

Society, Language, Difference

4. Frantz Fanon





Agenda

1. Introducing Frantz Fanon
2. *Black Skin, White Masks*
3. Colonisation of the mind
4. *The Wretched of the Earth*
5. Legacies

‘No leader, however valuable he may be, can substitute himself for the popular will; and the national government

... ought first to give back their dignity to all citizens, fill their minds and feast their eyes with human things, and create a prospect that is human because conscious and sovereign men dwell therein’

– Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 1961



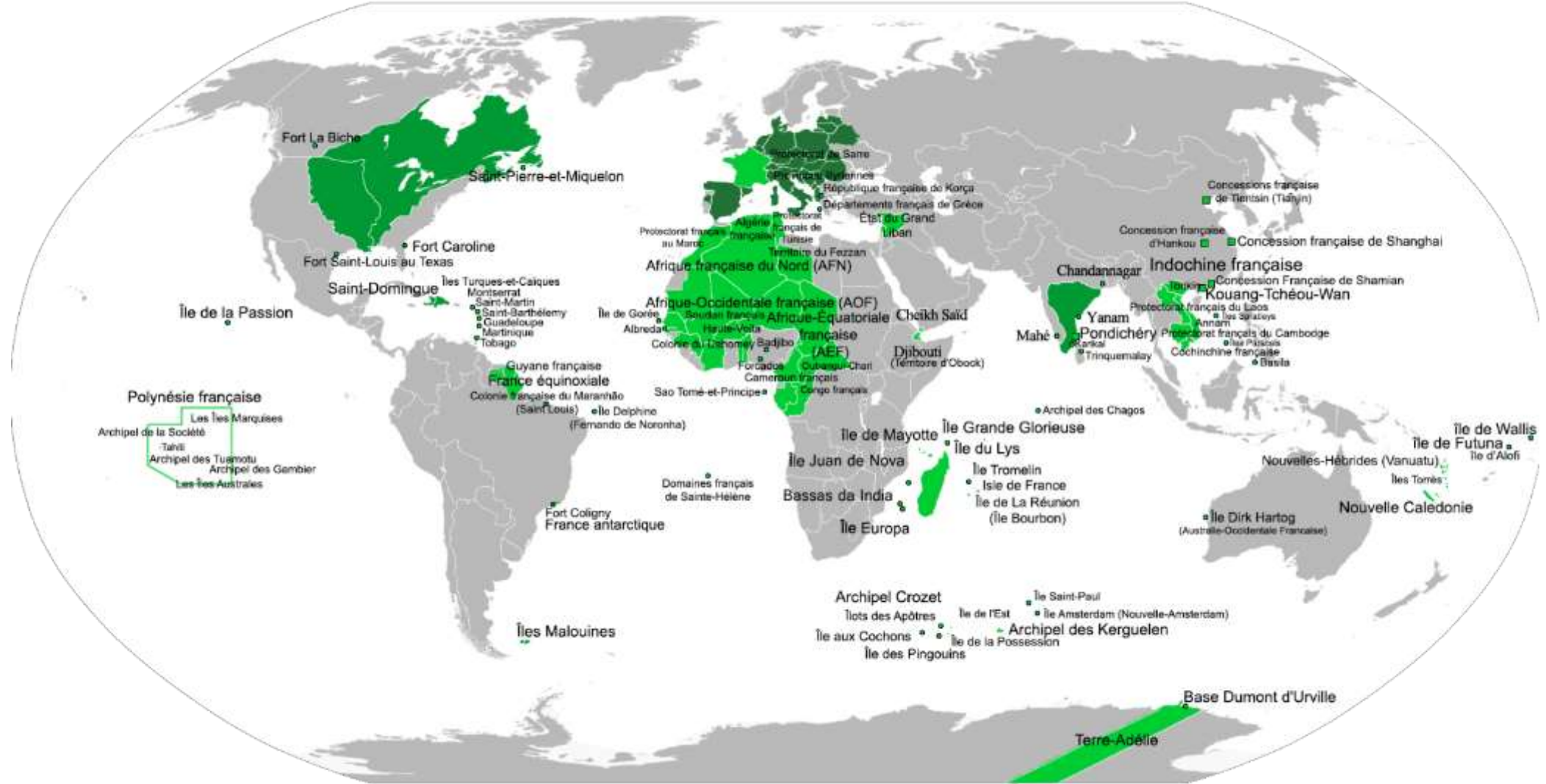


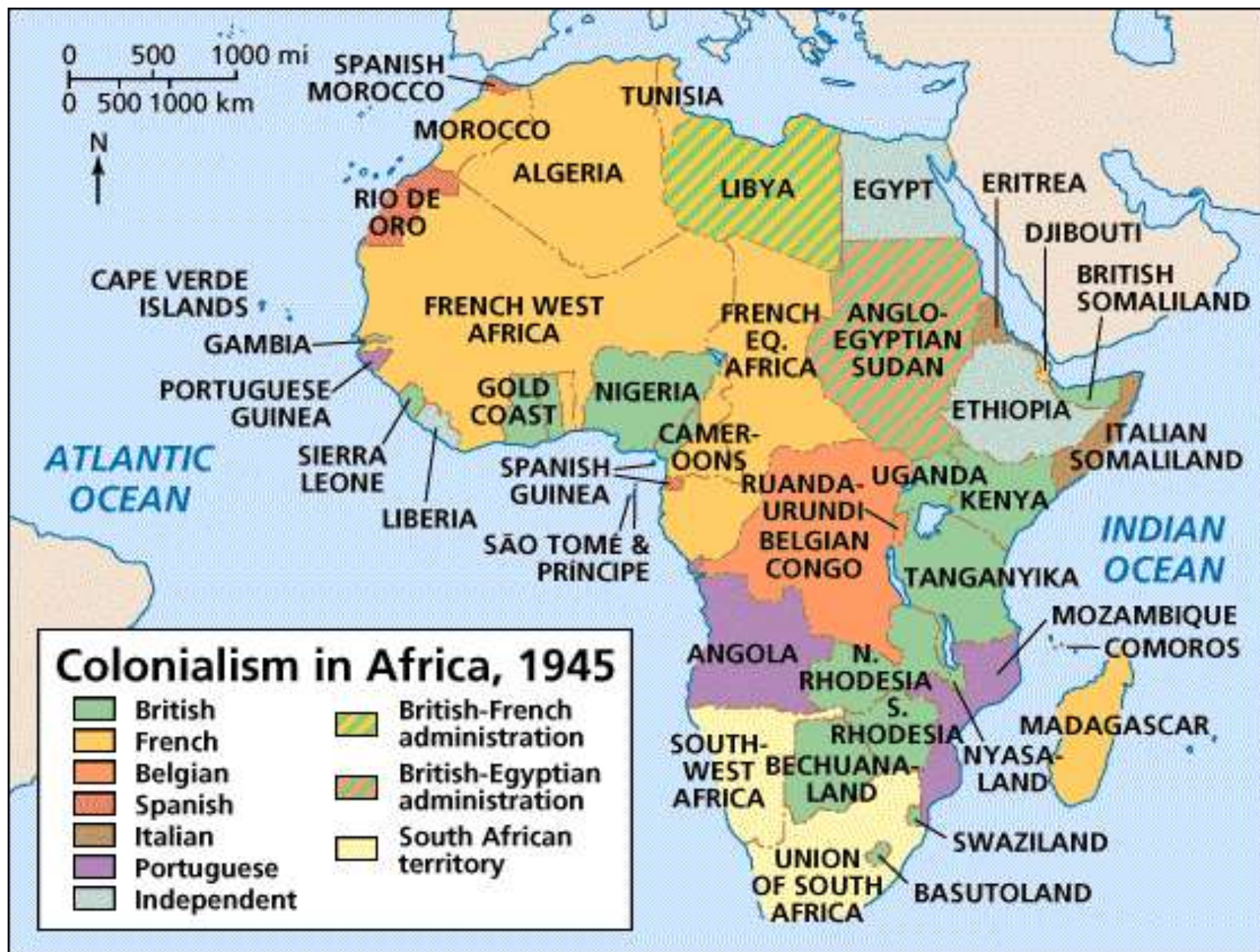
A 'Black Rousseau' ...

