

Chapter 1

Framing Identities

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Frantz Fanon remembered an incident when, as a young student of psychiatry in France, his presence on a crowded train was noticed by a child:

“Look, a Negro!” The circle was drawing a bit tighter. I made no secret of my amusement.

“Mama, see the Negro! I’m frightened!” Frightened! Frightened! Now they were beginning to be afraid of me. I made up my mind to laugh myself to tears, but laughter had become impossible. [. . .] Then, assailed at various points, the corporeal schema crumbled, its place taken by a racial epidermal schema. In the train it was no longer a question of being aware of my body in the third person but in a triple person. In the train I was given not one but two, three places [. . .] On that day, completely dislocated, unable to be abroad with the other, the white man, who unmercifully imprisoned me, I took myself far off from my own presence, far indeed, and made myself an object.

(Fanon 1986 [1952]: 112–13)

The incident is recollected in Fanon’s first major book, *Black Skin, White Masks*, which appeared in 1952. However, the work was not originally intended for publication, but for submission as an academic dissertation in order that Fanon might qualify as a psychiatrist at the University of Lyon. His supervisor at the faculty of medicine rejected the thesis and compelled Fanon to write a second piece which was more acceptable to the medical authorities. As David Macey, Fanon’s

biographer, comments, the rejection of the thesis that became one of the most influential and foundational texts of postcolonialism was predictable, since it 'defied all academic and scientific conventions' in combining an 'experimental exploration of the author's subjectivity' with lengthy quotations from literary works (Macey 2001: 138–9). The work was unconventional in other respects too. In analysing the effects of racism, Fanon had strayed from the strict path of psychiatry, which was dedicated to medical intervention and cure, into the rather more nebulous field of psychoanalysis. Further, the book was written in a style that was more poetic than scientific, influenced by the existential writings of Camus and Sartre, and by the Negritude poetics of his Martinican teacher and mentor, Aimé Césaire.

The child's terrified response to the presence of the black man, and the ubiquitous, daily, casual racism of French society in the mid-twentieth century which it symbolizes, triggers a 'crumbling' of the 'corporeal schema' in Fanon. The 'corporeal schema', a term derived from Gestalt psychology that Fanon had taken from the work of Jean Lhermitte, refers to the essential sense we have of ourselves as physical presences; a sense which enables us to interact and engage with the world around us (Macey 2001: 165). Racism fractures this ability to engage with others at a fundamental level by substituting a 'corporeal schema' with a 'racial epidermal schema'. Instead of a body among other bodies with which he shares space, Fanon becomes in this encounter a 'black body' marked out by his difference, his 'otherness'. The effects of this dislocation of presence are metaphorically dramatic – he is no longer 'a man among other men' but an 'object' of fear and loathing, 'excised' from productive contact with others and 'imprisoned', as the title of the chapter of *Black Skin, White Masks* where this appears has it, in 'the fact of blackness'.

'The fact of blackness' is Fanon's main preoccupation in *Black Skin, White Masks*. His intention is to diagnose this 'febrile' condition, but his analysis goes much further and has a wider relevance than this deeply personal recollection of a moment of 'nausea'. The incident on the train is symptomatic of a much wider, global 'dislocation', as Fanon describes it, which has its roots in the pernicious effects of colonialism. The growth of European empires and dominance by foreign powers have had an impact on the economic, political, and cultural lives of subject peoples who experience radical distortions of their language, law, and civil society; indeed, imperialist intervention is a fundamental denial of the enabling features of humanity. But for Fanon, colonialism does more than simply deprive the colonized of

their independence. Colonialism and its handmaiden, racism, strike much more deeply into the social and individual psychology of the colonized. The colonial regime re-enacts on a grand scale the drama of the incident on the train by substituting a society's 'corporeal schema', as it were, with an image of alienation and domination where the colonial looks at the world and sees only a reflection of imperial power which has replaced an enabling sense of otherness. The colonial condition prevents, therefore, the formation of workable forms of social and cultural life by creating psychological dependence on these substituted images of domination and inferiority.

In other words, colonialism attacks the very essence of identity in its subject peoples by inducing a form of mental illness:

The Negro's behaviour makes him akin to an obsessive neurotic type, or, if one prefers, he puts himself into a complete situational neurosis. In the man of colour there is a constant effort to run away from his own individuality, to annihilate his own presence. [. . .] The attitude of the Black man toward the white, or toward his own race, often duplicates almost completely a constellation of delirium, frequently bordering on the region of the pathological.

(Fanon 1986: 60)

And

every ontology is made unattainable in a colonized and civilized society.

