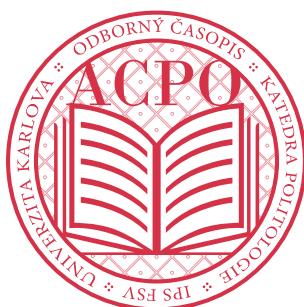


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Political and Cultural Identity in the Global Postcolony: Postcolonial Thinkers on the Racist Enlightenment and the Struggle for Humanity

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Abstract:

This paper investigates how, in the condition of postcolonialism, claims of political and cultural identity depend on the understanding of humanity, and how this understanding ultimately relates to historical agency. I understand postcolonialism as the condition that aims at the decolonization of thought of formerly colonized and former colonizers together – a condition that is global. I will construe my argument by discussing the following authors: Frantz Fanon, Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, Amilcar Cabral, Achille Mbembe and Michael Onyebuchi Eze. Fanon for his criticism of modern Western philosophy as dehumanizing the other; Emmanuel Eze for his in-depth critique of Kant and Hegel's ideas of humanity and the racialised and racist frames of thought they left behind and both Fanon and Eze for their proposals to understand humanity as a project under construction; Amilcar Cabral for his views on the interrelatedness of political and cultural identity in a situation of the building of new nations. Achille Mbembe because he showed the relations between the former colonizers and the formerly colonized to be characterized by conflicting temporalizations and Michael Eze for his understanding of historical agency in the condition of postcolonialism. Through this discussion I will disentangle the relations between identity (political and cultural) and humanity in the postcolony, and arrive, after a critique of the racist Enlightenment, at an inclusive, instead of an exclusive, understanding of humanity and historical agency.

Key words: postcolonial thought; racism; the enlightenment; political and cultural identity; humanity

Introduction

In my paper I will investigate the relations between political and cultural identity on the one hand, and the idea of humanity on the other, how they can be understood in the condition of postcolonialism, and how they relate to historical agency. I understand *postcolonialism* according to the distinction made by philosopher of history Michael Onyebuchi Eze:

"Postcolonialism' is not the same as Post-colonialism. Post-colonialism (hyphenated) refers to a time period after colonialism, or condition of life at the end of colonialism. Postcolonialism (not hyphenated) on the other hand is the theory that attempts to understand the post-colonial condition. [...] Postcolonialism involves the challenge or the attempt to decolonize the mind from its ideological prison." (Eze 2010: 95)

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So when I write, in the title of this paper, ‘postcolony’ (not hyphenated), I give heed to the call given in the quotation above to decolonize the mind, especially the mind of the peoples who in the past few centuries colonized (or in neocolonial situations still do) others. That many minds still lag behind the actual historical decolonization shows from the ignorant use of expressions like ‘third world countries’ or ‘underdeveloped people’. The stagnant epistemic frameworks not only still hold human-human relations captive but extend to the networks constituting our common world – including economics, politics, culture and history.

Within the above-defined framework, I will further focus on the question of the political and cultural identity of peoples. More specifically, I will try to rethink our philosophical and historical understanding of ‘the West and the rest’ in a way that relates the question of identity to that of historical agency – understood as being able to (co)determine the course of history. Political identity in modernity is normally taken in terms of nationality, which again is based on the concept of humanity. The relation between nationality and humanity was put forward clearly by Seyla Benhabib in her 2002 study on the question of culture in our time:

“For moderns, the moral equality of individuals qua human beings and their equality as citizens are imbricated in each other. The modern social contract of the nation-states bases its legitimacy on the principle that the consociates of the nation are entitled to equal treatment as right-bearing persons precisely because they are human beings; citizenship rights rest on this more fundamental moral equality, which individuals enjoy as persons.” (Benhabib 2002: 175)

In the philosophical as well as in the public debates on identity, the focus has over the past few decades been largely directed towards culture as the measure of belonging to a certain social unity. Again in the words of Benhabib: “*Culture has become a ubiquitous synonym for identity, an identity marker and differentiator*” (Benhabib 2002: 1). All the same, contrary to what was presupposed in the discussions on multiculturalism, it is very hard, if not impossible, to empirically distinguish cultures as clear-cut wholes. In real life, individuals not only belong to different cultures and sub-cultures simultaneously, these cultures and sub-cultures themselves are continuously changing in reaction to local and global challenges of the social and ideological belonging they are supposed to deliver. I would propose, following Benhabib, to understand “*cultures as complex human practices of signification and representation, of organization and attribution, which are internally riven by conflicting narratives*” (Benhabib 2002: ix).