His call for national revolutions is Jacobin in method, Rousseauist in spirit, and Sartrian in language – altogether as French as can be'

- *New York Review of Books*, 1966







Introducing Fanon

- Born 20 July 1925 in Martinique, a French colony in the West Indies
- Middle-class family: father a customs inspector, mother a shop-owner
- Studies under Aimé Césaire at school
- During WW2, Martinique is subject to brutal Vichy French rule







Introducing Fanon

- Fanon leaves in 1943 aged 18, joins the Free French forces
- Fights in the battles of Alsace, receives a *croix de guerre* at Colmar
- But... all non-white soldiers were removed from the media-focused regiment during the final victorious crossing of the Rhine

Introducing Fanon

- Returns to Lyon, studying literature and philosophy, and writes plays
- Qualifies as a psychiatrist in 1951 in France
- From 1953 heads the Blida-Joinville Psychiatric Hospital in Algeria, treating both French soldiers and traumatised locals as the Algerian Revolution erupts in 1954
- From 1957-61 works in exile for the FLN (Front de Libération Nationale) as a journalist, editor, strategist and ambassador
- An untimely death in the US December 1961 from leukaemia, leaving behind a wife and two children

Key dates

1951: Begins studies in Lyon under Merleau-Ponty

1952: *Black Skin, White Masks*

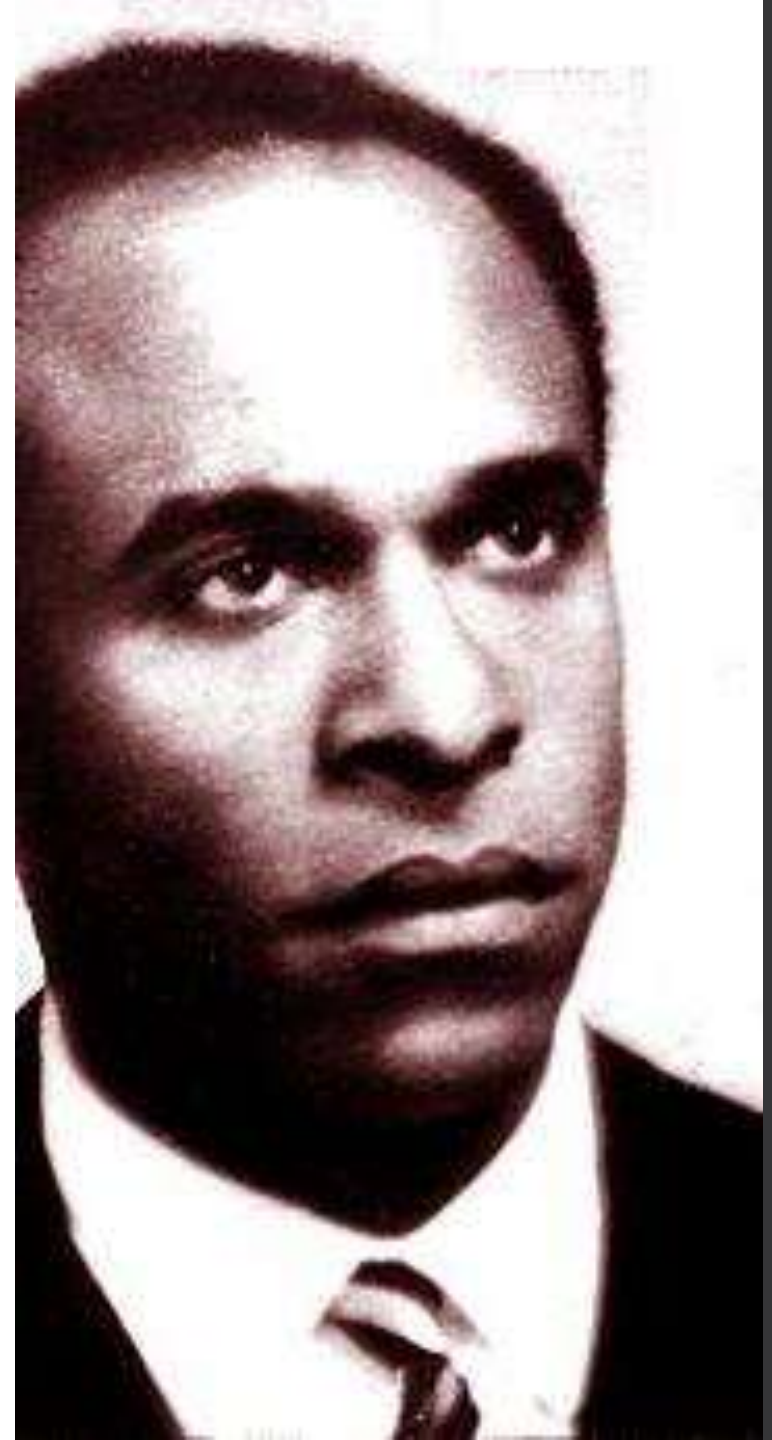
1954: Moves to Blida, Algerian War of Independence

1957-59: Edits *El Moujahid* (essays later collected in the posthumous *Toward the African Revolution*, 1964)

1959: *The Year of the Algerian Revolution*

1961: *The Wretched of the Earth*, dictated bed-ridden
Massacre of 40-200 Algerians by police in Paris, 17 Oct

1962: Algeria gains complete independence



*frantz
fanon*

*les damnés
de la terre*
préface de
jean-paul sartre

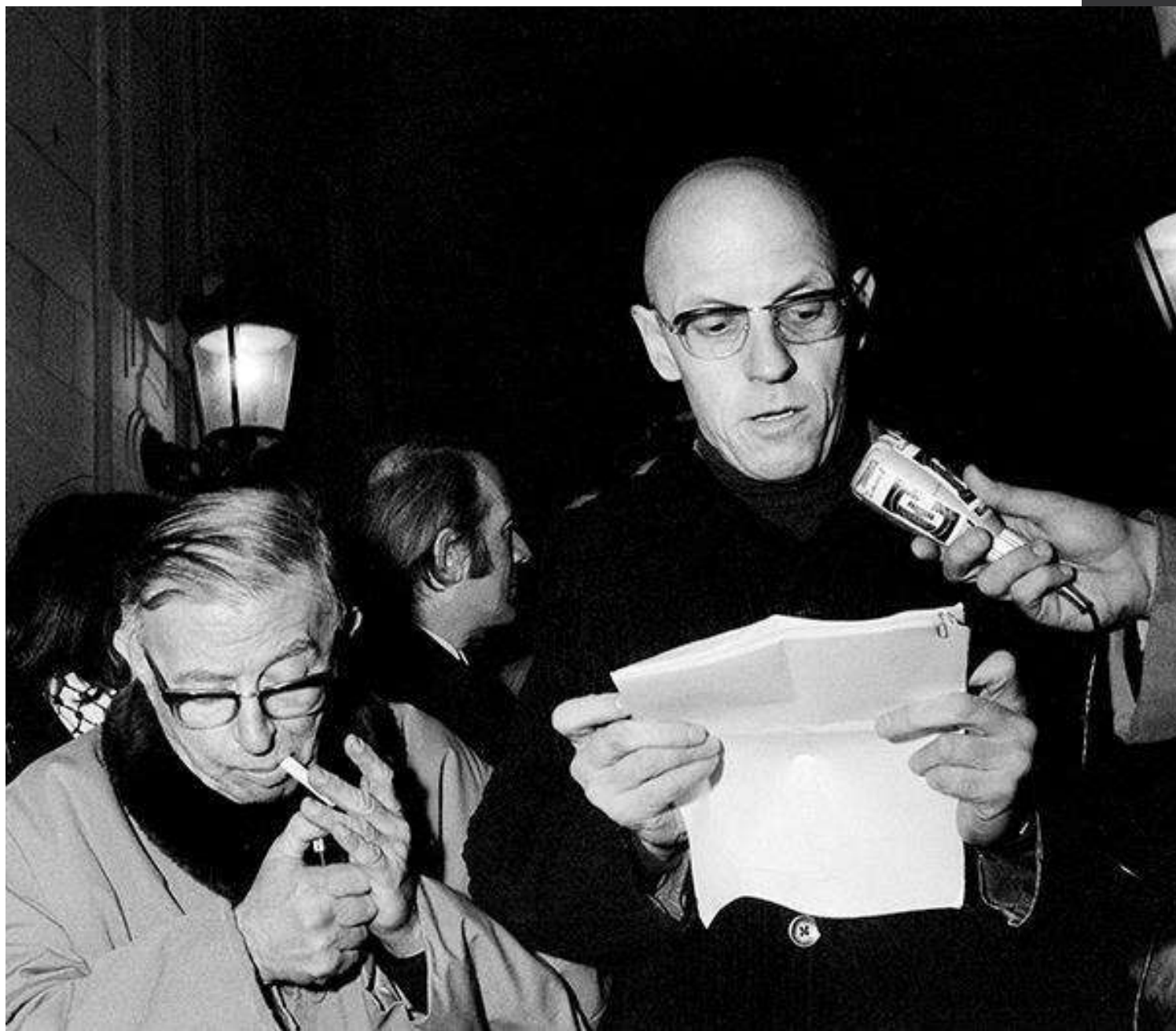
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JEAN-PIERRE
MAFFRE

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FRANTZ FANON ALIENATION AND FREEDOM





Foucault / Fanon

- Phenomenology (structures of experience and sense)
- Critique of how power relations are mentally internalised and operate at the level of dispositions, values and norms (via 'archaeology')
- Frontline experience of psychiatry
- Critique of a reduction of the psychic to the neurological (and of the social to the psychic)
- Cultural perceptions of madness (Foucault, 'Madness and Society'; Fanon on madness in Algeria)
- Is madness itself a source of liberation?

‘in the use of our body and our senses in so far as they involve us in the world, we have the means of understanding our cultural gesticulation, in so far as it involves us in history’

– “Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence” (1952)

‘The presence of structure outside us in natural and social systems, and within us as symbolic function, points to a way beyond the subject-object correlation which has dominated philosophy from Descartes to Hegel’

– *Signes* (1959)



2. Black Skin



Frantz Fanon

Points

Peau noire masques blancs



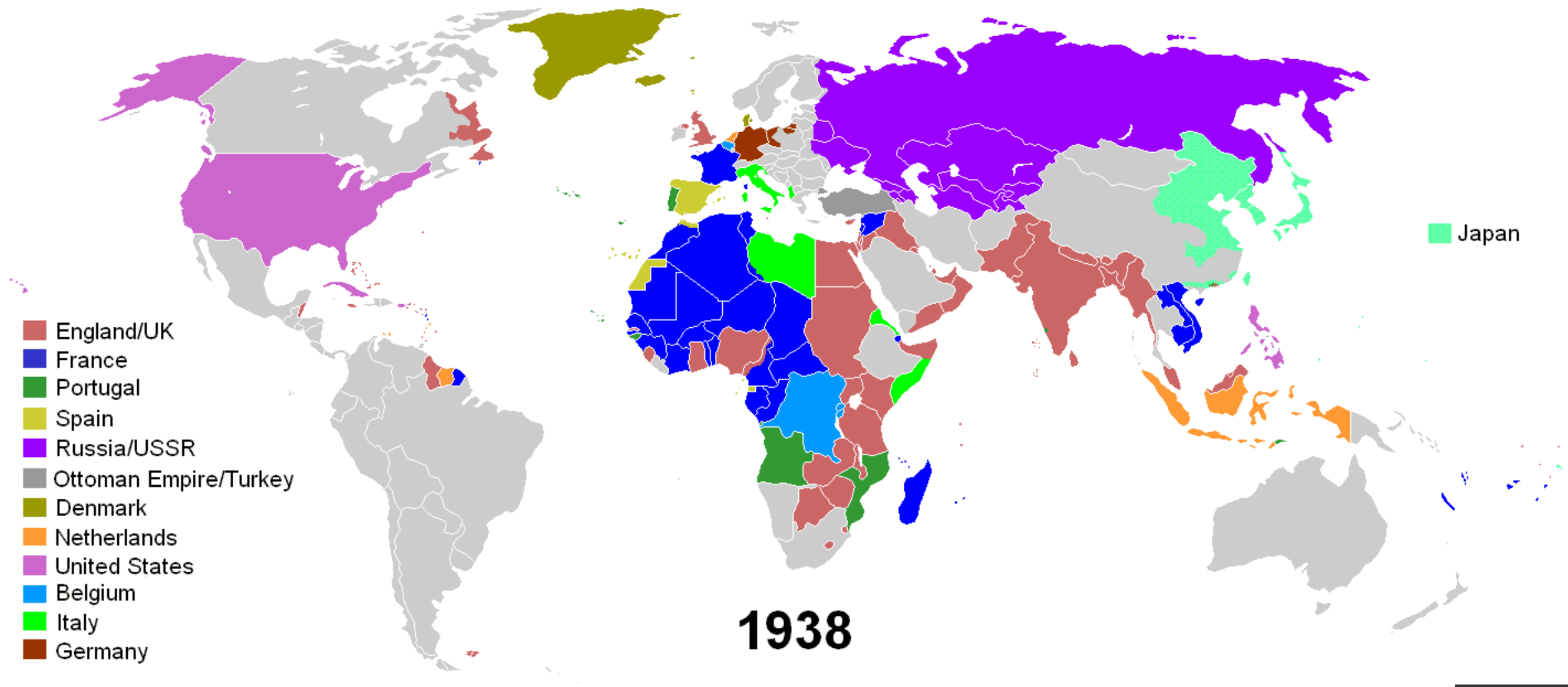
Essais

Black Skin, White Masks (1952)

- Explores the psychological impact of colonialism, drawing on his own lived experience

Colonisation establishes itself at the level of thought and language:

- The language and culture of the coloniser is established and recognised as superior, 'civilised'
- An inferiority complex establishes itself, with whiteness good, blackness bad
- Colonialism dehumanises the native, who in turn tries to imitate the white master, putting on a white mask...





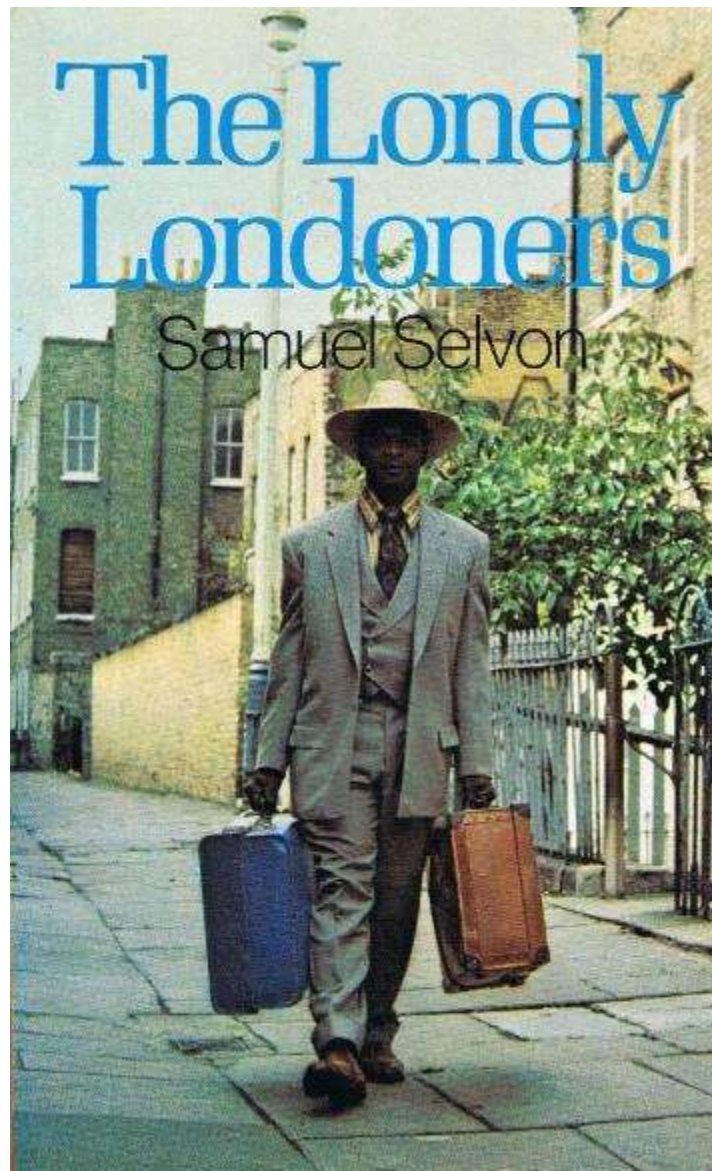


Black Skin, White Masks

‘The colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards’

‘The negro enslaved by his inferiority, the white man enslaved by his superiority alike behave in accordance with a neurotic orientation’

‘The black man wants to be white. The white man slaves to reach a human level’



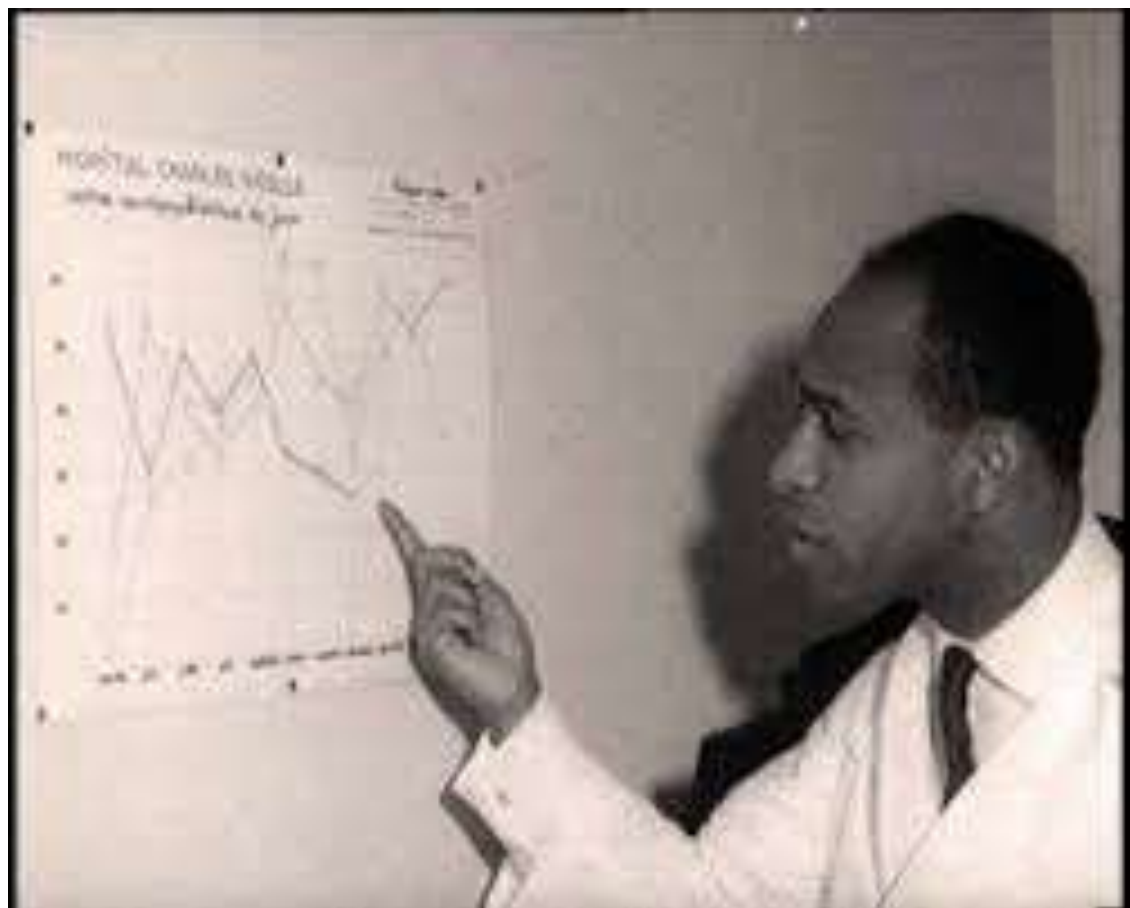
3. Colonisation of the Mind

‘If I were an Adlerian, then, having established the fact that my friend had fulfilled in a dream his wish to become white—that is, to be a man—I would show him that his neurosis, his psychic instability, the rupture of his ego arose out of this governing fiction, and I would say to him:

“M. Mannoni has very ably described this phenomenon in the Malagasy. Look here: I think you simply have to resign yourself to remaining in the place that has been assigned to you.”

Certainly not! I will not say that at all! I will tell him, “The environment, society are responsible for your delusion.” Once that has been said, the rest will follow of itself, and what that is we know. The end of the world.’ –

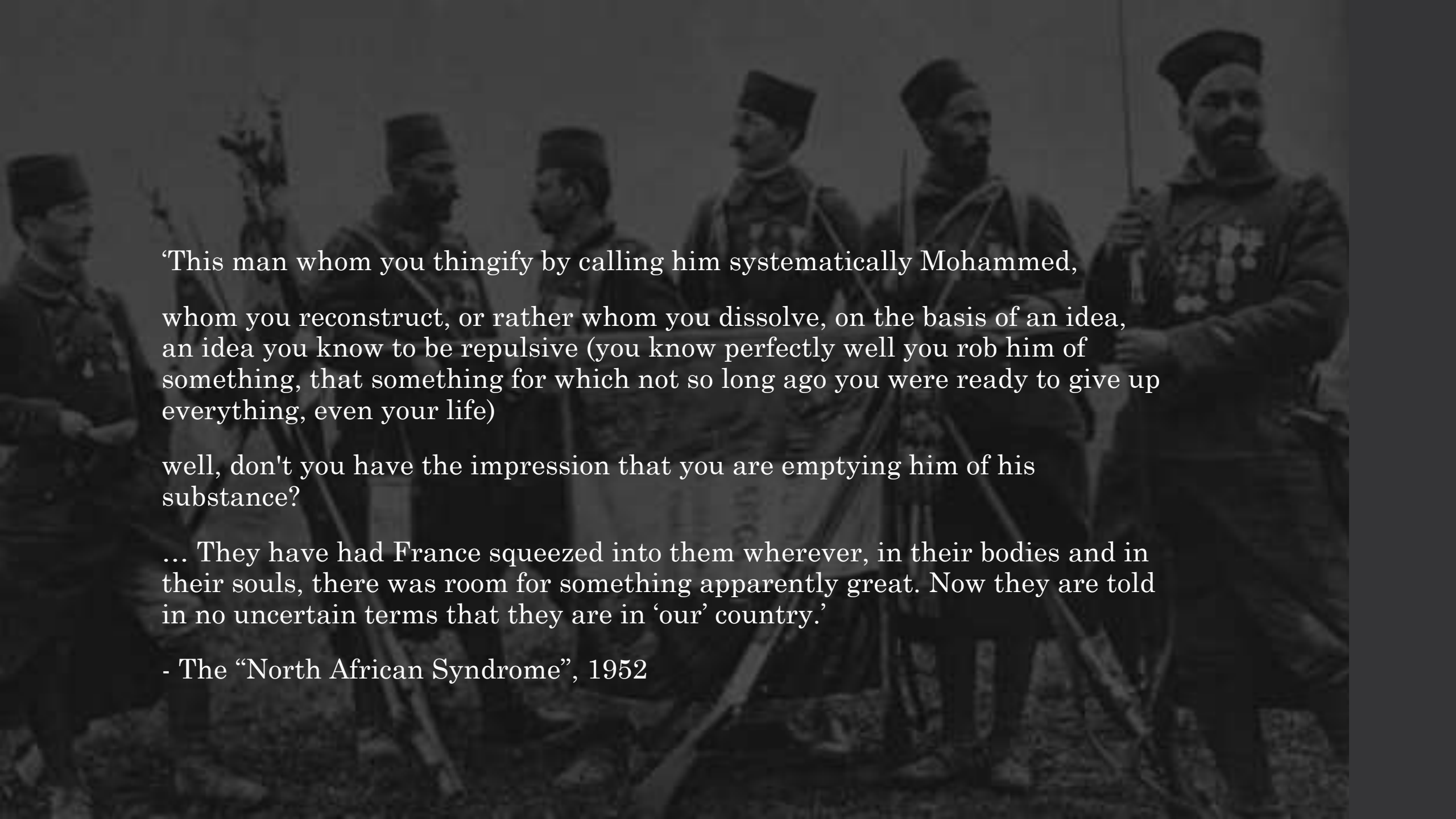
Black Skin, White Masks











‘This man whom you thingify by calling him systematically Mohammed, whom you reconstruct, or rather whom you dissolve, on the basis of an idea, an idea you know to be repulsive (you know perfectly well you rob him of something, that something for which not so long ago you were ready to give up everything, even your life)

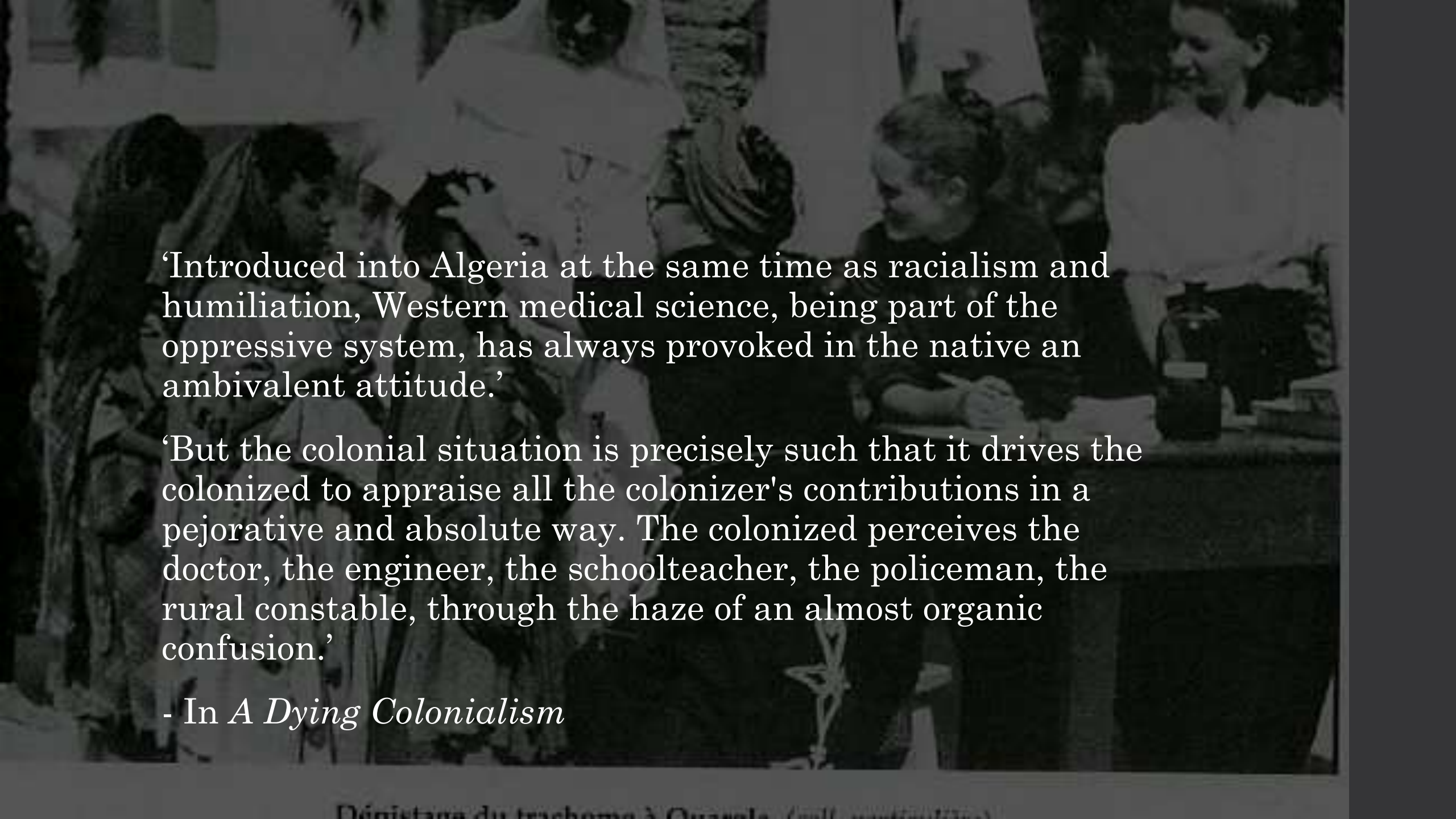
well, don't you have the impression that you are emptying him of his substance?

... They have had France squeezed into them wherever, in their bodies and in their souls, there was room for something apparently great. Now they are told in no uncertain terms that they are in ‘our’ country.’

- The “North African Syndrome”, 1952



Dépistage du trachome à Ouargla. (coll. particulière).

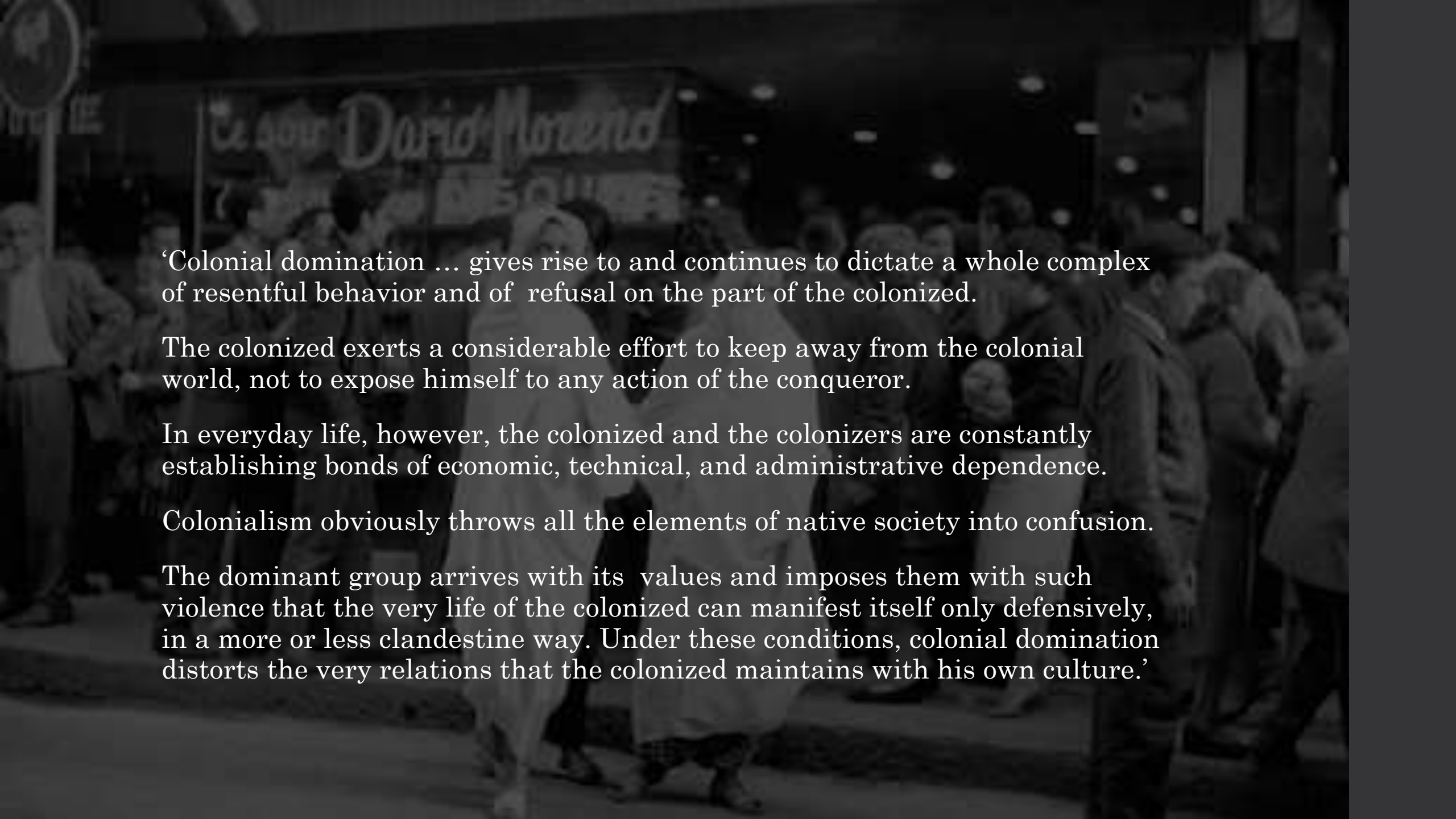


‘Introduced into Algeria at the same time as racialism and humiliation, Western medical science, being part of the oppressive system, has always provoked in the native an ambivalent attitude.’

‘But the colonial situation is precisely such that it drives the colonized to appraise all the colonizer's contributions in a pejorative and absolute way. The colonized perceives the doctor, the engineer, the schoolteacher, the policeman, the rural constable, through the haze of an almost organic confusion.’

- In *A Dying Colonialism*





‘Colonial domination ... gives rise to and continues to dictate a whole complex of resentful behavior and of refusal on the part of the colonized.

The colonized exerts a considerable effort to keep away from the colonial world, not to expose himself to any action of the conqueror.

In everyday life, however, the colonized and the colonizers are constantly establishing bonds of economic, technical, and administrative dependence.

Colonialism obviously throws all the elements of native society into confusion.

The dominant group arrives with its values and imposes them with such violence that the very life of the colonized can manifest itself only defensively, in a more or less clandestine way. Under these conditions, colonial domination distorts the very relations that the colonized maintains with his own culture.’



‘Madness is one of the means man has of losing his freedom.

And I can say, on the basis of what I have been able to observe from this point of vantage, that the degree of alienation of the inhabitants of this country appears to me frightening.

If psychiatry is the medical technique that aims to enable man no longer to be a stranger to his environment, I owe it to myself to affirm that the Arab, permanently an alien in his own country, lives in a state of absolute depersonalization.’

- Letter to the Resident Minister (1956), in
Toward the African Revolution



4. The *Wretched of the Earth*





FRANCE FORTE
ALGERIE FRANÇAISE

PARC
CENTRE VILLE
GARDIEN

HOTEL MODA

The Wretched of the Earth

- Colonisation based on the violent subjugation and dehumanisation of the colonised
- Decolonisation isn't just political power – at the level of social relations and the internal psyche, it means also becoming human
- Which involves facing how colonialism subjugates on many levels
- *Spatially* – in the separation of clean, well-built colonial quarters versus the shanty town of 'disreputable people', where life appears brutal, animal-like, swarming with 'yellow multitudes' (De Gaulle)
- *Underscored by unveiled police violence*, and ...

And socially...

in the way that the values
of the colonial power are
internalised and
reproduced by the
bourgeoisie that remains...

Resulting in what Fanon
calls elsewhere a pervasive
'self-hatred' on account of
the colonised, that can only
be overcome through a
violent rejection of the
colonial power and its
culture







‘What is the status of Algeria? A systematized de-humanization.

It was an absurd gamble to undertake, at whatever cost, to bring into existence a certain number of values, when the lawlessness, the inequality, the multi-daily murder of man were raised to the status of legislative principles.

