

Figure 6.4 Hijab as fashion

other places women may not have the choice whether or not to make this statement. In such places a very different identity politics emerges, where the territory of women's bodies is subject to different forces. One possible clear outcome of the French example is that those who want their daughters to continue to remain veiled (and who can afford to) will send them to special Muslim schools, hence reinforcing divisions between communities in the future, and more clearly still inscribing territories of belonging and exclusion.

Discussing her return from Iran, Iranian-American Azadeh Moaveni, hints at the complex meaning of the veil:

Today, in a quiet room in a country not far from Iran in space, I am finally unpacking the boxes from those two years in Tehran. As I sort through the clothes, peeling veil from veil, it is like tracing the rings of a tree trunk to tell its evolution. The outer layers are a wash of color, dashing tones of turquoise and frothy pink, in delicate chiffrons and translucent silks. They are colors that are found in life – the color of pomegranates and pistachio, the sky and bright spring leaves – in fabrics that breathe. Underneath, as I dig down, there are dark, matte veils, long, formless robes

in funeral tones of slate and black. That is what we wore, back in 1998. Along the way, the laws never changed. Parliament never officially pardoned color, sanctioned the exposure of toes and waistlines. Young women did it themselves, en masse, a slow, deliberate, widespread act of defiance. A jihad, in the classical sense of the word: a struggle. (Azadeh Moaveni (2005), *Liptick Jihad: A Memoir of Growing up Iranian in America and American in Iran*, p. ix)

HYBRIDITY

Hybridity is the name of this displacement of value ... that causes the dominant discourse to split along the axis of its power to be representative, authoritative. (Bhabha, 1994: 113)

Rather than directly opposing colonial or dominant discourses, some post-colonial theorists such as Homi Bhabha redefine postcolonial positively as uncertainty, ambivalence, hybridity, a third space and the space of multiple cultural borders. Rather than basing truth on authenticity, it valorises impurity and mixing.

This presents a profound challenge to the geography of Orientalism. Whereas, as we have seen, modern western thought is structured around a series of binaries which suggest that a person is one thing or the other (black or white, Oriental or Occidental, deviant or normal, and so on), postcolonial hybridity looks to the grey areas, arguing that there is no neat inside/outside division. The colonised are like colonisers in some ways (culture, education, language, and so on) but are also different (colour, origin). The very existence of this mixing – the mark of the self in the other – challenges the existence of binaries. Thus, the binary logic of Orientalism *cannot work* with the existence of such ambiguity: the very existence of the hybrid highlights the binaries as fantasy. Bhabha argues that the discovery of hybridity offers the emergence of resistance to colonialism, which ultimately in turn heralds the end of colonialism because it has not been possible to keep Occidentalism pure and separate from Orientalism.

Bhabha argues this by moving from the texts of colonialism (maps, manuals, official records and literature) to consider the actual practices of colonialism which, unlike these texts, were messy, incomplete and sometimes incompetent. The daily reality of colonial practice ensured that the purity of colonial ideas could not exist in actuality. And we might add as geographers that the differentiated landscapes upon which colonialism was practised would also ensure that reality would not be the same as theory – for instance, particular physical landscapes would offer different challenges to the projects of building colonial settlements or plantations, different cultural practices would respond differently to colonial rules and regulations and so on.

For Bhabha then, the very enactment of colonialism heralded its end. Rather than seeing impurity/mixing as bad (as colonial administrators did) or as a loss (as in the salvage paradigm), Bhabha celebrates the hybrid as the figure of post-colonialism. For Bhabha, the hybrid offers a resistant politics that does not simply redraw boundaries (as Said could be accused of doing by accepting the division between the Occident and Orient) but subverts them altogether.

