Reading pointers and discussion post prompts on Neo-colonialism/Decolonization, week 6.

Read the highlighted sections of Fanon, ‘Trials and Tribulations of National Consciousness’. This article, another chapter from his book *The Wretched of the Earth*, is a counterpart to Fanon’s chapter ‘On Violence’. In ‘Trials and Tribulations’, Fanon now addresses the aftermath of decolonization movements. He identifies some of the social, economic, and political hazards of post-independent African nations, in which a state of neo-colonialism, rather than socio-political transformation, arises. Fanon’s account goes on to identify progressive paths to post-independence, that he sees developing in Algeria and to which he is a programmatic contributor. It’s important to acknowledge that while Fanon’s critique of neo-colonialism is extensive, it is by no means fatalistic, but allows for the possibility of real decolonial transformation of humanity.

This distinguishes his approach from those that take a fatalistic perspective which considers African countries and societies ‘doomed’ to political-economic failure/tyranny/tribalism/primordial savagery/etc. Such approaches circulate widely in 20th and 21st-century US media, demonizing African politicians such as Robert Mugabe, Idi Amin, seeing in them—and in independent states more broadly-- the confirmation of an ‘essential’, metaphysical, negativity. (Ie, such approaches conform to and confirm the racist, colonial Manicheanism that Fanon identifies in ‘On Violence’). As the remainder of our class mostly focuses on critical literary representations of neo-colonialism in various post-independent states, I have highlighted Fanon’s critique passages more than his positive, programmatic passages in this chapter.

For further understanding, see the short piece defining ‘Neo-colonialism’ in the ‘Course Files’ folder for a summary of the phenomenon (optional not required reading). See also Nkrumah’s speech/article, ‘Neo-colonialism’, for an analysis which complements Fanon’s. Nkrumah focuses on the international factors in neo-colonialism, in particular, the role of the United States in attempting direct and indirect control across the African continent (also optional, not required, reading).

As you read the Fanon chapter, pay particular attention to these topics:

–the economics of neo-colonialism, in which the decolonized state continues to be part of the structure of global capitalism.

--the emergence of a class of African bourgeoisie, which Fanon casts as mediators not creators of capital.

--the growth of a militarized and centralized state, that treats its own population as a social and political threat. At times the state is organized through ethnic groups and loyalties (a left over from colonialism).

--the use and abuse of nationalist rhetoric, by the ruling class, that deploys liberationist discourse, celebrating nation-building, national unity, nationalism, etc, and exploits these as buzzwords. For Fanon, the use of these terms as empty abstractions reflects a failure of national consciousness to transform itself into social and political consciousness. The concept of the nation and of nationalism was, for him, supposed to be a means to a progressive humanistic and socialist end, rather than being an end in itself.

--the operations of symbols, pageantry, spectacles of national independence, and the place of anti-colonial heroic history, precolonial national culture and heritage, in these operations.

--the attitudes and behaviour of ‘the people’, under this new/old dispensation, whose frustration and alienation can take form in the growth of inter-ethnic hostilities and competition, and the growth of xenophobia (directed against migrant labor from other African countries)

--the cognitive dissonance of living in neo-colonial conditions, which can scramble perceptions, challenge understanding and upset emotions; social fragmentation of the body politic and its impact on the psyche, the material body, etc.

--Fanon’s advocacy of decentralization of government and the growth of local co-operative industries

Discussion Post prompt. Read Fanon’s “Trials and Tribulations” and Yvonne Vera’s short story, “Independence Day”. What kind of commentary on decolonization does Vera’s story provide? How does it connect with Fanon’s critique? Please write 200 or more words, with word count stated at the end of your post.