The social structure existing in Algeria was hostile to any attempt to put the individual back where he belonged.’

* * *

Decolonization, which sets out to change the order of the world, is clearly an agenda for total disorder. But it cannot be accomplished by the wave of a magic wand, a natural cataclysm, or a gentleman's agreement. Decolonization, we know, is an historical process: In other words, it can only be understood, it can only find its significance and become self coherent insofar as we can discern the history-making movement which gives it form and substance. Decolonization is the encounter between two congenitally antagonistic forces that in fact owe their singularity to the kind of reification secreted and nurtured by the colonial situation. Their first confrontation was colored by violence and their cohabitation—or rather the exploitation of the colonized by the colonizer—continued at the point of the bayonet and under cannon fire. The colonist and the colonized are old acquaintances. And consequently, the colonist is right when he says he “knows” them. It is the colonist who *fabricated* and *continues to fabricate* the colonized subject. The colonist derives his validity, i.e., his wealth, from the colonial system.

Decolonization never goes unnoticed, for it focuses on and fundamentally alters being, and transforms the spectator crushed to a nonessential state into a privileged actor, captured in a virtually grandiose fashion by the spotlight of History. It infuses a new rhythm, specific to a new generation of men, with a new language and a new humanity. Decolonization is truly the creation of new men. But such a creation cannot be attributed to a supernatural power: The “thing” colonized becomes a man through the very process of liberation.

What does Fanon mean by the confrontation of decolonisation?

In what way does the colonist fabricate the colonial subject?

What does Fanon mean by a fundamental altering of being, creating a ‘new humanity’, and becoming a man?

‘Read Fanon: you will see that in a time of helplessness, murderous rampage is the collective unconscious of the colonized.’

‘This book had certainly no need for a preface. Especially as it is not addressed to us. I have written one, however, to the dialectic through to its conclusion: we, too, peoples of Europe, we are being decolonized: meaning the colonist inside every one of us is surgically extracted in a bloody operation.’



- ‘I believe in justice, but I will defend my mother before justice’ — Albert Camus
- Camus believed in a third, non-violent way, between pro-French support and terrorism
- French censorship = no reporting of widespread torture in Algeria
- The Fourth Republic collapses in 1958 after rebels in the French army overthrow French civil authorities in Algiers, Corsica, and threaten Paris too unless De Gaulle is installed
- Sartre’s apartment was bombed twice in 1961-1962, as was *Les Temps Modernes*



geois have chanced to encounter have had insufficient impact to alter their current perception and nuance their thinking. During the period of liberation, however, the colonialist bourgeoisie frantically seeks contact with the colonized “elite.” It is with this elite that the famous dialogue on values is established. When the colonialist bourgeoisie realizes it is impossible to maintain its domination over the colonies it decides to wage a rearguard campaign in the fields of culture, values, and technology, etc. But what we should never forget is that the immense majority of colonized peoples are impervious to such issues. For a colonized people, the most essential value, because it is the most meaningful, is first and foremost the land: the land, which must provide bread and, naturally, dignity. But this dignity has nothing to do with “human” dignity. The colonized subject has never heard of such an ideal. All he has ever seen on his land is that he can be arrested, beaten, and starved with impunity; and no sermonizer on morals, no priest has ever stepped in to bear the blows in his place or share his bread. For the colonized, to be a moralist quite plainly means silencing the arrogance of the colonist, breaking his spiral of violence, in a word ejecting him outright from the picture. The famous dictum which states that all men are equal will find its illustration in the colonies only when the colonized subject states he is equal to the colonist. Taking it a step further, he is determined to fight to be more than the colonist. In fact, he has already decided to take his place. As we have seen, it is the collapse of an entire moral and material universe. The intellectual who, for his part, has adopted the abstract, universal values of the colonizer is prepared to fight so that colonist and colonized can live in peace in a new world. But what he does not see, because precisely colonialism and all its modes of thought have seeped into him, is that the colonist is no longer interested in staying on and coexisting once the colo-

Bourgeois colonised intellectuals often put across messages for ‘moderation’ which in turn perpetuate inequality after decolonisation

