Fanon: notes on religion and representation in the production of the sacred

Federico (Rico) Settler
Religious Studies, UCT

This essay is the result of some tentative investigations into the work of Frantz Fanon and his coming to prominence in the field of postcolonial studies. My primary interest is the persistence of religion and tradition in the struggle for self-determination under colonial and postcolonial conditions. Fanon is intriguing in that his work becomes appropriated by a wide range of groups, including radical nationalists, the anti-colonial pan-Africanist, and US-based civil rights activists, with their “oppositional rhetoric of black ‘mass’ vernacularism”.1 “Fanonism” appears at once to resonate with such material struggles, and at the same time it seems to fit quite comfortably within the discourse of postcolonial theory, largely resident within the western academy and far removed from the material conditions of the colonial periphery.2 The epistemic battle for the soul of Fanonism has as much to do with the politics of cultural studies, as it does with the complexities of the colonial condition.

His two definitive texts, Black Skin, White Masks and Wretched of the Earth, are to an extent an indication of the conceptual turns in the life of Fanon. In his article, “Remembering Fanon: Self, Psyche and the Colonial Condition”, Homi Bhabha suggests that the two texts can be articulated as respectively concerned with the politics of narcissism and the politics of nationalism3. Black Skin, White Mask, published in 1952, appearing well before Fanon had ever been to Algeria, addresses

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dysfunctions of oppression and a range of complex responses. These responses are largely derived
the impact of colonialism on the psyche of the native, and it also concerned with making sense of
the ambivalent material interest of the national bourgeois. *Wretched of the Earth* on the other hand,
published posthumously but containing work produced immediately prior to his death, concerns
itself with the project of decolonisation, looking beyond the Algerian struggle, to include the push
for national independence within the Third World more generally. It is noteworthy that in his
concluding remarks on the question of national solidarity and resistance to colonialism Fanon
reminds the reader of the necessity of the “new man” of *Black Skin, White Masks*. In translating
some of his earlier of personal transformation of the “new man” to he the development of a national
consciousness in *Wretched of the Earth* he argues that a total revision worldview is required when
he says: “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”4 Fanon understand the “new man” as
representing the transformation of the ways in which people position themselves in relation to the
Other. In *Black Skin White Mask* Fanon clarify the conception of the “new man” when he notes that
“man is not merely a possibility of recapture or of negation… Man is a *yes* that vibrates cosmic
harmonies”5 As such the new man thesis is not simply concerned with the liberation a singular
community or individual but with the complete transformation of social relations globally.

Fanon’s texts appear to straddle the anxieties raised by the attempts to integrate his detailed
investigation of individual and collective psyches. Whilst it is impossible to segregate these two
phenomenal texts from one another, I propose to focus on one of his essays included in *Wretched of
the Earth*, “On National Culture”6. With its urgent tone, this essay explicitly announces Fanon’s
reflections on the question of cultural tradition, and its place in the struggle for liberation. First

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4 Frantz Fanon (1968) *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington, New York: Grove, p.316
5 Frantz Fanon (1967) *Black Skin White Masks*, trans.Charles lam Markmann, New York, Grove, p.8
produced as a speech given to Presence Africaine’s Rome Conference during the Easter of 1959, “On National Culture” was expanded for inclusion in Wretched of the Earth thus locating it firmly within a broader narrative of postcolonial visions and parochial identities.

During recent years the term and idea of the “postcolonial” has been increasingly utilised within the academy to demarcate a field within which to articulate those concerns that seek to make sense of the complexity of the colonial condition and its aftermath. Postcolonialism is said to concern itself with the mutual imbrication of the coloniser and the colonised and that it investigates the ways in which narratives about colonialism makes Western man definitionally non-Eastern and hands him a self-image and a world-view which were basically responses to the needs of colonialism. As a point of clarification I wish to refer to the critical study, The Empire Writes Back, by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, in which they propose that we should read the postcolonial as a project of problematising or subverting conceptions of colonialism rather than simply as the period coming after colonialism. For the purposes of this paper I will particularly draw on the idea of postcolonialism as a field of enquiry into western ways of objectifying and domesticating its Other.

