Pointers and prompt for your first discussion post on syllabus readings.

Your post—to be posted in your small discussion group page--should be minimum of 300 words, with word count stated at the end of the post. It must include quotations from Fanon’s ‘On Violence’ and Marechera’s ‘The Slow Sound of His Feet’. It is due by midnight on Friday April 3rd.

Required reading and viewing, in sequence:

1. The reading guidelines below and then Frantz Fanon, ‘On Violence’ highlighted passages.
2. Cecil Rhodes and Joseph Chamberlain extracts (illustrations of British imperialist and colonialist ideology)
3. These short (25 mins each) British documentaries:

UK documentary on transition from Rhodesia to Zimbabwe:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g3u5CxS3j5M>

UK Newsnight on Mugabe’s election victory (1980):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JsWQF2ZXOrA>

1. The *Guardian* newspaper article on Marechera’s short story.
2. Dambudzo Marechera, ‘The Slow Sound of His Feet’ short story.

Frantz Fanon, ‘On Violence’, from *The Wretched of the Earth*.

Reading pointers.

It’s impossible to overstate the importance of this essay, and the book of which it is the first chapter—without question the most influential book of anti-colonial thought across the globe. The book has had a huge impact on liberation struggles in the global north and the global south, in its account of the politics, economics, ideology and cultures of colonialism, as experienced by the colonized populations. It has been equally influential in its analyses of anti-colonial nationalism as a revolutionary political, social, economic, psychological and cultural movement that has the potential for transforming and liberating humanity on a global scale. Still another facet of the book’s influence is in its critique of the failure of many post-colonial governments to provide that potential transformation, and the complex local, national and global factors that lead to neo-colonialism rather than freedom.

Fanon—a black psychiatrist from the French Caribbean island of Martinique—was sent by the French government to the North African country of Algeria, that had been under French colonial occupation for around 150 years. He became radicalized through witnessing the Algerian movement for decolonization, resigned his position, and became a full-time political activist, theorist and journalist for that movement. The Wretched of the Earth arises from his firsthand experience of a protracted struggle for freedom, that was brutally repressed and resisted by the French colonial government. Fanon died of leukemia, aged 36, in 1961, before Algeria won its independence. The book reflects the particular conditions of Algeria while at the same time serving as a more general theoretical account of the operations of colonialism and resistance in the continent of Africa. It is passionately written, and opens up to many different interpretations regarding its tone and argument. Fanon combines perspectives and materials drawn from an eclectic mix of existentialism, phenomenology, Marxism, Caribbean and African literature, and clinical psychiatry.

In this course, we will look at three chapters from the book, that address colonialism, anti-colonial nationalist culture, and neo-colonialism. We start, this week, with ‘On Violence’. Next week, we read ‘On National Culture’.

I’ve highlighted, in yellow, the passages from ‘On Violence’ that are most important for our course. Here’s what I want you to focus on, as you read through it this time. These are the crucial parts of his analysis that will help you explore the literature to follow.

1. The multifocal approach to the phenomenon and the structure of colonial domination—Fanon addresses the physical, metaphysical, economic, cultural, social and psychological dimensions. Rather than see any one of these as “the” foundation of colonialism, he presents them as intersectional (in modern parlance). Systems of knowledge-production, of aesthetics, of political economy, of social structure, identity formation, etc—all are explored and integrated by Fanon here.
2. The emphasis given to the physical, spatial expression of domination—that is, how it works through the visual, material social arrangement of space, the absolute contrast between wealthy settler space and impoverished shantytown space, and the significance of human movement across and through space. This connects to:
3. The centrality of land, more generally—land that is the object of physical occupation; the socio-economic and cultural value attached to land; the political significance of reclaiming land/space as the basis of national, imperial, colonial, and anti-colonial identities. 2. Also connects to:
4. Fanon’s famous formulation of colonial (colonizer) ‘manicheanism’, a metaphysical system of domination and exploitation, that situates black and white, colonized and colonizer, as absolute, antithetical and irreconcilable entities, categorically opposed, with black/colonized presented as the negation of ‘humanity’. If under colonial Manicheanism, humanity is construed as a nexus of positive values (associated with the operations of reason, history, morality, art, etc), the entity of blackness/the colonized is defined as the embodiment of the inhuman/the evil, etc. Manicheanism operates through the physical arrangement of space (as in the brutal contrasts of urban space occupied by black and white, poor and rich), and through the proclaimed supremacy of European religion and aesthetic culture. Articulated through naked physical violence as well as its corollary dehumanizing ideology, Manicheanism, for Fanon, is initially absorbed and expressed in self-destructive ways by the colonized, until that same violence becomes the basis for anti-colonial unification and resistance; the violence shifts to become directed against the colonizer. Revolutionary violence aims to abolish the Manichean premises of colonialism and create the conditions for both a new nation and a new global humanity. Ie, Fanon sees it as the impetus for radical humanism (this, it should be said, is one interpretation, but not the only one.)
5. The concept of ‘the nation’, as Fanon presents it here, that arises among the organized, revolutionary colonized peoples, in reaction to the dominant and oppressive concept of ‘the colony’. It also contrasts with the African continent-wide concept of race, or blackness, which Fanon sees as another ideological product of colonialism. This is part of a bigger debate on the meanings, politics, culture, and psychology of race and racial identity that runs across Fanon’s writings. We will return to this next week, in reading another chapter from *The Wretched of the Earth*, ‘On National Culture’.

Prompt for your discussion post:

Read Marechera’s 1978 story in relation to Fanon’s theory, especially those items listed above. The focus of your post is the topic of colonialism and its impact on the colonized. What light does Fanon’s essay cast on the story? Are there aspects of the story that seem to corroborate Fanon’s account of colonialism? Are there aspects that seem to complicate, or depart from, Fanon’s account? Choose at least one passage from the story and from Fanon’s essay, to ground your reflections and response, and quote these passages.

FYI, Marechera’s short story collection, from which this story is taken, *The House of Hunger*, is available as a pdf in the class ‘Further Reading’ files. And, FYI, yes, Marechera himself had a speech impediment.

An optional theoretical reading, from our files, that may assist your further understanding colonialism, as seen from the perspective of a colonized black artist, Marxist, and political activist: the extracts from Aime Cesaire’s ‘Discourse on Colonialism’. Cesaire, like Fanon, was from Martinique—in fact, he was Fanon’s school teacher. He went on to become the premier of the nation, governing for many decades, and was a major poet and playwright, one of the founding fathers of ‘Negritude’ literature.