For many theorists, hybridity has come to represent the icon of postcolonialism. As something which celebrates ambivalence and impurity, it offers a profound challenge to the colonial logic which attempted to catalogue and know the world. This has led some to fear that hybridity was being uncritically celebrated. Katharyne Mitchell (1997) calls this the 'hype of hybridity'. She argues that the privileging of hybridity celebrates everything that is impure because it sees essences and authenticity as bad as they lead to boundaries, binaries, hierarchies and exclusions. However, she also argues that the powerful can hybridise as well. She uses the example of international capitalism, which very effectively exploits mixtures and new forms (of identity, culture, food, music, fashion ...) in its constant bid for new products and thus more profit. Furthermore, Mitchell suggests that not all bids for purity or authenticity are bad. As we have seen already, essentialisms can be politically useful – ambivalence can seem like a weaker form of political action than outright opposition. Indeed some would argue that the politics of hybridity (such as mimicry) are somewhat trivial when compared to political marches, demonstrations, and the other embodied consequences of outright opposition which was seen over and over again in opposition to colonial administrations.

Mitchell's conclusion is that there is no *inherent* value to either hybridity or essential identity, and that we must judge each case based on the issues involved (and our own interpretation of the events). Others, however, have argued more powerfully about the negative effects of colonial hybridity, seeing this as a condition of trauma rather than something to be celebrated.

FANON AND THE VIOLENCE OF POSTCOLONIALISM

Some forms of postcolonialism have suggested that a more direct form of intervention is required for change, and one prominent theorist, Frantz Fanon, has even called for the necessity of violence. Violence is a very difficult issue to discuss as, by its very nature, it is destructive and divisive. Some postcolonial theorists and political figures insist that there is never a place for violence, while others have suggested that there are occasions when people are otherwise so powerless that this is the only door left open to them, their acts of violence being the only 'voice' they have that will be heard by those in control (think about the current debates around suicide bombers in the Middle East).

Fanon had a very different interpretation of the colonial world than Bhabha, although he too recognised the blurring of boundaries between coloniser and colonised. For Fanon, though, hybridity was a very destructive thing which had to be resisted head on.

In his 1963 book, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon argued that the 'colonial world is a Manichean world', a world of black and white alone, wherein colonial knowledge sought to completely separate black from white. Within this binary, Fanon argued that two elements of colonialism were in tension:

- 1 Through colonial rule and education, the colonised were constantly told of the superiority of colonisers' values and that these should be aspired to and copied.
- 2 However, at the same time there was the existence of what Fanon called 'the fact of blackness', in other words, the manner in which a colonised person can most immediately be identified is by the colour (or other features) of their skin. This 'fact of blackness' was a marker of inferiority which was inescapable.

For Fanon then, colonial authority worked by inviting black subjects to mimic white culture, an argument he developed in his book *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967). But for the colonised, the first point – the copying of colonisers' values – can never be totally successful, and it is this which maintains the superiority of the colonisers. Loomba explains this argument as follows: 'Indians can mimic but never exactly reproduce English values ... their recognition of the perpetual gap between themselves and the "real thing" will ensure their subjection' (Loomba, 1998: 173).

The colonised will then be trapped between the 'fact' of their racial difference, and their aspirations to the colonisers' culture which has been held up as the model for civilisation and development. They will always remain mixtures or hybrids. However, rather than celebrating this ambivalent position as other postcolonial thinkers like Bhabha do, Fanon sees it as a traumatic condition. We can best realise how Fanon came to this conclusion by looking at his own life.

Fanon was born in Martinique and was initially the model colonised subject. He volunteered for military service in the Second World War and afterwards returned to France to train as a doctor. However, when he subsequently went to Algeria to work for the French, he resigned because of the brutality of the colonial regime. Through his work as a medic he was exposed to the psychological impacts of colonialism that had resulted in a range of mental health problems in his patients. Because of this, he joined the Algerian resistance and wrote his treatises against colonialism.