The location of this field of study, and many Third World scholars of postcolonialism within the western academy, has given rise to a fierce debate about the political legitimacy of the discourse because of its denouncement of historical specificity. Magdoff argues that by ignoring the material conditions of the “third world”, postcolonial critics only serve the interest of the global status quo and that it undermines moves that might generate new strategies of resistance “globalised capitalism and its centrifugal hierarchies”. In his introduction to Beyond Postcolonial Theory, Eric San Juan Jr reminds us that postcolonialism, as a set of investigations into new social and political configurations, tends “to obfuscate the power of transnational ideology and practice of

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7 Ali Rattansi, Postcolonialism and its discontents,
consumerism… (and that) postcolonial discourse generated in “First World” academies turns out to be one more product of flexible post-Fordist capitalism, not its antithesis.”\footnote{E San Juan Jr, (1998) Beyond Postcolonial Theory, New York: St Martin’s Press, p.8} Other recent critiques have included suggestions that the field of postcolonial theory can be said to be racialised. This critique emerged out of a perception that certain subaltern perspectives are privileged over others. It has been said that because of its location in the western academy, postcolonial studies are more inclined towards privileging the extraction of theory from particular regions of the formerly colonised world, especially South East Asia. The rapid development of postcolonial reflection in relation to settler colonies such as Australia and Canada was also met with suspicion because of the striking under-development of the field in relation to Africa. With the exception of Ranger and Webner’s Postcolonial Identities in Africa, notwithstanding notable African scholarship of Fanon, Soyinka, Achibe and other the early development of the canon of postcolonial studies disproportionately relied significantly on the South-East Asian context. This apparent marginalisation of Africa and the supposedly apolitical preoccupation of postcolonialism, both inhibit the development of postcolonial reflection in Africa, and it does not allow the African experience to more comprehensively inform the development of postcolonial theory.

Since these structures of knowledge production developed largely out of encounters at a range of colonial frontiers, it would seems that a comprehensive critique cannot proceed without the inclusion of a significant ‘referent’ of the imperial project, Africa. Monglia reminds us that postcolonialism is not simply concerned with the period of colonisation and its immediate aftermath but significantly about a comprehensive critique of western structures of knowledge and power. As Monglia observes, “Postcolonialism is an umbrella term that covers different critical approaches which deconstruct European thought about colonisation. In this perspective the term postcolonial
refers not to a simple periodisation but rather to a methodological revision which enables a wholesale critique of western structures of knowledge and power.”

Frantz Fanon, a champion of the anti-colonial struggle in Africa, and the colonised world more generally is drawn upon in the field of postcolonial studies as a theorist of Africa. Yet, we have to ask why the use of fanon has been so patently limited within the field of cultural studies, except for the relative excitement generated by Homi Bhabha inventing a one-sided Fanon limited in its ability to challenge hegemonic knowledge structures they relate to emancipatory discourses. Recent works in the field of Fanonism have begun to recognise the invention of a range of Fanons informed by narratives of “end of struggle”11. Elsewhere, in his “Fanon and the Pitfalls of Cultural Studies”, Nigel Gibson suggests that the new Fanon of postcoloniality is one which “emphasises uncertainty and fragmentation, almost replacing social analysis with psychoanalysis.”12 I do not intend to invent or reinvent Fanon but rather to more generally to focus on the work of Fanon in particular relationship to the production of the sacred, and to expose the lingering but unacknowledged residue of the sacred in the field of postcolonial studies. The sacred can be understood as moments of privileging that which is ordinarily stifled, and the ways in which the ordinary becomes elevated to powerfully and compelling icons of change, rather than the effect of the sacred. My interest is in the way Fanon, and postcolonial critics more generally articulate conception of the sacred in the postcolony as at once parochial and national. In his reflection of the sacred Veikko Anttonen suggests that “setting specific times and places apart as sacred is a fundamental structure of human cultures, without which no religion, nation-state or political ideology can insure the continuity of its power, hierarchy and authority.”13 I therefore want to do a close reading of Frantz Fanon’s essay,

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10 Padmini Mongia, Contemporary Postcolonial Theory, Arnold, 1996. P.2
“On National Culture” where he attempts to engage a conversation between the notion of nation, cultural tradition, and the persistence of the sacred among Algerian communities. What sets this texts apart is the inscription of the problematics of culture as it relates to the question of nation and national identity. Eric San Juan argues that “On National Culture” represents an attempt by Fanon where he propose ways to “reconfigure the value and function of tradition and all the properties of indigenous life forms in a Manichean environment.”

To demonstrate this set of rather complex relations in the colonial or postcolonial context, Achille Mbembe aptly illustrates the characteristics of the postcolony that obscure the production and persistence of the sacred.

