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Source: *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 24, No. 4, Special Issue in Memory of Josaphat Bekunuru Kubayanda (Winter, 1993), pp. 69-98

Published by: [Indiana University Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3820255>

Accessed: 16-01-2016 16:27 UTC

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Disavowing Decolonization: Fanon, Nationalism, and the Problematic of Representation in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse¹

Neil Lazarus

Since 1989, for very obvious geopolitical reasons, there has been something of an obsessive return to the subject of nationalism in Western-based historical and social scientific scholarship. The unfolding of events in eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, in China, in southern and northeastern Africa, and elsewhere, has been both unpredicted and unprecedented. Yet for the most part, the outpouring of Western-based scholarship has tended to remain within the parameters of the established post-1945 ideologeme of nationalism. “[S]ince the Second World War, in a conveniently European lapse of memory,” as Tim Brennan has recently pointed out, “studies of nationalism have not only increased; they have for the most part condemned the thing they studied” (57). Naturalizing the trajectories of the European nationalisms, and hypocritically—not to say unhistorically—extrapolating U.S. nationalism to these models, mainstream scholars have characteristically deplored “new” nationalisms wherever they have been mobilized, on the grounds that they foment revolution, or that they are totalitarian, or that they result only in the intensification of already existing social divisions. In part, of course, this disparagement of what Brennan calls “insurgent or popular” nationalisms in mainstream Western scholarship has been strictly ideological: Western scholars’ “recoil...from

nationalism” in the post-1945 period clearly needs to be set against the backdrop of the challenge posed to Western hegemony by the anticolonial “national movements of the developing world” (57). Indeed, it is arguable that the further capitalism has been able to consolidate itself as a world-system over the course of the past 50 years, the more insurgent nationalisms have come, to bourgeois metropolitan eyes, to loom preeminently as barriers to expansion and accumulation. Thus, in the words of Armand Mattelart, there has been evident the gradual naturalization of

[t]he idea that it is necessary to smash the nation-state, the last obstacle to the new phase of the world-wide expansion of transnational capital, and transform it into a simple management state in an “interdependent” world.... [T]he transnationalization process creates an appeal for increasingly similar, ecumenical and universal values, or, to use the terms of [Zbigniew] Brzezinski, “a new planetary consciousness,” a new “harmony,” a “new world unity” and a new “consensus.” (qtd. in Brennan 46)

For radical Western-based scholars today, opposed to the smugly “First Worldist” quality of much of the prevailing scholarship (exemplified most notably, perhaps, in Francis Fukuyama’s widely disseminated recent essay, “The End of History?”), the question of how to think *differently* about nationalism—above all in the ongoing context of anti-imperialist struggle—is proving to be a vexed one. In another era, the manifest volatility of nationalism might have caused radical scholars to view it with cautious optimism as the open site of political and ideological contestation. Nationalist ideologies, as Anne McClintock has written, “are contested systems of representation enacted through social institutions, and legitimizing, or limiting people’s access to the rights and resources of the nation-state” (104-05). Stranded upon the perceived ruins of Marxism, however, and with their ears ringing with the cacophony of bourgeois triumphalism, many of today’s radical scholars tend to construe nationalism less as volatile than as Janus-faced.² To these scholars, McClintock suggests (she refers specifically to Hobsbawm), “nationalisms are dangerous, not...in the sense that they represent relations to political power and to the technologies of violence” but “in the sense that they should be opposed” (104).

This move among radical Western-based scholars to disavow nationalism *tout court* receives a distinctive stamp within the contemporary problematic of “colonial discourse theory.” In an important and challenging essay published in 1987, Benita Parry drew attention to what she identified as a widespread “disparaging of nationalist discourses of resistance” among the theorists most actively associated with this problematic. Writing with explicit reference to the work of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi Bhabha, Parry suggested that the practical consequence of this disparaging of nationalist discourse was to write out the evidence of concerted resistance to colonialism on the part of the colonized (35).

I have written elsewhere about the debate between Spivak and Parry, suggesting that although there are weaknesses in Spivak’s theorization of nationalism and subalternity, Parry’s reading is itself limited, tending on occasion to be reductive and careless of the particularly enabling insights of Spivak’s position.³ As a general commentary on colonial discourse theory, however, Parry’s critique strikes me as being indispensable. For it is clear that a profound hostility toward nationalism is much in evidence in the work of such influential colonial discourse theorists as, say, Bhabha, Trinh T. Minh-ha, and Christopher Miller. Nationalist discourse—both metropolitan (i.e., colonial) and anticolonial—emerges variously in the writing of these and other theorists as coercive, totalizing, elitist, authoritarian, essentialist,

and reactionary. Anticolonial nationalist discourse is disparaged for precisely the same reasons as metropolitan nationalist discourse, and for one additional and paramount reason besides: it is held to amount to a replication, a reiteration, of the terms of colonial discourse itself.

To read the discourse of anticolonial nationalism in this way, as corresponding to a repetition, a doubling, of colonial discourse, is not necessarily to conflate the two. After all, as Bhabha points out, “the repetition of the ‘same’ can in fact be its own displacement, can turn the authority of culture into its own non-sense precisely in its moment of enunciation. For to imitate is to cling to the denial of the ego’s limitations; to identify is to assimilate conflictually” (“Articulating” 216). Nor, moreover, is this kind of reading peculiar to colonial discourse theory. When Spivak notes that Mahasweta Devi’s “Douloti the Bountiful” is a story that “invites [the reader] to realize that... ‘Empire’ and ‘Nation’ are interchangeable names, however hard it might be... to imagine it” (“Woman” 107), for example, I, at least, am reminded of Ama Ata Aidoo’s story “For Whom Things Did Not Change” in *No Sweetness Here* (1970) or of Ayi Kwei Armah’s first three novels—*The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968), *Fragments* (1970), and *Why Are We So Blest?* (1972)—all of which rehearse much the same argument. Similarly, when Spivak, with particular emphasis upon the figuration of Woman in anticolonial nationalist discourse, remarks that one is obliged, on the strength of “recent historical examples,” to “suggest that even if, in the crisis of the armed or peaceful struggle, women seem to emerge as comrades, with the return of the everyday *and in the pores of the struggle*, the old codings of the gendered body, sometimes slightly altered, seem to fall into place” (“Woman” 113), I think of the devastating episode in *Why Are We So Blest?* in which Modin and Aimee, guests on a communal farm in a newly decolonized North African state, are informed by the manager that: “Yes, we have had a revolution. Our women helped us a lot. They continue to help, as you see. Revolutions are not for turning women into men” (243).

Nowhere is the view that anticolonial nationalism might best be represented as an ambivalent duplication of metropolitan discourse rather than as an uncompromising alternative to it more suggestively developed than in the work of Frantz Fanon. In his essay on “The Pitfalls of National Consciousness” in *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon produced an excoriating critique of bourgeois nationalist anticolonialism, a discourse aimed at the (re)attainment of nationhood through means of the capture and subsequent “occupation” of the colonial state, and which on Fanon’s reading represented only the interests of the elite indigenous classes. Fanon characterized bourgeois nationalist anticolonialism as “literally... good for nothing” (176). Its specific project, he wrote, was “quite simply... [to] transfer into native hands”—the hands of bourgeois nationalists—“those unfair advantages which are a legacy of the colonial period” (152). The social aspirations of the bourgeois nationalists were geared toward neocolonial class consolidation: this meant that their “historic mission” was to constitute themselves as functionaries, straddling the international division of labor between metropolitan capitalism and the subaltern classes in the peripheries. The “mission” of the national elites, Fanon argued, “has nothing to do with transforming the nation; it consists, prosaically, of being the transmission line between the nation and a capitalism, rampant though camouflaged, which today puts on the mask of neo-colonialism” (152).

Now while some contemporary theorists of colonial discourse attempt to build upon Fanon’s repudiation of bourgeois nationalism, Fanon’s own position typically poses severe problems for them. The difficulty derives from the fact that Fanon’s critique of bourgeois nationalist ideology was itself delivered from an *alternative*

nationalist standpoint, and seems itself, hence, deeply vulnerable to a deconstructive reading—above all in the eyes of theorists whose broad commitment to poststructuralist intellectual procedures inclines them to a mistrust of what Bhabha has rather dismissively called “naively liberatory” conceptions of freedom (“Question” 102). As we shall see, Bhabha himself tends to “solve” this problem by, in Parry’s words, “annex[ing] Fanon to Bhabha’s own theory” (Parry 31), maintaining, for instance, that Fanon’s political vision does “not allow any national or cultural ‘unisonance’ in the imagined community of the future” (“Question” 102). In truth, however, Fanon commits himself to precisely such a ‘unisonant’ view of the decolonized state in distinguishing categorically between bourgeois nationalism and another would-be hegemonic form of national consciousness—a liberationist, anti-imperialist, nationalist internationalism, represented in the Algerian arena by the radical anti-colonial resistance movement, the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN), to whose cause Fanon devoted himself actively between 1956 and 1961, the year of his death. Of this latter—“nationalitarian” (the term is Abdel-Malek’s)—form of consciousness, Fanon wrote that it “is not nationalism” in the narrow sense; on the contrary, it “is the only thing that will give us an international dimension.... [I]t is national liberation which leads the nation to play its part on the stage of history. It is at the heart of national consciousness that international consciousness lives and grows” (247-48).

Because of this palpable commitment on Fanon’s part to a would-be hegemonic nationalitarian discourse, some theorists within the general problematic of colonial discourse theory have moved to repudiate his legacy, charging that his ideas are as saturated with essentialist, totalizing, and latently authoritarian tendencies as those of his bourgeois nationalist antagonists. Perhaps the most interesting, and revealing, of these repudiations is that advanced by Christopher Miller, in his recent book, *Theories of Africans*.

Since Fanon addressed himself in such detail to the question of *national* liberation, many “orthodox” Marxists have envisioned him as a nationalist—no matter how progressive—rather than as a socialist revolutionary and have moved to criticize him on these grounds. Miller, however, takes Fanon’s commitment to the question of the *nation* to be indissolubly linked to a commitment to *Marxism*; and he attacks Fanon simultaneously for his nationalitarianism and his Marxism. Arguing in general that “the Marxist approach tends too much toward projection of a Eurocentric paradigm onto Africa, a continent in reference to which terms such as ‘class struggle’ and ‘proletariat’ need to be rethought” (32), Miller claims to find the same irreducible Eurocentrism in Fanon’s use of the language of nation and national liberation:

by placing the word at the center of his concern for evolution, without questioning the complexities of its application to different geographical and cultural environments, Fanon winds up imposing his own idea of nation in places where it may need reappraising.... Far from being “natural national entities” or cohesive nation-states, the modern nations of black Africa must make do with borders created to satisfy European power brokering in the “scramble for Africa,” borders that often violate rather than reinforce units of culture.... In Fanon’s essay on national culture, there is no analysis of what a nation might be, whether it is the same in reference to Algeria as it is in reference to Guinea, Senegal or, most notoriously, the Congo (now Zaire). The single most important fact of political existence in black Africa, the artificiality of the national borders and the consequent problem of cultural and linguistic disunity, receives no attention (48).

One must start by conceding the validity of some of what Miller says here. It is indeed true that Fanon fails to question the purchase of the idea of the nation on African hearts and minds. In this respect he takes for granted the unforgoability and even the world-historical “appropriateness” of what has been imposed upon Africa by the colonial powers. He also privileges the nation as not only the “obvious” but also the *decisive* unit of anti-imperialist struggle. Certainly, his commitment to internationalism is such that he does not theorize the acquisition of nationhood as an historical terminus: on the contrary, he insists that “the building of a nation is of necessity accompanied by the discovery and encouragement of universalizing values” (*Wretched* 247). But this is only to confirm Miller’s general observation that Fanon’s thinking follows the course of much post-Enlightenment Western thought in subordinating “history...to History, particular to universal, local to global” (50).

It is also clear that Fanon’s conceptualization of the nation is derivative of the discourse of romantic nationalism in the West. In his essay “Nationalism: Irony and Commitment,” Terry Eagleton has argued that

[t]he metaphysics of nationalism speak of the entry into full self-realization of a unitary subject known as the people. As with all such philosophies of the subject from Hegel to the present, this monadic subject must somehow curiously preexist its own process of materialization—must be equipped, even now, with certain highly determinate needs and desires, on the model of the autonomous human personality. (28)

It is relatively simple to demonstrate the applicability of this formulation to Fanon’s nationalitarianism. Fanon’s discourse is full of references to the self-realization of the Algerian people-as-nation through their struggle against colonialism. And on at least one occasion, he moves explicitly to figure the relation between individuality and nationhood in an essentialist language of particular and universal:

Individual experience, because it is national and because it is a link in the chain of national existence, ceases to be individual, limited, and shrunken and is enabled to open out into the truth of the nation and of the world. In the same way that during the period of armed struggle each fighter held the fortune of the nation in his hand, so during the period of national construction each citizen ought to continue in his real, everyday activity to associate himself with the whole of the nation, to incarnate the continuous dialectical truth of the nation and to will the triumph of man in his completeness here and now. (*Wretched* 200)

Yet Miller’s fundamental argument against Fanon is less that his discourse is derivative of European theory than that it is inapposite—not to say hostile—to African realities. Pointing to numerous passages in *The Wretched of the Earth* in which Fanon does indeed speak of the African peasantry in what Miller interprets as “massively ethnocentric” terms as being “stuck in time, outside of history, plunged... in the repetition *without* history of an immobile existence,” he claims that Fanon “leaves no room for local knowledge”: Fanon’s nationalitarian historicism commits him to viewing “precolonial history as no history at all” (50).

This reading strikes me as being deeply misconceived. To start with, Miller fails to acknowledge numerous passages in *The Wretched of the Earth*, and elsewhere, in which—even though his focus falls fairly unremittingly on *colonial* culture—Fanon does quite clearly address the specificity and interior adequacy of precolonial social and cultural forms. I have always been struck, for instance, by the passage in “Concerning Violence” in which Fanon celebrates as profoundly democratic the

“traditional” protocols of public culture in Africa. Referring to “the substance of village assemblies, the cohesion of people’s committees, and the extraordinary fruitfulness of local meetings and groupings,” he maintains that

Self-criticism has been much talked about of late, but few people realize that it is an African institution. Whether in the *djemaas* of northern Africa or in the meetings of western Africa, tradition demands that the quarrels which occur in a village should be settled in public. It is communal self-criticism, of course, and with a note of humor, because everybody is relaxed, and because in the last resort we all want the same things. (47-48)

Similarly, in the essay “On National Culture,” there is a good deal of informed and appreciative discussion of the styles, themes, tonalities, and registers of precolonial culture. Stating quite explicitly that there is “nothing to be ashamed of in the [African] past,” Fanon remarks that one will encounter there only “dignity, glory, and solemnity” (210). He also refers freely to the “wonderful Songhai civilization,” observing, however, that no number of such references can compensate for or alter “the fact that today the Songhais are underfed and illiterate, thrown between sky and water with empty heads and empty eyes” (209). To suggest, in the face of such passages as these, that Fanon had nothing but contempt for precolonial African cultures or that he regarded the social universe that they registered and to which they constituted a response only as “a primitive stage to be transcended, or... ‘liquidated’ ” (Miller 49) seems indefensible. Certainly, such a reading does not in my view find much warrant in Fanon’s work.

The fundamental error committed by Miller, I believe, is to misconstrue Fanon’s representation of African culture in the era of colonialism as a representation of a history-less, culture-less precoloniality. Miller fails to reckon with Fanon’s construction of colonialism as a total and elemental rupture within African history. Already in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), Fanon had viewed colonialism in these terms:

Overnight the Negro has been given two frames of reference within which he has had to place himself. His metaphysics, or, less pretentiously, his customs and the sources on which they were based, were wiped out because they were in conflict with a civilization that he did not know and that imposed itself on him (110).

We need to pay attention here to the time frame implicated—“Overnight”—and to the effect of colonialism as Fanon sees it —“customs...wiped out.” Fanon does not say that precolonial customs were *suppressed* under colonialism or that they went into decline. On the contrary, he insists that they were *obliterated*, and that this obliteration was instantaneous. Elsewhere in *Black Skin, White Masks*, he uses this conception to ground a *definition* of the experience of colonization. A colonized people, he writes, is one “in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality” (18; emphasis added). Again, colonialism is phrased as utterly destructive of precolonial culture.

In *The Wretched of the Earth*—as the passage cited above on the subject of the reflexivity of public culture attests—Fanon occasionally seems prepared to soften this position slightly, to allow that *in some areas* and *to a limited degree* it is meaningful to speak of precolonial cultural forms surviving into the colonial era. Yet the same general understanding as before continues to underpin his analysis of colonialism. In “On National Culture,” thus, he argues that “[t]he colonial situation calls a halt to national culture in almost every field.... A national culture under colonial domination is a contested culture whose destruction is sought in systematic fashion”

(237). Similarly, in “Concerning Violence,” he speculates that “[t]he appearance of the settler has meant in the terms of syncretism the death of the aboriginal society, cultural lethargy, and the petrification of individuals” (93).

We come close, here, to sensing both *why* Fanon should refer to the culture of the colonized in the disparaging terms that so offend Miller, and *what is at stake for him* in doing so. Miller has it that Fanon holds African culture in contempt. The truth is quite different. For in a significant sense Fanon does not regard the culture of the colonized in Africa as “African culture” at all! On the contrary, the culture of the colonized is for him a starkly colonial projection, bespeaking a colonial logic that, from the standpoint of the colonized masses themselves, cannot be redeemed except through the destruction of colonialism itself: “The immobility to which the native is condemned can only be called in question if the native decides to put an end to the history of colonization—the history of pillage—and to bring into existence the history of the nation—the history of decolonization” (51).

Rather like Edward W. Said’s concept of the “oriental” or Spivak’s of the “subaltern”—figures within colonial discourse that are imposed upon and, subsequently, taken up under duress and “lived” by, colonized populations—Fanon’s concept of the “native” or the “Negro” is not to be thought of as merely *descriptive* of independently existing (African) subjects. This is a point absolutely insisted upon by Fanon: he notes time and again that the figure of the native is not autochthonous, but is rather a construct of colonialism—in fact, of the settler: “The settler and the native are old acquaintances. In fact, the settler is right when he speaks of knowing ‘them’ very well. For it is the settler who has brought the native into existence and who perpetuates his existence” (36); and, elsewhere:

The settler makes history; his life is an epoch, an Odyssey. He is the absolute beginning: “This land was created by us”; he is the unceasing cause: the country will go back to the middle ages.” Over against him torpid creatures, wasted by fevers, obsessed by ancestral customs, form an almost inorganic background for the innovating dynamism of colonial mercantilism. (51)

In addressing himself to “native” culture, therefore, Fanon is not addressing himself to “traditional” African culture. On the contrary, he is addressing himself to a culture fabricated almost entirely by colonialism, a culture that positions the native as its degraded other:

The native is declared insensible to ethics; he represents not only the absence of values, but also the negation of values. He is, let us dare to admit, the enemy of values, and in this sense he is the absolute evil. He is the corrosive element, destroying all that comes near him; he is the deforming element, disfiguring all that has to do with beauty or morality; he is the depository of maleficent powers, the unconscious and irretrievable instrument of blind forces. (41)⁴

Pace Miller, then, Fanon does not argue that *precolonial* African culture is “plunged...in the repetition *without* history of an immobile existence.” This statement refers to the world of *colonial* culture. Nor is precolonial culture held to be “primitive”; rather, it is held to have been destroyed, if not totally then very nearly so. For this reason, Fanon maintains that colonialism can only be combatted on its “own terrain,” as it were—that is, on the basis of *nationalitarian* struggle. Nations, of course, like “natives,” are a function of *colonialism*, having been imposed upon African populations for reasons having little to do with their own aspirations, and in accordance with a social logic fundamentally alien to them. But the materiality of colonialism must be reckoned with, and cannot simply be wished away, by its antagonists. As Patrick Taylor has put it, although perhaps too much in the vocabulary of

individual agency: “[o]ne has to define oneself in terms of one’s opposition to the colonial system” (60). Colonialism cannot be overturned except through anticolonial struggle; and, as the historical record has surely demonstrated, the colonial state cannot be captured and appropriated except as a nation state. It only remains to be asked what *kind* of nation-state. Hence Fanon’s critique of bourgeois nationalism, and his insistence that the national liberation struggle has brought nationalistic consciousness into existence as a fundamental practical reality:

The Algerian people, that mass of starving illiterates, those men and women plunged for centuries in the most appalling obscurity have held out against tanks and airplanes, against napalm and “psychological services,” but above all against corruption and brainwashing, against traitors and against the “national” armies of General Bellounis. This people has held out in spite of hesitant or feeble individuals, and in spite of would-be dictators. This people has held out because for seven years its struggle has opened up for it vistas that it never dreamed existed. (*Wretched* 188)

One notes some imprecision on Fanon’s part as to the relationship between this decolonized world that the Algerian people are said to be bringing into existence and the precolonial social order. Fanon speaks at one point of the “*tabula rasa* which characterizes at the outset all decolonization,” adding that “the proof of success lies in a whole social structure being changed from the bottom up” (35). This tells us about the relationship between the *decolonized future* and the *colonial present*, but not whether the former is to be understood as amounting in any sense to a restitution of precolonial sociality. The claim that the liberation struggle is opening up vistas that the people “never dreamed existed” suggests not, but there are other passages in *The Wretched of the Earth*—particularly those concerning national culture—that seem to encourage a different reading. We have already glanced at Fanon’s affirmative characterization of such traditional legislative fora as the *djemaa*s or the village assembly (with respect to sub-Saharan Africa, one thinks here of institutions like the *kgotla* in Botswana), which seem to provide models for the future to emulate. And consider also the following passage, in which Fanon celebrates the emergence of new storytelling practices under the auspices of the national liberation movement and argues that, where the colonial order had rendered oral traditions “inert” and reduced precolonial cultural forms to a state of petrification, these new practices operate in accordance with, and offer to redeem, the vibrant and communitarian cultural practices of the precolonial era:

the oral tradition—stories, epics, and songs of the people—which formerly were [sic] filed away as set pieces are now beginning to change. The storytellers who used to relate inert episodes now bring them alive and introduce into them modifications which are increasingly fundamental. There is a tendency to bring conflicts up to date and modernize the kinds of struggle which the stories evoke, together with the names of heroes and the types of weapons. The method of allusion is more and more widely used.... The contact of the people with the new movement gives rise to a new rhythm of life and to forgotten muscular tensions, and develops the imagination. Every time the storyteller relates a fresh episode to his public, he presides over a real invocation. The existence of a new type of man is revealed to the public. The present is no longer turned in upon itself but spread out for all to see. The storyteller once more gives free rein to his imagination. (240)⁵

I have been arguing that Fanon’s thinking about colonial culture is premised upon a preliminary assumption as to the decisiveness of the transformation wrought by colonialism, such that scarcely anything of precolonial African culture is seen to

survive into the colonial era. Since Miller fails to recognize this initial assumption, he is obviously in no position to put pressure upon it. Yet it is precisely here, it seems to me—and not with respect to any supposed contempt on Fanon's part toward pre-colonial African culture—that Fanon's theorization is legitimately susceptible to criticism. For the plain fact is that, throughout Africa, precolonial cultural and ideological forms survived meaningfully, often intact, and in some instances entirely unaffected, not only into, but also through, the colonial era. Indeed, they continue to survive meaningfully today, in the “postcolonial” present.

The significance of this point cannot be overestimated. However central the idea might be to his analysis, Fanon is simply incorrect when he maintains that the imposition of colonialism entails “the death of the aboriginal society, cultural lethargy, and the petrification of individuals” (*Wretched* 93). Reports of “the death of the aboriginal society” in Fanon, one is tempted to say, are greatly exaggerated. The necessary corrective to Fanon is provided by Amilcar Cabral in a paper entitled “National Liberation and Culture,” initially delivered in 1970. In this paper, Cabral points out that “[w]ith certain exceptions, *the period of colonization* was not long enough, at least in Africa, for there to be a significant degree of destruction or damage of the most important facets of the culture and traditions of the subject people” (60).

At the *theoretical* level, Fanon's error consists in a confusion of *dominance* with *hegemony*.⁶ For a majority of the colonized, above all those (mostly peasant) members of the subaltern classes living at some remove from the administrative and increasingly urban centers of colonial power, colonialism was experienced preeminently in terms of dominance, that is, along the lines of material, physical, and economic exaction: conquest, taxation, conscription, forced labor, eviction, dispossession, etc. There was comparatively little attempt on the part of the colonial establishment to seek *hegemony* among these subaltern classes, that is, to win their ideological, moral, cultural, and intellectual support for colonialism. The explicit targets of colonial hegemonization were the national or (sometimes) regional elites.⁷ One consequence of this was that although the subaltern classes could on occasion be recruited to the campaigns of the colonial government or the indigeneous elites—and although the imposition and consolidation of colonial rule obviously had cumulative and long-term effects on the way in which subaltern populations lived, worked, and thought—inherited subaltern cultural forms (language, dance, music, storytelling) were able to retain both their traditionality and their autonomy from most forms of elite culture (colonial and “national”). The point is made thus by Patrick Taylor:

The colonizer's culture and his or her language, in particular, is the medium through which European values and life-style can be presented as the norm and the good, and in relation to which the colonized begin to define themselves. Still, the majority of the colonized, unlike the colonial bourgeoisie, are able to maintain a certain distance from these norms by resisting them and recreating traditional cultural patterns. (60)

Now it is not as though Fanon is altogether blind to this distinction between the forms of subjugation undergone by different classes among the colonized. It can certainly be argued that in *Black Skin, White Masks*, at least, he tends to generalize unwarrantedly from the ideological experience of his own class-fraction—that of the colonized intelligentsia—to the experience of the colonized population at large.⁸ But even there, he does finally move to differentiate between the motivations

that underlie “the quest for disalienation by a doctor of medicine born in Guadeloupe” and that of “the Negro laborer building the port facilities in Abidjan” (223). In the former case, “alienation” is described as being “of an almost intellectual character”; in the latter, “it is a question of a victim of a system based on the exploitation of a given race by another, on the contempt in which a given branch of humanity is held by a form of civilization that pretends to superiority” (223-24).

Unlike Patrick Taylor, however, I do not find Fanon’s conception of the distinction between elite and masses convincing. What is at issue, for me, is not merely whether Fanon *recognizes* that what is true of the colonized elite is not necessarily true of the majority of the colonized population. Rather, it is a matter of the ways in which, on the basis of this recognition, he then proceeds to think about the social existence and the forms of consciousness of this colonized majority. And here, it seems to me, Fanon’s supposition that—in Taylor’s words—“[i]n the creation of a colonial world, precolonial life and horizons were totally transformed and shattered” (47) begins to loom as a decisive liability. For inasmuch as he severely underestimates the resilience and vitality of “traditional” cultural forms and practices in the colonial era, Fanon renders himself incapable of understanding exactly what is at stake for the subaltern classes in their involvement in anticolonialism.

Fanon has, in general, an insufficient grasp of what Ranajit Guha, in the context of colonial India, refers to as the autonomous “politics of the people”:

parallel to the domain of elite politics there existed throughout the colonial period another domain of Indian politics in which the principal actors were not the dominant groups of the indigenous society or the colonial authorities but the subaltern classes and groups constituting the mass of the labouring population and the intermediate strata in town and country—that is, the people. This was an *autonomous* domain, for it neither originated from elite politics nor did its existence depend on the latter. (“Aspects” 4)

In the specific case of Algeria, Fanon’s failure to credit the degree to which subaltern consciousness in the colonial period is still governed by vital “traditional” protocols causes him to misread the mass recruitment of the Algerian peasantry to the FLN as testifying to their embrace of the FLN’s platform. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, thus, he speaks of the “upward thrust of the people” and declares that the people have “decided, in the name of the whole continent, to weigh in strongly against the colonial regime”; and he refers to the “coordinated effort on the part of two hundred and fifty million men to triumph over stupidity, hunger, and inhumanity at the same time” (164).

In my book, *Resistance in Postcolonial Literature*, I argue that this tendency on Fanon’s part to project a unity and coordinated political will onto the masses of the Algerian population in the late 1950s cannot withstand close historical scrutiny. For it is impossible, in Fanon’s reading, to account for the wholesale demobilization and disenfranchisement of “the people” in the years immediately following the acquisition of independence in Algeria in 1962, after an anticolonial war that had lasted for eight years and claimed a million Algerian lives. Such a development cannot be reconciled with Fanon’s evocation of a disciplined and progressively unified population coming closer and closer to self-knowledge as the struggle against the French colonial forces intensified. It seems inconceivable that, having been decisively and world-historically conscientized during the anticolonial struggle (as Fanon claims they had been), this population would have permitted itself to be so easily and so quickly neutralized after decolonization. The truth, rather, would seem to be that as a class the Algerian peasantry was *never* committed to the vision of the

FLN, even when it was fighting under the FLN's leadership. Thus Ian Clegg, on the basis of his research into subaltern politics and state formation in Algeria in the years following independence in 1962, claims that

[t]he involvement of the population of the traditional rural areas in the independence struggle must be clearly separated from their passivity in face of its revolutionary aftermath. The peasants were fighting for what they regarded as their inheritance: a heritage firmly rooted in the Arab, Berber, and Islamic past. Their consciousness was rooted in the values and traditions of this past, and their aim was its re-creation. (239)

Now it should be conceded that as a more or less "orthodox" Marxist—and writing, moreover, in the late 1960s—Clegg construes the political consciousness of the Algerian peasantry during the war of independence disparagingly, as characteristic of peasants as a class globally. He argues that while the Algerian peasantry might well have committed itself to a chauvinistic struggle for the restitution of its "homeland," it lacked the ideological resources to transform this struggle into a full-fledged social revolution: "[r]evolution, as a concept, is alien to the peasant consciousness, while the peasants' relationship to the environment remains one of passive endurance rather than active transformation" (239). It would not be difficult today to demonstrate the insufficiency of this sort of statement. Recent work by such scholars as James Scott, Terence Ranger, Benedict Kerkvliet, and the social historians associated with the Delhi-based Subaltern Studies project has served pretty thoroughly to falsify the idea that peasants' relationship to their world can be characterized in terms of passivity.

Despite this, I find Clegg's analysis compelling. Its great strength seems to me to consist in the fact that it is able to account both for the Algerian peasantry's *commitment* to the struggle for independence, on the one hand, and, on the other, for its lack of concerted militancy in face of the anti-socialist policies of the years immediately following decolonization, when "[n]either the peasantry nor the subproletariat played any other than a purely negative role in the events" (239). Clegg's observation, therefore, that Fanon "lacks a critical and dialectical analysis of the process of the formation of consciousness" (239), rings as plausible and judicious. For Fanon's formulations are consistently intellectualist in tone, often phrasing subaltern thought and practice in the elitist idealist vocabulary of negation, abstract totalization, and self actualization.

It is worth noting, therefore, that to the extent that Fanon's contemporary followers remain faithful to his own ideas in this respect, their writing tends itself to be revealingly intellectualist. Consider the following two passages from Patrick Taylor's *The Narrative of Liberation*, for example. In the first, Taylor is glossing Fanon's theorization of decolonization:

Decolonization, Fanon writes, is the process whereby "spectators crushed with their inessentiality" are transformed into "privileged actors, with the grandiose glare of history's floodlights upon them" [*Wretched* 36]. The colonized rise above the Manichaeic conception of the world as a tragic drama to assume a historical conception of the world as infinite possibility. They recognize human agency and responsibility in an open and unknowable history. Fanon's notion of the entry into history must be understood, not in Manichaeic terms, but in terms of the stepping out of drama (mythical, tragic understanding) and the assumption of historical, national, and human responsibility. (70)

In the second, Taylor is referring to Fanon's theory of the role of violence in the anticolonial struggle:

It is not the act of violent struggle that is the key to decolonization but, rather, the revolutionary leap, the “willed” entry into history, the consciousness of the categorical imperative. What moves the Hegelian dialectic from a situation of mutually exclusive protagonists to one of mutual recognition, is the recognition of the other and the recognition of oneself as an active, freely creative being. (85)

I cite these passages both because I believe that they provide a reliable (if, perhaps, one-sided) account of Fanon’s own conception of decolonization, and because I believe that their weaknesses as representations of popular anticolonial struggle are very clearly marked.⁹ Briefly put, the problem emerges from the fact that the radical intellectual positions subaltern thought and action as the *exact* substantification of his revolutionary theory. Theory and practice are so closely aligned that it almost seems as though the latter exists principally to confirm the former. One is reminded of those passages in the early Marx—the Marx of the *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right* (1844)—that give the impression that the European proletariat will soon be rising up to smash private property and the capitalist system because, as an emergent class, it represents the negation, “the effective dissolution of this order” (59). Comprehensively theorized in this way, how could the proletariat *fail* to overthrow capitalism, and, with it, class society as such! Similarly Fanon and Taylor are often tempted to “overread” anticolonial militancy, to construct it as the objective correlative of a revolutionary philosophy.

That the masses act; that they act *against* the colonial order; that they act *under the banner* of the national liberation movement—all of these things are true. But the interpretation of these mass actions as corresponding to “the consciousness of the categorical imperative” or to a recognition of “human agency and responsibility in an open and unknowable history” seems appropriative in its externality. I should stress that I do not doubt the legitimacy of Fanon’s authority as the spokesperson of the masses in the anticolonial struggle; at the same time, however, a certain unwarranted “speaking for”—that is, *speaking in the place of or instead of*—seems to be involved here.

It is precisely in this context that Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s warning about the need to “watch out for the continuing construction of the subaltern” seems especially timely (“Subaltern” 295). One of Spivak’s insistent contentions, after all, is that the “genuinely disenfranchised” among the colonized are represented as subaltern not only in the texts of empire, but also in “the great narratives of nationalism, internationalism, secularism, and culturalism,” whose unfolding marks the trajectory of anticolonialism (“Practical” 102). In Fanon’s world, the “genuinely disenfranchised” are plainly the peasant classes, of whom he writes that they are “systematically disregarded for the most part by the propaganda put out by the nationalist parties. And it is clear that in the colonial countries the peasants alone are revolutionary, for they have nothing to lose and everything to gain” (*Wretched* 61). Fanon’s own work distinguishes itself sharply from nationalist propaganda in this respect. But even in his representations of the Algerian peasantry as a revolutionary force, there is no sustained consideration of the ways in which the peasants’ views *fail* to match those of the FLN leadership or aim at *different ends*, or reflect *another* social logic.

In the light of these considerations, it might be useful for us to return at this point to Christopher Miller’s commentary on Fanon in *Theories of Africans* and to say something further about the direction that Miller’s reading takes. For Miller, as we have seen, Fanon’s weakness is seen to consist not in an underestimation of the

persistence of “traditional” political practices and forms of thought in the colonial era, but in a contempt for tradition. Miller’s general suggestion is that this “contempt” is characteristic of Marxist theory, which is held to “lack... relativism”; operating with a universalizing optic, Marxism, according to Miller, is constrained to gesture conceptually toward a “totalizing unity,” in the name of which it tends to “overlook or ‘liquidate’ difference, that which it cannot assimilate or subsume” (64). Marxism invariably claims “to possess the only fully integrated political... vision” (32).

With respect to Fanon, Miller advances this argument as aggressively and as tendentiously as possible, even claiming at one point that Fanon’s ignorance about and arrogance toward precolonial African history is reminiscent of that of Hegel or Hugh Trevor-Roper (50)! Nor is this extreme statement resorted to accidentally. On the contrary, having introduced us to a conception of “ethnicity”—tentatively defined, following Jean-Loup Amsell and others, as “a sense of identity and difference among peoples, founded on a fiction of origin and descent and subject to forces of politics, commerce, language, and religious culture” (35)—Miller maintains that Fanon’s *imposition* of the category of “nation” upon African cultures organized ideologically around “ethnic” modes of self-understanding has to be accounted an act of epistemic violence, of such colossal proportions that it invites comparison with the violence of colonial discourse itself. “What matters most, what is most impressive in reading Fanon,” he writes, “is the sheer power of a theoretical truth to dictate who shall live and who shall be liquidated” (50-51). And just as colonial discourse is undergirded by the repressive power of the colonial state, so too Miller casts Fanon’s discourse as the official ideology of an empowered regime. This seems implausible, since Fanon died in 1961, with the struggle for independence still to be won in Algeria. Miller, however, brushes this fact aside in constructing an image of Fanon’s political philosophy fully compatible with bourgeois nightmares of Robespierre or Lenin or Mao. When, for instance, Fanon calls for the “liquidation of regionalism and of tribalism” and, addressing himself to the collaborative role played by many local rulers (the deliberate wooing of whom by colonial regimes, in an attempt to facilitate the pacification of local populations, is well documented), suggests that “[t]heir liquidation is the preliminary to the unification of the people” (*Wretched* 94), Miller draws the conclusion that “Fanon’s response to local resistance is to call out the firing squad” (Miller 50). The statement *reverses* the logistics of power in the colonial context. It was not the national liberation movement but the colonial state that tended to use firing squads; and it was not “local resistance” but the official *suppression of local resistance* that mandated the liberation front’s “response.”

Miller then goes even further: in an extraordinarily dehistoricizing analysis, he attempts to implicate Fanon in Sekou Toure’s execution of poet-politician Keita Fodiba in Guinea in 1969! Rhetorically, his question as to whether “the fact that Sekou Toure wrapped himself in Marxist and Fanonian discourse ma[kes] Fanon responsible for the reign of terror in Guinea” is already answered in being asked. But Miller is careful to affect scrupulousness: he states that Keita Fodiba’s execution cannot be read as a “necessary outgrowth of either Marxism or Fanon’s theories” (62; emphasis added). However, this ostentatious circumspection is surely compromised by being positioned between an earlier observation that, when alive, Fanon often cited Toure as a “practitioner of what... [Fanon] preache[d]” (52), and the subsequent suggestion that Fanon’s “discourse on liberating violence inevitably [leads] to thoughts on the violence of discourse” (63).¹⁰ In constructing Sekou Toure’s Guinea

as a model of Fanonism realized, Miller completely ignores a central feature of Fanon's analysis of "the pitfalls of national consciousness." In his essay of this title, Fanon had spoken with remarkable prescience of the evolution of precisely such a leader as Sekou Toure, a "man of the people" who might have had "behind him a lifetime of political action and devoted patriotism," but whose objective historical function it would become in the postcolonial era to "constitute a screen between the people and the rapacious bourgeoisie" (*Wretched* 167-68). No matter how progressive the role he played prior to independence might have been, Fanon argued, this populist leader, position between "the people" and the elite, would find himself thrust, in the postcolonial era, into the position of pacifier of "the people":

For years on end after independence has been won, we see [the leader] incapable of urging on the people to a concrete task, unable really to open the future to them or of flinging them into the path of national reconstruction; we see him reassessing the history of independence and recalling the sacred unity of the struggle for liberation.... During the struggle for liberation the leader awakened the people and promised them a forward march, heroic and unmitigated. Today, he uses every means to put them to sleep, and three or four times a year asks them to remember the colonial period and to look back on the long way they have come since then. (168-69).

Far from being "responsible" in any way for the direction taken by Sekou Toure as the leader of Guinea after independence, Fanon had already foreseen its likelihood and tried to warn against it. Miller points to the contradiction between Toure's "ostensibly socialist ideology" and the fact that "his Guinea was always dominated by multinational corporations," as though this tells in some way against Fanon and Fanonism (60-61). Fanon, however, does not need this lesson; before it had even entered the political vocabulary, he had already subjected "African socialism" to a blistering critique.¹¹

Miller paints Fanon in the colors of despotism in order to suggest that any alternative hegemonic discourse is predicated upon a will to power that cannot, in ethical terms, be distinguished from the will to power materially exemplified by the dominant discourse itself. Fanon's nationalitarianism, on this reading, exists only as a latent recapitulation of colonialism: between it and colonialism there is little to choose. A European-derived import, nationalitarianism is without organic roots in African soil and can be imposed upon Africa only by force. Because it is a totalizing discourse, there can be no dialogue between it and the "local" discourses of "ethnicity."

In recoiling from Fanonism and nationalism, Miller calls for a new cultural relativism, "retooled as contemporary critical anthropology" (66). Appealing to intellectuals to unlearn their privilege, to reimagine universalizing thought as "local knowledge" (65), he goes to considerable lengths to disclaim any privilege for intellectuals, above all where the representation of subaltern populations is concerned. Indeed, he joins many other contemporary critical theorists in embracing a standpoint from which the very idea of speaking for others comes to be viewed as a discredited aspiration, and secretly authoritarian.¹² What is at issue here, it seems to me, is a kind of intellectualist anti-intellectualism, a premature post-Foucauldian disavowal of the problematic of representation as such. It is one thing to concede, with Spivak, that unless intellectuals "watch out for the continuing construction of the subaltern," their work will tend to be "sustained" by the "assumption and construction of a consciousness or subject," and that this assumption/construction will "in the long run" assure that their work "cohere[s] with the work of imperialist subject-constitution, mingling epistemic violence with the advancement of learning

and civilization” (“Subaltern” 295). It is quite another thing, however, to argue—as Trinh T. Minh-ha does, for example—that any attempt to distinguish in social terms between intellectuals (or members of social elites), on the one hand, and “the people” or “the masses,” on the other, already contains an implicit justification of class-division:

Like all stereotypical notions, the notion of the masses has both an upgrading connotation and a degrading one. One often speaks of the masses as one speaks of the people, magnifying thereby their number, their strength, their mission. One invokes them and pretends to write on their behalf when one wishes to give weight to one’s undertaking or to justify it.... Guilt... is always lurking below the surface. Yet to oppose the masses to the elite is already to imply that those forming the masses are regarded as an aggregate of average persons condemned by their lack of personality or by their dim individualities to stay with the herd, to be docile and anonymous.... One can no longer let oneself be deceived by concepts that oppose the artist or the intellectual to the masses and deal with them as with two incompatible entities. (Trinh 12-13)

One does not want to deny, of course, that self-proclaimedly radical intellectualism is often an exercise in bad faith, and that expressions of solidarity with “the masses” should therefore always be scrutinized carefully. But in Trinh’s formulation, the baby of representation is thrown out with the bathwater of ideological appropriation or “subalternization.” The proposition that intellectuals cannot talk about “the masses” without guiltily romanticizing and/or implicitly disparaging them strikes me as being empirically indefensible. I cannot accept that such contemporary writers as Njabulo Ndebele, Naguib Mahfouz, Ninotchka Rosca, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Yashar Kemal, Micere Mugo, Pramodya Ananta Toer, Michelle Cliff, Salman Rushdie, Ousmane Sembene, and Mahasweta Devi (and one could name literally hundreds more) insist on the distinction between the masses and the elite in their work only to sanctify their own positions, or to assuage guilt. Nor can I accept that in the writing of such influential contemporary cultural critics, historians, and political theorists as, say, Aijaz Ahmad, Benedict Anderson, Belinda Bozoli, Hazel Carby, Edward Said, E. San Juan, Jr., Margaret Randall, Jean Franco, Ranajit Guha, Terence Ranger, and James Scott—all of whom, again, regard the distinction between elite and subaltern populations as indispensable—there is at work an implication that “the masses” are herd-like, doltish, or anonymous.

What Trinh says about the representation of “the masses” in the totalizing discourse of intellectuals accords precisely with Miller’s view of Fanon’s intellectual practice. Yet if we return to *The Wretched of the Earth*, we find Fanon reiterating, time and again, that the relationship between “the masses” and “intellectuals who are highly conscious and armed with revolutionary principles” is not to be viewed from the standpoint of elitist assumptions about leaders and led, seekers and followers, shepherds and sheep. “To educate the masses politically,” Fanon writes,

does not mean, cannot mean, making a political speech. What it means is to try, relentlessly and passionately, to teach the masses that everything depends on them; that if we stagnate it is their responsibility, and that if we go forward it is due to them too, that there is no such thing as a demiurge, that there is no famous man who will take the responsibility for everything, but that the demiurge is the people themselves and the magic hands are finally only the hands of the people. In order to put all this into practice, in order really to incarnate the people, we repeat that there must be decentralization in the extreme. (197-98)

It is easy to be cynical in face of such formulations as these. Miller states that “[e]veryone gives lip service to dialectics” (64). Doubtless, there is something to this

complaint. But not everybody who evokes dialectics is a hypocrite, or merely giving lip service to it.¹³ And in a remarkable passage in “The Pitfalls of National Consciousness,” Fanon points to the implications that follow from his understanding of the relation between intellectuals and “the masses” as dialectical:

If the building of a bridge does not enrich the awareness of those who work on it, then that bridge ought not to be built and the citizens can go on swimming across the river or going by boat. The bridge should not be “parachuted down” from above; it should not be imposed by a *deus ex machina* upon the social scene; on the contrary, it should come from the muscles and the brains of the citizens. Certainly, there may well be need of engineers and architects, sometimes completely foreign engineers and architects; but the local party leaders should be always present, so that the new techniques can make their way into the cerebral desert of the citizen, so that the bridge in whole and in part can be taken up and conceived, and the responsibility for it assumed by the citizen. In this way, and in this way only, everything is possible. (200-01)

Miller (and Trinh) would, of course, seize on the characterization of the citizens’ intellect in this passage as a “cerebral desert.” I have tried to demonstrate above that in deploying such language, Fanon was describing *colonial* culture rather than “local knowledge.” Taken as a whole, moreover, the passage is remarkable for its *refusal* to sanction the idea of imposing epistemologies or technologies upon any people who have not first “internalized” them, who have not first made them their own. The very thing that Miller accuses Fanon of doing, in fact, turns out to be the one thing that Fanon refuses on principle to do! Even if the citizens’ intellect does amount to a “cerebral desert,” even if the citizens are—from the point of view of the cosmopolitan radical intellectual—intransigent, narrow-minded, stubborn, wrong, nothing can proceed without them. The “fighting” intellectual can “shake the people” or try to “turn...himself [sic] into an awakener of the people” (222-23). Ultimately, however, “he” “must realize that the truths of a nation are in the first place its realities” (225). And these realities neither necessarily follow, nor can they forcibly be made to follow, “his” script.

One finds these Fanonian emphases also in the work of Amílcar Cabral. In his essay, “National Liberation and Culture,” Cabral spoke of the need for revolutionary intellectuals and leaders of the national liberation movement to live with and among “the masses” as the liberation struggle unfolded:

The leaders of the liberation movement, drawn generally from the “petite bourgeoisie” (intellectuals, clerks) or the urban working class (workers, chauffeurs, salary-earners in general), having to live day by day with the various peasant groups in the heart of the rural populations, come to know the people better. They discover at the grass roots the richness of their cultural values (philosophic, political, artistic, social and moral), acquire a clearer understanding of the economic realities of the country, of the problems, sufferings and hopes of the popular masses. The leaders realize, not without a certain astonishment, the richness of spirit, the capacity for reasoned discussion and clear exposition of ideas, the facility for understanding and assimilating concepts on the part of population groups who yesterday were forgotten, if not despised, and who were considered incompetent by the colonizer and even by some nationals. (54)

Writing a decade after Fanon’s death, Cabral’s thought is such that one would not have imagined that he could possibly be represented as undervaluing the richness and sophistication of precolonial African sociality. After all, he refers explicitly to the “richness of the...cultural values” of the “rural populations” and notes that “the accomplishments of the African genius in economic, political, social and cultural

domains, despite the inhospitable character of the environment, are epic—comparable to the major historical examples of the greatness of man” (50). Yet in *Theories of Africans*, Miller contrives to read Cabral precisely as he reads Fanon. He quotes an observation of Cabral’s, to the effect that although the peasantry—as the overwhelming majority of the population of colonial Cape Verde and Guinea Bissau—were indispensable to the armed struggle against Portuguese colonialism in those territories, the national liberation movement did not find it easy to mobilize them: “we know from experience what trouble we had convincing the peasantry to fight” (qtd. in *Theories* 44). Miller then proceeds to gloss this observation as follows:

Any revolution in Africa must have the support of the so-called peasants, who make up the vast majority of the population, yet the peasants do not lead but must be led.... The Marxist leader must stand in a transcendent relation between the peasant and History. The peasant’s destiny will be revealed to him by the leader, in a relation of active to “passive,” literate to “illiterate,” progress to tradition, knowledge to “ignorance.” (44)

It becomes apparent that for Miller, Cabral’s fault is that he sought to “convince” the Guinean peasantry to take up arms against Portuguese colonialism. Initially encountering among the peasantry views that were dissimilar from his own, Cabral ought, it seems, as a good, respectful cultural relativist, to have accepted their legitimacy and abandoned forthwith his own aspirations to struggle for the overthrow of colonial rule! Miller reads Cabral’s word “convince” as meaning to “impose.” The fact, therefore, that Cabral was so successful in persuading the Guinean peasantry to take up arms against their colonizers that they were able, within a space of fifteen years, to topple the colonial regime, is interpreted by Miller as revealing only the degree to which the PAIGC (Partido Africano da Independencia da Guine e Cabo Verde) was able to inflict a “new” colonialism upon an already colonized people. It seems not to occur to Miller that the Guinean peasantry’s struggle against the Portuguese might have reflected their own identification—however belated—with the PAIGC’s cause; nor, indeed, that the PAIGC’s ideology might itself have been a barometer of popular aspirations. There is evident in Miller’s work a spectacular reluctance and/or inability to come to terms with the manifold political *achievements* of anticolonial nationalism.

In the work of Miller and several other contemporary theorists of colonial discourse, anticolonial nationalism (whether bourgeois or nationalitarian) is cast as a derivative discourse of the Europe-oriented colonized middle-classes and is disparaged, as such, for its externality and, indeed, alien-ness, to the majority of the colonized population. Now it seems quite clear to me that nationalism in the colonial theater is indeed a derivative discourse—and unavoidably so, given the objective circumstances. But where Miller commits himself to an essentialism in presenting his dissenting case for “ethnicity,” I believe that it is crucial to allow for the possibility that, in adapting the received or inherited discourse of nationalism to the ends of anticolonialism, even bourgeois nationalists might have had to refunction it, in order to make it bear the burden of their particular political needs. This, of course, is the argument advanced by Partha Chatterjee in his important study, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*. Conceding that (bourgeois) anticolonial nationalism was inescapably derivative of European nationalist ideologies, Chatterjee nevertheless argues that, merely by virtue of its specificity as anticolonial nationalism, it was obliged to go beyond them:

Pitting itself against the reality of colonial rule...[anticolonial] nationalism succeeds in producing a different discourse. The difference is marked, on the terrain of political-ideological discourse, by a political contest, a struggle for power, which nationalist thought must think about and set down in words. Its problematic forces it relentlessly to demarcate itself from the discourse of colonialism. Thus nationalist thinking is necessarily a struggle with an entire body of systematic knowledge.... Its politics impels it to open up that framework of knowledge which presumes to dominate it, to displace that framework, to subvert its authority, to challenge its morality.

Yet in its very constitution as a discourse of power, nationalist thought cannot remain only a negation; it is also a *positive* discourse which seeks to replace the structure of colonial power with a new order, that of national power. Can nationalist thought produce a discourse of order while daring to negate the very foundations of a system of knowledge that has conquered the world? How far can it succeed in maintaining its difference from a discourse that seeks to dominate it?

A different discourse, yet one that is dominated by another: that is my hypothesis about nationalist thought. (40, 42)

What is true of bourgeois nationalism in this regard is doubly true of nationalism as a mass configuration. Perhaps the central weakness of the reading of nationalism proffered by the leading contemporary theorists of colonial discourse is that it is incapable of accounting for the huge investment of “the masses” of the colonized historically in various kinds of nationalist struggle—the “involvement,” as Ranajit Guha has put it, in the context of India, “of the Indian people in vast numbers, sometimes in hundreds of thousands or even millions, in nationalist activities and ideals” (“Aspects” 3). Many of today’s theorists of colonial discourse tend to follow the trajectory of liberal historical and anthropological scholarship in casting all forms of national consciousness as impositions upon more or less disunited “ethnically” (or “local knowledge”) identified communities. In Guha’s words, however,

What...historical writing of this kind cannot do is to explain...nationalism for us. For it fails to acknowledge, far less interpret, the contribution made by the people on their own, that is, independently of the elite to the making and development of...nationalism. In this particular respect the poverty of this historiography is demonstrated beyond any doubt by its failure to understand and assess the mass articulation of this nationalism except...in the currently...fashionable terms of vertical mobilization by the manipulation of factions. (“Aspects” 3)

Referring to the Indian case, Guha argues that even in those cases in which “the masses” were mobilized very self-consciously and willfully by bourgeois nationalist elites, they “managed to break away from their control and put the characteristic imprint of popular politics on campaigns initiated by the upper classes” (“Aspects” 6). Especially if we follow Cabral (or, ironically, Miller), in believing that colonialism was, on the whole, unable to shatter the strength and integrity of indigenous cultural and moral frameworks, we should be willing to concede that “the people” could or would not have spoken the language of nationalism without transforming it at least to some degree into a discourse capable of expressing their own aspirations.

Following Chatterjee, I have spoken of nationalism as a “derivative” discourse. I do not mean by this that it is an “ambivalent” discourse, at least not in the sense that this term has been deployed recently by Homi Bhabha in his influential writings on colonial subjectivity. When Bhabha refers to colonial discourse as “ambivalent,” he means to describe a certain slippage at the heart of the colonial episteme. In his essay “Signs Taken for Wonders,” thus, he argues that the colonial

mode of authority is *agonistic* rather than *antagonistic*: “the colonial presence is always ambivalent, split between its appearance as original and authoritative, and its articulation as repetition and difference” (169).¹⁴ For Bhabha, “the effect of colonial power” is to produce not submission on the part of the colonized, nor “the silent repression of native traditions,” but hybridization, or mimicry (173). Colonial “mimicry” is defined as

the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a *subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is constructed around an ambivalence; in order to be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference. (“Mimicry” 126)

In these terms, “hybridity” does not describe the identity of the “native” under colonial rule, but is rather “a *problematic* of colonial representation and individuation that reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that other ‘denied’ knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority—its rules of recognition” (“Signs” 175). Bhabha’s emphasis upon the incoherence of the colonial episteme, upon the “ambivalence at the source of traditional discourses on authority,” enables him to insist upon the destabilizing propensities of colonial mimicry: he speaks of “a form of subversion, founded on that uncertainty, that turns the discursive conditions of dominance into the grounds of intervention” (173). Bhabha’s writing thus operates, as Benita Parry has put it, to render “visible those moments when colonial discourse already disturbed at its source by a doubleness of enunciation, is further subverted by the object of its address; when the scenario written by colonialism is given a performance by the native that estranges and undermines the colonialist script” (Parry 42).

Yet as Parry also notes, the effect of Bhabha’s distinctive approach to colonial discourse “is to displace the traditional anti-colonialist representation of antagonistic forces locked in struggle with a configuration of discursive transactions” (42). She adds that since, for Bhabha, “colonial power is theorized...as a textual function, it follows that the proper form of combat for a politically engaged critical practice is to disclose the construction of the signifying system and thereby deprive it of its mandate to rule” (42-43). Bhabha’s textualism and his theoretical idealism prevent him from engaging adequately with the vastly differential thrusts, effects, and modes of domination/subjectation of colonialism as practiced at different times by different powers in different parts of the world, or even within single colonies subject to the vicissitudes of “uneven development.”

The problem derives, arguably, from the fact that although Bhabha predicates his theory of colonial discourse upon the work of Fanon, he contrives to read him “back to front,” as it were—that is, from *The Wretched of the Earth* to *Black Skin, White Masks*—thereby falsifying the testimony of Fanon’s own evolution as a theorist. Bhabha’s essay “Remembering Fanon” was initially written as a foreword to a new British edition of *Black Skin, White Masks*. The subtitle of the essay, “Self, Psyche, and the Colonial Condition,” does justice to the *situation* (the term of course is Sartre’s) of that text, but not to the work of Fanon as a whole. Bhabha, however, reads *Black Skin, White Masks* not merely tendentiously but more specifically *against* Fanon’s subsequent intellectual production, using it to disavow Fanon’s political commitments and his theorization of “the African Revolution.” The strengths of *Black Skin, White Masks* are seen, thus, to derive from the related facts that it “shift[s]...the focus of cultural racism from the politics of nationalism to the politics of narcissism” (“Remembering” 146) and 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" (136).

Bhabha's "re-membering" of Fanon inverts the historical trajectory of Fanon's thought in order to propose a vision of Fanon as preeminently a theorist of "the colonial condition," of the interpellative effectivity of colonial discourse. Fanon's "search for a dialectic of deliverance" emerges on this reading as "desperate" and "doomed" (133). Bhabha concedes the existence of a revolutionary-redemptive ethic in Fanon, of course, grounded in an existentialist and dialectical Marxist humanism, but he insists that the real value of Fanon's work lies elsewhere, in a psychoanalytic interrogation of the problematics of colonial desire. Fanon's constant utilization of existentialist, dialectical, and Marxist-humanist categories is therefore cast in the light of a sequence of unfortunate lapses, or as a determinate failure of vision:

In his more analytic mode, Fanon can impede the exploration of the...ambivalent, uncertain questions of colonial desire. The state of emergency from which he writes demands more insurgent answers, more immediate identifications. At times Fanon attempts too close a correspondence between the *mise-en-scène* of unconscious fantasy and the phantoms of racist fear and hate that stalk the colonial scene; he turns too hastily from the ambivalences of identification to the antagonistic identities of political alienation and cultural discrimination; he is too quick to name the Other, to personalize its presence in the language of colonial racism. These attempts, in Fanon's words, to restore the dream to its proper political time and cultural space can, at times, blunt the edge of Fanon's brilliant illustrations of the complexity of psychic projections in the pathological colonial relation.... Fanon sometimes forgets that paranoia never preserves its position of power, for the compulsive identification with a persecutory "They" is always an evacuation and emptying of the "I." (142)

Inasmuch as Bhabha wishes to construct a portrait of Fanon as a poststructuralist *avant la lettre*, his writing is full of such passages. The procedural logic of these passages is curious. Their thrust is to represent Fanon's ideas as according fundamentally with Bhabha's own epistemological and methodological principles. To the extent that Fanon's explicit formulations seem to render such a construction implausible, however, they need to be reproved for preventing Fanon from saying what he would have said, had he been able—that is, had he had the right words, or the time to reflect, or the courage to follow through his best insights. For example, the real strength of Fanon's thought is said by Bhabha to consist in his attention to "[t]he *antidialectical* movement of the subaltern instance" ("Interrogating" 198); but since it cannot be denied that his characteristic mode of conceptualization is profoundly dialectical, Fanon "must sometimes be reminded that the disavowal of the Other always exacerbates the 'edge' of identification, reveals that dangerous place where identity and aggressivity are twinned" ("Remembering" 144). Similarly, Fanon is said by Bhabha to "warn...against the intellectual appropriation of the culture of the people (whatever they may be) within a representationalist discourse that may be fixed and reified in the annals of History" ("DissemiNation" 302); but since it has to be admitted that Fanon's discourse is typically emphatically nationalitarian, and therefore both historicist and representationalist, Bhabha bids us understand that his (Fanon's) preeminent claim to our attention is not as a theorist of decolonization or revolution, but of the "subversive slippage of identity and authority" ("Remembering" 146).¹⁵ And again, Fanon's thought is said by Bhabha to tend toward theoretical antihumanism; but since it has to be admitted that his

language is more or less unwaveringly humanistic, Bhabha is obliged to proffer the rationalization that, for various reasons,

Fanon is fearful of his most radical insights: that the space of the body and its identification is a representational reality; that the politics of race will not be entirely contained within the humanist myth of Man or economic necessity or historical progress, for its psychic effects question such forms of determinism; that social sovereignty and human subjectivity are only realizable in the order of Otherness. ("Remembering" 142-43)

According to Bhabha, in short, Fanon's "deep hunger for humanism, despite [his] insight into the dark side of Man, must be an overcompensation for the closed consciousness or 'dual narcissism' to which he attributes the depersonalization of colonial man" (143)!

Although I believe, therefore, that little warrant for Bhabha's reading of colonial discourse is provided by Fanon's work—it is clear among other things that Bhabha's Fanon would have been unrecognizable to Fanon himself—I would not want to be misunderstood as denying the suggestiveness of Bhabha's intellectual production over the course of the past several years. On the contrary, Bhabha has contributed very positively and substantively to the contemporary theorization of "(post)coloniality" as an ideological configuration. But it is necessary to specify the precise *object* of Bhabha's theorization with great circumspection. It might be supposed, on the grounds of his discussion of ambivalence and hybridization—"Almost the same but not white," he puns in "Of Mimicry and Man": "the difference between being English and being Anglicized" (130)—that Bhabha's real object was colonized *elitism*. Bhabha's theorization of colonial discourse is, indeed, manifestly pertinent to a reading of colonized elitism. But I would like to suggest that the cardinal figure of Bhabha's work is the *marginal* subject of (post)colonialism—"marginal" not (necessarily) in the sense of being powerless or "genuinely disenfranchised" (Spivak's phrase), but in the sense of existing at the margins, that is, "subject to" but not "the subject of" dominant discourse.

The particular burden of Bhabha's work is to demonstrate that in the contemporary world-system, social identities—"strategies of identification and...processes of affiliation" ("Question" 90)—are not only always compound and overdetermined, they are also unstable at their origins, and incapable of being stabilized. On this reading, the problematics of exile, migration and diaspora emerge as paradigmatic. Bhabha's characteristic concept-figures are the *mohajirs*, "emigrants" from the countries of their birth and "newcomers" in other countries (as Salman Rushdie puts it in *Shame* [89-90]), multiply-rooted subjects dwelling fully neither within the "First World" nor within the "Third," but ranged across them, so to speak, athwart the international division of labor. The space of such subjectivity is labeled "postcolonial" by Bhabha:

The postcolonial space is now "supplementary" to the metropolitan centre; it stands in a subaltern, adjunct relation that doesn't aggrandise the *presence* of the west but redraws its frontiers in the menacing, agonistic boundary of cultural difference that never quite adds up, always less than one nation and double. ("DissemiNation" 318)

As this formulation makes clear, Bhabha tends to use the concept of "postcoloniality," as he has defined it, *against* nationalism. He writes that

the postcolonial perspective...attempts to revise those nationalist or "nativist" pedagogies that set up the relation of Third and First World in a binary structure of opposition. The postcolonial perspective resists attempts to provide a holistic social explanation, forcing a recognition of the more complex cultural and

political boundaries that exist on the cusp of these often opposed political spheres. ("Freedom" 47-48)

In "DissemiNation," Bhabha praises Eric Hobsbawm for writing "the history of the modern western nation from the perspective of the nation's margin and the migrants' exile" (291). His general contention is that the problematic of nationalism is *exploded*, rendered both anachronistic and incoherent, by the questions that stem from any consideration of the situation of the marginal subjects of contemporary "postcoloniality." It is not only that "colonials, postcolonials, migrants, minorities" are "wandering peoples who will not be contained within the *Heim* of the national culture and its unisonant discourse, but are themselves the marks of a shifting boundary that alienates the frontiers of the modern nation" ("DissemiNation" 315). The "atonality" of the discourse of "postcoloniality" is in addition positively *disruptive* of "the powerful oratory of the unisonant" ("Question" 96). "Postcoloniality"—the standpoint of the migrant—is in these terms itself extremely powerful: Bhabha speaks, thus, of a "strange, empowering knowledge...that is at once schizoid and subversive" and which emerges as a function of the condition of exile, migrancy, diaspora ("DissemiNation" 319).

In his 1991 essay "A Question of Survival," Bhabha devotes a good deal of his time to reflecting on the significance of Edward Said's book *After the Last Sky*. On the basis of Said's poignant and deeply contemplative reading, Bhabha draws the following conclusions, not only about Palestinian identity but about the "impossibility" of nationalist discourse in general:

The opaque silence of the atonal overwritten space of the Palestinian—Abandon the metanarrative!—petrifies the present, barring access to any... reflective, representationalist distance of knowledge, or time of return. The questions of the Other, "What do you Palestinians want?", cannot simply be answered in the images of identity or the narrative of historicism, because they are also asked in the language of Desire: *He is saying this to me but what does he want?* And that question cannot be replied to directly because it leads us past the place of meaning or truth and leads us to the enunciative level, to the moment that determines unique and limited existence of the utterance—the broken, fragmentary composition of the Palestinian: the atonal void.... The silence or void dangerously decomposes the narrative of the national culture. (97)

Two points need to be made about this formulation. First, it is important to draw attention to the tendentiousness of Bhabha's reading of Said. As earlier with respect to Fanon, here too he seems simply to appropriate Said, to assimilate him to his own theoretical interests and preoccupations. In a recent essay on "Yeats and Decolonization," Said distinguishes between the "insufficient" moment of "nationalist anti-imperialism" and "liberationist anti-imperialist resistance" (76). Like Fanon and Guha, Said emerges in his work—even in an introspective text like *After the Last Sky*—as well as in his political practice as an open advocate of the project of national liberation; this commits him to a nationalitarian politics—that is, to a discourse of representation predicated upon the assumption that it is indeed possible for a movement or alliance or party to "speak for the nation." This longstanding commitment on Said's part is not only ignored, but actually transmuted into its opposite, in Bhabha's commentary. The injunction to "[a]bandon the metanarrative," for instance, finds no sanction in Said's thought.

Second, and more important, it seems to me that Bhabha's claims both for the representativeness and for the "disruptive" effectivity of the kind of subjectivity allegedly embodied in "the Palestinian" are considerably overstated. On the one

hand, the Palestinian situation is socially and historically *sui generis*, and cannot be taken as a generative model. On the other hand, even if, in the contemporary world-system, the subjects whom Bhabha addresses under the labels of exile, migration, and diaspora, are vastly more numerous than at any time previously, they cannot reasonably be said to be paradigmatic or constitutive of “postcoloniality” as such. By the same token, even if the category of the migrant or diasporic subject significantly complicates any easy espousal of nationalism in terms of belonging or territoriality, it is scarcely sufficient to undermine the credibility of those contemporary anti-imperialist discourses—in South Africa, in Palestine, in El Salvador, for instance—that present themselves as nationalist.

Bhabha contends that to open the question of the nation under the sign of “postcoloniality” is to push oneself “not merely to the edge of the discourse of a national culture, but to the limits of a metaphor of the modernity of Western Man at the point at which he encounters the Other” (“Question” 96). Let me, in attempting to rebut this position, turn again to Cabral’s essay on “National Liberation and Culture.” Earlier, I cited a passage in which Cabral commented on the “realizations” and “discoveries” (about themselves and about “the people”) that the leaders of the liberation movement make in their interaction with “the various peasant groups in the heart of the rural populations.” But Cabral focuses, too, on the transformations wrought on the consciousness of “the people”:

On their side, the working masses and, in particular, the peasants who are usually illiterate and never have moved beyond the boundaries of their village or region, in contact with other groups lose the complexes which constrained them in their relationships with other ethnic and social groups. They realize their crucial role in the struggle; they break the bonds of the village universe to integrate progressively into the country and the world; they acquire an infinite amount of new knowledge, useful for their immediate and future activity within the framework of the struggle, and they strengthen their political awareness by assimilating the principles of national and social revolution postulated by the struggle. They thereby become more able to play the decisive role of providing the principal force behind the liberation movement. (54)

I am particularly interested, here, in the idea of a movement from “local knowledge” to knowledge of “the principles of national and social revolution.” For Cabral, of course, this is the desired consequence of the articulation of revolutionary intellectuals and “the people.” It reveals, therefore, not only exactly what it is that such intellectuals (can) bring to the struggle against imperialism, but also why the moment of nationalism (and, behind and beyond it, of internationalism) should emerge as decisive to this struggle.

Readers will no doubt recall that Fredric Jameson opens his controversial article on “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism” by casting himself, oddly, as an eavesdropper on “recent conversations among third-world intellectuals” (65). The empirical weaknesses and questionable conceptual assumptions of Jameson’s article have been very widely discussed: and I am sure that they do not need rehearsing here.¹⁶ What Jameson “overhears,” of course, is that “a certain nationalism is fundamental in the third world”; and this “mak[es] it legitimate” in his view, “to ask whether it [nationalism] is all that bad in the end” (65). One would have wanted a much more precise formulation, obviously; yet the “information” that Jameson relays to us remains valuable, nevertheless. For it seems to me that “a certain nationalism” is fundamental in the “Third World.” It is fundamental, arguably, because it is only on the terrain of the nation that an articulation between cosmopolitan intellectualism and popular consciousness can be forged; and *this* is

important, in turn, because in the era of multinational capitalism it is only on the basis of such a universalistic articulation—that is, on the basis of nationalitarian struggle—that imperialism can be overthrown.

In his essay on “Yeats and Decolonization,” Edward Said helps us to theorize this distinctive connection between nationalism (as a derivative but different discourse) and the specificities of intellectualism in the context of imperialism. He writes that

[i]t has been the substantial achievement of all of the intellectuals, and of course of the movements they worked with, by their historical interpretive, and analytic efforts to have identified the culture of resistance as a cultural enterprise possessing a long tradition of integrity and power in its own right, one not simply grasped as a belated reactive response to Western imperialism. (“Yeats” 73)

The significance of this passage, arguably, is that it enables us to envision the accomplishments not only of anticolonial *nationalism* but also of radical *intellectualism* as irreducible. For Said, it seems, what intellectuals have been able to contribute to the anti-imperialist struggle—the opening up of horizons, the crystallizing of memories and experiences as legitimate aspects of a cultural heritage, the globalizing of resources, etc.—could not have been provided by any other form of labor-power, by any other social practice, in any other arena. Elsewhere, Said has commented on the immense significance of the role that literature, as one specific medium of intellectual production, has been able to play in advancing the cause of anti-imperialism in the post-1945 era:

in the decades-long struggle to achieve decolonisation and independence from European control, literature has played a crucial role in the re-establishment of a national cultural heritage, in the reinstatement of native idioms, in the re-imagining and re-figuring of local histories, geographies, communities. As such, then, literature not only mobilised active resistance to incursions from the outside, but also contributed massively as the shaper, creator, agent of illumination within the realm of the colonised. (“Figures” 1-2)

Obviously, some writers, some intellectuals, could have “contributed massively” to the decolonizing effort on the basis of their work as trade unionists or party officials or coordinators of armed struggle. (One thinks for example of such figures as Sergio Ramirez or Ghassan Kanafani or Jose Luandino Vieira.) But Said’s point seems to be that intellectuals have contributed most decisively to decolonization on the basis of their specific labor as intellectuals: by writing, thinking, speaking, etc.¹⁷ It is in these terms alone that they have been able to constitute themselves as “agent[s] of illumination within the realm of the colonised.” Nothing, therefore, could have replaced this kind of practice, whose effects have been both unique and, perhaps, indispensable.

It is in this connection that I would like, in closing, to urge theorists of (post)-coloniality to think again about the potentialities of both nationalism and radical intellectualism. Of course I have in mind Lenin’s asseveration that “[w]ithout revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement,” an idea, as he put it, that “cannot be insisted upon too strongly at a time when the fashionable preaching of opportunism goes hand in hand with an infatuation for the narrowest forms of practical activity” (25). But it also seems to me that in the context of the contemporary capitalist world system, the need to construct a “counternarrative...of liberation” is especially pressing (Gates 458). Such a counternarrative would necessarily be derivative of the narratives of bourgeois humanism and metropolitan nationalism, with

their resonant but unfounded claims to universality. But it would not need to concede the terrain of universality to these Eurocentric projections. On the contrary, where postmodernist theory has reacted to the perceived indefensibility of bourgeois humanism and of colonial nationalism by abandoning the very idea of totality, a *genuinely* postcolonial strategy might be to move explicitly, as Fanon already did in concluding *The Wretched of the Earth*, to proclaim a “new” humanism, predicated upon a formal repudiation of the degraded European form, and borne embryonically in the national liberation movement:

Leave this Europe where they are never done talking of Man, yet murder men everywhere they find them, at the corner of every one of their own streets, in all the corners of the globe.... When I search for Man in the technique and style of Europe, I see only a succession of negations of man, and an avalanche of murders.... For Europe, for ourselves, and for humanity, comrades, we must turn over a new leaf, we must work out new concepts, and try to set afoot a new man. (311-12, 316)

From *this* proleptically “postcolonial” standpoint, it is vital to retain the categories of “nation” and “universality.” Hence, arguably, the specific role of anti-imperialist intellectualism today: to construct a standpoint—nationalitarian, liberationist, internationalist—from which it is possible to assume the burden of speaking for all humanity.

NOTES

¹Earlier versions of this paper were presented at a symposium on “Colonial Discourse/ Post-colonial Theory” at the University of Essex in July 1991 and at a conference on “Emergent Literatures” at the University of Minnesota in April 1992. I would like to thank the participants in these meetings for their helpful comments and criticisms. The paper that I presented at the Essex symposium is due to appear in print soon, under the title “National Consciousness and the Specificity of (Post)Colonial Intellectualism.”

²The reference here is to the representation of nationalist ideology in Nairn. Homi Bhabha further develops Nairn’s thesis of the Janus-face of nationalism in his essay, “Dissemi-Nation,” where he argues that “the political unity of the nation consists in a continual displacement of its irredeemably plural modern space, bounded by different, even hostile nations, into a signifying space that is archaic and mythical, paradoxically representing the nation’s modern territoriality, in the patriotic, atavistic temporality of Traditionalism. Quite simply, the difference of space returns as the Sameness of time, into Tradition, turning the People into One.”

