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Abstract
In a recent article entitled 'Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse', Benita Parry is critical of the recent trend in contemporary anticolonialist criticism to 'disown work done within radical traditions other than the most recently enunciated heterodoxies'. In her opinion the contemporary taste for 'theory' has led to the down-grading of the antiimperialist discourses of colonial liberation movements begun in the 1950s, and in particular the 'exemplary and exceptional radical stance' of Fanon. And she warns that this development may result in a criticism which is unable to withstand the force of the dominant order. In taking up such a position, Parry claims to be siding with critics such as Edward Said and Abdul Jan Mohamed, for whom resistance requires not a return to a transparent realism, but an oppositional stance (she is particularly impressed by Jan Mohamed's theory of Manichean aesthetics)? and to be distancing herself from critics like Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak, who confine themselves to the purely negative task of deconstructing the texts of colonialism.
ANN MAXWELL

The Debate on Current Theories of Colonial Discourse

In a recent article entitled 'Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse',¹ Benita Parry is critical of the recent trend in contemporary anti-colonialist criticism to 'disown work done within radical traditions other than the most recently enunciated heterodoxies'.² In her opinion the contemporary taste for 'theory' has led to the down-grading of the anti-imperialist discourses of colonial liberation movements begun in the 1950s, and in particular the 'exemplary and exceptional radical stance' of Fanon. And she warns that this development may result in a criticism which is unable to withstand the force of the dominant order. In taking up such a position, Parry claims to be siding with critics such as Edward Said and Abdul Jan Mohamed, for whom resistance requires not a return to a transparent realism, but an oppositional stance (she is particularly impressed by Jan Mohamed's theory of Manichean aesthetics);³ and to be distancing herself from critics like Horni Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak, who confine themselves to the purely negative task of deconstructing the texts of colonialism.

Spivak is the main target of Parry's disapproval. In particular, Parry is critical of Spivak's obliteration of the role of the native 'as historical subject and combatant, possessor of another knowledge and producer of alternative traditions';⁴ for in Parry's view it is the appeal to the equal aspects of native tradition which furnishes the colonized with an alternative representational framework or form of language from which to fashion a combatant subjectivity or self. Such a figure, she argues, is represented by the character of Christophine, the recalcitrant black native woman in Jean Rhys's Wide Sargasso Sea.⁵ According to Parry, Spivak 'misconstrues' Christophine, seeing her as only a tangential figure whose image is conflated with that of the similarly marginalized character of Antoinette, the white Creole woman who is also 'native' to the colonies. Interpreted thus, Christophine is effectively silenced by the epistemic violence of imperialism, her presence merely serving to mark the limits of the European text. By way of contrast to this explication of Christophine as an unknown, because silenced entity, Parry gives her the status of both speaking subject and interpreter who acts to disrupt it.⁶ In this respect, she judges Spivak's approach to be even less radically subversive than Bhabha's; for he at least
offers the colonized some hope of being able to challenge colonial authority through the mimicry of colonial discourse. This is 'a mode of contradictory utterance that ambivalently re-embeds both colonizer and colonized'. Despite this distinction, however, Parry remains generally critical of Bhabha's stance. After all, as Bhabha himself concedes, 'The place of differences and otherness, or the space of the adversarial, within such a system of "disposal" as I've proposed, is never entirely on the outside or implacably oppositional'.

This brings me to Parry's second complaint against Bhabha's and Spivak's methods - their refusal of a Manichean discourse based on binary oppositions. Hence her observation that their narratives of colonialism serve to 'obscure the "murderous and decisive struggle between two protagonists", and discount or write out the counter-discourses which every liberation movement records'. What is being targeted here is the purely 'deconstructive' nature of their critical approach - its decision to do no more than 'place incendiary devices within the dominant structures of representation and not to confront these with another knowledge'. This is a failure which is reflected in a further weakness of their work, namely its 'exorbitation of discourse and a related incuriosity about the enabling socio-economic and political institutions and other forms of social praxis'.