“the notion of the ‘postcolony’ identifies specifically a given historical trajectory – that of societies recently emerging from the experience of colonization… the postcolony is chaotically pluralistic; it has nonetheless coherence. It is a specific system of signs, a particular way of fabricating simulacra or reforming stereotypes. It is not, however, an economy of signs in which power is mirrored or imagined self-reflectively.”

I hope to demonstrate the persistence of the sacred in Fanon’s work, even though it is not given explicit expression in his reflections on theories about individual or collective psyches. I hope to illustrate the ambivalent relationship Fanon maintained in relation to the sacred. Traditionally the sacred has been described as “a class of objects of belief, ritual and experience. The sacred is other than the ordinary and mundane… the sacred may in a manner be private and unique but they are bound up with dimensions of belief, behaviour, experience and social organisation that define a

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human, cultural phenomenon.”17 This understanding of the sacred, developed initially by Rudolph Otto in his *Idea of the Holy*, assumes that it is the ineffable character of the sacred that makes for religion. More recently Mircea Eliade argued that “sacred” be treated as a *sui generis* ontological category because he believed that “whatever the historical context in which (man) is placed… there is an absolute reality, the sacred, which transcends this world but manifests itself in this world, thereby sanctifying it and making it real”18 Departing from this ahistorical notion of the sacred, Emile Durkhein and Marcel Mauss suggest that the sacred be treated as a symbolic representation of collectivity, through which a social or political group may produce cognitive boundaries that set them apart from others. George Bataille noted that “that nature of the sacred, in which we recognise the burning existence of religion, is perhaps the most ungraspable thing that has been produced between men.”19 The relation between the manufactured nature of sacred and national liberation, as expressed through parochial tradition, caused Fanon a great degree of anxiety. He sought to make sense of the paradoxical relation of “the people” to religion, recognising that the relation was at once rooted and marked by acts of negation and resistance. The ambivalence of this relationship expressed through acts of resistance and negation means that religion can be an opiate but that it also possessed the characteristics that allowed people to draw on it as a analytical category and social resource.

Reflecting some of Fanon’s ambivalence with culture and tradition, the study of Fanon has recently seen a significant amount of attention dedicated to the ‘question of culture’. In his biography of Frantz Fanon, David Macey explores at length the ambivalent relationship between Fanon’s universalist struggle against oppression and the force of local Algerian Arabic interests concerned

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with revitalising national culture\textsuperscript{20}. Influenced by the Pan-Africanism of the negritude movement Leopold Senghor, Fanon did not speak of the re-introduction of indigenous culture and traditions. He appeared suspicious of such acts of recovery of the dignity and glory of past generation\textsuperscript{21}, seeing it as no different to the colonial approaches to local traditions. For Fanon the recovery of dignity and culture cannot be divorced from the struggle for liberation, because once this enlightenment has occurred the activist throws “himself body and soul into the national struggle… (and that) …there is no other fight for culture which can develop apart from the popular struggle.”\textsuperscript{22}

In his \textit{Theories of Africans: Francophone Literature and Anthropology in Africa}, Christopher Miller argues that “Fanon’s weakness is seen to consist not in an underestimation of the persistence of the “traditional” political practices and forms of thought in the colonial era, but in a contempt for tradition.”\textsuperscript{23} Similarly in his critique of Fanon’s humanism Richard Onuwbike suggests in the development of his “revolutionary humanism” and the emergence of the new man that Fanon was positively dismissive of indigenous religion and traditions.\textsuperscript{24} This general lack of attention to the “sacred” in both Fanon’s work and postcolonial studies more generally has significantly inhibited more comprehensive theory making about native agency.

Without labouring the point, I simply wish to clarify that this supposed silencing of the sacred is not peculiar to Fanon but characteristic of the field of postcolonial studies in general. I find it perhaps more ironic than surprising that such acts of silencing continue to plague even this radically self-reflective field. Early notions of religion as a belief in supernatural beings continue to haunt the discipline, more recent conceptions of religion seek to define it as “a system of beliefs and practices

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{20} David Macey (2000) \textit{Frantz Fanon: A Life} London: Granta Books, p484
\item \textsuperscript{21} Halford H Fairchild (1994) “Fanon’s Wretched of the Earth in Contemporary Perspective” \textit{Journal of Black Studies} Vol. 25: 2, p.195
\item \textsuperscript{22} Frantz Fanon (1968) \textit{The Wretched of the Earth}, trans. Constance Farrington, New York: Grove, p.232-233
\item \textsuperscript{23} Christopher Miller (1990) \textit{Theories of Africans: Francophone Literature and Anthropology in Africa}, Chicago: Chicago University Press, p. 64
\item \textsuperscript{24} Richard Onwuanibe (1983) \textit{A Critique of Revolutionary Humanism: Frantz Fanon} St Louis: Warren H Green Inc. p.116
\end{itemize}
by means of which a group of people struggle with these ultimate problems of human life.”

