Strangers to Ourselves: On the Displacement, Loss and "Homelessness" of Migrant Experiences

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> "And what about your origins? Tell us about them, it must be fascinating!" Blundering fools never fail to ask the question. Their surface kindness hides the sticky clumsiness that so exasperates the foreigner.
> —KRISTEVA (1991, P. 29)

My father lived all of his life in rural Ireland. Having lost all of his siblings as emigrants to London in the worst of circumstances, he stacked up the economic benefits of exile against the lifelong loss he knew would ensue and it just simply didn't add up. I never could find the words to explain my decision to emigrate to my dad. He wept profusely every time I left. I, in turn, am left perpetually to wonder if Kristeva wasn't correct when, in *Strangers to ourselves* (1991) she suggested that all of us who choose the path of exile are running away from, and toward, alienation: "Or should one recognize that one becomes a foreigner in another country because one is already a foreigner from within?" (1991, p. 14). Speaking of her own parents, Kristeva—an immigrant from Bulgaria to France—captured the violent alienation of this loss as follows: And nevertheless, no, I have nothing to say to them, to any parents. Nothing. Nothing and everything, as always. If I tried—out of boldness, through luck, or in distress—to share with them some of the violence that causes me to be so totally on my own, they would not know where I am, who I am, what it is, in others, that rubs me the wrong way.

I am henceforth foreign to them. (1991, pp. 22–23) Philip Noyce's film, *Rabbit-Proof Fence* (Noyce, 2003; see also Pilkington, 2002), tells the story of the flight of three aboriginal girls from Moore River Settlement, a mission school for *half caste* children born as the result of liaisons between white fencers and aboriginal women. They were members of Australia's *stolen generation* of aboriginal and mixed-race children who were forcibly removed from their homes in an attempt at cultural annihilation and forced assimilation.[i]

As I watched this story of the systematic attempt by the Australian government to *whiten* Aboriginal people I was struck by the layers of complexity and complicity in the colonizing enterprise. The three girls are tracked relentlessly by the Australian police, and while they are betrayed by some whites on their twelve hundred mile trek, they are assisted materially by others. Their most formidable opponent is one of their own, Moodoo, an Aboriginal tracker who gives them a run for their money. Yet he, himself, is coerced into working for the government, and his daughter, too, is incarcerated in the school. Like all *good natives*, he has cultivated an inscrutability that makes it impossible to tell if he is working faithfully for the government or secretly subverting the pursuit. The inscrutable native allows us to project onto him whatever we choose.[ii] Consistent with the colonial narrative, Christianity, and racism are conjoined in the persons of the angelic white nuns who run the mission school, scrubbing the children white, policing their language use, and tutoring them in Kiplingesque ditties for the benefit of their white benefactor, the ironically titled Chief Protector of Aborigines, Mr. Neville, named by the children "Mr. Devil."

As I read postcolonial reconstructions of the history of India, the Caribbean, the Pacific, countries in Africa, histories of indigenous peoples around the world, and of course the history of Ireland itself, I am increasingly struck by the unvarying sameness of the narrative, including economic colonization and military repression in the service of capitalism; racism through processes of inferiorization, dehumanization, and even enslavement; cultural and literal genocide; prohibition on access to schooling and the banning of native language and cultural practices; the development of a planter class, a local bourgeoisie, who through mimicry crudely ape their masters, implement their will, and aspire to inherit their power; the use of Christianization as a tool of subjugation, except in Ireland, where Otherness had to be reinforced through the attempted strangers to ourselves imposition of Anglican Christianity on a Roman Catholic population; and the elimination of indigenous knowledge-making through installation of a univocal, Eurocentric worldview and master discourse. All of this has ultimately

led to participation of the oppressed in their own subjugation, frequently in late capitalist "democracies," in which the colonized people in what are now often called postcolonial societies are taught to believe that they are free. Gramsci (1971), who claimed there was no more powerful form of oppression than that which occurs with the consent of the oppressed, would be proud![iii]

I come from Ireland and I spend a great deal of time meditating on the ways in which colonization, class subjugation, and Catholicism have interpellated and split my being. I will begin with some autobiographical meditations that will hopefully help locate myself. I will then introduce a few brief excerpts from writers whose capacity to capture some of the splits in Irish identity I find useful. I will then offer some meditations on history, memory, subjectivity, and the possibility of occupying the pedagogical margin subversively.

But first, a cautionary note from Trinh Minh-ha about the trickiness of this enterprise:

> How do you inscribe difference without bursting into a series of euphoric narcissistic accounts of yourself and your own kind? Without indulging in a marketable romanticism or in a naïve whining about your condition? . . . Between the twin chasms of navelgazing and navel-erasing the ground is narrow and slippery. (Trinh, 1989, p. 28)

My God! I'm Split!