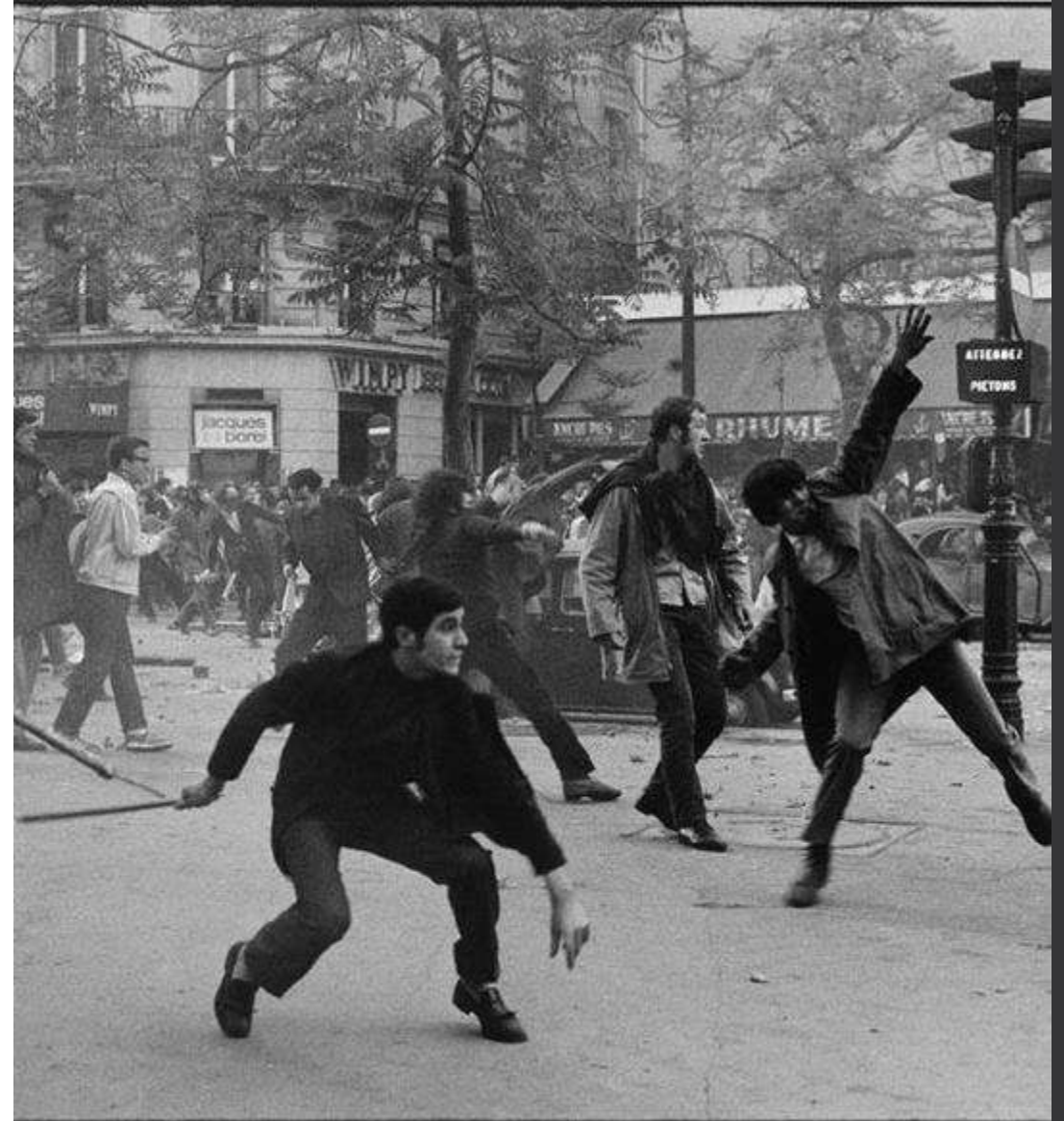
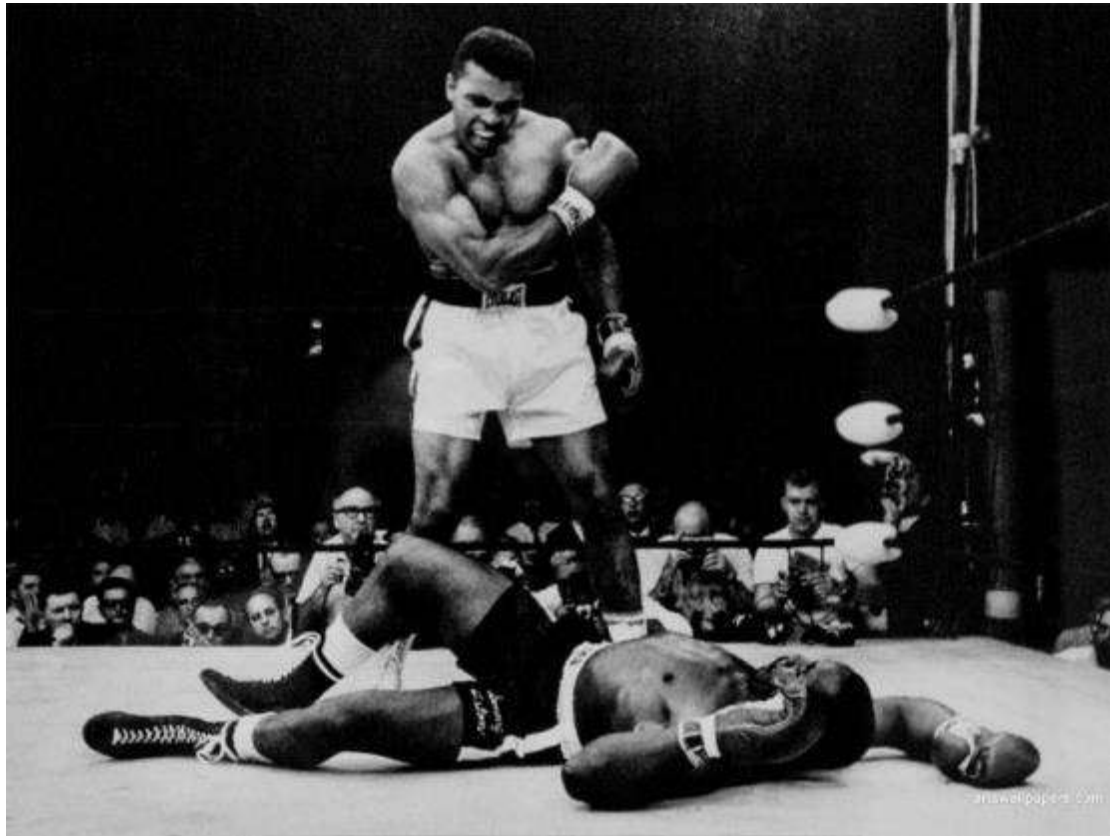
Instead for Fanon, intellectuals need to spend time immersed among a subjugated population, giving up their ‘sly’, ‘subtle’ and neurotic individualism for a faith in the reasoning of collectives

This also means facing up to, and making sense of, the far greater violence inflicted by the colonised and others





- Can we “cure” the colonised from the mental pathologies of colonisation?
- ‘colonialism forces the colonized to constantly ask the question: ‘Who am I in reality?’
- ‘In fact the aim of the militant engaged in armed combat, in a national struggle, is to assess the daily humiliations inflicted on man by colonial oppression. The militant sometimes has the grueling impression he has to drag his people back, up from the pit and out of the cave. The militant very often realizes that not only must he hunt down the enemy forces but also the core of despair crystallized in the body of the colonized’



- The revolution “nationalises” affect and redirects aggressivity
- ‘When the nation in its totality is set in motion, the new man is not an a posteriori creation of this nation, but coexists with it, matures with it, and triumphs with it.
- This dialectical prerequisite explains the resistance to accommodating forms of colonization or window dressing.
- Independence is not a magic ritual but an indispensable condition for men and women to exist in true liberation, in words to master all the material resources necessary for a radical transformation of society.’



5. Legacies



‘Fanon had believed decolonisation and national liberation would demystify racial oppression and *recerebralise* the poor and colonised subject. These processes, he thought, would lead to full, mutual self-recognition.

Instead, the failure of independence seemed to confirm for my students the truth of the racist myths of stupidity and backwardness’

– Leo Zeilig, *Fanon the Militant Philosopher*, about teaching in Senegal

Or a ‘product of its time’ – Stuart Hall?

Legacies?



The IRA collection is almost exclusively paperback; hardbacks hide weapons. They are almost all worn, though not carelessly so. There is little doodling and almost no defacing. There are at least 11 copies of Lenin's *The State and the Revolution*, one carefully re-covered in a smoothed-out brown paper bag. There are also numerous copies of Marx and Engels' *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, and works by Freud, Trotsky, Kafka and Mao Zedong. There are biographies of Margaret Thatcher, Enoch Powell and Ian Paisley, and books on Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala, Palestine, South Africa and the Basque separatists.

Frantz Fanon's classic anti-colonial text, *The Wretched of the Earth*, sits beside Henry Pelling's *Origins of the Labour Party* and works by the Brazilian theorist Paulo Freire. There is a shelf full of *National Geographic* magazines dating from 1974 to 1997 and a broad range of Irish-language texts as well as numerous works by Irish writers and thinkers. Ernie O'Malley and Sean O'Faolain compete for space with James Joyce and the *Irish Feminist Review*.

Legacies?

- ‘Third World’ internationalist political movement of the 1960s,
- Anti-colonial struggles in the US, Ireland, Vietnam, and Palestine
- Power as operating at a psychological level shared by Foucault and, later, Deleuze
- In an era of Black Lives Matter, Kanye West, Trump’s ‘shithole countries’, and grotesque and persistent global inequalities, perpetuated by multinationals often linked to former colonial states...

How might Fanon challenge us to interrogate the present?

Discussion points

1. How does Fanon argue that colonialism dehumanises the colonised?
2. How should the colonised respond?
3. How do make sense of Fanon in his own contexts? (E.g. colonialism, psychiatry, phenomenology, etc.)
4. To what extent do his arguments apply today?

Monday 8th June – 6pm



Next week – Lacan

The Ethics of Psychoanalysis (Seminar VII)

- Please read the final chapter, XXIV: “The paradoxes of ethics, or, Have you acted in conformity with your desire?”
- Here Lacan puts across his view of desire in relation to Freud, Kant, Aristotle and others
- Please see what you can find out about the mirror stage, and the relation between the Real, Imaginary, and the Symbolic (or Big Other)
- I will also upload a good 1957 interview and some good further introductory guides