Recognising the tension between religion as personal belief and religion as social category, for the purpose of this essay a durkheimian definition of religion as “a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things…” In his treatment of the relationship between the development of the study of religion and the socio-political discourses, Russell McCutcheon, in *Manufacturing Religion* explores the imperial dynamic in the history of religion. He suggests that the development of the relationship between the study of religion and the imperial condition is mediated through “rhetorical and ideological strategies to control the production of knowledge through the representation of people and events.” Similarly Chidester’s *Savage Systems* explores the ways in which religion is denied, discovered and produced in the colonial context as part of a process of knowledge production as it relates to the humanity of indigenous communities. Chidester illustrates the extent to which the denial of religion among indigenous colonised communities and the emerging representation of the Other, expose the struggle for the mechanisms of knowledge production in which the native is an ‘active’ agent. In exploring a range of representations, Chidester’s description the history of religion in Southern Africa exposes the range of strategies and interests that inform the struggle over the terms of what constitutes humanness. He describe the struggle as developed out of “a history of denial, and discovery, of displacement and containment, of global mediation and local negotiations, it is not only an enlightenment product but was expanded, thought out, worked out, fought out in local colonial situations and global imperial relations.”

It is the persistence of the sacred in the (post)colonial context, whether settler or indigenous that require attention. More particularly, I am concerned with the new configurations through which the

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problem of the sacred becomes expressed in the postcolonial situation. Located in a political context where tradition is largely described and organised around ethnicity, Fanon seeks to develop a totalising humanism, calling for the “liquidation of regionalism and of tribalism”…suggesting that such… ‘liquidation is the preliminary for the unification of the people’. In his aggressive critique of Fanon, Miller introduces a definition of ethnicity 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”. Thus Miller considers Fanon’s imposition of the “nation” on African traditions as an act of epistemic violence. For Fanon human life must be seen as isolated, as having dignity and value without reference to the transcendent or supernatural, thus extending humanist values to all. It is precisely this revolutionary humanism that lies at the heart of Fanon’s conception of the transformed and not alienated “new man”.

“No to the butchery of what is most human to man: freedom… To educate man is to be actional, preserving in all his relation his respect for the basic values that constitute a human world, it is the prime task of him who, haven taken thought, prepares to act”

Onwuanibe reminds us that the emergence of Fanon’s new man does in fact have a slightly longer and rather eclectic history. He reminds us of the ‘new man’ of the Christian tradition articulated in terms of the redemptive grace of Christ, and he points to the Marxist vision of ‘new man’ as a condition of redemption from the alienation brought about by capitalist exploitation, concluding: “Fanon’s vision of the new man shares in this powerfully messianic vision”.

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29 Frantz Fanon (1968) *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington, New York: Grove, p.94
Fanon’s conception of alienation refers to the processes whereby acts of oppression create conditions that divorce the subject from her humanness. It is in inhabiting the mundane that Fanon’s treatment of the question of sacred can be distilled. Fanon consider every act of domination as contributing to the development of a colonised mind, pacified through multiple strategies including force, which “produces as its residue a debilitating self-doubt”.33 Fanon views alienation as intrinsic to the colonial condition, primarily defined as loss of self, desire, rootedness, beliefs and values. Drawing on Hegel and Marx he develops and understanding of alienation or rupture as occurring both at the level of spirit, as well as at the level of socio-political condition. Religion, therefore, is viewed as exacerbating this condition of alienation. Throughout Wretched of the Earth one is struck by the intimate relationship between the psychiatric institution and the social world of colonialism.