(Fanon 1986: 109)

Fanon is here, I think, using the term 'civilized' in a somewhat ironic sense. He was not alone, nor was he the first, to attempt to diagnose the psychological dynamics of colonial and racist discourses. Fanon located his own position from a triangulation of different influences from existentialism, colonial anthropology, and Negritude. He was profoundly influenced by Jean-Paul Sartre's deconstruction of anti-Semitism, and he replicates in his discussion of 'the fact of blackness' Sartre's counter-intuitive argument concerning Jewish identity that '[t]he Jew is one whom other men consider a Jew; that is the simple truth from which we must start . . . It is the anti-Semite who *makes* the Jew' (Sartre 1965 [1946]: 69). This remarkable reversal, that identity is neither 'natural' nor 'essential', but constructed from discourses of difference and inequality, finds an immediate echo in Fanon when he writes that 'not only must the black man be black;

he must be black in relation to the white man' (Fanon 1986: 110). But it was in his engagement with anthropology that Fanon further refined this position. A central argument of *Black Skin, White Masks* concerns Octave Mannoni's then recent book on Madagascar, *Prospero and Caliban* (1950). On the face of it, Fanon would seem to share some very basic points of agreement with Mannoni: that colonialism extends into the realms of the psyche, and a full understanding of colonization is only possible if its psychological impact is properly acknowledged. But Fanon and Mannoni soon parted company as Mannoni argued that colonization does not *create* in its subjects the 'constellation of delirium' of the pathological and neurotic types Fanon observed in himself and others, but rather colonization is a type of traumatic experience that makes overt these latent forms of psychosis. In exasperation Fanon asks, 'why does he try to make the inferiority complex something that antedates colonization?' (Fanon 1986: 85) And echoing Sartre again, he declares, 'Let us have the courage to say it outright: *It is the racist who creates his inferior.*' (93).

Fanon also quarrelled with the very basic assumptions of the psychoanalytic method he had adopted to diagnose the colonial condition. The concept of the Oedipus complex is the root and origin of Freudian (and later Lacanian) psychoanalysis as it is the central theory of Freud's first major work *Totem and Taboo: Resemblances Between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics* (1913). As the subtitle of Freud's text may suggest, he was helped in the writing of this seminal work in the emerging field of psychoanalysis by a number of works in colonial anthropology, particularly Sir James Frazer's *Totemism and Exogamy* (1910) which he drew on particularly heavily. Frazer's four-volume work collected data from missionaries and travellers from all over the European empires to construct a compendium of every known form of totemic belief, which Freud then used to speculate on the nature of an original prehistoric human society. Having constructed an image of the archaic and original 'primal horde' from Frazer's work on contemporary colonized peoples, Freud argued that avoiding sexual intercourse with members of the same clan or family must arise from 'the oldest and most powerful of human desires' (Freud 2001 [1913]: 32). To safeguard themselves, the primal horde fashioned strict taboos on incest, but these taboos only demonstrate ambivalent psychic impulses 'corresponding to *both* a wish and a counter-wish', and thus there exists a 'psychological agreement between taboo and obsessional neurosis' (35–6). Freud named it the Oedipus complex from the Greek legend of Oedipus who unknowingly

killed his father and married his own mother. The Oedipus complex is the metanarrative of universal incestuous fears; but it also expresses paradoxically our fundamental desires and, so deeply is it ingrained in our psychic existence from prehistory to the present, that it can be thought of as 'the beginnings of religion, morals, society and art' (156). Everything flows from this archaic mixture of desire and fear. Fanon, however, was not convinced of the universal applicability of the concept: 'Like it or not, the Oedipus complex is far from coming into being among Negroes' (Fanon 1986: 151–2). It could be, he argued, that the anthropologists whose data Freud used, had projected their own cultural obsessions, unique to their societies, onto the peoples they had studied and consequently 'discovered' Oedipal complexes where none existed (152). This is a radical revision. A revisionism which not only undermines many of the fundamental principles of psychoanalysis (principles that Fanon himself relied upon to build his argument), but which also reiterates the necessity to see particular psychological states as arising from particular cultural and historical moments.

The impact of Fanon's initial analysis of the psychology of colonialism was to be felt in a number of related but distinct areas. His insistence on linkages between colonial oppression and psychological repression led him to the formulation of a fully 'politicized' version of psychoanalytical discourse, and to his role of political philosopher of anti-colonial liberation movements. As anti-colonial conflicts escalated, particularly in Algeria where he participated in the war against the French, Fanon argued in his subsequent book, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), that the mere achievement of independence from empire was insufficient to remove the colonialists' distorting mirror and to return the subjected peoples to their rightful sense of identity. The colonial rupture had made 'a constellation of delirium' which perpetuates a tragic cycle and renders the colonial subject silent, invisible, and unformed since language, law, civil society, culture now consist of the replicated divisions of colonial identity. There is no possibility of a return to a state prior to colonial intervention, nor is there a 'cure' for colonialism; recuperation is only possible through violence. Only insurrection and civil war, matching the violence of imperial domination with the violence of resistance, will enable the colonial subject to achieve catharsis and be healed. Violence, for Fanon, was not only a political strategy to secure independence, it was a psychological necessity to liberate the minds of the colonized from the repressive effects of the empire. Here, Fanon is attempting to confront a major

