



Lire Frantz Fanon *Reading Frantz Fanon*

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**Série de séminaires ouverts aux étudiants des Masters
et Ecoles Doctorales du PRES HÉSAm.**

**Centre Panthéon – 12 pl. du Panthéon Paris 5^e.
Salle 58 de 17h30 à 19h, chaque mercredi.**

Séminaire hebdomadaire – Semestre 2 2012-13
Première séance le mercredi 23 janvier 2013.

Résumé / Abstract

What is the question to which one can read Frantz Fanon's *Les Damnés de la terre* (The Wretched of the Earth), published in 1961, as constituting an answer? This is the question with which my proposed course will be concerned. It is a question, I submit, that is at once deeply complex and rich with implications not only for how we think about empire, but how we think about the ethics and politics of self-determination. In order to discern the question about colonialism to which *Les Damnés de la terre* constitutes an answer, one has to discern the picture of colonialism (or more precisely, the picture of colonial power) that he constructs. As Fanon conceived it, what was the nature of colonial power as power? What were its bases, its technologies, and its targets? What was it about colonial power that needed to be (conceptually and morally) identified and (politically) overcome? Or to put this differently: what were the ill effects of colonial power? What harms did it perpetrate on the colonized that required redress and repair? What were the political, philosophical, and psychological sources by which Fanon built-up this picture of colonial power? What was the conceptual-ideological problem-space that made this picture of colonialism plausible and intelligible? I suggest that only by reconstructing the answers to these (and other cognate) questions can we begin to adequately appreciate the context of problematization and intervention inhabited by *Les Damnés de la terre*.

NB : le séminaire sera donné en langue anglaise.



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Reading Frantz Fanon

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Introduction

What is the question to which one can read Frantz Fanon's *Les Damnés de la terre* (*The Wretched of the Earth*), published in 1961, as constituting an answer? This is the question with which my proposed course will be concerned. It is a question, I submit, that is at once deeply complex and rich with implications not only for how we think about empire, but how we think about the ethics and politics of self-determination. In order to discern the question about colonialism to which *Les Damnés de la terre* constitutes an answer, one has to discern the picture of colonialism (or more precisely, the picture of colonial *power*) that he constructs. As Fanon conceived it, what was the nature of colonial power as *power*? What were its bases, its technologies, and its targets? What was it about colonial power that needed to be (conceptually and morally) *identified* and (politically) *overcome*? Or to put this differently: what were the ill effects of colonial power? What harms did it perpetrate on the colonized that required redress and repair? What were the political, philosophical, and psychological sources by which Fanon built-up this picture of colonial power? What was the conceptual-ideological problem-space that made this picture of colonialism plausible and intelligible? I suggest that only by reconstructing the answers to these (and other cognate) questions can we begin to adequately appreciate the context of problematization and intervention inhabited by *Les Damnés de la terre*.

Books

The central text of the course is Frantz Fanon's *Les Damnés de la terre*, which you can read in either the French original or the English translation, *The Wretched of the Earth* (we will use the Richard Philcox translation in class). However I would also urge you to read, as background, Aimé Césaire's essay, *Discours sur le colonialisme* (*Discourse on Colonialism*) and Albert Memmi's *Portrait du colonisé, Portrait du colonisateur* (*The Colonizer and Colonized*).

Other anticolonial texts that will feature in our discussions are the following:

C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins*
Mahatma Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*

The secondary literature on Fanon is now very large. But I would suggest the following:

David Macey, *Frantz Fanon: A Biography*
Alice Cherki: *Frantz Fanon: A Portrait*
Nigel Gibson: *Fanon: The Postcolonial Imagination*
Vivaldi Jean-Marie: *Fanon: Collective Ethics and Humanism*

Order of Seminars

Week 1:

Introduction: Why is anticolonialism a question? Why re-read classics of the anticolonial era? How should we re-read these classics? I offer a frame in which to pursue this reading, a frame organized around the elucidation of the “picture” of colonialism constructed in these texts.

Week 2:

In this week and the next, we look closely at the structure of two closely connected Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (*Discours sur le colonialisme*)

Week 3

Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and Colonized* (*Portrait du colonisé, Portrait du colonisateur*)

Week 4:

Now we begin a close reading of Frantz Fanon’s great classic of anticolonial revolution. We will read chapter by chapter.

Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (*Les Damnés de la terre*), chapter 1, “On Violence”

Week 5

Chapter 2, “Grandeur and the Weakness of Spontaneity”

Week 6

Chapter 3, “Misadventures of National Consciousness”

Week 7

Chapter 4, “On National Culture”

Week 8

Chapter 5, “Colonial War and Mental Disorder”

Week 9

“Conclusion”

Requirements

The first requirement is that you *read*. There is a lot of ground to cover and it is imperative that you keep up with the reading. It will *not* be acceptable that you are unprepared for class discussion. I want to hear you thinking, *conceptually* (if also through empirical instances) around the theme of the class.