In short, the charge is that their use of deconstruction is a narrowly 'textualist' one which does not allow for any point outside of discourse from which concrete forms of opposition can be marshalled. Not surprisingly, Parry is also highly critical of both Bhabha's and Spivak's dissolving of the binary opposition colonizer/colonized in favour of a much less differentiated concept. The power of this opposition, she argues, lies precisely in its ability to recover humanism's idea of the unified self. As against this, deconstruction has little more to offer than 'a silent place laid waste by imperialism's epistemic violence, or an agonistic space within which unequally placed contestants negotiate an imbalance of power'.

To summarize, what Parry is attacking is the critic's refusal to attribute to the colonized a unified consciousness or speaking voice which will enable him or her to stand in unmitigated antagonism to the oppressor. This is the result of an inordinate preoccupation with 'theory', and in particular deconstruction's critique of the sovereign subject. Instead, Parry believes that critics should be concentrating on articulating the margins, and gaining control of the way in which the marginalized are represented. This is to take seriously Said's claim that feminism, black, ethnic and anti-imperialist studies all rest similarly upon one ethico-discursive principle, 'the right of formerly un- or misrepresented human groups to speak for and represent themselves in domains defined, politically and intellectually, as normally excluding them, usurping their signifying and representing functions, over-riding their historical reality'.

Parry's position is admirable in its intent, but is surely not without its own problems, the most serious of which are her quarrel with deconstruc-
tion or ‘theory’, and her perception of the colonized as being the holder of an authentic, sovereign voice. But let us start with her quarrel with deconstruction or ‘theory’. The idea that deconstruction reflects a failure to connect textual subversions to concrete forms of struggle in the world appears to be an example of what Homi Bhabha has condemned as ‘the damaging and self-defeating assumption ... that theory is necessarily the elite language of the socially and culturally privileged’.¹⁵ For according to him, it is part of this heterodoxy that ‘[t]he Olympian realms of what is mistakenly labelled “pure theory” are assumed to be eternally insulated from the historical exigencies and tragedies of the wretched of the earth’.¹⁶ Bhabha’s defence of theory rests on its ability to reveal or analyse the processes involved in the ideological production of representational images. He argues that the categorical distinction between practice and theory, or politics and text, overlooks the metaphorical and rhetorical force of writing as ‘a productive matrix which defines the “social” and makes it available as an objective of/for action’. Hence, ‘[t]extuality is not simply a second-order ideological expression or a verbal symptom of a pre-given political subject’;¹⁷ it too can be a force for social change. Indeed, for Bhabha, theory has more to offer in the way of hope for the oppressed than the sort of criticism which attempts to resurrect the rigid binary oppositions which inform ‘identity’, for what must never be forgotten is that the latter carries with it its own legacy of violence:

Must we always polarize in order to polemicize? Are we trapped in a politics of struggle where the representation of social antagonisms and historical contradictions can take no other form than a binarism of theory vs. politics? Can the aim of freedom or knowledge be the simple inversion of the relation of oppressor and oppressed, margin and periphery, negative image and positive image? Is our only way out of such dualism the espousal of an implacable oppositionality or the invention of an originary counter-myth of radical purity? Must the project of our liberationist aesthetics be for ever part of a totalizing, Utopian vision of Being and History that seeks to transcend the contradictions and ambivalences that constitute the very structure of human subjectivity and its systems of cultural representation?²⁰

Here, Bhabha is exploding the myth of the ‘transparency’ of the human agent and the reasonableness of political action at the heart of the liberal tradition. In contrast to this stark concept of politics, whose space can only be Right or Left, theory opens up the ambivalent and phantasmic texts that make ‘the political’ possible:

The language of critique is effective ... to the extent to which it overcomes the given grounds of opposition and opens up a space of ‘translation’; a place of hybridity, figuratively speaking, where the construction of a political object that is new, neither the one nor the Other, properly alienates our political expectations, and changes, as it must, the very forms of our recognition of the ‘moment’ of politics.¹⁹
For the radical critic, the advantage of theory lies in its being able to prevent a relationship of simple identity forming between the political objective and its means of representation. In denying an essentialist logic and a mimetic referent to political representation, it cuts through the moralism that usually accompanies political separatism. In this sense, its impact can be described as ideological. This is not to deny the importance of more overtly material or political forms of anti-colonial struggle: theory cannot of itself substitute for these. Rather, it is to challenge the belief that theory is not a radically subversive force.

