Fanon and Cesaire readings:

These help us notice and conceptualise some of the contradictions, dialectics, ironies of colonization. The readings underline the economic nature of colonialism, but also illuminate the ideological and cultural processes by which this economy can be obscured. They also illuminate the psychological, epistemological and ontological effects of the ‘colonial encounter’ on both colonizer and colonized.

Reading pointers on extracts from Aime Cesaire’s *Discourse on Colonialism* (1955). Cesaire, like Frantz 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. His *Discourse on Colonialism* is a powerful critique of the hypocrisies and savagery of European colonialism, that draws upon poetic language and surreal imagery to develop its critique. As you read, pay attention to these elements:

1. Cesaire’s attack upon Hypocrisy, ie the practice of claiming to have moral standards or beliefs to which one's own behavior does not conform. This leads him to expose the ironies of the colonial condition (refresher: irony occurs when an intended meaning and an actual meaning are opposite):

--“…the essential thing here is to see **clearly**, to think **clearly**—that is, dangerously—and to answer **clearly** the innocent first question: what, fundamentally, is colonization?” (32 my bolding)

--Césaire’s answer? Colonization uses mystifications and justifications to hide the larger truth: “*Europe is morally and spiritually indefensible*” (32)

--So-called ‘Western Civilization’ is the opposite of ‘civilized’ (it is ‘decadent,’ ‘stricken,’ ‘dying’)

--What is represented as moral is immoral

--What is represented as spirituality is the absence of spirituality

--European colonialism is a system of economic exploitation and political domination, starting 500+ years ago, which in its 19th- and 20th century forms invented and added ideological mystifications and justifications(33)

1. This is a form of dialectical thinking (a philosophical term used to mark the presence of simultaneous contradictory states of being). For example: civilization and barbarism are not mutually exclusive, opposite categories, but interdependent and combined experiences.

--“First we must study how colonization works to *decivilize* the colonizer, to *brutalize* him in the true sense of the word” (35).

--Europe thinks itself different from the Nazis, but no:

--“…what he cannot forgive Hitler for is not *the crime* in itself, *the crime against man*, it is not *the humiliation of man as such*, it is the crime against the white man, the humiliation of the white man, and the fact that he applied to Europe colonialist procedures which until then had been reserved exclusively for the Arabs of Algeria, the ‘coolies’ of India, and the ‘niggers’ of Africa” (36)

1. Humanism and Reification. For Cesiare, when experienced as colonization, European liberal humanism = dehumanization.

--When you treat others like animals, you make an animal of yourself (41)

--Colonization = “thingification” (the more commonly used philosophical term for this is ‘*reification*’)

--The colonized turned into an *object* of European colonial power

--Césaire’s *coup de grace*: **it didn’t have to be this way**.

1. Colonialism, Contact, Connection. Contact between cultures, for Cesaire, is a good thing. However European colonialism involves “No *human* contact, but relations of domination and submission which turn the colonizing man into a classroom monitor, an army sergeant, a prison guard, a slave driver, and the indigenous man into an instrument of production” (42).

--Admits indigenous, pre-colonial societies could contain unjust and oppressive elements, too (43-44)

--But colonialism irreparably damaged the positive elements of these societies, while augmenting any oppressive characteristics of precolonial social organization: “I am talking about societies drained of their essence, cultures trampled underfoot, institutions undermined, lands confiscated, religions smashed, magnificent artistic creations destroyed, extraordinary *possibilities* wiped out*”* (43).

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.

Here’s what I want you to focus on, as you read through the specified passages for this session on colonialism. These parts of his analysis 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.)

After reading Cesaire and Fanon, read Cecil Rhodes and Joseph Chamberlain, whose writing stems from the late 19th-century imperial era that, as Cesaire argues, added ideological and cultural justification/mystification to the colonial system of political and economic expansion. Do you see any differences between Rhodes’ and Chamberlain’s ideologies?

Finally, read the poems of Margarido and Mhlophe. How do these works represent, and illuminate, colonialism? Do these representations complement those given by Cesaire and Fanon? How might you relate the poems to the speeches of Rhodes and Chamberlain?