³See Lazarus “National Consciousness.” For further commentary on the debate between Spivak and Parry, see Sharpe.

⁴See also the revealing passage in which Fanon begins by speaking of “the town belonging to the colonized people,” but then revises himself: “...or at least the native town, the Negro village, the medina, the reservation.” The latter, he writes, is “a place of ill fame, peopled by men of evil repute.... The native town is a hungry town, starved of bread, of meat, of shoes, of coal, of light. The native town is a crouching village, a town on its knees, a town wallowing in the mire. It is a town of niggers and dirty Arabs” (39).

⁵See also 243-44: “The native *rebuilds* his perceptions because he *renews* the purpose and dynamism of dancing and music, and of literature and the oral tradition. His world comes to lose its accursed character” (emphasis added).

⁶The distinction between dominance and hegemony was, of course, first elaborated by Antonio Gramsci. Here, however, I am drawing more on the reconstruction of Gramsci’s basic concepts in the recent work of Ranajit Guha.

⁷In his influential article “The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature,” Abdul JanMohamed offers a very strange reading of the relationship between dominance and hegemony in the context of imperialism. Where I

have followed Ranajit Guha in articulating these concepts around the axis of *class*, JanMohamed suggests that they refer rather to different *historical periods*. “Dominance” is defined by him in a more or less orthodox fashion, in terms of the “exercise [of] direct and continuous bureaucratic control and military coercion of the natives” (80). However, as a mode of subjugation, dominance is *historically* delimited: the “dominant phase...spans the period from the earliest European conquest to the moment at which a colony is granted ‘independence’ ” (80). Within this period, “the indigenous peoples are subjugated by colonialist material practices (population transfers, and so forth), the efficacy of which finally depends on the technological superiority of European military forces” (81). This “dominant phase” is then to be set against the “hegemonic phase,” marked by the moment of independence, within which “the natives accept a version of the colonizers’ entire system of values, attitudes, morality, institutions, and, more important, mode of production. This stage of imperialism does rely on the active and direct ‘consent’ of the dominated, though, of course, the threat of military coercion is always in the background” (81). I do not find this conceptualization convincing, not least because it clearly has the effect of minimizing, if not of denying, the significance of class divisions among the colonized in both the “dominant” and the “hegemonic” phases. (In his book *Manichean Aesthetics*, JanMohamed had earlier proposed that “in the colonial situation the function of class is replaced by race” [5]—a reductive reading that works similarly to deny the pertinence of hierarchical divisions *within* colonized societies.) While the moment of independence might be taken to mark the acceptance by the *indigenous elite* of “the colonizers’ entire system of values,” for example (although to claim even this seems to me to claim too much), it is surely implausible to argue that the lives and cultural forms of the *subaltern populations* of Africa in the post-independence period betoken a conversion to bourgeois ideology. Nor, it seems to me, can it be plausibly maintained that these subaltern populations have “accepted” the colonizers’ “mode of production,” even when cash crop farming, wage labor, land rent, etc. have been imposed upon them.

⁸In his book *The Narrative of Liberation*, Patrick Taylor attempts to defend Fanon against this charge. He concedes that in *Black Skin, White Masks*, “it is the colonized intermediary and elite classes in general whose story is told” (44). But he argues that the text is less an analysis of colonialism as such than an impressionistic and semi-autobiographical working-through of the problematic of “racial alienation” in an attempt to “overcome” it. The value of the text, for Taylor, then derives from the fact that “it is not concerned with one man’s alienation; it is addressed to the alienated black person in the Caribbean, and particularly to the dependent black bourgeoisie.... The book is a mirror in which they can reconstruct their own stories, according to their own particular situation” (44).

⁹Taylor reads Fanon’s thought very much in the light of an existentialist Marxist-humanism. Thus he constructs the Fanonian distinction between bourgeois nationalist and nationalitarian ideologies in terms of a distinction between “the humanistic national consciousness brought about by the revolutionary movement” and “the degenerate consciousness of a dependent bourgeoisie” (*Narrative* 10); he argues that “[u]nderneath the roles into which they are forced, the colonized preserve a human identity and temporal being through the recollection of the past in terms of a vision of the future” (49); and he proposes that “the task” confronting radical intellectuals is “to tell the story of human freedom totalizing its situation in such a way that freedom is communicated and the oppressive situation transformed” (19). Intellectually, I do not find these theorizations particularly compelling. Yet I believe that the representation they offer of Fanon’s own problematic is considerably more accurate than that proffered by such theorists as Homi Bhabha or Robert Young, who would claim Fanon for a distinctly contemporary poststructuralism. In his book *White Mythologies*, for example, Young attempts to distinguish between “the Marxist-humanist attempt, by Lukacs, Sartre, and others, to found ‘a new humanism’ which would substitute, for the Enlightenment’s conception of man’s unchanging nature, ‘a new historical humanism’ that would see man as a product of himself and of his own activity in history” (121), and Fanon’s own position, which Young characterizes as “new humanism” (125). Young maintains that Fanon (and other “non-European writers” such as Aimé Césaire) were as critical of the historical humanism of Lukacs and Sartre as they were of Enlightenment humanism; and he claims Fanon’s standpoint as a theoretical *antihumanism*, one rooted in “the realization of humanism’s involvement in the history

of colonialism, which shows that the two are not so easily separable" (122). Certainly, there is a critique of certain aspects of Sartre's philosophy in Fanon's work; but I do not accept that the substance of Sartre's *humanism* is ever the object of these critiques. In short, I am not persuaded that Fanon's humanism distinguishes itself from that of Sartre. In my reading, Fanon never places a "new 'new humanism'" on the agenda. On the contrary, the new humanism of which he speaks in concluding *The Wretched of the Earth*—"For Europe, for ourselves, and for humanity, comrades, we must turn over a new leaf, we must work out new concepts, and try to set afoot a new man" (316)—strikes me as being manifestly Sartrean, and therefore just as Taylor represents it. (I shall return to Fanon's formulation in the final pages of this paper.)

¹⁰There is a superficial overlap here between Miller's position and that advanced by the Moroccan writer and critic Abdelkebir Khatibi, in his important article "Double Criticism: The Decolonization of Arab Sociology." (Miller does not cite Khatibi in *Theories of Africans* and appears to be unfamiliar with his work.) In "Double Criticism," Khatibi argues that to the extent that Marxism is a universalistic "Western system of thought," it is prone to a reductive and otherizing construction of non-Western societies even though it "presents itself as, claims to be, and is applied—in one way or another—against imperialism" (12). In these terms, Khatibi notes, it becomes possible to "read Marx in the following manner: the murder of the tradition(s) of the other and the liquidation of its past are necessary so that the West, while seizing the world, can expand beyond its limits while remaining unchanged in the end" (12). Unlike Miller, however, Khatibi does not finally accept this reading—"which would reduce Marx's thought to a murderous ethnocentrism" (13)—as legitimate. It falls foul both of the progressive thrust of Marx's own ideas and of the historical effects of Marxism as an institutionalized politics: "Who can deny that [Marx] was against colonialism and imperialism, that his thought has helped and continues to help the Third World in overthrowing imperialism and local powers?" (13). Ultimately the approach that Khatibi advocates is "neither Marxist in the strict sense nor anti-Marxist in the narrow sense of the term, but does recognize the limits of its potential. For we want to uproot Western knowledge from its central place within ourselves, to decenter ourselves with respect to this center, to this origin claimed by the West. This should be done by operating in the sphere of a plural and planetary 'thought of difference' that struggles against its own reduction and domestication" (13).

¹¹For a critique of African socialism explicitly animated by Fanon's reading, see Armah "African Socialism."

¹²Cf. Linda Alcoff's recent observation, with particular reference to contemporary feminist theory, that "[a]s a type of discursive practice, speaking for others has come under increasing criticism, and in some communities it is being rejected. There is a strong, albeit contested, current within feminism which holds that speaking for others is arrogant, vain, unethical, and politically illegitimate" (6).

¹³Cf. Parry, who notes that "[a]t a time when thinking is not the rage amongst colonial discourse theorists, it is instructive to recall how Fanon's dialogical interrogation of European power and native insurrection reconstructs a process of cultural resistance and cultural disruption, participates in a text that can answer colonialism back, and anticipates another condition beyond imperialism" ("Problems" 44).

¹⁴Bhabha adds that "[i]t is this ambivalence that makes the boundaries of colonial 'positivity'—the division of self/other—and the question of colonial power—the differentiation of colonizer/colonized—different from both the Hegelian master/slave dialectic or the phenomenological projection of Otherness" (169).

¹⁵"Nowhere" Bhabha writes, "is this slippage more visible than in [Fanon's] work itself, where a range of texts and traditions—from the classical repertoire to the quotidian, conversational culture of racism—vie to utter that last word that remains unspoken. Nowhere is this slippage more significantly experienced than in the impossibility of inferring from the texts of Fanon a pacific image of 'society' or the 'state' as a homogeneous philosophical or representational unity. The 'social' is always an unresolved ensemble of antagonistic interlocutions between positions of power and poverty, knowledge and oppression, history and fantasy, surveillance and subversion. It is for this reason—above all else—that we should turn to Fanon ("Remembering" 146-47).

¹⁶Aijaz Ahmad's "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the 'National Allegory,'" among the first critiques of Jameson's article to be published, is still arguably the most thorough.

¹⁷The title of one of E. San Juan, Jr.'s essays captures this point brilliantly: "The Responsibility to Beauty: Toward an Aesthetics of National Liberation." In this essay, San Juan offers a suggestive analysis of Roque Dalton's extraordinary essay, "Poetry and Militancy in Latin America." Quoting directly from Dalton's essay, San Juan writes as follows: "Retrospectively noting the 'painful scars' left by his Jesuit education, his irresponsible lifestyle nurtured in the 'womb of the meanspirited Salvadoran bourgeoisie,' Dalton's career exemplifies the predicament of the Third World artist bifurcated by his 'long and deep bourgeois formative period' and his 'Communist militancy.' His text registers the hesitations, reservations, misgivings, and scruples of this hybrid genealogy. The writer engages in self-criticism not by jettisoning the past, but by subsuming it in a dialectical mode of absorption/negation: he believes that far from exhausting its potential, the bourgeois outlook offers 'creative possibilities,' so by discarding its essentially negative aspects, the artist can 'use it as an instrument to create ideal conditions for the new people's art that will spring up' in the process of Salvadorans fashioning a new autonomous life for themselves" (90).

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