In 1940, one of my father's five sisters became pregnant out of wedlock at age sixteen. As was the custom then, as Peter Mullan details in his film *The Magdalene Sisters* (Mullan, 2004), girls who had sinned in this way were essentially ordered into permanent servitude under the auspices of Catholic nuns. They lived out their lives scrubbing floors and operating commercial ventures such as hand laundries on behalf of the nuns, in conditions that were appalling. Many children were physically and sexually abused in these institutions.[iv] Their bastard children were either fostered to Irish families or sent as adoptees to Catholic families in the U.S. My father's sister was thus consigned to the local workhouse as an indentured-for-life servant. My dad saved enough money from his own meager income for her boat passage to England. He bribed the night watchman, climbed the gate, extracted her from the workhouse, and sent her to England. He never set eyes on her again. Her child, fostered out to a farm family in another abject form of indentured service in the Ireland of the period, died in

his teenage years. My father continued to be a devoutly observant Catholic to the very end of his life. His sister's child was fostered to a family less than five miles from my family home . . . but we were not to learn of this until well after his death.

> *"C'mon. Hurry up. We'll miss our lift to school," my brother urged. I ran furiously. P.J. and Frances, older than I, knew that if we were there he'd let us pile in with all the other kids. What kid wanted to walk the mile to school in the frosty winter of 1958? We arrived at the van out of breath, with thank-yous on the tips of our tongues. We were on the tail end of the group as I scrambled after my brother and sister into the back of the blue Ford van. That was when the hand shot out and Hogan's voice rasped: "Are you an O'Loughlin? Get out. No O'Loughlins or Macs. I don't want to see the likes of you again."*

The story of my early life is in large part a battle against sanctioned inferiorization. I grew up as a member of the working poor in a rigidly classstratified society. In the Ireland of my youth, local county councils bought plots of land from farmers and built subsidized council houses, commonly called laborer's cottages, for the working poor. They put special red tiled clay roofs on the houses so that they were distinctive. A ghetto of red-roofed houses scattered across the rural landscape. I guess they felt that we were not sufficiently marked by poverty, and God forbid we might rise above it and conceal our origins. The red roofs served as a powerful reminder to all of our abject origins. My mother lives in that house to this day. She is still marked as Other by the tyranny of bureaucratic architecture. I can recall returning from the only college visit I ever made, and asking the coach driver to stop a quarter of a mile from my home so that my abject origins would not be evident to my classmates.

I grew up in a society that endured British colonization for over eight hundred years. British colonialism in Ireland continues to this day. Since the British erased our language in a purposeful campaign of cultural genocide, most of us grew up speaking only English. However, as Homi Bhabha reminds us in his discussion of mimicry, while the British forced us to speak their language for purposes of domination, there were limits to how well we should speak it: "[T]o be Anglicized is *emphatically* not to be English" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 87). Our English was actually meant to mark us as inferior, in the same way that Indian English

and Caribbean Englishes mark their speakers as Other. It worked. I can recall attending a conference a few years ago and, by chance, sitting next to a colleague from Oxford University who spoke in the perfect cadences of Oxford English. In spite of my strangers to ourselves   best efforts to carry on a collegial conversation, I became overwhelmed with a sense of inferiority and was tongue-tied throughout the meal.

Growing up working-class, I often feel mystified as I try to live the life of an academic and try to understand the pretensions, aspirations, and mysterious ways of my academic colleagues. Ryan and Sackrey's (1995) *Strangers in Paradise* and Sennett and Cobb's (1993) *The hidden injuries of class* comfort me that the class dislocations I experience are not uniquely mine, but are in fact typical of the contradictions and tensions people experience as they try to cross boundaries in a class stratified society. Must we hide? Do we have to become impostors to ourselves? Or can we make room in our society for hybrid identities that allow us to minimize loss as we move across class, gender, race, and national boundaries?

Although I was not conscious of my racial formation, I now realize that the signs of otherness were always present. In our small town people commonly referred to the occasional Nigerian intern at the county hospital as "the black doctor." The Catholic Church abetted our racial formation through ubiquitous collection boxes soliciting pennies for "black babies" in Africa. There was a collection box in every classroom, with a destitute "black baby" staring vacantly from the photograph pasted on the front. Colonialist images of African blackness as destitute, ignorant, and *other* were promulgated in glossy missionary magazines such as *The Far East* and *Africa*, which we sold door to door to help Irish missionaries in "darkest Africa" and South America. When television came to Ireland we also received our share of images of exotic black otherness from National Geographic type documentaries. I would go to a neighbor's house on summer evenings to watch television. In a country in which Catholic bishops had the power to suppress all images of sexuality, we were permitted to gaze without shame on the dark nakedness of the African Other in National Geographic specials. As Franz Fanon remarks in his analysis of the effects of colonialism on the black psyche: "In Europe, that is to say, in every civilized and civilizing country, the Negro is the symbol of sin. The Negro represents the archetype of the lowest values." (1967, p. 189).

