

Introduction to Cultural Studies
Dr. Avishek Parui
Department of Humanities & Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology-Madras

Lecture - 14
Fanon – Black Skin, White Masks (Part - II)

So hello and welcome to this Introduction to Cultural Studies NPTEL Course where we are reading Frantz Fanon's Black Skin, White Masks. We just started with the text in the last lecture. We will continue with this in this lecture.

So we will read the introduction to Fanon written by Ziauddin Sardar which is a very compelling introduction because it sort of gives you an idea of Fanon's life as a sort of an activist, as a psychiatrist. Somehow he combines the psychiatric training with his activism in order to expose the torture, the subjugation of the colonial condition and the discrimination the colonial condition sort of systematized through a process of control, right.

So as he goes on to say that when reading Black Skin, White Masks one ought to keep the time and circumstances in which it was written firmly in mind. It is up in your screen right now. So the time and circumstances of the production of the book is very important and he talked about when it was originally written in 1952, it was not really you know paid much attention to it.

But then in 1967 when the different student protest were happening in London and Paris 67 was a big year where lots of protests were happening across Europe against racism, against imperialism etc. So it was that time when this particular book was completely in sync with the climate, in sync with the cultural condition and it became a very important book at that time. So this is a dynamic text written in the heat of an intense and often bloody liberation struggle.

So the bloody quality of the book is very important. It is something which is so alive in a very wounded kind of a way. So it is a book about a wounded subject. It is a book about a subject which you know wants to be liberated from discrimination, wants to be liberated from racism, wants to be liberated from all kinds of biases, all kinds of you know imprisonment. The imprison can obviously mean different things at different points of time.

The imprisonment can be epistemic imprisonment. Imprisonment can mean linguistic imprisonment can mean linguistic imprisonment. Imprisonment obviously can mean cultural imprisonment. Now so these are very important terms over here in terms of looking at how the black subject is controlled and subjugated and you know made into inferior subject by the you know the white subject by the colonizer through a system of racism.

And he calls this process epidermalization. So epidermalization is you know epidermal is obviously related to skin so how the skin becomes an identity. So how the skin becomes the process of identification and how the skin becomes the process through which identity is so privatized, identities are hegemonized, where identities become inferior and superior depending on the skin color.

(Refer Slide Time: 03:00)

be black in relation to the white man. It is the internalization, or rather as Fanon calls it epidermalization, of this inferiority that concerns him. When the black man comes into contact with the white world he goes through an experience of sensitization. His ego collapses. His self-esteem evaporates. He ceases to be a self-motivated person. The entire purpose of his behavior is to emulate the white man, to become like him, and thus hope to be accepted as a man. It is the dynamic of inferiority that concerns Fanon; and which ultimately he wishes to eliminate. This is the declared intention of his study: to enable the man of color to understand ... the psychological elements that can alienate his fellow Negro.

So epidermalization is a process which is used very effectively I think by Sardar in terms of looking at how Fanon situates the black subject, okay. So you know he says Sardar says it is the internalization or rather as Fanon calls it epidermalization, it is a term used by Fanon as well of this inferiority that concerns him. So this inferiority is something which is accepted and internalized and epidermalized by the black subject, right.

It is part of who he is, inferiority, right and that obviously means a triumph of colonialism, a triumph of racism because that is exactly what racism wants. That is what racism is designed to you know deliver, this idea of inferiority and this innate idea of inferiority. This idea of making inferiority into some kind of an innate you know presupposition. It is not just internalization, it is epidermalization.

So this is visceral quality about inferiority that Fanon resents and that is something that he exposes as a hollow construct which is used very effectively and which has been a grand success of racism this idea of you know the visceralization, the epidermalization, the internalization of inferiority the part of the black man. So the black man comes into contact with you know the white world he goes through an experience of sensitization. His ego collapses.

His self-esteem evaporates. He ceases to be a self-motivated person. The entire purpose of his behaviour is to emulate the white man, to become like him and thus hope to be accepted as a man. It is the dynamic of inferiority that concerns Fanon and which ultimately he wishes to eliminate. This is the declared you know intention of the study, to enable the man of color to understand, the psychological elements that can alienate his fellow Negro.