Though for the most part Parry appeals to a Manichean model of identity, and thereby carefully avoids the slide toward essentialism, there are nevertheless moments when her argument hinges on the notion of authenticity. One such moment is her appeal to native culture as the platform from which a recalcitrant identity can be fashioned. This appeal is, I would suggest, responsible for her misconstruction of Bhabha’s project. Take, for example, her assertion that ‘by showing the wide range of stereotypes and the shifting subject positions assigned to the colonized in the colonialist text, [Bhabha] sets out to liberate the colonial from its debased inscription as Europe’s monolithic and shackled Other, and into an autonomous native “difference”’.20 Or consider her subsequent conclusion that, in Bhabha’s work ‘the subaltern has spoken, and his readings of the colonialist text recover a native voice’.21 I would like to know how we can reconcile this idea of the autonomy of the speaking subject not only with Bhabha’s own theses concerning the ambivalence of colonial discourse and the refraction of the subjectivity of both colonizer and colonized, but also with his claim that the only space of resistance on offer to the colonized is the mimicry or parody of the speech of the colonizer.22

A further difficulty occurs with respect to her invocation of Said’s concept of oppositional criticism. At first glance, this might seem easy to reconcile with her appeal to Fanon’s theory of a unified consciousness for the colonized, which is collective and stands in unmitigated antagonism toward the oppressor. But in fact Said’s oppositional criticism ‘posits “nothing less than new objects of knowledge ... new theoretical models that upset or at the very least radically alter the prevailing paradigmatic norms”’23 precisely because these are based on an unmitigated antagonism and hatred of the Other.24 In appealing to Said’s notion of oppositional consciousness Parry is therefore ignoring his rejection of the Manichean discourse adopted by Fanon. As far as Said is concerned, the destructive forms of representation used by both colonizer and colonized alike must be replaced by more positive and conciliatory modes which emphasize the overlapping of cultural boundaries and the interdependence of the historical narratives belonging to either side. This would involve abandoning fixed ideas of settled identity and culturally authorized definition.25 Said’s own interpolation of Fanon gives prominence to the latter’s vision of a new form of identity which recognizes both racial and class equality as
This is a reading which emphasizes the dialectical nature of Fanon’s program of counter-insurgency in order to down-play any importance given to a destructive or antagonistic phase based on the recovery of native traditions. This is perhaps to be expected given Said’s idea that nativism invariably gives rise to an ardent practice of separatism.

Both Bhabha’s defence of theory and Said’s dialectical interpretation of Fanon should perhaps serve to warn us that the emphasis which Parry places on nativism in her own reading of Fanon may be attributable to an unspoken desire to retain the antagonistic paradigms of identity. A careful reading of Fanon would lend support to this hypothesis, for it reveals that although the appeal to native culture does help to facilitate the production of a new self, it never assumes anything like the cardinal role that it does in Parry’s account. Moreover, in my opinion Said is quite right to give more weight to the conciliatory aspects of Fanon’s program than to what he perceives as its unwonted element of violence, particularly since it is Fanon’s dream of producing a radically new form of humanism – tolerant of heterogeneity – which distinguished his narrative of nationalism from the one sustaining European imperialism. But in stressing the placatory moments of Fanon’s program at the expense of its more dissonant phase, it would seem that it is also Said’s intention to dissuade post-colonial intellectuals from appealing to an authentic or originary identity. His ulterior motive would seem to be to keep the space of the Other from being appropriated by the still powerful arm of western imperialism, this time round in the form of the dominant narratives of postmodernism. For according to Said, despite inroads made by earlier anti-colonialist intellectuals such as C.L.R. James and Fanon, the struggle for control of cultural representation continues unabated today, the latest target for appropriation being the ‘otherness’ or ‘difference’ of the non-European world.