issue in the identity politics of decolonization: how, when colonialism psychologically debilitates so radically, can the colonial or postcolonial subject achieve any kind of agency? His answer is that the colonial subject achieves agency through the cleansing power of violence. There is not the space here to explore further how Fanon's potent combination of political and psychic liberation through violent action found a ready audience among the 'wretched of the earth' of the European empires, and beyond, in black consciousness movements in the United States, and radical movements in Asia, the Caribbean, and Latin America. However, as James Le Sueur argues in his *Uncivil war: Intellectuals and Identity Politics during the Decolonization of Algeria* (2005), Fanon foregrounded the problems of identity and agency for those 'confronting the problem of decolonization', propelled 'alterity or the issue of Otherness' into the position of being the single most important theoretical concern of decolonization, and made 'identity' the universal *lingua franca* of contemporary global post-colonial discourse.

If Fanon's writings on identity made a significant impact on anti-colonial political rhetoric, his work both drew on, and helped to reshape, emerging forms of literary expression and cultural criticism. *Black Skin, White Masks* is embedded in and rests upon literary works; indeed, it makes as much of an intervention in literary concerns as it does in either psychology or liberation politics, so dependent is it upon literary texts for its 'evidence' of the impress of empire. Fanon deals with two kinds of literary texts. The first is the now rarely read fictions and semi-autobiographical writings of empire: works by Mayotte Capécia, Abdoulaye Sadj, and René Maran. To varying degrees, Fanon is disparaging or dismissive of each of these. Fanon's purpose is not only to use these writings as evidence of his thesis but to deploy them as foils to another set of literary texts with which they are compared: the Negritude poetry of Leopold Sedar Senghor and Aimé Césaire. Negritude was a francophone literary and political movement that was begun in France in the 1930s by a group of colonial intellectuals, Senghor from Senegal, Césaire from Martinique, and Leon Damas from Guiana. Its influences ranged from the Black American Harlem Renaissance to European Surrealism, and it was strongly supported by the Existentialists, particularly Jean-Paul Sartre who wrote an influential essay in their praise entitled 'Orphée Noir' (1948). Although all the Negritudists were committed to countering the racist dogma of colonialism by promoting the cultural identity and value of Black arts and cultures, there are important differences among them of which

Fanon is all too aware. Senghor's version of Negritude emphasized the physical, sensuous, and mythical qualities of Black African identity; his poetry is filled with images of a dark, female Africa, the body, and the drum.

Naked woman, dark woman
Ripe fruit with firm flesh, dark raptures of black wine,
Mouth that gives music to my mouth
Savanna of clear horizons, savanna quivering to the fervent caress
Of the East Wind, sculptured tom-tom, stretched drumskin
Moaning under the hands of the conqueror
Your deep contralto voice is the spiritual song of the Beloved.
(‘Black woman’ [1948] see Senghor 1964)

This short extract is typical of Senghor's belief that ‘l'émotion est nègre, comme la raison est héllène’ (‘emotion is Negro, reason is Greek’). For Senghor, black identity is the inverse mirror image of white identity: emotion rather than reason, body over intellect, rhythm against logic. Although Fanon could see the strategic value of any consciousness movement that tried to undo the depredations of colonialism, this anti-racism merely inverted colonial racism without challenging its basic presuppositions. Rather than liberating the agency of colonial subjects, Senghor's Negritude simply confirmed racism by turning ‘negative’ stereotypical racial identities into ‘positive’ racial values. ‘My black skin is not the repository of specific values,’ Fanon commented, in a way that would be echoed later by many anglophone writers, Wole Soyinka most famously in the statement at a conference in Kampala in 1962, ‘A tiger does not proclaim his tigritude, he pounces.’

Aimé Césaire's brand of Negritude was more to Fanon's taste, although not without qualification. Césaire was a fellow Martinican, and briefly taught both Fanon and the poet Edouard Glissant in Martinique. ‘No book by Senghor has ever been banned by a French government,’ comments David Macey (2001: 184); the same could not be said of the Antillean form of Negritude. Césaire, in his *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* [*Notebook of a Return to My Native Land*] (1939) defines his Negritude as belonging to:

Those who invented neither powder nor compass
Those who harnessed neither steam nor electricity
Those who explored neither the seas or the skies but those
without whom the earth would not be the earth
[. . .]

My negritude is not a stone, its deafness hurled against the clamor
of the day
My negritude is not a leukoma of dead liquid over the earth's
dead eye
My negritude is neither tower nor cathedral
It takes root in the red flesh of the soil
It takes root in the ardent flesh of the sky
It breaks through the opaque prostration with its upright patience.
(Césaire 1983: 67, 69)

The language here is deeply indebted to French modernism (particularly the Surrealists who promoted his work), as was Senghor's, but Césaire's Negritude, although rooted in anti-racism and anti-colonialism, is not tied in the same way as Senghor's to an essentialized black racial identity. In important ways, Césaire's Negritude breaks out of the discourse of race to embrace all those subject to imperial hegemony; in that sense, 'blackness' is not only or merely a matter of skin colour but encodes a set of relationships of subjugation to dominant military, technological, and colonial powers. Fanon's response to these lines, which he quoted in *Black Skin, White Masks*, was exuberant: 'Yes, all those are my brothers – a "bitter brotherhood" imprisons all of us alike' (124).

In the anglophone Caribbean, seemingly without the benefit of the influence of French modernism, surrealism, existentialism, and the developing theories of self and other, similar expressions of the psychological damage inflicted on subjugated identities were, nonetheless, being explored. In 1953, the Barbadian writer, George Lamming, published *In the Castle of my Skin*, the first of a series of semi-autobiographical fictions that would explore, in a Fanonian way but independent of Fanon, the colonial and postcolonial condition (see also *The Emigrants*, 1954, *The Pleasures of Exile*, 1960, and *Natives of my Person*, 1972). In an introduction he wrote to a new edition of *In the Castle of My Skin* celebrating the thirtieth anniversary of publication, Lamming makes explicit the novel's purpose which is to explore the question of colonial identity:

It was not a physical cruelty. Indeed, the colonial experience of my generation was almost wholly without violence. No torture, no concentration camp, no mysterious disappearance of hostile natives, no army encamped with orders to kill. The Caribbean endured a different kind of subjugation. It was a terror of the mind: a daily exercise in self-mutilation. Black versus Black in a battle for self-improvement. [. . .]

The result was a fractured consciousness, a deep split in its sensibility which now raised difficult problems of language and values; the whole issue of cultural allegiance between imposed norms of White Power, represented by a small numerical minority, and the fragmented memory of the African masses: between white instruction and Black imagination.

(Lamming 1994: xxxix, xxxvii)

There are conflicting assessments of Fanon's contribution to anti-colonial political action: in Algeria he is regarded as a national hero, but in his native Martinique he is only grudgingly acknowledged. Since his early death from leukemia in 1961, his political legacy has divided commentators into those who see him as the prophet of liberation from empire, and those who regard him as the harbinger of an era of violence and terrorism. In the postcolonial academy, however, the reception of Fanon's ideas on the colonial condition has been much less equivocal. His writings have had a profound effect on an increasingly influential body of visual artists, writers, sociologists, anthropologists and cultural theorists engaged in an interdisciplinary undertaking to refashion the epistemological basis for the discussion and analysis of visual representations, literatures, and cultures, in an era 'after empire'. To gauge the distance travelled since 1961, we must leap forward in time to a conference on Fanon's legacy held at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London in 1995 as a prelude to a major exhibition, *Mirage: Enigmas of Race, Difference and Desire*. The conference took its theme from Fanon's key chapter in *Black Skin, White Masks* – 'The Fact of Blackness', and was an indication of the growth both in significance and application of the central ideas of postcolonialism. Among those contributing were Martine Attille (filmmaker), Homi Bhabha (literary critic and theorist), Stuart Hall (sociologist), bell hooks (writer, artist, and cultural activist), Isaac Julien (filmmaker), Steve McQueen (artist), Mark Nash (editor and filmmaker), and Françoise Vergès (political scientist). In many respects, this was a different world from that in which Fanon wrote *Black Skin, White Masks*; the colonial regimes Fanon railed against have passed into history (although many feel they have simply reinvented themselves), and the discourse has changed from Fanon's admixture of psychoanalysis, literature, and polemic to embrace an astonishing range of disciplines and practices (with many questioning Fanon's views of women and gays). But, at the centre of all these different voices with different concerns, the old Fanonian questions of identity and agency still shaped the postcolonial agenda.

Let us take these two dates – the death of Fanon in Algeria in 1961, and remembering Fanon in London in 1995 – and ask what happened in between? An imperfect and partial answer is that Edward Said happened in between. Said was already a distinguished literary critic when his ground-breaking work *Orientalism* appeared in 1978. *Orientalism* was an extended critique of Western representations of the Orient that had, Said argued, depicted the East as exhibiting cultural traits and qualities that were fundamentally different from, indeed opposite to, the West. Orientalists portrayed the East as the West's weak and irrational 'other', a shadowy reverse mirror image of a vigorous and reasonable occident. Far from offering a 'real' image, Orientalist discourse, Said controversially claimed, was a construction, which placed the 'orient' in a discourse that repeatedly expressed and reinforced unequal power relations between the West and the East. Orientalism was nothing more than the ideological support for colonial domination, and, although concerned principally with the West's construction of the orient, Orientalism was but one of a number of '-isms', such as Africanism and Americanism, that supported global colonial hegemony. The book, and the subsequent controversies it provoked, projected Said into the centre of the postcolonial debate on identity and cultural representation that took two related courses: he wrote extensively on the representation of Islam and the Palestinian conflict, as in *The Middle East: What Chances For Peace?* (1980), *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (1981), and *Blaming the Victims: Spurious Scholarship and the Palestinian Question* (1988); and he continued to uncover the impact of colonial discourses in the canonical works of English literature, as in *The World, the Text and the Critic* (1983), and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993). Throughout, Said had an abiding interest in Fanon's theories of colonial identity, returning repeatedly to his writings, most notably in the essays on 'traveling theory' (*The World, the Text, and the Critic*, 1983) and in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (2000) where he argued that Fanon adapted Georg Lukács' idea of 'reification' (a form of alienation, or distortion of consciousness, by which unequal class relationships are sustained) for colonial conditions of racial inequality. But it was probably his re-reading of canonical literary works that brought about the greatest transformation in postcolonial literary studies. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said applied what he called 'contrapuntal readings' to literary texts to uncover the presence of hitherto hidden or obscured colonial contexts that alter our sense of the texts' meanings. In his reading of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, for example, he argued that the material wealth

and high social position of the Bertram family are wholly dependent on the slave trade, indeed the central narrative is occasioned by Sir Thomas' absence in Antigua to put his West Indian plantations in order. Yet, Said argues, Austen only obliquely reflects this complicity in empire, an involvement which is revealed when the novel is read 'against the grain' or 'contrapuntally'.

Said radically transformed postcolonialism and, although towards the end of his life he criticized postcolonialism's increasing turn towards solipsism, he did much to shape an agenda of engaged political commitment and 'contrapuntal' critical analysis. First and foremost, Said embedded a process of questioning, which postcolonialism shares with many other forms of poststructuralist analysis, of the 'essential' or 'natural' or 'commonsense' categories by which identity is constructed: 'race', ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexuality. After Fanon, and after Said, postcolonialism sees identities, not as fixed and rooted, but as products of a world in constant motion. Although 'race', ethnicity, and nationality may appear to be the solid bedrock upon which we shape a sense of ourselves, these are not, nor have they ever been, stable, but are always being formed and reformed in different patterns and combinations in a process of constant interaction and change shaped by historical circumstance. As a consequence, identities are also in a constant state of flux. Colonialism has been a major engine driving an accelerated pace of change, forcing different cultures into new forms, 'unfixing' what was thought to be solid, and creating new identities. The postcolonial project is, therefore, concerned to deconstruct the older language of identity founded upon notions of impermeable entities, such as the nation, culture, and selfhood, and to reconstruct the debate around hybrid and porous formations, such as displacement, dislocation, and migrancy. This postcolonial subject inhabits 'travelling cultures' (meaning cultures in a constant process of transformation), transgressive intercultural zones and intersecting regions (see Pratt 1992), transnational and nomad identities (see Clifford 1997). According to Stuart Hall, these 'diasporic conjunctures' offer a truer model of identity than that which is founded upon, for example, the fixities of race and nation. They 'invite a reconception . . . of familiar notions of ethnicity and identity' (Clifford 1997: 36). However, the reconception of identity which postcolonial theory offers is neither neutral nor detached from its subject, but engaged and oppositional, since such a reconception of others also requires a radical reconception of one's own identity as similarly 'fluid' and transforming. It involves an interrogation of such words as 'homeland', 'nation', 'border', 'people', the 'orient' in

order to reimagine identity, not as exclusive, static, and pure, but as intercultural, plural, contingent, and constantly negotiated through contact with others. Postcolonialism is, therefore, constantly challenging accepted notions of 'being', particularly when those notions arise out of the 'fractured consciousness', as Lamming has it, of colonialism.