Alienation occurs essentially as simultaneously spiritual and material exploitation. In Black Skin Whites Mask Fanon argues that the native is over-determined by myth and representations largely derived from the contemporary European imagination.34 He suggests that this alienation is reversed through a pro-active acceptance of the self. Drawing on George Sorel’s helpful conception of myth as ‘not descriptions of things, but expressions of a determination to act’ Robyn Dane suggests that it is at this character of myth that “offers a respite where sanity and a sense of the inviolable sacred can be rejuvenated.”35 While some scholars have argued that myth must be understood as the theoretical expression of the religious experience, it is essentially a medium through which sentiments of the sacred are expressed and made public, such as we are reminded by Jonathan Z, Smith “there is no primordium… it is all history.”36

On cultural imposition, Fanon develops his thesis largely in terms of language, devoting the opening chapter in Black Skin White Mask to it, and its impact on native articulations of self-understanding and definition. He concludes that language serves as the primary marker of tradition,

34 Frantz Fanon (1967) Black Skin White Masks, trans.Charles Lam Markmann, New York, Grove, p.116
35 Robyn Dane (1994) “when Mirrors Turns Lamp: Frantz Fanon as Cultural Visionary” Africa Today Vol.41: 2, p.77
which incidentally must here to be understood as referring to practices of transfer. To assume an interchange-ability between tradition and traditional would be limited, because the term traditional is concerned primarily with positioning particular practices in the broader socio-political context and giving them meaning. These terms have often been used to denote appeals to essentialist continuities, transmitting imagined representations into the present. Notions of traditionality have been used both to legitimate and contest socio-legal categorisation, they invariably appeal to static and monadic representations of the past to legitimate their particular types of visions for the future. Fanon’s emphasis on language does still raise critical questions as to the range of other markers of tradition (not traditionality) that need to be considered, in the process of overcoming alienation. Houston Smith reminds us that the term traditional historically referred to “an entire category of people whose behaviour and thinking are portrayed negatively… seen as conservative, backward and pre-literate,… It is therefore important to realize that when practices are termed ‘traditional’ this is never simply a statement of objective fact.”

On economic exploitation he simply describes the dialectic of opposition in terms of class exposing his arguably underdeveloped critique of Marxist analysis. In his revision of Marx, Fanon writes in *Wretched of the Earth* that “In the colonies the economic substructure is also a superstructure… Everything up to and including the very nature of pre-capitalist society, so well explored by Marx, must here be thought out again” Whilst class in this context of the colonies must be considered a legitimate category, an over-reliance on class-analysis does appear to dismiss the nuances of the exchanges between the native and the colonist at the colonial frontier. Fanon’s overriding anxiety was that the peasantry through lack of participation in the struggle for liberation would remain a

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39 Frantz Fanon (1968) *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington, New York: Grove, p.31
passive class. To Fanon the black problem can only be understood and solved as a facet of the human problem, exposing his understanding of native societies as understandable only in terms of class disparity, envisioning liberation as a classless national culture.

The unresolved intersection of class and race in Fanon’s work is in part reflected by the unsurprising turn in the very last lines of Onwuanibe’s *Critique of Revolutionary Humanism*: Frantz Fanon which he devotes to raising questions about the reluctance of Fanon to attend to material conditions and indigenous values in Africa. One is able to sense in these few lines at the end of this text, Onwuanibe tentatively appeal for a serious treatment of the native traditions. In his repudiation of indigenous cultural tradition, Fanon might be interpreted as at once an Orientalist and revolutionary. Orientalist, insofar as he dismissive of local tradition but is equally able to propose the reinvention of national culture in the interest of the struggle for liberation. Neil Lazarus draws our attention to the fact that is “On National Culture”, Fanon recognises the registers of various precolonial cultural practices when he refer to the “wonderful Songhai civilisation” but also that he saw such pre-colonial registers as a primitive stage that needed to be transcended because “today the Songhais are underfed and illiterate, thrown between sky and water with empty heads and empty eyes”. Onwuanibe call for a recognition of the persistence of traditions and the sacred is not so much an ethno-centric appeal for originary authority, as it is an observation as to the resilience of the indigenous in the face of homogenising nationalist projects, whether of the European modernist, or pan-africanist variety. It is in “On National Culture” that the theme of cultural metamorphosis is refined, and we come up against the extent to which Fanon’s thoughts replicate the “West’s civilising mission” insofar as his passion for a transformed world led him to set aside parochial

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43 ibid. p.210
interests. Homi Bhabha, expresses similar sentiments but reduces this to being largely a result of the nationalitarian character of Fanon’s discourse but he acknowledges that this nonetheless render Fanon, both historicist and representationalist. In her essay *Chains of Madness, Chains of Colonialism* Francoise Verges argue that Fanon uncritically believed in the reconstitution of the “social and cultural organisation of Muslim society.” This refashioning of the native is exactly what Gayatri Spivak calls for when she warns the postcolonial theorist to “watch out for the continuing construction of the subaltern” by cautioning theorist to note that representations of the native inhabit not only the texts of empire, but also narratives of nationalism.