Now that debates on multiculturalism have faded, it is time to highlight once more, next to our understanding of identity in terms of culture, the understanding of identity in political terms. And especially the relationship between them. The focus on culture served the situation in modern Western countries specifically, as they have been dealing, over the past decades, with more strained relationships among individuals of different cultural and geographical backgrounds claiming rights of citizenship in them. For the countries in the formerly colonized areas of the world, the question of political identity was, and still is, a more prominent issue, while they grapple with boundaries that were drawn partly on the basis of the political and economic interests of their former colonizers. Their experiences,

as reflected upon by the authors chosen, get more attention globally nowadays – in a time in which the rich countries that call themselves the West (although countries like Australia and Israel also consider themselves to belong to their group) notice that their traditional Enlightenment ideas on political legitimacy and humanity are more and more contested.

In order to investigate therefore the relations between political and cultural identity on the one hand and the idea of humanity on the other, I will discuss the views of the following authors: Frantz Fanon, Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, Achille Mbembe, Amilcar Cabral and Michael Onyebuchi Eze. I will show how their reflections contribute to disentangle from a postcolonial angle the relations between the concepts of identity (political and cultural) and humanity. Fanon, who is now considered a classical critic of colonialism, and who aimed to repossess humanity and subjectivity in a context where racism dehumanized those colonized, is discussed for his criticism of philosophy as the failed attempt of European Enlightenment thinkers to think humanity as an inclusive concept, animalizing non-Europeans as ‘others’. Emmanuel Eze consequently provided an in-depth reading of the Enlightenment authors that allows us to rethink the concept of humanity as a concept under (practical) construction, instead of something which was ‘discovered’ as a universal by philosophers such as Kant and Hegel. Cabral deserves renewed attention for his analysis of cultural and political identity as interconnected. His analysis, written in a situation of the formation of the new post-colonial nations, can add meaningfully to the present discussion, because it provides insights to make a new turn in reflection, after the Western-centred debates about multiculturalism and the so-called clash of cultures. Michael Eze is discussed for his treatment of historical agency. Mbembe, finally, is cited for his understanding of postcolonial relations between different cultures and nations in light of the different temporalizations they create. This understanding helps to clarify the elements brought forward by the other authors to lay out some lines for a globally shared discussion of identity – a discussion that is urgent in our times, to try to begin to understand humanity anew, in inclusive ways, in the postcolonial public space.

The Global Postcolony

During and after the time that African nations struggled for and reached political independence from their European colonizers, impressive work has been done by many thinkers – not only to work out pathways toward a postcolonial situation but also to look back and bring to light the racism that was inherent in the philosophy of progress and civilization that ideologically sustained the efforts of their European colonizers. Their work has shown us – both the former colonizers and the former colonized, the rich countries and the poor, the North and the South, that both parties play their role in the shattered narrative of a humanity supposed to be on its way to universal reason and global material development. The formerly colonized are still in the process of finding their place of agency within the post- or neo-colonial leftovers of an economical vampire system; the former colonizers are beginning to realize the inherent flaws of their previously cherished understanding of humanity. The concept of humanity was false in two ways. It was no universal humanity, because it excluded darker skinned and poor peoples, and it was not humane, because its civilization and progress was built on the blood and lives of countless dehumanized workers.

Because formerly colonized as well as formerly colonizing peoples are together in the condition of postcolonialism, I will speak of the ‘global postcolony’. In the global



postcolony, the nation states are the primary measure of belonging or identity. The colonizing powers installed modern states where they had not been before, and left them behind when retreating. It is important, though, to state that today, in a world where borders are drawn as state borders, the state is not a universally recognized measure of belonging for all societies. There are, for instance, movements among indigenous peoples that contest their belonging to a state they never signed on to, as in Australia and South America. State power is also internally contested by minority groups in many modern countries, like in the case of the Basque or Catalan separatists in Spain, the Kurdish separatists in Turkey, and numerous other examples. These situations of contested state authority signify that it is problematic to determine identity in a political as well as in a cultural sense, where culture (music, religious customs, language) is under pressure to contest politics, and politics is under pressure to appease culture.

Below the issue of the struggle for political and cultural identity, however, we can detect another struggle, which concerns the question of humanity. Although the Enlightenment philosophy that provided the legitimization of modern secularity and, concurrently, of autonomous state power, used to speak about humanity in the singular, several authors have shown that this should not be read as a factual and normative concept in one (as in ‘we are all human in that we all have human dignity’) but primarily as a normative concept, which has been used to exclude large numbers of human beings from (real) ‘humanity’. Thus the idea that was supposed to sustain the common belonging to ‘mankind’ has turned out to be a failure, creating opposing forces rather than harmonious relations. While self-government and cultural rediscovery for the new post-colonial nations have been historical necessities, in many cases their aim to reach sustainable positive national self-identities suffered setbacks and intrinsic problems. In many African countries, for instance, politics in the post-colonial era consisted of a destructive succession of coups, dictatorships, and leader cults. And on a cultural note, we see an ongoing struggle “*for the African subject, [to achieve] a balance between his/her total identification with ‘traditional’ African life, and his/her merging with, and subsequent loss in, modernity (in the discourse of alienation)*” (Mbembe, 2001: 12).

Getting Rid of ‘The Other’

In his recent work on Fanon, Africana philosopher Lewis Gordon historically situated the life of this revolutionary and revolutionary thinker as follows:

“Frantz Omar Fanon, this denied body through being too much body, was born on the 20th of July 1925 in Fort de France, Martinique. Malcolm Little, who then became Malcolm X and eventually El-Hajj Malik El Shabazz, the famed black revolutionary thinker in the United States, was born two months earlier. So too was Patrice Lumumba, the martyred father of the Congolese Revolution, as well as the revolutionary Nicaraguan Catholic priest and poet Ernesto Cardenal. If creativity were like wine, one could argue that 1925 was a vintage year.” (Gordon 2015: 9)

Creativity, of course, is not like wine; it is not dependent on the seasons. But Gordon rightly draws attention to the fact that one can speak of a generation of revolutionary thinkers who mostly also were revolutionaries in a literal political sense. Their historical role can, in my view, be better understood from the circumstances into which they matured, marking their year of birth. A slightly older generation, those born about five years earlier, were young adults when WW II started, and the creative and inventive among them were most likely to spend their vital forces in this great clash of the old powers. Those who were, like Fanon and Cabral, young adults at the end of that war, were destined to play a role in the effort to build a new world on the ashes of the old. Already during the war, but more so in the decade-and-a-half leading up to the decolonization, the power of Russia and the United States grew, while the former 'centre of the world', Europe, was in decline. These powers and their Cold War crushed many of the efforts to political and cultural self-determination of the formerly colonized states, and took the lives of leaders like Patrice Lumumba, Thomas Sankara, Amilcar Cabral and others. A slightly older revolutionary, Nelson Mandela, was biding his time in prison, but could only play his glorious role in the ending of the Apartheid regime after the end of the Cold War – when the so-called great narratives seemed to have faded – while the Enlightenment ideal of a common humanity was still generally accepted without criticism.

This idea of a common humanity, however, was not only under duress in colonial times and in the post-colonial states of the 1960s and 1970s. It still is in the global post-colony in which we live. Frantz Fanon, a psychiatrist, philosopher and revolutionary, let his readers feel the blows of being cast out of it, by being made into an 'other', by an 'innocent' child even, in chapter 5 of his *Black Skin, White Masks*: "*Mama, see the Negro! I'm frightened! Frightened! Frightened! Now they were beginning to be afraid of me. [...] assailed at various points, the corporeal schema crumbled, its place taken by a racial epidermal schema*" (Fanon 2008: 84). Just this one sentence contains a compressed reaction, not only to someone's experience of being categorized by someone else – an act by which both are dehumanized, but also to the tradition of modern Western philosophy. The most influential thinkers in this tradition supposed the essence of humanity to be localized in the non-extended, in the mind or spirit. At the same time, however, it presupposed some relation to the experienced body, the 'empirical self' of Immanuel Kant, the material companion of the thinking self or 'noetic' self. Racism in its cruder form has denied darker skinned people the potential for reason, seeing them as "[...] the link between monkey and man – meaning, of course, white man" (Fanon 2008: 18). The 'negro' who is called thus by the child, according to Fanon, is denied not only noetic potential but even the constructed body, as 'the corporeal schema crumbled'. Thus, one is negrified – meaning: emptied of even bodily substance, leaving a supposedly dark skin, 'a racial epidermal schema' as the mere place to live (that is, in the white man's world).

In a personal observation, Fanon thus showed the Enlightenment ideals to fail – which led him to propose to move beyond philosophy, because its ontology of reason over lived experience could not take this same observation serious.

"If there can be no discussion on a philosophical level – that is, the plane of the basic needs of human reality – I am willing to work on the psychoanalytical level – in other words, the level of the 'failures', in the sense in which one speaks of engine failures." (Fanon 2008: 12)



This makes psychoanalysis, for Fanon, not just a therapeutic discipline but the field where we have to move to understand and change what philosophy (that is modern Western philosophy) leaves not-understood and solidly in place: a failed humanity, a humanity which stumbles over the limits it has drawn to distinguish itself from the animal, from the irrational, from the body, from the feminine for that matter too. Should we return to philosophy after Fanon, it will have to move beyond those limits in order to achieve what it is supposed to do: understand our being in the world, and the world in which we are, and the conditions under which both world and human can be in relation to each other. The conditions and the relata, the experience of the negrified man reveal, can only be understood while psychoanalytically researching what forces drive this cultural and political process of universalizing the European being and its concepts.

Achieving Humanity?

When the first Portuguese set foot in Mbanze Kongo in 1491, opening the land up to the Atlantic slave trade, it was under the reign of a highly influential king, Nzinga Mbemba Affonso, who stayed in power for almost forty years. Affonso took on his Christian name after conversion to Christianity. He aimed to make the best of the presence of the Europeans, adopting their religion, some of their learning and material culture, whilst opposing their attempts to impose their legal code. His letters to two Portuguese kings provide a rare view into the thinking of a pre-colonial African ruler. Although holding slaves was a common practice in his times, the scale of their deportation by the Portuguese worried him greatly. In the early 16th century he wrote to ‘king and brother’ Joao III in Lisbon on this matter, observing with a sharp eye that on the African side, the greed for Portuguese merchandise brought his subjects “*to seize members of their own families [...] to do business by selling them as captives.*” To his view, “*We need in this kingdom only priests and schoolteachers, and no merchandise, unless it is wine and flour for Mass. [...] It is our wish that this kingdom not be a place for the trade or transport of slaves*” (Hochschild 1999: 13).

Affonso’s letters are of high historical importance, providing insight in the human decisions and their consequences that shaped the early stages of the colonialist era. Most important for our investigation, though, is that their author speaks as a king among kings. Although his situation is obviously one of backlog concerning the development of modern weaponry and naval power, we see no sign of ‘negrification’. His letters do not show any sign of the culturally and politically destroyed Africa of a few centuries later, which gave false evidence to European writers of the ‘primitive’ nature of its inhabitants. For Affonso and his European contemporaries, it was as yet unimaginable that three hundred years later, in 1822, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel would write in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*:

“The negro, as already observed, exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state. We must lay aside all thought of reverence and morality – all that we call feeling – if we would rightly comprehend him; there is nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in this type of character.” (Hegel 1914: 97)

And not only did Hegel write Africans out of (full) humanity, more importantly, he excluded them from history. While these ‘natural men’ could not reflect on their own condition or position, they lacked historical being and agency: “*What we properly understand by Africa, is the Unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature [...]*” (Hegel 1914: 103).

Nor could a man like Affonso have imagined Immanuel Kant to write in 1795 that African and other non-European peoples are a threat to the legality and order of ‘civilized’ European society. As in Perpetual Peace:

“The individual (or nation) who remains in a mere state of nature deprives me of this security [of civil law, AR] and does me injury, by mere proximity. There is perhaps no active (facto) molestation, but there is a state of lawlessness (status injustus) which, by its very existence, offers a continual menace to me.” (Kant 1903: 119)

This threat could be solved, the text continues, by one-sidedly establishing European rule over these peoples. The philosopher Emmanuel Eze referred to these and other quotations of modern Western thinkers in his book *Achieving our Humanity*, of which the aim was “*to write a historical survey of philosophical reason in modern Europe and modern Africa, with the aim of imagining what reason might look like apart from its implication in racism and colonial and postcolonial capitalist modernity*” (Eze 2001: 215). In his earlier collection of Enlightenment texts on race (*Race and the Enlightenment*, 1997), Eze had provided part of the material he now used to show that the modern Western idea of humanity was intrinsically connected to racialized and racist concepts. While, for instance, humanity was defined by a philosopher such as Kant as the dignity to become reasonable – that is to understand moral law and act according to it – this very potential – to become reasonable – was denied to non-white peoples.

“This presumption that the lives of the so-called savages were governed by caprice, instinct, and violence rather than law left no room for Kant to imagine between the Europeans and the natives a system of international relations, established on the basis of equality and respect [...].” (Eze 2001: 78)

Such relations were what the king Affonso, three centuries before Hegel, still implied when he addressed the king of Portugal as his ‘brother’. While rule on the basis of nobility gradually made way for the modern state, which was based on economic power relations, the West, while successfully plundering and destroying political and cultural frameworks of ‘the rest’, came to view its outlook on the world and humanity as the highpoint of reason, pinning in its universalization of, as Max Scheler put it, the “*ethnically and historically very limited [...] ethos of the people and state of a specific epoch in the history of Prussia*” (Scheler 1973: xviii) – and declaring any other view of life to be ‘natural’ and brutish.



On the basis of his analysis, Eze proposes that the first priority for human beings – to discontinue the age of racism – is to aim at “*achieving our humanity*”. With this expression he meant not so much that humanity should be sought for beyond race but to highlight that humanity can and should never be thought of as a pre-given ‘essential’. This was, in his view, the basis of the ‘mistake’ of the Enlightenment thinkers: their ignoring the fact that their philosophical definition of humanity was not found in the realm of universal and timeless ideas but was constructed on the basis of their historical and regional, European experiences and interests. Thus, humans living for a post-racial future should take ‘humanity’ as a responsibility, and therefore as a process in actual life, not to be decided by philosophers working isolated in their studies. One should add to this that Eze’s philosophical scrutiny showed that ‘history of philosophy’ and the analysis of philosophical ideas themselves are to be taken as interruptions in the actual political process in which we, human beings, are continuously creating our world, instead of as just academic work, a point that has been given new corroboration in the recent work on racism in the formation of the philosophical canon, by historian of ideas Peter J. Park, which shows how only in the Enlightenment period “*historians of philosophy began to claim a Greek beginning for philosophy [...] [and] within one generation, academic philosophers succeeded in excluding the non-European world [...]*” (Park 2013: 2,9).

Temporalities in the Global Postcolony

“[...] from Max Weber to the deconstructionists, the link between modernity, rationalism, and Westernism was seen as more than merely contingent; it was seen as constitutive of all three, so that precisely this interlinking that is the ‘distinctive feature of the West,’ distinguishes it from the rest of the world, [which] means that its developments have not happened anywhere else. This uniqueness would cover, for example, the secularization of culture, the release from the thrall of nature, the end of miracles, the elimination of finalism from religions, and the shattering of primary bonds and loyalties and ancient customs and beliefs – an assertion of which the validity might, if one so wanted, be profoundly questioned.” (Mbembe 2001: 10)

In his book *On the Postcolony*, Achille Mbembe aimed to disentangle the prejudice that what actually were local and historically situated ideas (those defining modernity) are to be understood as universal truths. To understand the histories of non-Western countries, he abstains from asking what role universal reason could play in the continent of Africa. First, to his view, we should understand that there is not one (universal, rational) development, but that “*every age, including the postcolony, is in reality a combination of several temporalities*” (Mbembe 2001: 15). To better understand what is going on between ‘the West and the rest’, we should do the hard work to get better informed and contextualized accounts of the histories of peoples and nations, better informed and contextualized sociological and anthropological research, all of which in turn ask for more refined philosophical work to widen the current frameworks of such research. An example of such research is that of historian Dienke Hondius, who studied the development and role of ideas of race in Europe, in her work *Blackness in Western Europe*, while especially highlighting the role of the Dutch, whose

[...] merchants and their companies were among the Europeans who played a critical role in the development of white supremacy across the globe. In practice, through empire and the slave trade, as well as in theory, developing and disseminating racial ways of thinking” (Hondius 2014: 3). Research like hers shows that investigating a particular (small) people, the Dutch, in fact adds to our understanding of the rise of globality. Globality, the historical situation of the economic, political and cultural interconnectedness of all peoples of the world, is not, as Enlightenment-inspired thought might have it, the necessary result of the coming together of the peoples of the earth due to their universally shared humanity. It is rather the contingent historical outcome of the search for power and riches of certain local peoples, such as the Dutch. By sailing the seas and moving goods and people across them, they in fact, to put it in Mbembe’s words, imposed their own ‘temporality’ on the world.

It is no coincidence that Kant proposed to bring non-European peoples forcibly under European legality and that king Affonso especially opposed to accept Portuguese laws. By being brought under another people’s legal system, their ‘temporality’ is brought upon you – including their values and goals, and most of all: their idea of humanity. Humanity as reason, for instance. Or humanity as civilization, meaning Western-style schooling and economic progress. This historical situation of equalization through submission has, in a dialectical movement, inspired however the search for identity – political and cultural. In Marxist thought, which focused on the plight of the poor workers who fuelled with their labour the economies of Europe, there was no focus on this issue. It considered all the workers of the world to be in the same boat, as deprived human beings. The temporality of Western culture – that of economic progress and ‘human dignity’ – was not questioned as such. This gave the Marxist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre (1976) the opportunity to describe, in 1948, the literary *négritude* movement as just a phase in the dialectical process of the freeing of all the oppressed workers of the world. A description which made Fanon respond that:

[...] from the point of view adopted here, there is no black problem. Or at any rate if there is one it concerns the whites only accidentally. It is a story that takes place in darkness, and the sun that is carried within me must shine into the smallest crannies.” (Fanon 2008: 18)

Fanon made it clear that the Marxist approach had to deny any special significance to the oppression of peoples on the basis of the colour of their skin – thereby, I would add, inscribing itself into Western modernity, its temporality, its legality, its idea of a common humanity. Thus Fanon could write in 1952 that “*the Negro [...] has fought for Liberty and Justice, but these were always white liberty and white justice; that is, values secreted by his masters*” (Fanon 2008: 172). For Fanon it was therefore adamant that the colonized peoples gained their independency – and he got himself involved in the struggle for it in Algeria, training revolutionary fighters. This did not solve, however, the question of what ‘liberty’ and what ‘justice’ they were fighting for. Would they be true to an Algerian, a Congolese, or whatever local identity? Would the struggle for independence bring the decolonizing peoples to their own temporality, and their own (political and cultural) identity, automatically? Or would there be, in the modern concept of the state adopted, still a silent remnant of oppression, an invisible stronghold, so to speak, for white liberty and white justice to remain in place?



Towards Just Politics and Right Culture

Agricultural engineer, revolutionary and postcolonial thinker Amilcar Cabral addressed the questions of building new national identities after the end of colonial rule. While Mbembe, as we saw above, saw the issue of identity as standing for the impossible choice of orienting oneself towards a lost tradition, or submitting to a foreign set of values, and as a result saw the postcolonial subject as between temporalities, Cabral proposed thinking of identity in a different fashion. Not as a process of orienting oneself toward some past or toward some future, but as a process in the making, as a historical process in the most real sense. According to Mbembe, the postcolonial subject is in a ‘time of entanglement’:

“I felt that what distinguishes the contemporary African experience is that this emerging time is appearing in a context – today – in which the future horizon is apparently closed, while the horizon of the past has apparently receded.” (Mbembe 2001: 17)

Cabral on the other hand does not focus on the past or on the future but rather on the present, where history is being written:

“History allows us to know the nature and extent of the imbalances and conflicts which characterize the evolution of a society; culture allows us to know the dynamic syntheses which have been developed and established by social conscience to resolve these conflicts at each stage of its evolution, in the search for survival and progress.” (Cabral 2007: 3)

Being inspired in his thought by Marxism, Cabral however tends to see the forces of culture to be closely connected, or even intertwined, with those of politics and economics. He doesn't follow the Marxist essentialism with regard to ‘humanity’, nor does he accept its dialectical understanding of history, according to which cultural development will always and only follow the objective development of the relations of production. To him, culture is itself a force in the development of peoples. A very powerful force, as Cabral not without humour shows in an anecdote about one of Hitler's most important men: *“When Goebbels, the brain behind Nazi propaganda, heard the word ‘culture’, he reached for his pistol. This shows that the Nazis [...] had a clear idea of the value of culture as a factor of resistance to foreign domination”* (Cabral 2007: 170). This quotation shows Cabral to have understood the pitfalls of the Sartrean mode of Marxism, which lets itself be caught in universalistic schemes, and therefore does not do right to the lived experience of peoples nor to empirical facts. Cabral looks closely into the actual historical realities of domination, and while speaking about African countries he observes that colonial powers on the one hand denied ‘real’ culture to their subjects, and on the other hand manipulated existing cultural constructions to their own benefit, installing:

[...] chiefs whom it trusts and who are more or less accepted by the population, [giving] them various material privileges including education for their eldest children, [creating] chiefdoms where they did not exist, [establishing] cordial relations with religious leaders, [building] mosques, [organizing] journeys to Mecca, etc.” (Cabral 2007: 176)

Focusing on empirical realities, Cabral acknowledges that the post-colonial nations are a complex network of different ethnic groups with their own cultures, in which, to complicate matters further, culture is not evenly distributed. Cultures should not, therefore, be understood as clear-cut or finished entities, but as phenomena in development, with “*virtues and defects, factors for progress and stagnation or regression*” (Cabral 2007: 179). He thus avoids the position that takes cultures to be the sedimented totality of traditions of a people or of an ethnic or religious group, as it is often done in political movements, claiming culture as an identity marker to keep others out like in the present day movements in Europe that oppose further immigration. While Cabral forgoes any romanticism in the use of the concept of ‘culture’, he gives it its full significance as a factor in the building of political identity. Vice versa, he claims that the struggle for a political identity is one of the determining factors in the struggle for cultural development. When he uses the word ‘struggle’ he thinks, obviously, of the kind of guerrilla movement of which he himself was a leader, where former intellectuals and former village people come together, and are transformed by the shared experience of, temporarily, becoming military and political strategists. Getting to know each other’s stories, learning from each other, in the best case they creatively forge a cultural identity, which encompasses elements of Western education and of traditional knowledge – in a process which does not have an end, although its most creative phase will take place in the actual time of decolonization.

It will be important to discuss Cabral more elaborately than space admits of now, as his work is not very well-known in academia. Dismissed all too easily as a leader of armed struggle, his creative work on cultural and political identity is unjustly overlooked. His speeches and writings, which were meant to encourage the liberation movement, stand in a stark contrast to the sombre tone of Fanon’s books. Although both are dismissive of the ‘civilizing’ ideology of the colonizing powers, Fanon sees them already as a historical relic, to be bypassed as soon as possible, as in *The Wretched of the Earth*: “*Let us leave this Europe which never stops talking of man yet massacres him at every one of its street corners, at every corner of the world*” (Fanon 2004: 235). This quotation, describing the atrocities of ‘Europe’, shows its glorious talk of humanity to be just the other side of its global looting and pillaging. In this light, ‘humanity’ is no ‘universal value’, luckily discovered by modern man. But what is it then? Following Emmanuel Eze one could say that it is, rather, the very fragile stuff of human interaction to be discovered and developed in responsible political and cultural action. It demands what Benhabib has called “*risky dialogues*” (Benhabib 2002: xiv). On this view, the work towards the realization of humanity, at once a contingent value and a hope to gain a collective self-understanding in solidarity, can only be done through the actual local struggle for cultural and political identities of peoples. This insight is truly a great step from Kant’s view on universal reason as the foundation of any human’s worth. It has processed the lesson that there can be no worth without the submergence in the collective, actual, nitty-gritty making of just political practices and right cultural values and rituals.