Fanon argued that psychic trauma occurred when the colonised subject realised that he (and it was always 'he', something we will return to shortly) would never be able to attain the whiteness he had been taught to desire, or shed the blackness he had learnt to devalue. His conclusions were stark: 'At the risk of arousing the resentment of my coloured brothers', he argued in

Black Skin, White Masks, 'I will say that the black man is not a man'. This was due to the impacts of the colonial system:

Because it is a systematic negation of the other person and a furious determination to deny the other person all attributes of humanity, colonialism forces the people it dominates to ask themselves the question constantly: 'In reality, who am I?' (Fanon, 1963: 250)

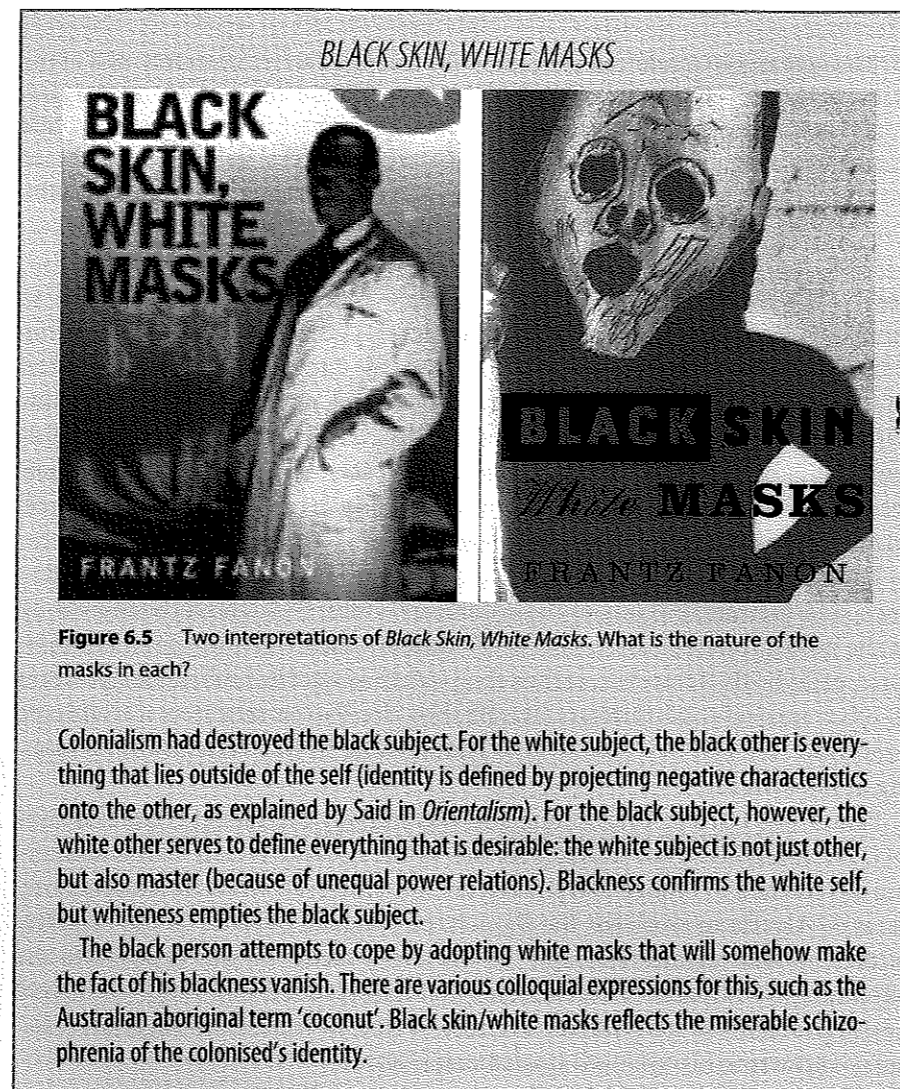


Figure 6.5 Two interpretations of *Black Skin, White Masks*. What is the nature of the masks in each?

Colonialism had destroyed the black subject. For the white subject, the black other is everything that lies outside of the self (identity is defined by projecting negative characteristics onto the other, as explained by Said in *Orientalism*). For the black subject, however, the white other serves to define everything that is desirable: the white subject is not just other, but also master (because of unequal power relations). Blackness confirms the white self, but whiteness empties the black subject.