Of all those theorists involved in current postcolonial debates, perhaps the most Fanonian is Homi K. Bhabha. At least, he has written an illuminating foreword to a reissue of *Black Skin, White Masks* published in 1986, which he expanded upon in his subsequent book *The Location of Culture* (1994). In some important respects, Bhabha's work begins where Fanon's ends, with the 'fact of blackness' – Fanon's encounter with the child on the train and the crippling sense of having one's identity defined and trapped within another's representation of oneself. Bhabha pushes this much further than Fanon, and even further than Said's deconstruction of cultural representations, when he declares that 'the question of identity can never be seen "beyond representation"' (Bhabha 1987: 6): all we can know of identity is its manifestation in reproduction and we inhabit identities, like Sartre's Jew, forced upon us by others. Bhabha goes on to define further that construction of identity as descending from 'two . . . traditions in the discourse of identity':

the philosophical tradition of identity as the process of self-reflection in the mirror of (human) nature: and the anthropological view of the difference of human identity as located in the division of Nature/Culture.
(Bhabha 1987: 5)

This needs a little unpicking. By the 'philosophical tradition', Bhabha means the sense we have of a unique selfhood whereby we imagine ourselves as possessing a distinctive core or kernel which is not the product of anything external to us but our inimitable possession. I look in a mirror and see 'something' that I take to be the *real* me. But this may be only an optical illusion, as it were, an effect created by a discourse of the self in philosophy, the arts, religion, and present deep within the culture and historical moment I inhabit. Indeed, the anthropologist, Marcel Mauss, the art historian, Jacob Burckhart, and the literary critic, Stephen Greenblatt, among others, have argued that this self-fashioning has an origin and a history that began in the Renaissance and is an effect of new modes of representation. The 'anthropological view' Bhabha refers to alludes to our position as actors within a social matrix of similar actors. In other words, I am known

in this respect, not by my unique qualities of self, but by my position in the social sphere where I identify myself and am identified by others according to a set of roles I fulfil (family, occupation, religion, etc.) and in relation to others like (or unlike) me playing other equivalent roles. I am identified by the part I play in a collective of possible identities. Bhabha's intention is to deconstruct both traditions: the 'philosophical' which emphasizes notions of an autonomous selfhood, and the anthropological which places identity in a *habitus* of social practices. However, for Bhabha, and this is the key point, the post-colonial subject fits into neither of these 'traditions in the discourse of identity'. Indeed the key 'fact' of postcolonial identity is that it lies *between* the frames of these mirrors of identity. Consequently, Bhabha sees the postcolonial subject as 'displaced', 'dislocated', 'hybrid' (in the sense of combining several different cultural traces into a new formation): the postcolonial subject is 'an incalculable object, quite literally difficult to place' and 'the demands of authority cannot unify its message nor simply identify its subjects' (Bhabha, 1986: xxii). The philosophical tradition was never part of the postcolonial's inheritance, and anyway colonialism suppressed any notion of selfhood (unique or otherwise) in subject peoples, just as it destroyed the social matrices that constitute the 'anthropological view' of identity. Fanon's encounter on the train, which he sees as a moment of 'nausea', is paradoxically a source of agency since in encounters such as these the postcolonial subject possesses the 'the evil eye, that seeks to outstare linear history and turn its progressive dream into nightmarish chaos' (Bhabha 1987: 8). The fixed orders of colonial difference are split apart by postcolonial identities that cannot be 'placed' or located in the frame, and know only fluid boundaries free from borders and frames of all kinds. Words such as 'displacement', 'dislocation', 'migrancy' fill Bhabha's writings on postcolonial identity. Strictly speaking, such terms describe only a part of the postcolonial historical experience, although the global population of exiles and refugees is increasing exponentially. The term 'migrant' also covers a very broad spectrum of social types, from the wealthy cosmopolitan novelist born in India, educated in England, and resident in New York (who feels that the problem is not that he comes from nowhere, but from too many places) to the homeless asylum seeker or illiterate economic migrant (who feels that the problem is that there is nowhere left to go). But Bhabha is using these terms partly metaphorically to describe a condition in postmodernity: the rupture caused by empire has created a universal psychic 'migrancy' and sense of dislocation as well as physical displacements. Such

metaphorical usage has attracted criticism that Bhabha's one-size-fits-all postcolonial subject lacks both historical specificity and sensitivity to different kinds of postcolonial experience, but it has also provided a powerful set of analytical tools for reading.

For example, Sam Selvon's novel, *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), is given a new and refreshing relevance by the kinds of readings Bhabha has enabled. The novel concerns a group of male working-class West Indian migrants in London in the 1950s – 'the Boys'. This first Windrush generation of arrivants would seem to represent perfectly the post-colonial experiences of being caught between the frames of representation of cultural identities. Indeed the text has been read as a definitive expression of the migrant experience. The Boys are placeless, subjected to abuse and stereotypical labelling, disconnected from histories, roles, ethnicities. In the following extract, the boys gather at Moses's one-room flat:

In the grimness of the winter, with your hand plying space like a blind man's stick in the yellow fog, with ice on the ground and a coldness defying all effort to keep warm, the boys coming and going, working, eating, sleeping, going about the vast metropolis like veteran Londoners.