Frantz Fanon, the sacred cow of African nationalism, being termed an Orientalist require more explanation and whilst the above section begins to address some of the issues I wish to briefly return to Edward Said’s definition of Orientalism. Among other conceptions of orientalism Said argues that every time we speak of the native in a manner that dismisses the interest of the subject, we are engaged in acts of Othering or Orientalising. Sometimes referred to as “a style in which such tropes are conceived and presented… something deeper than surface rhetoric or convention – invoking more, perhaps, questions of political positionality and moral attitude.” We may wish to therefore consider Fanon, an orientalist because he too frequently appear to speak about the native condition, through inventing and re-inventing Africa that is divorced from the material reality, except in the interest of the nationalist struggle.

The Sacred and Representation

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But what of the persistence of the sacred in postcolonial contexts. Frantz Fanon in “On National Culture” reminds us that “colonialism has not ceased to maintain the Negro as savage”⁵⁰ as if to focus our attention on European representations of the native but then he himself closely follows this statement with references to local traditions with associated characteristics such as superstition, and fanaticism in frenzied ritual, denoting conceptions of indigenous as primitive and non-rational. In seeking to articulate his conception of cultural alienation in *Black Skin White Masks* Fanon writes that the “Negro’s behaviour makes him akin to an obsessive neurotic type”.⁵¹ In “On National Culture” he distances himself from such essentialist notion by couching his argument in terms of European ‘parentism’. He reminds his reader that “the effect consciously sought by colonialism was to drive into the native’s head the idea that if the settlers were to leave, they would at once fall back into barbarism, degradation and bestiality.”⁵² He argues that European representations are developed out of a conception of humanness that equates being human with having rational religion. Thus the native, lacking religion, are more base and animal-like, which is quite the opposite of the vision of the new man.

Whilst he recognises the role of religion in the production of representations of the native, Fanon remains dismissive of local knowledge forms, leaving it no room to consciously inform the nationalist project. In “On National Culture” Fanon develops an elaborate attempt to reconfigures the sacred in his production of a nationalist narrative. He critically revises any attempt to indulge in the development of native traditions when he suggest that:

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⁵¹ Frantz Fanon (1967) *Black Skin White Masks*, trans.Charles lam Markmann, New York, Grove, p.60
“At the very moment the native intellectual is anxiously trying to create a cultural work, he fails to realise that he is utilizing techniques and languages that are borrowed from the stranger in the country.”

This argument allows Fanon to at once dismiss any project concerned with native culture and the production of the sacred, and he is able to suggest that such strategies detract from the struggle for national liberation and pan African solidarity. These acts of production, subversion, and resistance are primarily contest over the means and mechanism of representation of the Other, whether oriental, native or domestic. A broad definition of representation is offered by Griselda Pollock and Rizsika Parker in *Framing Feminism* which makes this point, when they suggest that “representations” secure its meaning from the relationships between a single image and its total cultural environment of images and social belief systems. Such productions acquire power when particular connotations prevail as preferred meaning which form the dominant order of sense, a regime of truth for a particular culture or social group. Finally Pollock and parker suggest that representations are “notions of images whose meanings derive from conscious intentions of their maker give way to an understanding of the social and ideological networks within which meanings are socially produced and secured.”

The relationship between Fanon transformation and subject agency is in echoed by Maud Eduards’ conception of agency as a “transformative and transcending capacity.” Arguing that by nature all human being have agency, Eduards focus on the ability to initiate change and to commit to a certain set of action regardless of circumstances. She goes on to suggest that people are in most cases

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53 ibid. p.
inclined to utilise this capacity to influence their circumstance rather than be the passive recipients of another’s will and interest. Fanon seem not to accept that whilst within a particular social hierarchy people are differently resourced in terms of the kind of agency they are able to generate, they nonetheless devise acts agency and self-determination within wider social relations. This tensions is illustrated by Sherry Ortner suggestion that agency is concerned with “the mediation between conscious motives and unexpected outcomes, between historically marked individuals and events on the one hand, and cumulative reproduction and transformations that are a result of everyday practices on the other.”