The black person attempts to cope by adopting white masks that will somehow make the fact of his blackness vanish. There are various colloquial expressions for this, such as the Australian aboriginal term 'coconut'. *Black skin/white masks* reflects the miserable schizophrenia of the colonised's identity.

Fanon produced an analysis of the psychological problems facing black men and women in a white world. The condition he identified was self-division or alienation from the self. He presented a number of case notes recording

'colonial war and mental disorders' (1963). One diagnosed a man's sexual impotence as being the trauma caused by the rape of his wife by colonising soldiers (see the box below). As a response to these traumas, Fanon argued that the colonised need 'nothing short of the liberation of the man of colour from himself'.

FANON AND THE TRAUMA OF COLONIALISM

In the chapter 'Colonial war and mental disorders', in *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon provides information on a number of cases he examined between 1954 and 1959 in Algerian hospitals. Most involve Algerians, but Fanon also considers the impact of the war on French individuals as well.

Consider the case below which describes man B—'s trauma, and his ability to narrate his story after receiving therapy. Think about the ways in which the war had become internalised by this individual through his own actions, and actions done to his wife, but also think critically about how Fanon is telling the story. Why is the story about the man? What role does the wife play in this story? What about the trauma she suffered?

Case No. 1: Impotence in an Algerian following the rape of his wife

B— is a man twenty-six years old. He came to see us on the advice of the Health Service of the FLN [*Front de Libération Nationale*] for treatment of insomnia and persistent headaches. A former taxi-driver, he had worked in the nationalist parties since he was eighteen. Since 1955 he had been a member of a branch of the FLN. He had several times used his taxi for the transport of political pamphlets and also political personnel. [...]

One day however, in the middle of the European part of the town, after fairly considerable fighting a very large number of arrests forced him to abandon his taxi, and the commando unit broke up and scattered. B—, who managed to escape through the enemy lines, took refuge at a friend's house. Some days later, without having been able to get back to his home, on the orders of his superiors he joined the nearest band of Maquis [resisters].

For several months he was without news of his wife and his little girl of a year and eight months. On the other hand he learned that the police spent several weeks on end searching the town. After two years spent in the Maquis he received a message from his wife in which she asked him to forget her, for she had been dishonored and he ought not to think of taking up their life together again. He was extremely anxious and asked his commander's leave to go home secretly. This was refused him, but on the other hand measures were taken for a member of the FLN to make contact with B—'s wife and parents.

Two weeks later a detailed report reached the commander of B—'s unit.

His abandoned taxi had been discovered with two machine-gun magazines in it. Immediately afterward French soldiers accompanied by policemen went to his house. Finding he was absent, they took his wife away and kept her for over a week.

(Cont'd)

She was questioned about the company her husband kept and beaten fairly brutally for two days. But the third day a French soldier (she was not able to say whether he was an officer) made the others leave the room and then raped her. Some time later a second soldier, this time with others present, raped her, saying to her, 'If ever you see your filthy husband again don't forget to tell him what we did to you.' [...] When she told her story to her mother, the latter persuaded her to tell B— everything. Thus as soon as contact was re-established with her husband, she confessed her dishonor to him. Once the first shock had passed, and since moreover every minute of his working time was filled with activity, B— was able to overcome his feelings. [...]

In 1958 he was entrusted with a mission abroad. When it was time to rejoin his unit, certain fits of absence of mind and sleeplessness made his comrades and superiors anxious about him. His departure was postponed and it was decided he should have a medical examination. This was when we saw him. He seemed at once easy to get to know; a mobile face; perhaps a bit too mobile. Smiles slightly exaggerated; surface well-being: 'I'm really very well, very well indeed. I'm feeling better now. Give me a tonic or two, a few vitamins, and I'll build myself up a bit.' A basic anxiety came up to break the surface. He was at once sent to the hospital. [...] at the end of several days we were able to reconstruct his story.