In this connection, Said has drawn our attention to the way in which the relentless celebration of ‘otherness’ and ‘difference’ by First World intellectuals has reached the status of ‘spectacle’, with the unfortunate result that Western intellectuals have felt they can continue to blatantly ignore the presence of the Third World. As a case in point, he singles out Jean-François Lyotard, who accounts for the phenomenon of postmodernism in terms of a loss of the legitimizing power of the great narratives of emancipation and Enlightenment, and their replacement by smaller local narratives legitimated by their users’ ability to manipulate the codes in order to get things done. According to Said this is an explanation which shows Lyotard to be guilty of separating Western postmodernism from the non-European world, and from the consequences of European modernism and modernization in the colonized world. For Said, Lyotard’s narrative represents the culminating stage of a process of relentless aestheticization and sterilization of modernism – a dynamic which can be traced through Albert Camus’s version of Algeria. For in stark contrast to Fanon’s Arabs,
those of *La Peste* and *L'Etranger* are 'nameless beings used as background for the portentous European metaphysics explored by Camus, who, we should recall, in his *Cronique algérienne* denied the existence of an Algerian nation'.

In place of the intrinsically one-sided, or ethnocentric accounts proffered by intellectuals such as Lyotard, Said would like to see narratives which take the Third World seriously by placing what it has to say on equal terms with its own explanations. The current dearth of such material within the First World can be attributed to a failure on the part of its present-day intellectuals to attend to the fuller global context in which the West's ideological productions occur – something which Said believes is being covered over by the vogue for 'thick descriptions and blurred genres' which only act to 'shut and block out the clamor of voices on the outside asking for their claims about empire and domination to be considered'.

Nor does he consider that the recovery of this fuller, more responsible perspective can be easily achieved. For instance, it isn’t a case of exercising a politically, or ideologically disinterested form of reason based on aestheticism or theory as distinct from ethics or morality; for as history has shown this kind of reason always works to the advantage of the West. Rather, about the best that responsible critics can do is to uncover the political interests concealed behind the rarefied institutional practices of interpretation produced by their own culture:

In short what is now before us nationally, and in the full imperial panorama, is the deep, the profoundly perturbed and perturbing question of our relationship to others – other cultures, other states, other histories, other experiences, traditions, peoples, and destinies. The difficulty with the question is that there is no vantage outside the actuality of relationships between cultures, between unequal imperial and non-imperial powers, between different Others, a vantage that might allow one the epistemological privilege of somehow judging, evaluating, and interpreting free of the encumbering interests, emotions, and engagements of the ongoing relationships themselves. When we consider the connections between the United States and the rest of the world, we are so to speak of the connections, not outside and beyond them. It therefore behooves us as intellectuals, humanists, and secular critics to grasp the role of the United States in the world of nations and power, from within the actuality, and as participants in it, not as detached outside observers who, like Oliver Goldsmith in Yeats' marvellous phrase, deliberately sip at the honeypots of our minds.

Spivak, also, is highly critical of the current intellectual enterprise of constituting the colonial subject as Other, and in her article 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' she cautions post-colonial critics against such an undertaking by reminding them that wherever such a subjectivity is theorized by First World intellectuals, it is accompanied by the desire to conserve the Subject of the West. She even ventures to suggest that 'the theory of pluralized "subject-effects" gives an illusion of undermining subjective sovereignty while often providing a cover for this subject of knowledge'. Hence her
contention that: 'The much-publicized critique of the sovereign subject thus actually inaugurates a Subject'. A good example of this kind of critique is a text entitled 'Intellectuals in Power' by Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze. In her analysis of this text, Spivak points to the inherent contradiction in Foucault's and Deleuze's claim concerning the contributions made by French post-structuralist theory to counter-hegemonic discourse. On the one hand they maintain that the networks of power/desire/interest are so heterogeneous that their reduction to a coherent narrative is counterproductive – which is why a persistent critique is needed. On the other hand, insisting that intellectuals must attempt to disclose and know Society's Other, they proceed to articulate it in terms which are at once Eurocentric (by reducing radical struggle to the 'the worker's struggle') and essentialist (by appealing to the empirical reality of the worker's 'concrete experience'), as is seen in Foucault's claims that 'the masses know perfectly well', and 'they know far better than [the intellectual] and they certainly say it very well'). As Spivak notes, the latter lends support to a positivistic paradigm which in turn forms the justifying foundation of an advanced capitalistic neo-colonialism: This S/subject, curiously sewn together into a transparency by denegations, belongs to the exploiters' side of the international division of labour. The source of this contradiction, so Spivak argues, lies in a failure to distinguish between two different categories of representation: representation as 'speaking for', as in politics; and representation as 're-presentation', as in art and philosophy. Thus it is the opposition between 'applied practice' (suggested by the appeal to 'concrete experience') and 'pure theory' which conflates the two forms and affords the transparency of the intellectual.

For Spivak, Foucault's effort to locate epistemic violence in the re-definition of sanity at the end of the European eighteenth century constitutes a powerful instance of the transparency of the intellectual, precisely because it fails to rewrite the history of the systematic suppressions and marginalizations of Western society since the eighteenth century in accordance with the discourses of 'normativity' effected by imperialism. In other words, in Foucault's account what was represented as normal was deemed not to be the result of contact with other cultures. What is left out of such a version is a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to the taste of First World intellectuals because they are thought to be 'insufficiently elaborated: naive knowledge, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity'. Such an attitude, Spivak contends, is oblivious to the possibility that European intellectuals can never 'know' the non-European in any way other than through the prism of their own desires:

It is impossible for contemporary French intellectuals to imagine the kind of Power and Desire that would inhabit the unnamed subject of the Other of Europe. It is not only that everything they read, critical or uncritical, is caught within the debate of
the production of that Other, supporting or critiquing the constitution of the Subject as Europe. It is also that, in the constitution of the Other of Europe, great care was taken to obliterate the textual ingredients with which such a subject could cathect, could occupy (invest?) its itinerary – not only by ideological and scientific production, but also by the institution of the law.37

To ask therefore what happens to the critique of the sovereign subject when it is applied to the knowledge of society’s Other leads to the realization that, in representing the subaltern, intellectuals represent themselves as transparent. This is another way of saying that the western project to constitute the colonial subject as Other itself constitutes an instance of epistemic violence.

If Said’s and Spivak’s views are to be taken seriously, then surely we must ask ourselves if Parry’s desire to rescue the native woman subject from out of the quiescence imposed on her by recent criticism has more in common with the sort of epistemic violence which Spivak has just been describing than with the ‘exceptional stance’ of Fanon. As Parry herself has noted, her own objective is in marked contrast to the position taken up by Spivak, in whose writings the native subject is historically muted as a result of ‘the planned epistemic violence of the imperialist project’, where the native was prevailed upon to internalize as self-knowledge the knowledge concocted by the master. This required of the native that he rewrite his position as object of imperialism by domesticating the alien as Master and himself as a self-consolidating and silent Other, a process which brought about the European ‘worlding’ of the native’s own world. Hence the following premise:

No perspective critical of imperialism can turn the Other into a self, because the project of imperialism has always already historically refracted what might have been the absolutely Other into a domesticated Other that consolidates the imperialist self.38. A full literary inscription cannot easily flourish in the imperialist fracture of discontinuity, covered over by an alien legal system masquerading as Law as such, an alien ideology established as only truth, and a set of human sciences busy establishing the ‘native’ as self-consolidating Other.38

If this is true of the native in a general sense then it is doubly true for the native as woman. Spivak’s observation that ‘One never encounters the testimony of the women’s voice-consciousness’, ‘There is no space from where the subaltern (sexed) subject can speak’, ‘The subaltern as female cannot be heard or read’, and ‘The subaltern cannot speak’39 is derived from studying the discourse of Sati, in which the Hindu patriarchal code converged with colonialism’s narrativization of Indian culture to efface all traces of woman’s voice. This study could conceivably be used as a starting point for a critique of Fanon’s reinscription of native culture as demonstrated by his story of the haik. Just as the tradition of widow sacrifice became a battleground for the competing discourses of Hindu patriarchy and imperialist culture – a terrain from which the voice of the
subaltern woman was excluded – so it is possible that Algerian women had little or no say in clashes between the revolutionaries and the French government over the wearing of the veil.\textsuperscript{40} A critique developed along these lines could prove an embarrassment to Parry’s attempt to rescue the notion of an autonomous speaking voice and unified subjectivity for the native or subaltern woman based on a revival of elements belonging to the traditional native culture.

The omission of women from the formation of both traditional and revolutionary forms of culture is not the only aspect of Fanon’s work which could serve to compromise Parry’s argument. In ascribing to traditional native culture the power to generate a new identity for the colonized, Parry is seriously violating the spirit of Fanon’s whole critique of nativism. For Fanon, native culture had but a transitional part to play in the revolutionary process. Indeed, its only role was in the second phase of liberation – the moment when the native, discovering that ‘the settler’s skin is not of any more value than a native’s skin’, turns away from the values of the colonizing culture and comes into touch again with those of his own people. Here, in contrast to the ‘individualism’ and ‘egoism’ of the settler, the native rediscovers the strength to be gained from communal ideals. This is the power of unity contained in ‘the substance of village assemblies, the cohesion of people’s committees, and the extraordinary fruitfulness of local meetings and groupments’. Above all, it is this new found communalism which forms the basis of the political cohesion of the colonized: ‘Henceforward, the interest of one will be the interests of all, for in concrete fact everyone will be discovered by the troops, everyone will be massacred – or everyone will be saved. The motto “look out for yourself”, the atheist’s method of salvation, is in this context forbidden.’\textsuperscript{41} But what is being insinuated here is that bourgeois individualism isn’t the only enemy of liberation; it is also those aspects of traditional native culture, such as tribalism and chieftainship, which because of their inherently hierarchical qualities have proved to be compatible with the colonizer’s culture:

The colonial system encourages chieftaincies and keeps alive the old Marabout confraternities. Violence is in action all-inclusive and national. It follows that it is closely involved in the liquidation of regionalism and of tribalism. Thus the national parties show no pity all towards the caids and the customary chiefs. Their destruction is the preliminary to the unification of the people.\textsuperscript{42}

Fanon has to get rid of these features of the native’s pre-colonial past because they contravene the notion that one can determine one’s own future. For that, an entirely new belief system is needed, based on the concrete reality of the present, or the common experience of confronting death at the hands of the colonizer. Hence his pronouncement that:
After centuries of unreality, after having wallowed in the most outlandish phantoms, at long last the native, gun in hand, stands face to face with the only forces which contend for his life—the forces of colonialism. And the youth of a colonized country, growing up in an atmosphere of shot and fire, may well make a mock of, and does not hesitate to pour scorn upon the zombies of his ancestors, the horses with two heads, the dead who rise again, and the dijms who rush into your body while you yawn. The native discovers reality and transforms it into the pattern of his customs, into the practice of violence and into his plan for freedom.

The place of nativism in Fanon's decolonization program, then, is one of subordination to a revolutionary new culture which in its 'fight against poverty, illiteracy and underdevelopment' is unashamedly modern and progressivist. Here is how Christopher Miller puts it: 'Fanon allows the look backward into tradition, but only to the extent that it is "in the intention of opening the future, as an invitation to action and as a basis of hope".' Thus Fanon was in fact undermining the force of traditional native culture by brandishing a completely new type of identity based on progressivist Marxist principles. Only where traditional native culture undergoes a radical transformation and takes on new meaning is it conceived of as contributing to the fashioning of such an identity.

Of course it's always possible that Parry's gloss on Fanon's use of native culture may be deliberate. Miller, for example, has pointed out that one of the most serious problems with Fanon's theory of a new national culture based on Marxist precepts is that it has provided the inspiration for the heinous crimes of Guinea's tyrannical leader Sékou Touré. And he adds that the problem of Marxism's clash with ethnicity is nowhere more obvious than in Fanon's dream of imposing a modern form of rationalism on Africa; for here it can be seen that what is meant to liberate people from the fetters of colonialism is imperialism in another guise.

Briefly, I would submit that Fanon's use of the word 'nation' covers over important unresolved tensions between ethnicity and ethics: 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. As David Caute has accurately pointed out, 'It is curious that Fanon, who wanted to snap the bonds of European culture, should have transformed arbitrary European structures into the natural units of African progress'. 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 violate rather than reinforce units of culture.

Miller's is both a powerful and persuasive critique of Fanon's progressivist concept of nationalism, and it raises important moral questions concerning the destruction of native or ethnic culture when anti-colonialist resistance acquires a Marxist mien. But even if Parry's interpretation of Fanon is based on such a concern, there is still reason to be wary of those forms of
western intellectualism which exhort ethnicity. Spivak, for one, has noted
that: 'In the United States the third-worldism currently afloat in human­
istic disciplines is often openly ethnic'. And she cautions that a nostalgia
for lost origins can be detrimental to the exploration of social realities
within the critique of imperialism. That Spivak places Parry in this cat-
egory seems clear from her own assessment of the latter's project. Parry's
criticisms, she says, are 'well meaning' but compromised by her insertion
into the nineteenth-century anthropological mode; that is to say she is still
cought within a system of belief which privileges 'the native informant',
as if there is still a pure native voice to be heard. Included under the
rubric of third-worldism is the feminist project to constitute the native
subject as Other. That Parry might be party to such a practice is suggested
by her own thesis that: 'What Spivak's strategy of reading necessarily blots
out is Christophine's inscription as the native, female individual Self [my
emphasis] who defies the demands of the discriminatory discourses im­
pinging on her person'. For this reference to the individual self places
Parry fairly and squarely within First World feminist discourse, something
which I believe is reinforced by her subsequent declaration that 'it should
be possible to locate traces and testimony of women's voice[s] on those
sites where women inscribed themselves as healers, ascetics, singers of
sacred songs'. Such a proposal betrays the influence of a western femin­
ism which attempts to articulate a separate women's identity for western
and non-western women alike through the recovery of a separate female
tradition, while ignoring its own privileged positioning on the other side
of the international division of labour.
Caught between the coercions of a totalizing counter-discourse of
national liberation, and the epistemic violence implicit in the project of
speaking for the colonial subject, what forms of resistance remain open to
the subaltern woman? Having exposed the tacit imperialism behind the
post-structuralist project of knowing and disclosing society's Other, Spivak
admits that the critic is still left with the problem of what constitutes a
more recuperable project than the 'clandestine restoration of subjective
essentialism'. For an answer she looks to traditional Marxist theory and
in particular to the critique of the individual as oppressed subject. Here
the two different categories of representation referred to earlier are not
confated. Class consciousness consequently remains attached to the feel­
ing of community that belongs to national links and political organiza­
tions, and not to that other experience of desire whose structural model
is the family. Thus full class agency (if there were such a thing) is not an
ideological transformation of consciousness on the ground level, a desiring
identity of the agents and their interest, an identity whose absence
troubles Foucault and Deleuze. Hence Spivak's view is that a radical prac­
tice should attend to what she describes as Marx's 'double session' of rep­
resentations rather than introduce the individual subject through totalizing
concepts of power and desire. Put more simply, it should insist on the
distinction between the plurality of subject-effects adduced by art and philosophy and the conscious subject of politics. She is also of the view that the critic would do well to follow Marx’s example in keeping the area of class practices on the second level of abstraction (as distinct from the stage of ‘concrete experience’), for by doing this Marx effectively kept open the Kantian (and Hegelian) critique of the individual subject as agent of history. And she further notes: ‘It does seem to me that Marx’s questioning of the individual as agent of history should be read in the context of the breaking up of the individual subject inaugurated by Kant’s reading of Descartes’. All of this represents a solution compatible with the post-structuralist critique of the sovereign Subject.

For Spivak, what remains useful in Foucault is what she calls the mechanics of ‘disciplinarization and institutionalization’, the constitution, as it were, of the colonizer. This, she believes, can be used to much greater analytic and interventionist advantage than his invocations of the authenticity of the Other. In a similar vein to this kind of work is Spivak’s own attempt to develop a strategy of reading that will ‘speak to’, as distinct from ‘speaking for’, the historically muted subaltern woman.