I sit here, more than forty years later, and wonder what effect these unexamined representations of otherness have on my psyche. When my mom was in New York for her annual visit a few years ago we got to speaking of my sister and her newly adopted child from India. We were discussing how well my sister was

prepared for raising an ethnically Indian child in Ireland. My mother acknowledged that the child would have problems, and went on to cite widely publicized incidents of racial harassment involving a family of Indian origin.

Then, to my surprise, she said: *"It's just as well your father is not alive. He'd never speak to her again."* She went on: *"The baby's too dark. Dad would never accept him. He was always dead set against blacks."* My father had only a fourthgrade formal education. He had limited access to literacy and no interest in television. He rarely traveled beyond a forty mile radius of home. Living in a racially homogenous society what could be the source of his hatred of "blacks"?

Did his father before him hate "blacks" too? Did his neighbors and friends?

What effect did this unacknowledged hatred have on my racial formation? Are such sentiments handed down unconsciously from one generation to the next through the inferiorization of the psyche and the transmission of historical memory? What does knowing this do to me? As for my nephew, he was beaten up on the first day of kindergarten that Fall in his neighborhood school in a small town in Ireland.

Shadows of Memories:
Exactly Who Do You/I Think I am?

History matters. Traumatic events in history and in families matter even more. There is considerable literature in psychoanalysis on the effects of ghosts (Fraiberg, Adelson & Shapiro, 1975; Gordon, 1997) phantoms (Abraham & Torok, 1994), unspoken secrets (Rashkin, 1992; Rogers, 2006), specters (Derrida, 1994; Venn, 2002) and catastrophic histories (Davoine & Gaudillière, 2004) on the psyches of people.[v] Selma Fraiberg, for example, suggests that pathological responses in the present can often be traced back across multiple generations, and Davoine and Gaudillière offer compelling evidence of a relationship between madness in the present and unspoken ancestral trauma. In attempting to understand myself, and particularly the unquiet aspects of my being, I have attempted to reach into my past and retrieve not only individual and familial narratives, but also narratives from the larger sweep of history that may serve to help explain my passions, disquietudes, and inhibitions to myself.

Reading *The Irish mind* (1985) by Richard Kearney, for example, I cringe anew at the characterization of my ancestors and wonder how this disrespect was internalized by them and whether remnants of it are still lurking in my psyche producing potential for inferiority, rage, and even racism:

The British historian Charles Kingsley provided further justification for the cultural and military oppression of his Irish neighbours, when he composed this racist portrait in 1860: "I am daunted by the human chimpanzees I saw along that hundred miles of horrible country. I don't believe they are our fault. I believe that there are not only many more of them than of old, but that they are happier, better and more comfortably fed and lodged under our rule than they ever were. But to see white chimpanzees is dreadful; if they were black, one would not feel it so much, but their skins, except where tanned by exposure, are as white as ours." So much for the colonial calibanization of the Irish. (1985, p. 7)

When I was a child a mass grave with a large number of skeletons was discovered a few hundred yards from my home. These were the remains of victims of the Great Famine which overtook Ireland in the mid-1800s. In her epic work on the Irish Famine, *The great hunger* (1962), Cecil Woodham-Smith offers vivid and depressing descriptions of the genocidal famines that yielded over a million deaths in Ireland and forced millions more into exile as indentured servants, while Great Britain exported Irish grain and livestock. Many of those who fled traveled in dreadful conditions in the holds of sailing ships. So many died that the ships became known as *coffin ships*. From a passenger's journal here is how one such voyage was described:

Most of the passengers were from the South of Ireland; provisions and water were short and of execrable quality, but the captain, Thompson, was kind. Ship fever appeared before the *India* was a week out and Captain Thompson caught it and died; twenty six passengers also died, water ran short and the ration was reduced to a pint a day, three of the passengers became lunatics, and one threw himself overboard. Two ships were hailed and implored for a little water; they replied that they had none to spare—ship fever was raging in their own holds . . . when, after a voyage of more than eight weeks the *India* arrived at Staten Island he [the journal author] and 122 others were taken to the hospital . . . the patients were cruelly treated: the beds, grids of iron bars with a little straw laid on the top inflicted torture on the sick, who were reduced by fever to skin and bone; the doctors were negligent and indifferent, the male nurses took a delight in abusing and thwarting the helpless

> and struck patients for innocent errors; food was uneatable and
> conditions horribly insanitary. (Woodham-Smith, p. 251)

What phantom might dwell within me from the suffering of my ancestors who evidently survived such wrenching events? At what psychic cost did they survive, and did those psychic scars have an opportunity to heal or are they still haunting contemporary descendants such as I? I do know that I experienced

Cecil Woodham-Smith's *The great hunger* as profoundly haunting from the first time I read it at age sixteen. While there is tragedy aplenty in my Irish heritage, it is possible, nevertheless, to fashion redemptive narratives from Irish history that induce stirrings of patriotism, creativity and pride. Much of the great literary output of Ireland may well be associated with the ready juxtaposition of tragedy, comedy and hope. The story of my encounter with Irish-American history is a much more difficult tale however. Tragically, the Irish who made it to the U.S. were greeted with an onslaught of nativist prejudice and xenophobia.[vi] Irish immigrants might have responded to this by making common cause with free Negroes and by supporting the movement for abolition. Instead, they edged out blacks at the bottom of the social ladder, and, on the basis of racial bonding, claimed domestic and laboring jobs as their right by virtue of their whiteness. As Frederick Douglass noted in 1853, "The Irish, who at home readily sympathize with the oppressed everywhere, are instantly taught when they step upon our soil to hate and despise the Negro" (cited in Ignatiev, 1995, frontispiece). Douglass also commented: "Every hour sees us elbowed out of some employment to make room for some newly-arrived emigrant from the Emerald Isle, whose hunger and color entitle him to special favor . . ." (cited in Ignatiev,1995, pp. 111–112). Ignatiev concludes: "To be acknowledged as white, it was not enough for the Irish to have a competitive advantage over Afro-Americans in the labor market; in order for them to avoid the taint of blackness it was necessary that no Negro be allowed to work in occupations where Irish were to be found."(pp. 111–112). Scholarship on whiteness (Fine et al., 1996; Frankenberg, 1993; McIntosh, 1988; Roediger, 2006, 2007; Seshadri-Crooks, 2000; Tuckwell, 2002) has established the responsibilities white people bear for historical inequalities and oppression, and for the perpetuation of those inequities through implicit systems of privilege. My awareness of the strategic role Irish Americans played in declaring themselves white troubles further my engagement with my white privilege. It is very difficult for me to square my progressive politics, which are in part a product of the kind of privilege that access to cultural capital such as my advanced education provides, with the historical inequalities on which such privilege is constructed.

As I rummage in my cultural/historical backpack a few other elements are worthy of scrutiny. Growing up in southern Ireland, I was raised in an ultra-Catholic environment, and while it would probably take many years on an analyst's couch to disentangle the interpellative effects of that experience on my being, I will content myself with this brief satirical thumbnail sketch from the pen of Anglo Irish social critic Terry Eagelton. In *The gatekeeper*, Eagelton, raised in an Irish family in England, summarizes his experience of Catholicism, this way:

> Just as the convent bore only a tenuous relation to reality, so did Catholicism as a whole. Its esoteric doctrines seemed no more applicable to everyday life than trigonometry was applicable to pressing your trousers. Like magic, it was a highly determinate system, but entirely self-confirming, with all the exceptional clarity of an hallucination. Catholicism was less about good deeds than about how to keep the charcoal in your thurible alight or knock about fifty years off your allotted time in purgatory. It was less about charity than candelabras. We were pious and heartless, strict-minded and mean, pure-living and pagan. There was a crazed precision about the Church's doctrinal system . . . It resembled the insane exactitude of the psychotic whose mathematical calculations are impeccable, but who is carrying them out perched on a window ledge thirty floors up. (2002, pp. 30–31)

Another deeply embedded dimension of Irish culture, one not so removed from the Catholic Puritanism of that era in Ireland, is a certain hardness when it comes to children's emotions. This is evident, for example, in Frank McCourt's widely read *Angela's ashes* (1996), a work, that was received in parts of Ireland with considerable resentment. Writing in 1991, Anthony Clare, one of Ireland's leading psychiatrists, characterized Irish culture as "A culture heavily impregnated by an emphasis on physical control, original sin, cultural inferiority and psychological defensiveness" (p. 14), and he quotes an Irish psychiatrist writing on Irish child-rearing practices in 1976:

> The family home in Ireland is a novitiate for violence. Even from the cradle the child is made to feel rejection, hostility, and open physical pain. The infant is left to cry in his cot because his mother does not want to 'give in to him.' Later he is smacked with the hand or a stick. He is made to go to bed early. He is not allowed to have his tea. He is put in a room by

> himself . . . and in order to invite this morale breaking treatment
> from his parents, all the Irish child has to do is to be *normal.* It
> is the normality of childhood that sets parents' teeth on edge.
> They take no joy in childishness. (1991, pp. 15–16).

I am a child therapist, I teach courses on children's emotional well-being, and I consider myself an advocate for children. I spend a large portion of my life working with parents and teachers to create the possibility of healing and caring communities for children at home and at school (e.g., O'Loughlin, 2006; see also Chapter 4 in this volume). As I explained in Chapter 3, I am in little doubt that these activities are fueled by a reparative impulse based on the tone-deafness to children's needs in my Irish childhood.

On Homelessness, Marginality and the
Decolonizing Potential of Loss and Otherness

My return to my native Ireland a few summers ago was unsettling. I went home—yes, I still call it "home"—but everywhere I went I felt that people silently coded me as Other. I wandered through Dublin trying fruitlessly to find myself in a sea of Irish faces. At the conference I attended I felt pierced by an Irish gaze. This contemptuous gaze, with which I was all too familiar, was the one that we—oops, "they"—reserve for pathetic Yanks coming back to find their roots. As Eva Hoffman (1990) and others (e.g., Aciman, 1999) have noted, a journey into subjectivity is also a wrenching journey away from subjectivity.
Gains come through losses. Voice emerges from muteness. Movement stems from paralysis. As Kristeva (1991) notes, border crossers—and here I include gender, class, and ethnic border crossers as well as migrants and exiles—become strangers to themselves. This painful location, one of displacement, ambiguity, hybridity and loss, is increasingly a feature of the alienated global capitalist world all of us inhabit (cf. Augé, 1995; Cushman, 1995). While alienation structures all of our subjectivities, it is etched in sharpest relief in the migrant's futile search for home.

The Possibilities of Subaltern Memory and
the Perils of Autobiography

> Eventually, of course, one does stop being an exile. But even a
> "reformed" exile will continue to practice the one thing exiles
> do almost as a matter of instinct: compulsive retrospection.

> With their memories perpetually on overload, exiles see double, feel double, are double. When exiles see one place they're also seeing—or looking for—another behind it. Everything bears two faces, everything is shifty because everything is mobile, the point being that exile, like love, is not just a condition of pain, it's a condition of deceit. (Aciman, 1999, p. 13)

From a theoretical perspective, my interest is in exploring what Leo Spitzer (1989) calls "the predicament of marginality" engendered by multiple border crossings and suppressed memories. In *The burden of memory,* Wole Soyinka (1999) describes the capacity of an ancient piece of Yoruba music played on the legendary Sosso-Balo to call up fossil memories from deep within his psyche:

> It was a dirge of ancestral severance, of loss too great to quantify . . . The Sosso-Bala becomes an unsolicited metaphor for the near intolerable burden of memory, a muse for the poetry of identity and that elusive "leaven" in the dough of humanity—forgiveness, the remission of wrongs, and a recovery of lost innocence. (pp. 193–194)

I share Soyinka's faith in the possibility of memory and I have found books such as Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1988; see also Plasa, 1999) and Elie Wiesel's *Night* (1982) pedagogically valuable for stirring unconscious memories and engaging students with their own historical constitutedness.[vii] It would be naïve, however, to assume that stepping out of a Westernized/Eurocentric/ enlightenment/rational bubble is an easy task. In asking "Can the subaltern speak?" Gayatri Spivak (1988) raises the critical question: Can we ever create conditions that allow non-dominant cultural identities and historical narratives to surface and claim their space in national discourses and educational practices?

Trinh Minh-Ha (1989) is skeptical of the pervasive rhetorics of inclusive multiculturalisms. She worries about the dangers of "hegemonic dis-ease" embedded in such rhetorics: "A conversation of 'us' with 'us' about 'them' is a conversation in which 'them' are silenced. 'Them' always stands on the other side of the hill, naked and speechless, barely present in its absence" (p. 67). How might a teacher address this predicament of marginality?

In *The intimate enemy,* Ashis Nandy (1983) points out that the greatest obstacle to truly embracing subaltern Others has to do with *the enemy within*. Western,

and perhaps non-Western, people's subjectivities have been interpellate with an *imperial consciousness* which prevents acknowledgment of subaltern identities. In meeting an Indian, for example, Nandy suggests that instead of understanding that Indian a Westerner is more likely to project onto that person his or her own fantasies of Indianness.

> India has always been a separate world, hard for any outsider, *Eastern or Western*, to penetrate. Such a culture becomes a projective test; it invites one not only to project onto it one's deepest fantasies, but also to reveal, through such self-projection, the interpreter rather than the interpreted. All interpretations of India are ultimately autobiographical. (pp. 79–80)

Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000) makes a similar argument regarding Western epistemology (cf. also Chatterjee 1993). He suggests that Western ways of knowing are so ingrained in how we think about knowledge that in school contexts it is virtually impossible to think otherwise. Referring to history, for example, he states that "Europe remains the sovereign theoretical subject of all histories, including the ones we call 'Indian,' 'Chinese,' 'Kenyan,' and so on. There is a peculiar way in which all these histories become variations on a master narrative that could be called 'the history of Europe' " (p. 27). The issue is further troubled in that Western modes of being are tied up with "the practices, institutions, and discourses of bourgeois individualism," such that for an Indian "to be a 'modern individual' was to be European" (Chakrabarty, p. 33). Chakrabarty argues that the kind of confessional, private archeological inquiry that typifies Western subjectivity (and that some of the chapters in this book represent)—and that is inherent in bourgeois psychoanalysis, for example, of which I am a practitioner[viii]—is alien to Indian epistemology and subjectivity.[ix] Can all of this mirror-gazing and projection ever get us outside the circle of imperial consciousness? Is our interiority, the very thing we call *self,* peculiarly a Western illusion? He frames the issue thus:

> This modern individual, however, whose political/public life is lived in citizenship, is also supposed to have an interiorized "private" self that pours out incessantly in diaries, letters, autobiographies, novels, and, of course, in what we say to our analysts. The bourgeois individual is not born until one discovers the pleasures of privacy. . . . It is not that the forms of

the bourgeois private self did not come with European rule.
There have been since the middle of the nineteenth century,
Indian novels, diaries, letters, and autobiographies, but they
seldom yield pictures of an endlessly interiorized subject.
(Chakrabarty, p. 35)

In teaching children from subaltern cultures, therefore, we are faced with two
enormous challenges. How can we see the enculturated child in front of us for
who he or she is, when our subjectivity predicates us to see them as projections
and fantasies of our own cultural experiences? How can we embrace diverse
ways of knowing and being if the worldview of Westernized education is
saturated with forms of knowing that are ideologically imperial, rational,
individualist, capitalist, and ultimately silencing of diverse viewpoints and
historical narratives?

The Anxiety of the Foreigner, the Double Bind of Exile, and the Risks of Assimilation

I belong nowhere, and everywhere am a stranger, a guest at
best. Stefan Zweig (quoted in Spitzer, 1989, p. 171)

This means that settled within himself, the foreigner has no self
. . . I do what they want me to, but it is not "me"—"me" is
elsewhere, "me" belongs to no one, "me" does not belong to
"me," . . . does "me" exist?   Julia Kristeva(1991,p.8)

What is to be the fate of the exile, the migrant, the hybrid, the border crosser?
Are these writers unduly pessimistic? The in-depth case studies of the lives of
three very successful nineteenth century border crossers, Stefan Zweig, Cornelius
May, and André Rebouças, as reported by Leo Spitzer (1989), offer little comfort
that even assimilated second-generation migrants can stop looking over their
shoulders. Spitzer tells us that despite the extraordinary success of these men in
their adopted lands, assimilation and acceptance were highly contingent.
Cornelius May, son of a freed slave, was raised in bourgeois respectability in
Freetown, Sierra Leone, and accomplished his parents' dream of assimilation by
becoming a newspaper publisher as well as mayor of Freetown. "Throughout his
formative years," Spizer notes, "Cornelius May found the British colonial system,
of which he was a subject, generally acceptable, and viewed himself as different
from and superior to Africans who had not experienced or taken advantage of

prolonged cultural contact with Europeans in order to 'better' themselves" (p. 143).

André Rebouças, a mulatto child in Brazil, rose to a position of major importance in Brazil's government as well as in industry through a "willingness to become totally identified with the values of the predominantly white Brazilian elite" (Spitzer, p. 115). Stefan Zweig, one of the most widely read and translated authors of his time (Spitzer, p. 73) was a Viennese Jew who experienced immense success until the rise of Hitler, when "for perhaps the first time . . . Stefan Zweig, European, was being *defined from without* as Stefan Zweig Jew" (Spitzer, p. 167). Two of these highly accomplished men (Rebouças & Zweig) became despondent at their ultimate rejection on racial grounds after years of apparently successful assimilation and committed suicide, and the other (May) was turned upon and imprisoned for being an outspoken Black man in a British colony.

What these case studies demonstrate is the permanent insecurity many border crossers feel. Otherness and difference are continually marked and the *race/gender/sexualorientation/class/religion/migrant/exile/alien/terrorist/Muslim /of Middle Eastern descent/illegal alien/suspicious looking/shifty/different . . .* cards can be sprung at a moment's notice. The illusions of assimilation are easily shattered. Spitzer notes that despite the apparently successful assimilation of Zweig, May, and Rebouças, they were only one incident away from being "plunged into a period of considerable psychological uncertainty about their identity: a crisis period of inner conflict and disorientation during which they became conscious of their marginal position between two worlds" (p. 145). How many of our children must live thus vigilant in putatively "multicultural" societies?

Kristeva sums up the perpetual anxiety of the foreigner thus in *Strangers to ourselves:* "Civilized people need not be gentle with foreigners. 'That's it, and if you don't like it why don't you go back where you came from!' " (1991, p. 14). A graduate student in my class on multicultural education one year sent me a note with similar sentiments after a class discussion that explored social inequalities and the workings of white privilege in the U.S. "If you are so critical of U.S. society why don't you just leave?" she queried. Small wonder we keep looking over our shoulders.

The Origins of Subjectivity in Alienation

> "Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life." Thus Genesis, on humankind's first exiles. Since then, is there anyone who does not—in some way on some level—feel that they are in exile? We feel ejected from our first homes and landscapes, from childhood, from our first family romance, from our authentic self. We feel there is an ideal sense of belonging, of community, of attunement with others, and at homeness with ourselves, that keeps eluding us. (Hoffman, 1999, p. 39)

While my remarks thus far may have induced in you, the reader, reverie about your own border crossings, or speculations about the challenges facing indigenous, bicultural, and migrant children, and facing all children who are seen as other in our world, Eva Hoffman's statement is a reminder that this comes much closer to home for all of us. Both Kleinian theory (cf. Rose, 1993) and Lacanian theory (Apollon et al., 2002; Fink, 1995; Homer, 2005; Lacan, 1968, 1977, 1998; Nobus, 1998; Van Haute, 2002) address the onset of otherness in the formation of subjectivity, though, in this respect, Klein's emphasis is more narrowly on the psychic scars of the birth trauma itself.[x] Here I will discuss Lacan's understanding of the alienation caused by entry into the social world, beginning perhaps at six months of age.

For Lacan, the journey into self is, in many respects, a journey away from our originary sense of being, such as it is. Lacan argues (cf., also Althusser,1971b; Butler, 1997) that becoming a subject is a process of becoming subject to the prevailing discursive practices of society. The paradox is that what we consider to be a self requires giving up much of whatever primordial sense of self we are born with and constructing a socially constituted sense of self by entering the linguistic and discursive practices of society. Thus, self is shaped through the responses of others, and is thereby a fundamentally alienating experience.

More precisely, a child's subjectivity is shaped both by the explicit demand and the unconscious desires of the Others in a child's life. When the infant first encounters its own image in a mirror it sees the primordial I. The mirror image rapidly becomes objectified through the linguistic structuring of the Other who

basically tells the child what it sees. "Look. There's Joseph. Say Joseph. J O S E P H!" Gradually the child internalizes identification with the objectified image of itself and eventually becomes a speaking and indeed spoken—hence alienated—subject:

> The *mirror-stage* is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation—and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality that I shall call orthopaedic—and, lastly, to the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the subject's entire mental development. (Lacan, 1977, p. 4)

The young child is in an impossible position. To refuse to enter the world of language and to refuse identification with the Other in an attempt to preserve the primordial I leaves the child in an autistic/psychotic state of the kind described by Alvarez (1992) and Tustin (1992). As Bruce Fink notes, "A psychotic child may very well *assimilate* language, but cannot *come to be* in language the same way as a neurotic child" (1995, p. 55). Accepting language, however, and entering the symbolic world, while clearly necessary for interpersonal functioning, as well as for the symbolization of subjective psychic experience, comes with a high price tag—alienation. The *coming to be* of the child is in response to the linguistic structuring and recognitions/ misrecognitions of the child by its parents. Lacan suggests that it is the sum of these collective linguistic structurings that causes a child to build up a sense of its own subjective self.

While a mother, for example, may repeatedly tell her son that he is a model son, this is not necessarily what enters the child's unconscious. As Fink, from whom this example is drawn, notes, " 'You're a model son'—is, like all communication, prone to miscommunication: the son may understand/misunderstand that appraisal in terms of model cars and planes, viewing himself thereafter as but a miniaturized, plastic version of the real thing, instead of a genuine son" (1995, p. 37). In addition, since the child is taking in mirror images of reality through the Other's discursive practices and desires, many distortions, are incorporated in the child's construction of self. Thus, each of us gains a sense of existence by subscribing to a symbolic order that has begun structuring our subjectivities well before we are born, and even before we are conceived. Lacan is clear, however, that while we develop a sense of subjective being through entry into language and

the capacity to symbolize, human agency rests not with an essential *self* or ego, but resides in the unconscious. He gives numerous examples of how the unconscious plays with language to express meanings and desires through slips and slides that offer tiny windows to our inner subjectivity or state of being (cf. Apollon et al., 2002).

Lacan also believes that a child's unconscious desires are structured through the Other's—often mOther's—desires and that in effect "*the subject is caused by the Other's desire*" (Fink, 1995, p. 50). Philippe Van Haute summarizes the workings of desire in the child this way:

> What then does the mother want? What makes her repeated absences necessary? Or yet again: What does she desire that apparently I cannot give her. To the degree that the little child remains caught in the logic of the unconditional demand for love, it can think of only one solution to this situation—it tries to be or become the object that can fulfill the desire of the mother, and thereby tries to finally assure itself of the mother's love. (2002, p. 113)

The price the child pays for this, as Van Haute notes, is that in unconsciously pursuing the Other's desire, the child loses sight of its own desires (p. 114). Lacan suggests that the omnipotence of the mOther's desire is a significant source of anxiety, and that the child needs to break free from the mOther in order to develop its own desires. Lacan argues that through entering the symbolic the child can break free from this reality, and he suggests that a transitional object serves the function of symbolizing this break—a rupture that is inevitably accompanied by alienation.

In *Desiring whiteness* (2000) Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks uses this theory to show how, because of the dominance of whiteness as a racial signifier, the racial identities that children acquire as they grow up are inherently colored by whiteness. If Seshadri-Crooks is correct, then notions of racial difference are absorbed into our subejctivities very early, and are therefore very difficult to change later.

Rending the Fabric of Multicultural Discourses

> Trying to find the other by defining otherness or by explaining the other through laws and generalities is, as Zen says, like beating the moon with a pole or scratching an itchy foot from

> the outside of a shoe. There is no such thing as a "coming face to face once and for all with objects"; the real remains foreclosed from the analytic experience, which is an experience of speech. In writing close to the other of the other, I can only choose to maintain a self-reflexively critical relationship toward the material, a relationship that defines both the subject written and the writing subject, undoing the I while asking "what do I want wanting to know you or me?" Trinh (1989, p. 76)

Multicultural discourses, like all other aspects of schooling, are premised on information and reason. What if Trinh is correct that rational reason cannot get the job done because we are dealing with deeply unconscious aspects of the psyche? What if, instead of trying to persuade children to be *tolerant* and *inclusive*, we recognize that we must turn reason on its head and teach to the unconscious? Lacan argues for using a hysterical sensibility to detect the tears in the fabric of the symbolic order and to reach through for revolutionary possibilities. I suspect that the late Spike Milligan (2003, 2006) with his mad capacity for seeing the world from upside down and inside out, or maverick comic book illustrator Robert Crumb (Zwigoff, 2006), might serve as better guides to getting close to the unconscious than the kind of intellectual imprisonment that much of the discourses of schooling and multiculturalism offer.

Those of us who live consciously with the predicament of marginality can work to complexity and decolonize our students' understandings of these processes. By becoming sensitive to the exquisite losses involved in border crossings we can engage our migrant, ethnic and class border crossing students and our gender bending students in hysterical conversations that rupture rationality and reveal the socially constructed and hence hegemonic nature of the symbolic realm of language use. We will never be able to assure them of comfort but at least we can let them know that they are not alone (cf. hooks, 1990). The margin is actually a pretty crowded place—thankfully!

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[i]   For the severe consequences of this contemporary Australian Aboriginal communities see Michael O'Loughlin (2008), *Radical Hope or Death by a Thousand Cuts? The Future for Indigenous Australians* and John Altman and Melinda Hinkson (2007), *Coercive reconciliation: stabilize, normalize and exit aboriginal Australia.* For a similar discussion in North American context see Ward Churchill's (2004) aptly titled *Kill the Indian, save the man.*

ii   Aboriginal actor David Gulpilil who plays Moodoo in *Rabbit proof fence* offers another variation on the *instrutable naitive* in Rolf de Heer's (2002) film *The Tracker.*

iii   In *Imaginary maps* (1995), Mashaweta Devi, commenting on oppression of Native American peoples in the U.S. notes "Only in the names of places the Native American legacy survives. Otherwise entire tribes have been butchered. Their land has been taken away… But I say to my American readers, see what has been done to them, you will understand what has been dene to the Indian tribals [i.e., in India]. Everywhere it is the same story" (1995, p. xi).

iv   See for example, Frances Finnegan (2001), *Do penance or perish: Magdaden asylums in Ireland's industrial schools;* Patrick Galvin (2002), *The raggy boy trilogy.*

v   See Michael O'Loughlin (2007b), *Spectral memory and trauma: speaking with the ghost* and Chapter 9 of this volume for an overview of this literature.

vi   See, for example, the depiction of anti-Irish nativist sentiment in Martin Scorsese's (2003) film *The gangs of New York.*

vii   See O'Laughlin (2002b), *A decolonizing pedagogy: Introducing undergraduate students to the psychology of hatred and genocide and the nature of historical memory* for further discussion.

viii   Referring to psychoanalysis, Jacques Derrida notes that "there is practically no psychoanalysis in Africa, white or black, just as there is no psychoanalysis in Asia or the South Seas. There are among those parts of 'the rest of the world' where psychoanalysis has never set a foot, or in any case there it has never taken off its European shoes…. African psychoanalysis was European, structurally defined in the profoundest way by the colonial state apparatus" (1998, p. 69).

ix   See Paula Gunn Allen's *Off the reservation* (1998)for a critique of U.S. universities from the perspective of a Native American woman who finally left her academic post because of the predicament of marginality.

x   See chapter 4 of this volume to and Rose (1993) for further discussion. Psychoanalytic inquiry into the origins of autistic and schizophrenic states in children, conducted at the Tavistock Clinic, London, includes

inquiry into the effects of trauma of initial separation (cf. Alvarez, 1992; Tustin, 1992) as a contributing factor in the development of those conditions.

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