During his stay abroad, he tried to carry through a sexual affair which was unsuccessful. Thinking that this was due to fatigue, a normal result of forced marches and periods of undernourishment, he again tried two weeks later. Fresh failure. Talked about it to a friend who advised him to try vitamin B-12. Took this in form of pills; another attempt, another failure. [...]

[H]e spoke to us for the first time about his wife, laughing and saying to us: 'She's tasted the French.' It was at that moment that we reconstructed the whole story. The weaving of events to form a pattern was made explicit. He told us that before every sexual attempt, he thought of his wife. [...]

'In the Maquis, when I heard that she'd been raped by the French, I first of all felt angry with the swine. Then I said, "Oh, well, there's not much harm done; she wasn't killed. She can start her life over again." And then a few weeks later I came to realise that they'd raped her *because they were looking for me*. In fact, it was to punish her for keeping silence that she'd been violated. She could have very well told them at least the name of one of the chaps in the movement, and from that they could have searched out the whole network, destroyed it, and maybe even arrested me. That wasn't a simple rape, for want of something better to do, or for sadistic reasons like I've had occasion to see in the villages; it was the rape of an obstinate woman, who was ready to put up with everything rather than sell her husband. And the husband in question, *it was me*. This woman had saved my life and had protected the organization. It was because of me that she had been dishonored. And yet she didn't say to me: "Look at all I've had to bear for you." On the contrary, she said: "Forget about me; begin your life over again, for I have been dishonored." [...]

'So I decided to take her back; but I didn't know at all how I'd behave when I saw her. And often, when I was looking at the photo of my daughter, I used to think that she too was dishonored, like as if everything that had to do with my wife was rotten. If they'd tortured her or knocked out all her teeth or broken an arm I wouldn't have minded. But that thing — how can you forget a thing like that? And why did she have to tell me about it all?'

Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, (1963) pp. 254–58

Fanon reversed the ideas of the colonisers. Rather than seeing colonialism as the *result* of the failings of the other (namely, European colonialism was needed as the others were not able to rule themselves), Fanon insisted we now saw it as the *cause* of the mental defects of the other. For Fanon, it was colonialism that was regarded as psychopathological and violent, not the colonised. Thus, the negative character traits that were associated with the colonised (violence, hysteria, laziness ...) were interpreted by Fanon as conditions brought on by colonialism.

In addition to the psychological examination of the conditions of colonialism, Fanon thought of what should be done. His vision for action was laid out in *The Wretched of the Earth: The Handbook for the Black Revolution that is Changing the Shape of the World*. In this book, Fanon discusses the inevitability of violence in decolonisation.

Why violence?

Read Fanon: you will learn how, in the period of their helplessness, their mad impulse to murder is the expression of the natives' collective unconscious. (John-Paul Sartre (from the introduction to *The Wretched of the Earth*, 1963: 18)

Europeans saw anti-colonial resistance as incredibly violent, illustrating the necessity for a European, civilising influence and the lack of ability of the indigenous population to rule themselves. But for Fanon it was colonialism itself that was the real source of violence; firstly in the initial act of conquest, but then in the day-to-day practices of rule which required a power over the body and mind of the native. For Fanon, this was a totalising violence, which, as Sartre explained, 'does not only have for its aim the keeping of these enslaved men at arm's length; it seeks to dehumanize them' (1963: 15). Fanon also argued that this dehumanisation meant that colonised societies would become violent. The alienation created by colonialism would first generate violence among the colonised. Their frustration meant this initial violence would erupt between those who were colonised. However, Fanon saw that it was important that this violence was turned against the colonisers, arguing that this would fulfil a number of purposes. Firstly, it would prise loose the grip of the colonists, and as the colonisers would not want to give up power, decolonisation would always be a violent phenomenon. Secondly, the actions of decolonisation would bring together the colonised in a common purpose. Finally, and most controversially, violence would be cleansing and restorative for those individuals subject to colonial rule, purging their feelings of impotence and inferiority and restoring their self-respect.

At the level of individuals, violence is a cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless