culture or from pan-African/pan-Arabian/racial cultures? What’s the relationship between culture and politics?

Sources

Albert Memmi, “The Impossible Life of Frantz Fanon”

Gilroy, *Against Race*

1. Why are colonized and colonist (native and settler) two different species for Fanon?

2. Why do the colonized find freedom through violence?

3. Is Fanon persuasive?

Colonialism

A system of foreign rule over a society by another power for the purpose of extracting that society's wealth.

Imperialism

The principle of unlimited political expansion by a state, or “expansion for expansion's sake.” (Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*)

European imperialism established colonial relations between European and African and Asian nations.

Postcolonialism (Neocolonialism)

The period after formal independence in which the former colonies are politically independent but economically and culturally dependent on the West.

Postcoloniality

The condition of a relatively small, Western-trained intellectual elite in the former colonized nations who are caught between the West and their formerly colonized homeland.

It's like double consciousness: Am I of my home country or am I Western? Is it possible to be both?

Decolonization

Independence from European rule.
The end of Europe's political
domination over Africa and Asia.

For Fanon: The violent overthrow of
one species by another.

The Revolutionary Process According to Marx

1. Rise of capitalism and the industrial system
2. Exploitation and immiseration of the proletariat
3. Development of revolutionary class consciousness among the working class
4. Revolution
5. Seizure of state power from the capitalists
6. Dictatorship of the proletariat
7. Withering away of the state
8. Stateless society/communism

The Revolutionary Process According to Fanon

1. Invasion of colonists;
establishment of colonial regime
2. Economic development in the
colonial cities but not the
countryside
Cities: rise of relatively privileged
national elites, intellectuals,
working class
Countryside: exploitation and
immiseration of the peasantry
3. Development of a reformist or
even reactionary consciousness
among the urban classes
4. Development of a revolutionary
consciousness among the
peasantry

5. Spontaneous, violent uprisings in the countryside
6. Urban revolutionaries go to the countryside and organize the spontaneous rebellions
7. From peasant rebellion to revolutionary war; uprising moves to the cities
8. Revolution, decolonization