So what Fanon really resents and wants to do away with and wants to deconstruct is the innate inferiority of the black man you know and just collapse the ego. So his sense of self, his ownership over his own body, his ownership over his own self, over his own identity you know gives way to a predestined, a presupposed privilege which is located completely, almost completely to the white man. So his the black man's ego collapses.

His self-esteem evaporates and what happens subsequently is he ceases to be a self-motivated person. So his entire life his entire activities are directed to emulate, to mimic, to aspire, to approximate, to appropriate the white man's metaphors, the white man's markers where there is a way the white man speaks, where there is a way the white man eats, the way white man behaves etc.

So this process of emulation becomes quite problematic in Fanon, according to Fanon and Fanon resents it. Fanon wants to do away with that completely. So he goes on to say that you know Fanon is dynamic of inferiority that concerns Fanon and which he ultimately wishes to eliminate, okay. So and obviously this idea of internalizations, idea of you know this visceral knowledge of inferiority is a very psychological condition and it is a product of a long drawn out colonial condition, a long drawn out colonial struggle okay.

The struggle which is, the struggle is part of the colonized of course but the whole point is to do away with the struggle by creating or constructing you know consensual subjects, confirming subjects. And subjects can be confirming, subjects can become consensual when they completely epidermalize or internalize inferiority of their own selves. So if you think you are inferior, if you think you are completely inferior in comparison to the white man then obviously you would not resent the white man's territorialization.

You would not resent the white man's domination because you accept your inferiority and this acceptance of inferiority goes through a very discursive process, is obviously a very material process. But at some point the success of this material process is it becomes a psychological process. It becomes psychological condition. It is so innate in a colonized and it does not question it at all. And that is something that Fanon resents and wants to deconstruct, okay.

(Refer Slide Time: 06:58)

Whiteness, Fanon asserts, has become a symbol of purity, of *Justice, Truth, Virginity*. It defines what it means to be civilized, modern and human. That is why *the Negro knows nothing of the cost of freedom; when he has fought for Liberty and Justice ... these were always white liberty and white justice; that is, values secreted by his masters*. Blackness represents the diametrical opposite: in the collective unconsciousness, it stands for *ugliness, sin, darkness, immorality*. Even the dictionary definition of white means clean and pure. We can find, in *Roget's Thesaurus*, over 134 synonyms for whiteness, most with positive connotations. In contrast, *Roget's Thesaurus* tells us black means dirty, prohibited and funereal. It provides 120 synonyms for


And Fanon says whiteness, Fanon asserts has become a symbol of purity of justice, truth, virginity. It defines what it means to be civilized, modern and human. So obviously this takes us back to some extent to Edward Said's Orientalism as you can understand because Said's Orientalism does exactly this. It talks about how the European created a constructed as other.

So the European becomes purity, the European becomes whiteness, European becomes justice, truth, virginity then the non-European or the non-white becomes just the opposite injustice, lies, contamination, sexual impurity, sexual contamination, etc. So contamination is pitted against purity over here, right. So purity is the white man, contamination is the non-white man. So a Negro of course you know becomes the site of vehicle of contamination, the metaphor of contamination etc. and that is something that racism does quite effectively.

And the whole point of racism, the whole purpose of racism is to create this other of the white person, the white race, right that the other which will consolidate the supremacy of the white race, okay and that is something that Fanon wants to deconstruct. So it is a construct, this idea of white man's superiority, the white man's supremacy and contamination carried by the black man. This whole idea is a construct which Fanon wants to deconstruct and he does it quite effectively.

(Refer Slide Time: 08:15)

abominates him. The idealized Negro is equally a construction of the white man. He represents the flip side of the Enlightenment: he is constructed not as a real person with real history but an image. The idealized Negro, the noble savage, is the product of utopian thinkers, such as Sir Thomas More, who comes from "No place" and is in the end "No person." This Negro was born out of the need of European humanism to rescue itself from its moral purgatory and project itself, and displace, the original inhabitants of Latin America and the Caribbean. Not surprisingly, Fanon does not look on lovers of Negroes with favor.



So on page 14 Sardar goes on to say the idealized negro is equally a construction of the white man. So there are 2 kinds of black men, one obviously is the dangerous black man who is the potential you know, he is violent, he is hyper sexualized, he is aggressive, he is someone who can create anarchy at any point of time and is the other kind of black man who is idealized, who is benevolent, who is submissive, who confirms to the wishes and desires of the white man etc.

So both are obviously essentialized categories. Both are actually a reified categories of identity production. So Fanon goes on to say you know and this is for the talking about Fanon's idea of the benevolent, idealized black man, the idealized Negro is equally a construction of the white man. He represents the flip side of the enlightenment. He is constructed not as a real person with a real history but an image.

The idealized Negro, the noble savage, the product of utopian thinkers such as Sir Thomas More, who comes from no place and in the end no person is in the end no person. This Negro was born out of the need of European humanism to rescue itself from its moral purgatory and project itself and displace the original inhabitants of Latin America and the Caribbean. Not surprisingly, Fanon does not look on lovers of Negros with favor.

So this whole idea becomes a project you know a purgatory project really. It is a project of you know European humanism. So as you know there are 2 or 3 different kinds of narratives which he use to legitimize imperialism and one dominant narrative of legitimization was a rescue mission narrative. That you know the narrative is, the European goes to the non-European space.

The imperialist goes to the non-European imperialist space, the non-white space and territorializes it and of course if he says territorialization alone then it make it bad and vulgar. So he have to supplement it, he have to embellish it by you know using the rescue mission narrative. So it is a act of civilizing, the act of rescuing and redeeming the people who have no religion, who have no culture with no civilizations, giving them culture and in the process you know it becomes the enlightenment project.

It becomes purgatory project etc. and in the process they create this mimetic idea of the noble the noble Negro, the noble savage, right who is more of a mimetic construct and a real human being. So this mimetic construct of course is you know is discursively done, is a process through which you know is a process of different discursive formations which create it and which idealize it. So idealization is also a form of essentialism. Idealization is also a form of reification and that is something that Fanon resents.

So Fanon resents both people who you know look at the Negro, look at the black man as savage, as a dangerous savage as well as the kind of idea which looks at the black man as some kind of a noble, submissive, nice, Christian person with no sense of resentment, with no sense of you know dissent etc. So this perfectly confirming this perfectly agreeing, this perfectly agreeable, this perfectly nice and noble and submissive black man is another construct of racism which Fanon deconstructs as well.

(Refer Slide Time: 11:37)

Fanon's idea of universalism is based on the notions of dignity, equality and equity: on a *concrete and ever new understanding of man*. It is a universalism that does not exist as yet, it cannot emerge from the dominant discourse, and it cannot be seen as a grand narrative that privileges a particular culture and its representatives. It is the universalism we need to struggle for and build. That is why Fanon is not content simply with knowledge and criticism. He wants man—and here he does mean man as the universal person—to be *actional*. Having thought, we must

So what we can see over here is how Sardar is looking at the ways in which Fanon deconstructs the different kinds of categories which form a colonial identity formation which basically inform the hegemonic process through which colonial identities are produced and reproduced and deproduced, right.

So we have this standard hegemonic identity of the white person of course who presumes the dominant position and opposed to that we have the idea of the non-white person who is in non-dominant position and of course this binary needs to be replicated and consolidated across the entire colonial map, the colonial parameter. So it is done with the process of approximation, of the process of standardization, the process of hierarchization, the process of racialization and also medicalization. And this is the real original bit in Fanon's work.

This collusion as I mentioned between racism and medicine how medicine sanctions racism to a great extent, how medicine legitimates racism how medicine gives you the epistemic sanction you know and tells you that ya we have this medical "knowledge" of the black man's inferiority or the black man's innate violence or the black man's innate dullness and stupidity, of the black man's innate hyper sexuality.

So if he can medically prove this with "empirical evidence" then obviously that completely legitimizes your colonial program, right your imperial program, your racist rhetoric and this is exactly what deconstruct is and this is what Fanon sets out to deconstruct, okay. and as I mentioned at the very beginning of this introduction, Sardar gave us the idea of dignity. How Fanon is someone who aspires dignity.

So dignity to be who you are, dignity to regain ownership over your body, over your self, over your self-esteem, over your culture, over your ethnicity etc. And this idea of dignity carries a universal quality according to Sardar and you know Fanon this is the way we look at Fanon as something of a universal philosopher of the colonial condition. So because although he speaks from a position this French-Algerian conditions specifically the directness and the clarity of his expression they make it sort of universal in quality.

So Fanon's idea of universalism is based on the notions of dignity, equality, and equity on a concrete and ever new understanding of man. It is the universalism that does not exist as yet. It cannot emerge from the dominant discourse, and it cannot be seen as a grand narrative that privileges a particular culture and its representatives. So this is a very important point that this universality is not to be mistaken as a grand narrative.

This universality is a basic condition, is a basic human condition which does not exist as yet you know in Fanon's times as Sardar is summarizing it. So it cannot be a dominant discourse. It cannot be, so it cannot be, the tables have turned. Now we have the black man as the dominant person and that would not be the idea of universality that Fanon aspires to sort of assume. So it is the universality which is a common, a basic human condition which is which has been arrived as yet.

So it cannot be seen as a grand narrative that privileges a particular culture and its representatives. Its universalism we need to struggle for and build. That is why Fanon is not content simply with the knowledge and criticism. He wants man and here he wants, he does mean man as a universal person to be actional. And this is the really the key point in Fanon's entire writing over.

I mean he wants activity, he wants action, he wants real praxis. So you know he does not want someone. He is not the kind of philosopher who deals with theory, a very revised rhetorical theory alone. He wants the theory to be executed in a real space, to be actional. To be out there dealing with real things in a real world, okay. So this reality of Fanon, this real engagement with real human situation in Fanon is what makes him a real important philosopher for us today, okay.

So this introduction as you see is a very important introduction because it, what it does it gives you an idea of what Fanon aspires in this particular book, what Fanon's writing aspires, etc. Now we come to the next introduction by Homi K. Bhabha. This is a foreword actually and he talks about, so this was Ziauddin Sardar and Homi K. Bhabha talking about Fanon.

And you know if you remember a reading of Bhabha and what we looked at in the other question the (()) (15:55) introduction of the other, so it is a very important text because you can read Fanon very interestingly with that kind of a theory. Now if you come to the you know Bhabha's sort of foreword, the way he looks at Fanon as a profound, as an important philosopher of the colonial condition.

Again, he sort of orients the attention, directs the attention to Fanon's psychiatric you know training and how the psychiatric training is important in terms of looking at the deconstructing the collusion between medicine and racism that Fanon sets out to attack.

(Refer Slide Time: 16:29)

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

The extremity of this colonial alienation of the person—this end of the “idea” of the individual—produces a restless urgency in Fanon's search for a conceptual form appropriate to the social antagonism of the colonial relation. The body of his work splits between a Hegelian–Marxist dialectic, a phenomenological affirmation of Self and Other and the psychoanalytic ambivalence of the Unconscious, its turning from love to hate, mastery to servitude. In his desperate, doomed search for a dialectic of

So you know this is Bhabha quoting Fanon up in your screen and Fanon says 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. The social structure existing in Algeria was hostile to any attempt to put the individual back where he belonged.

So his idea of deep personalization becomes very important to Fanon. It is related to a large extent with the idea of alienation. You are alienating yourself from your own world. So you do not really insist as a person. You insist only as a mimetic category, you are an Arab, you are an Algerian, you are an African, you are a black man. So all this become hollow mimetic categories you know just shallow signifiers, an entire narrative of racism, right.

And that the shallowness, the hollowness of this mimetic categories makes the entire process depersonalized. So you take away the human element. You take away the human agency. You take away the human complexity. Just brand the person according to the race, according to the

skin color, according to the anatomy, according to you know certain kinds of racialised categories.

So that obviously makes it an act of dehumanization and depersonalization which is related to reification and which in turn produces a sense of alienation. So the Arab is alienated from his own country. The social structure existing in Algeria was hostile to any attempt to put the individual back where he belongs. So this is what I mean when I say you know when Fanon mentions dignity he actually talks about ownership; to reclaim ownership over your body over yourself, over your society, over your ethnicity, over your race etc.

So that ownership is denied which is a basic condition, a basic aspiration, a basic privilege is denied to the Arab, is denied to the Algerian, is denied to the African in general who is subjugated you know instead to you know to white imperialist's control, white imperialist's discrimination, okay. So this, it becomes an example of extreme alienation. So as Bhabha goes on to say, the extremity of this colonial alienation of the person, this end of the idea of the individual. So the individual becomes an idea, a hollow idea as it were.

He does not really mean anything beyond the level of idea, beyond the level of a mimetic category. So he just behaves in a particular way which makes it you know shallow mimetic sort of signifier, nothing more than that. There is no human complexity or human agency which is accorded to this mimetic signifier. So it produces a restless urgency in Fanon's search for a conceptual form appropriate to the social antagonism of the colonial relation.

The body of his works splits between a Hegelian-Marxist dialectic, a phenomenological affirmation of self and other and the psychoanalytic ambivalence of the unconscious, its turning from love to hate, mastery to servitude. So you know it is a very interesting Hegelian-Marxist kind of a dialectic happening over here because he talks about a self and the spirit of the self which is Hegelian.

But he also talks about reification and alienation which are Marxist terms and the entire idea of Fanon is bringing in psychoanalysis to settle the ambivalence, ambivalence of the unconscious, ambivalence of you know this internalized idea of inferiority.

So how is that a grand success of racism, how is that a grand success of you know imperialism you know because once we can as I mentioned in the previous lecture, once we can affirm the inferiority through a discursive process which includes medicine, which includes medical science then you essentially consolidate mastery you know of the white race, of the you know imperialist, okay and that is something that Fanon examines and deconstructs in his works.

(Refer Slide Time: 20:20)

What is this distinctive force of Fanon's vision that has been forming even as I write about the division, the displacement, the cutting edge of his thought? It comes, I believe, from the tradition of the oppressed, as Walter Benjamin suggests; it is the language of a revolutionary awareness that "the state of emergency in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a concept of history that is in keeping with this insight." And the state of emergency is also always a state of *emergence*.

So the whole idea of what Bhabha the reason why Bhabha looks at Fanon with such respect, with such significance is because he looks at Fanon as someone who questions ambivalence and if you remember Bhabha himself has said the ambivalence and examine the ambivalence you know which is operative in a colonial condition and he relates ambivalence to mimicry, with hybridity all this the other categories, other sort of experientialities which come with colonialism.

But Fanon is important over here because to Bhabha he really enacts what Bhabha theorizes. He you know he talks about the real action, the real activity which happens in the colonial condition and that becomes a very important you know condition which you know privatizes human

activity, which privatizes human agency, which privatizes human experientiality you know above any dry discursive theory, okay.

So and then Bhabha talks about the distinctive quality of Fanon's vision, the uniqueness of Fanon's vision, the thinker of the colonial condition and what is that vision. So what is this distinct force of Fanon's vision that has been forming even as I write about the division, the displacement, the cutting edge of the thought. It comes to believe from the tradition of the oppressed as Walter Benjamin suggests it is the language of a revolutionary awareness that the state of emergency is what we live, in which we live is not the exception but the rule.

We must attain to a concept of history that is in keeping with this insight. And the state of emergency is also always a state of emergence. So this is a very Benjaminian tradition of looking at emergency and emergence together. So we emerge out of an emergency and the articulation that you do from a state of emergency is a very you know complex commentary of a situation where emergency is a norm and not the exception right.

So if emergency becomes a norm, if possession becomes a norm, if territorialization becomes a norm then obviously that would create its own kind of rhetoric, will create its own kind of retaliation and Fanon is a thinker of this tradition of retaliation. Fanon is a philosopher of this traditional retaliation, traditional angry retaliation you know resentment and retaliation, resentful retaliation and therein lies Fanon's freshness as a thinker.

Therein lies Fanon's brilliance as a writer, as a commentator, as a philosopher because he talks about displacement, he talks about division, he talks about alienation, but you know what is more important than that is that he talks about how the human self is subjugated in a state of emergency and in the state of emergency the human emerges as an articulator, as someone who articulates the pain, the suppression, the oppression that goes on in the colonial times and therein lies the quality of Fanon which makes him so directly universal as a thinker.

So he is not an insider individual, insider philosopher who is not concerned so much about the empirical of the discursive attractiveness of his theory but rather he is talking he is more

interested in the experiential evidence, the experiential truth of this and the fact that he is really born out of experiential quality, experiential conditions which makes Fanon's writings really important to us today, okay.

(Refer Slide Time: 23:48)

("Who is the alienated colonial man?"). Fanon's question is not addressed to such a unified notion of history nor such a unitary concept of Man. It is one of the original and disturbing qualities of *Black Skin, White Masks* that it rarely historicizes the colonial experience. There is no master narrative or realist perspective that provide a background of social and historical facts against which emerge the problems of the individual or collective psyche. Such a traditional sociological alignment of Self and Society or History and Psyche is rendered questionable in Fanon's identification of the colonial subject who is historicized as it comes to be heterogeneously inscribed in the texts of history, literature, science, myth. The colonial subject is always "overdetermined from without," Fanon writes. It is through image and fantasy—those orders that figure transgressively on the borders of history and the unconscious—that Fanon most profoundly evokes the colonial condition.

So then Bhabha talks about how Fanon is some as a thinker or brings in the idea of history and Psyche together in a very interesting way. So there is no master narrative as Bhabha says. There is no master narrative or realist perspective that provide a background of social, historical facts against which emerge the problems of the individual or collective Psyche.

Such a traditional sociological alignment of self and society or history and Psyche is rendered questionable in Fanon's identification of the colonial subject who is historicized as it comes to be heterogeneously inscribed in the texts of history, literature, science, and myth. So this is a very important gift of Fanon as you might say which Fanon says, the subjectivity of the colonized subject is actually a product of a very complex form of historicization which includes myth, which includes medicine, which includes science, which includes literature, which includes history.

So the colonial subjects always over determine from without. So over determination is over influence from without. From without means the discursive apparatus outside him. So discursive apparatus outside him you know over determines the colonial subject formation. So again we

have this limit in the outside and the inside. So the inside begins to become you know a medical condition from the pressure from the outside.

So the outside wall, the discursive with outside which is obviously this entire architectural racism, the architectural imperialism it bombards the human subject. It over determines human subject with this knowledge of his inferiority, the knowledge of his savageness, the knowledge of his you know unfitness to be sovereign self etc.

And that knowledge is constantly supplied to him and constantly injected to him to discursive parameters and that becomes a medical condition at some point of time. So it is through image and fantasy those orders that figure transgressively on the borders of history and the conscious and the unconscious that Fanon most profoundly evokes the colonial condition. So it works through an entanglement of history and the unconscious.

It works through an entanglement of image and fantasy, right. So as I mentioned it is the fantasy of the colonizer to you know create this myth of inferiority of the colonized subject and this fantasy is consumed by the colonized subject at some point of time who becomes, the colonized subject becomes a hollow image, right. So again we have a combination of image and fantasy, right.

And this image and fantasy you know is something which comes together and Fanon deconstructs this collusion between image and fantasy in his book on the colonial condition, *The Wretched of the Earth*. And this concludes the lecture today. So what we see in Fanon is a very compelling study of the psychological condition of colonialism and the psychological condition obviously includes fantasy, obviously includes a very twisted form of the history.

It includes a racial history. So the colonizer's you know history becomes a dominant history. The colonizer's knowledge system the knowledge narrative of the colonizer becomes a dominant narrative and what that does away with completely, what that erases that completely is the original identity of the colonized. So we never get to know the original identity of the colonized.

What we have is the imposed identity of the you know colonized which is obviously imposed by the colonizer. And so in the process that I mentioned the colonized becomes more of a mimetic category, more of a moving signifier you know a machine which reveals certain attributes, certain selective attributes, certain racialized attributes rather than a complex human self.

So the sense of self, the ownership on your own self goes away and the dignity attached to the ownership goes away and in the process the colonized subject becomes you know a historical subject, becomes a nervous subject, becomes a pathological subject, becomes a sick subject and therein lies Fanon's psychiatric training. Therein lies Fanon's sort of glimpse into the entire idea of colonialism from medical perspective.

So again we are sort of coming back to this originality of Fanon as a thinker who combines medicine and racism and uses his own psychiatric training to reveal to deconstruct this constructed collusion between racism and medicine. I will continue with this study in the next lecture. Thank you for your attention.