Nearly every Sunday morning, like if they going to church, the boys liming in Moses room, coming together for a oldtalk, to find out the latest gen, what happening, when is the next fete, Bart asking if anybody see his girl anywhere, Cap recounting an episode he had with a woman by the tube station the night before, Big City want to know why the arse he can't win at pool, Galahad recounting a clash with the colour problem in a restaurant in Piccadilly, Harris saying he hopes the weather turns, Five saying he have to drive a truck to Glasgow tomorrow.

(Selvon 2006: 122)

Selvon's text explores the 'nausea' of fracture and dislocation, but there is also as much in this text about postcolonial agency, and as much about location as about dislocation. As James Procter has argued, this is a novel about dwelling as much as it is about migrancy (Procter 2003): the Boys evoke a series of locations, as in that wonderful phrase, their hands 'plying space like a blind man's stick' – the tube, Piccadilly, Glasgow, Moses's room – 'like if they going to church'. The Boys act upon the fact of their displacement in a dynamic negotiation with place. Far from being lost, or invisible, to representation, their identities as strategic individuals are made out of this interaction, and new identities emerge in praxis, in performance. There is no contradiction in saying that the text is simultaneously about dislocation *and*

location, far from it; it is in the dynamic interchanges between these states that a reconception of notions of ethnicity and identity is enacted in Moses as he engages with 'differently-centred' but 'inter-connected' worlds (Clifford 1997: 25, 27) and begins to 'live each of their lives, one by one'.

Like Said and Bhabha, Gayatri C. Spivak began as a literary critic, and her main contribution to the postcolonial debate on identity arose out of early work on the Anglo-Irish modernist poet, W.B. Yeats, whom she read as presenting multiple, changing identities in his life and writings (Spivak 1974). This was followed by a celebrated translation of Jacques Derrida's seminal text of poststructuralism, *Of Grammatology* (1976). These two apparently dissimilar routes nonetheless travel a common path: to deconstruct accepted notions of identity (the figure of the individual and singular canonical literary figure) and to seek out the overlooked or hidden presences in the text. Viewed in this way, Spivak's next step seems wholly logical: to inquire into and to recover from history and literature those excluded voices of the marginalized or, in the term used by the Marxist intellectual, Antonio Gramsci, the 'subaltern'. The Subaltern Studies Collective or Group (SSG), which Spivak is most closely associated with, comprises a number of South Asian intellectuals and academics (most notably Ranajit Guha) concerned with the rewriting of the history of India, not as the traditional narrative of elites engaged in a heroic struggle with the British empire, but as small-scale local insurrections (often failing) enacted by groups and individuals – workers, peasants, women – ignored or 'written out' of the historical grand narrative. In many respects, this search for an alternative and truer history to that which has been hijacked and falsified by dominant political interests marks a radical step towards a remembering of those who have been the victims of a form of cultural and historical amnesia. But it also contains the seeds of something rather different: if subaltern history is the true history, the subaltern's voice is then the voice of an authentic Indian identity. What began as a Marxist endeavour to rewrite 'history from below', can be turned, against the will of those who write that history, to serve the purposes of their right-wing political opponents seeking support for fundamentalist ideologies of Hindu nationalism. It is precisely on this issue that Spivak parts company from the SSG and, in doing so, she poses one of the fundamental questions of postcolonial identity theory: 'Can the subaltern speak?'

Spivak's essay of this title is a classic application of Derridean analysis which, through the loops, twists, and turns of deconstruction,

leads to some compelling and problematic impasses. The first problem concerns the provenance of the method of analysis itself: postcolonialism applies external, male-dominated discourse from the Western academy to the question of the subaltern and therefore is in danger of reproducing a form of 'colonization' of the subaltern subject which it ostensibly professes to oppose. The second problem concerns the nature of what is identified by this analysis: to identify the subaltern and bring that voice out of the silent shadows of history is to render the subaltern no longer truly 'subaltern', but to incorporate that hidden or obscured identity into dominant discourse. The third problem concerns the valorization of the subaltern: for the subaltern to speak (or rather, perhaps, for postcolonial discourse to speak for the subaltern) as a site of true and authentic identity is to essentialize that voice, again reproducing the very attributes the project set out to challenge in the first place. The logic of these arguments seems to be leading to an inescapable conclusion: for the subaltern to be 'subaltern', he or she must remain silent. And so, too, must the postcolonial critic.