For Fanon it is only in the ‘armed struggle’ that the native find integration from the alienation of the Self, introduced by colonialism. The political reality is seen to be the ‘first truth’ of the nation and thus the artist, performer and the poet must give voice to the people’s revolution, evident from Fanon’s belief that “It is not enough to try and free oneself by repeating proclamations and denials”

He then moves quickly from such calls to armed struggle to a more apocalyptic call for turn to the highly charged “zone of occult/ value instability”, revealing an apparent recognition the evocative potential of mobalizing the nation around parochial values – the production of he sacred. Fanon battles to integrate various aspects of the local material reality with his universal humanism thus in seeking to respond to the persistence of local traditions he suggests that “to fight for national culture… is to fight for the liberation of the nation.” He later argues that to seek cultural coherence from delving into the past in order to expose the false representations produced by colonialism is a futile exercise unless directly related to the national armed struggle. Fanon views the discourse on national cultural produced by colonialism and indigenous appeals to a glorious past as the primary threats to liberation. He argues that through the interventions of native intellectuals,

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56 Sherry Ortner (2001) “Specifying Agency” Interventions 3.1, p.77
58 ibid, p.43
59 ibid, p.43
a reinvented national culture may become an organising category in the interest of the struggle for liberation. He suggests that “when a people undertake an armed struggle or even a political struggle against a relentless colonialism, the significance of tradition changes.” The intellectual’s participation in the nationalist project according to Fanon will simultaneously reduce the potential for being seduced by power because in his view “the desire to attach oneself to tradition or bring abandoned tradition to life does not only mean going against the current of history but also opposing one’s own people.” For Fanon, this proposed revision of national culture offers the only possible relationship between indigenous culture and the nationalist struggle against alienation.

One such critical term comes in his proposal for the transformation of the term “savage”. He is acutely conscious of the prevailing representation of the native as savagely illiterate and violent, and he is determined to assert the humanness of the native. His proposal follows the movement of the native from an uncritical location in the colonial system, towards a reclaiming of culture with self-determined integrity and finally participation in the struggle for liberation. The paradoxical nature of the term is illustrated by references to the savage as primitive and pre-logical mentality as proposed by Bernard de Fontenelle (1657-1757), and yet at the same time others such as Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803) regarded the savage state as more spontaneous and alive. The aggressive proliferation of evolutionary theories during the nineteenth century uncritically reinforced the representation of the natives as savage. In her treatment of early anthropology Margaret Hodgen reminds us of the conceptions of African as “rude and beastlie” and certainly “more brutish than the beast they hunt”, that Fanon was seeking to invert. Fanon knew that current knowledge forms were captive to certain representation such as the conviction expressed by J C Prichard, that the savage races cannot be saved, and that the primary objective of engagement with

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60 ibid, p.42
61 ibid, p.42
62 Margaret T Hodgen (1964) *Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* Philadelphia: p.410
the native must be a concern with their physical and moral characteristics.\textsuperscript{63} In \textit{Savage Childhood}, Dudley Kidd says of the native that other than being uneducated, aggressively self-assertive, vain and indolent, a more primordial characteristic cause the native to be ‘sociable and unreflective that it never occurs to him that he might possibly be an unpleasant object to any other human being.’\textsuperscript{64} Understanding the brutality validated by such fixed representations, Frantz Fanon remarks that “The fact that in the colonized country the most elementary, most \textit{savage}, and the most undifferentiated nationalism is the most fervent and efficient means of defending the national culture” \textsuperscript{65} Fanon appear to have understood this paradox because he recognised that the revision the nations preferences, taboos and values are simultaneously the informed by the struggle for national liberation and the renaissance of the state.

Elsewhere in his essay “\textit{On National Culture}” Fanon makes reference to the development of pottery and cultural artefacts as possibly being produced as savagely in style, such that savage behaviour come to denote progressive acts of resistance to oppression. Fanon reinvents markers of difference as ways of manufacturing a sacred character that inhabits the nationalist project without conceding to conservative demands for indigenism. Thus the sacred is produced as the mobalisation of individual subjectivities through themes of collectivity. This highlights is not only the religious character of the nationalist project but draws attention to the persistence of sacred markers. The varying degrees of connectedness of such sacred markers to local conditions are what produce the desired material and political consequences. Religion understood as those elements of human aspiration that in an immediate fashion, motivates and focuses our attention on imagined landscapes that transcend material conditions is part of those forces that bring national liberation and integration. This conception of the sacred demonstrate a continuity between ritual and material

\textsuperscript{63} JC Prichard (1839) “On the Extinction of Human Races” in \textit{Edinburgh New Philosophical Journal} vol.28, p.166-170
\textsuperscript{64} Dudley Kidd (1906) \textit{Savage Childhood} London: Adam and Charles Black, p.5
reality, producing a critique of those very socio-political conditions without reducing it to emotional and material forces, and thus avoid equating religion with the institutions, or faith in general.

Religion can then be understood as “a set of symbols which act to establish a powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motives in men, by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence, and clothing these conceptions with an aura of factuality, that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.”66 In a postcolonial context traditional conceptions of the sacred has become problematic because while social institutions remain important, it is a material world of commodities, objects and bodies prevail. This offers new conceptions of subject agency, and finally the production of representations that define, mediate and produce a multiplicity of social relations.

Finally, for Fanon the poet, artist performer can be seen as the ritual specialists of the nation because they produce word, image and performance; text, icon, and ritual through which imagined collectivities are articulated67. Talal Asad suggest that the manufacturing of the sacred is a prerequisite of the secular nationalism.68 Nationalism has been said to be a form of religion by virtue of its potential to organise individual subjectivities I hoped in part to expose the residue of the sacred contained in Fanon’s development of nationalism and ultimately, pan-africanism.

Religion, in its various permeations, present or absent has historically been an integrated part of the production of representation of natives peoples, whether organised around colonist religious traditions, or indigenous traditions. This account for the persistence of the sacred in the development of postcolonial identities has unintentionally, and even with resistance been demonstrated by Mahmood Mamdani in his recent works on the bifurcated state.

66 Geertz (1966)…… p.4
In his reflections on rule in the colonial context, Mamdani seek to investigate three crucial questions about the nature of rule in the colonies. First, he asks whether the structures of power in Africa are inherited from colonial authorities. Second, he reflects upon the role of local ethnic power, whether expressed in term of compliance or in terms of resistance. Finally, he asks why African states failed to transcend internal parochial difference in a post independence period.\(^6\) Like Fanon, he find that it is necessary to take full account the parochial agency in the production of that which is sacred, even in the postcolonial state.\(^7\) These questions are critical, in that it ask questions about the ways in which we theorise about Africa, and allude to the institutionalised relations of power that continue to reside in post-(after)-colonial societies, and perhaps more importantly, the residue of the sacred in postcolonial Africa. The tension between consolidating political development concerned with the end of colonial rule, and the recognition of indigenous traditions are mirrored in the unresolved tensions in Fanon reflections on the Algerian national question. The persistence of the sacred have been obscured by the nationalist anxiety that a treatment of the indigenous cause the exoticizing of Africa or by representing religion as part of European colonial history, and thus dismissing African agency.

A postcolonial emphasis on plural subjects that does not reinvent the sacred but produce the traces, residues, sentiments and sediments of the sacred to open possibilities of de-centred forms of civil participation, based on a democracy of fractured identities.\(^7\) It acknowledges the persistence of the sacred in the context within which new forms and strategies of inclusion and exclusion will emerge to characterise the social and political landscape. Fanon’s anxieties reveal that the binaries of citizen and subject will continue to be a dominant force in a postcolonial context, where subject interest will constantly seek to assert itself. The relations of power and formations of resistance require a critique of generic inventories of representations in the postcolony, where traces of the


\(^7\) Mahmood Mamdani (2001) *When Victims Becomes Killers* Cape Town: David Phillip Publishers (Pty) Ltd., p.8

sacred persist and are constantly reproduced. Whilst not articulated as religion, the Fanon’s nationalism acquired sacred character, some residue of the sacred is produced in the collective imagination that compels actions to alter material conditions. National culture, informed by parochial interests is persistently used by the postcolonial state to motivate and compel citizens, on occasion where the secular nationalist discourse fails. Notwithstanding the supposed scarcity of the sacred in Fanon, and postcolonial theory in general, the persistence of the sacred in the postcolonial context offer resources that explain the proliferation of indigenous collectivities or local struggles, and a revision of the way we speak about and theorise Africa.

“My final prayer: make me always a man who asks questions”

Inscription, Frantz Fanon Memorial at Fort-de-France