In seeking to learn to speak to (rather than listen to or speak for) the historically muted subject of the subaltern woman, the post-colonial intellectual systematically ‘unlearns’ female privilege. This systematic unlearning involves learning to critique post-colonial discourse with the best tools it can provide and not simply substituting the lost figure of the colonized.

Given that Parry’s complaints against Spivak include her ignoring of the methods of liberation of the 1950s, it is ironical that Spivak alone endeavours to return post-colonial criticism to a Marxist notion of consciousness. Her aim here is mainly to take the emphasis off an individualist concept of freedom so as to return anti-colonial struggle to its roots in collective as well as political and economic freedom. The individualist concept of freedom is something adhered to by both Parry and western ‘culture’ critics in general, and would appear to have been developed out of Fanon’s theories on the phenomenological self.

To summarize, recent debates are divided on the issues of whether or not the post-colonial intellectual should be engaged in the attempt to recover an autonomous form of subjectivity for the Others of Europe that will allow them to ‘speak for themselves.’ Such a view would have it that: ‘The current post-structuralist/post-modern challenges to the coherent, autonomous subject have to be put on hold in feminist and post-colonial discourses, for both must work first to assert and affirm a denied or alienated subjectivity.’ Vying with this argument is the one which believes that the theorizing of an autonomous subject for the colonized ministers to the desire of First World intellectuals to know and thereby control the Other of the West. Faced with this prospect, the most that post-colonial intellectuals can hope to do is to continue critiquing the
subject of the West. This is the position taken by Spivak who has argued that:

If instead we concentrated on documenting and theorizing the itinerary of the consolidation of Europe as sovereign subject, indeed sovereign and subject, then we would produce an alternative historical narrative of the ‘worlding’ of what is today called ‘the Third World’. To think of the Third World as distant cultures, exploited but with rich intact heritages waiting to be recovered, interpreted, and curricularized in English translation helps the emergence of the ‘Third World’ as a signifier that allows us to forget that ‘worlding,’ even as it expands the empire of the discipline.57

The ground covered by this article represents what remains today of the challenge to both colonial and neo-colonial forms of representation professed by Fanon. The shifts which have taken place in the interim period would have to include the attempt on behalf of Western intellectuals to restore themselves to a position of global supremacy through the deployment of increasingly subtle methods of cultural appropriation, as well as the efforts of post-colonial intellectuals to respond in equally wily fashion. What the outcome of these changes will be is very hard to predict; the ground I have just covered, for instance, serves only to confirm that the space of representation opened up by Fanon is still being hotly contested.

NOTES

2. Parry, ‘Problems in Current Theories,’ p. 27.
4. Parry, ‘Problems in Current Theories,’ p. 34.
18. Bhabha, ‘The Commitment to Theory,’ p. 5
22. See Bhabha, 'Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse,' October 28 (1984) pp. 130-32. Here Bhabha writes: 'The ambivalence of mimicry – almost but not quite – suggests that the fetishized colonial culture is potentially and strategically an insurgent counter-appeal. What I have called its ‘identity-effects,’ are always crucially split.'
23. Quoted in Parry, 'Problems in Current Theories,' p. 27.
27. Said, 'Representing the Colonized,' p. 213.
34. This is in fact a conversation. See Michael Foucault, Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1977) pp. 205-17.
40. For Fanon’s account of the Haik, see Frantz Fanon, ‘Algeria Unveiled,’ in A Dying Colonialism, trans. Haakon Chevalier (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965) pp. 21-53. For an alternative story of the Haik written by Arab women, see Lila Abu-Lughod, Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in Bedouin Society (Berkeley: U. of California P, 1986). This book examines the multiple positions and the modes of personal as well as collective expression taken up by Arab women in response to the pressures of modern life and the traditional expectations of Arab society. See particularly the chapters on women’s love poetry and the veil itself.
42. Fanon, The Wretched p. 74.
43. Fanon, The Wretched p. 45.
44. Fanon, The Wretched p. 74.
46. Miller, 'Ethnicity and Ethics,' pp. 89-90.
47. Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' p. 281.
What do you give to friends who have everything?

A SUBSCRIPTION TO KUNAPIPI.