Spivak had already rehearsed these arguments in relation to a literary text in her collection *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (1988): her introduction, translation, and essay on the Bengali short story, 'Breast-Giver', by Mahasweta Devi. The central figure, Jashoda, is a wet nurse, the breast-giver of the title, to the children of a wealthy Brahmin family, and, although the bodily labour gradually drains her, quite literally, of her strength, she is the only breadwinner in the family and must continue to feed the children of the elite until she dies horribly of untreated breast cancer. Devi's own notes to the story suggest a very specific reading of 'Breast-Giver' as a national allegory of India: the subaltern Jashoda is an allegorical figure of Mother India, whose exploitation by the elite has been ignored by history but whose sacrifice nonetheless enables the survival of others. Devi's reading of her own narrative is clearly thought of by herself as the female subaltern 'speaking' and, through the telling of this forgotten story, claiming a central voice in the narrative of national identity. Spivak's interpretation is rather different. Although she praises Devi's intention to foreground the plight of the overlooked, Devi's lending of a voice to the subaltern runs the gamut of 'problems' Spivak has elaborated in 'Can the subaltern speak?' Further, by tying the essential subaltern to the nationalist figure of Mother India, Devi elevates Jashoda to a mythical status which undercuts the fundamental truths of her actual position, not as goddess, but as a subaltern woman whose

'reproductive body is employed to produce economic value' (Morton 2003: 126). The story of class, gender, and the body is eclipsed by another of heroic struggle and self-sacrifice, wherein the previously unrecognized subaltern finds a new, but still essentialized identity, as the mythology of the nation.

The subaltern still has not spoken, and perhaps never truly can until the world changes, although Devi has come closest to creating the conditions for enunciation. But the question of the subaltern is, ultimately for Spivak, an ethical and political question. It is clear from her scrutiny of the subaltern debate that, although real, the kinds of 'problems' she has elaborated are without solution in terms of the current postcolonial debate, where ideas formed (in Western academe) outside the site of conflict (in Eastern social orders) come trailing self-defeating paradoxes and insurmountable essentialisms. But 'silence' on the matter of economic, class, and gender inequalities, which are just as real and even more pressing, is not an option either. Subaltern identification, however compromised, is necessary to enable agency, according to Fanon's original premise. In order to break open this dilemma, Spivak proposes a kind of compromise to enable subaltern identity and therefore agency. Her concept of 'strategic essentialism' argues that it is necessary to adopt certain 'essentialized' identities (national, ethnic, gender, racial) in order to 'speak' and to achieve specific strategic goals. To return to (and revise) Soyinka's critique of Senghor's Negritude, 'strategic essentialism' means it is necessary for the tiger to assert its 'tigritude', while always knowing its assertion is spurious, in order to 'pounce'. Without strategic essentialism, all that is left of the postcolonial project of liberation and agency is the solipsistic nihilism of the postcolonial academy, broken on the rocks of its own deconstruction.

To conclude, it is perhaps necessary to return to the place where this essay began. Fanon's purpose was not only to observe and analyse the 'constellation of delirium' of the colonial subject, but to oppose it and, by opposing, to end it in initiating a new moment in history which is truly *postcolonial*. The 'incident on the train' has not only been a point of origin for many postcolonial theorists, critics, and writers, it has also been a constant touchstone and a point from which one could measure progress towards that place which is 'after empire'. Half a century and more later, there is still a considerable distance to travel, not least because the colonial regimes Fanon fought have themselves travelled along a parallel route which is also, like postcolonialism, beyond national and ethnic identity, to globalization which, if one follows

A. Sivanandan, 'is the latest stage of imperialism' (Sivanandan 1999: 5). A more nuanced critique of globalization is offered by John Berger when he writes that in globalization 'There is no horizon . . . There is no continuity between actions, there are no pauses, no paths, no pattern, no past and no future. There is only the clamour of the disparate, fragmentary present' (Berger 1999). Yet there is something in the progress of the debates on postcolonial identity which is uncomfortably close to the effects of globalization: a tendency towards what James Clifford calls the 'fashionable postmodernist notion of nomadology' which heralds 'the breakdown of everything into everything' (Clifford 1992). The more postcolonialism attends, quite properly, to the analysis of 'the excluded other', 'the operations of reason', 'inside/outside structures', 'alterity', 'difference', 'displacement', 'the destabilizing encroachment of the marginal', 'the subversive subaltern', and 'the constitutive dependency of the centre on the marginal' (all terms used to summarize postcolonial concerns by Young 2001), the more, ironically, it seems to describe, not Fanon's notion of a liberated postcolonial identity, but a new regime of globalized subjects. Postcolonialism has taken great strides in refining the use of psychoanalytic discourse in the articulation of postcolonial identity, of issues of agency and representation, of the politics of location and dislocation, and in providing a structure of ideas for understanding the formation of new identities, but it is still some way off from realizing Fanon's exhortation to future postcolonial intellectuals: 'Let there be no mistake about it; it is to this zone of occult instability where the people dwell that we must come' (Fanon 1985 [1961]: 183).

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