Aiming for transcendent ideals will always unluckily tempt human beings to look beyond the obstacles of their own psychological pathologies, and therefore will let them stumble and fall time and again into inhumane cruelty.

Conclusion

Recently, in the field of history, we have witnessed a spreading awareness that history should be studied more profoundly from several different localized standpoints, while avoiding the pitfalls of a return to a romanticized past. This position, likening the one of Cabral by its claim for a pluralist yet inclusive approach, also characterizes the work of the philosopher of history Michael Eze. Africa's history, he holds "[...] needs to be purged of the invented 'mystifications', since the history of Africa need be a history in continuity." The aim being to "[...] locate individuals as active historical agents and otherwise, restoring dynamism and humanism to history" (Eze 2010: 155). Eze writes forty years after Cabral's death, and has seen the enthusiasm of the liberation struggles become smothered in internal political problems of the new nations, as well as international economic infrastructural patterns that can be described as neo-colonial. His tone is not as pessimistic as that of Fanon, nor as optimistic as that of Cabral. Rather, he proposes to see all sides of the difficulties of the postcolonial situation, asking:

"[I]s there a way of transcending the residual problems of colonial history, or is Africa necessarily condemned to the mappings of the colonial world and its logic? [...] How can the African historian 'relocate' African historiography in a manner that would open spaces for fresh air, fresh perspectives?" (Eze 2010: 194)

Pointing, for an explanation of the present situation of so many African states, to the problematic relations between leader cults and the quest for riches, Eze gives words to what we might call the heritage of combining plundering natural and human resources with the self-aggrandizement that was first invented by the modern Europeans: "*Where resources and their quest are tied to human subjectivity, this vision of humanity stifles social progress*" (Eze 2010: 195).

These words seem to address primarily African readers, but they contain a message for the entire global postcolony, the post-colonial age having come to a phase of critical reflection. Not only African and other so-called 'developing' nations but 'Western' nations alike show increasing levels not only of a stifling of social progress, but of actual social regress, as many social achievements of the twentieth century are being undermined by the ongoing global liberalization of commerce and industry. As the 'first world' struggles with the effects of the disappearance of production industry to low wages countries, and simultaneously has to deal with large numbers of refugees and immigrants for which it still is the safest and economically attractive place to be, the process of reinventing its political and cultural identities has become more urgent there too. The urgency is shown in the actuality of destabilizing movements of minority peoples (e.g. Catalonia or Scotland) gaining fresh

momentum, as well as of neo-traditionalist movements which claim a common national culture over against immigrants (e.g. Pegida in Germany or the Front National in France).

To conclude, I have proposed a reconstruction of the Enlightenment view of Europe's role in the world, the view of Europe as the place of historical agency, of the birth of civilization and of modernity – a view that is still very much present in philosophy as well as in the public sphere. I have argued that we should leave behind the outlook compressed in the thought of the ‘white man’s burden’, the idea that Europe was destined to bring the Enlightenment, and its civilizing universal values to the rest of the world – a view which is actually a-historical in its false eschatological understanding of the revelation of true humanity by means of its European prophets. And I have proposed that we trade that view for a really historical view, which understands the anti-black attitude of white culture as the “[...] consequence of a contingent historical situation” (Gordon 1995: 34). In order to make that move, to start viewing the actions and views of the modern Western world as contingent instead of as necessary, as historical instead of eschatological, the ‘white’ world has to start first to acknowledge what Fanon wrote in *The Wretched of the Earth*: “*The colonist makes history and he knows it. [...] The history he writes is [...] not the history of the country he is despoiling, but the history of his own nation's looting, raping, and starving to death*” (Fanon 2004: 15).

And then, when Europe’s role in history has come to be seen in a more truthful manner than in the traditional textbooks, a crack is being made where another light can come in – the light that makes us see once again, after three hundred years, the history and the histories of the African continent, as well as of the other non-European peoples, which were denied by Hegel and his likes. The material for these histories is hard to access, due to a lack of scholarly knowledge of the languages in which they were written, to deficient infrastructure in the countries concerned and also due to the successful ‘destruction of the evidence’ of better days by the colonial powers who destroyed ancient cities and royal buildings. Studying these histories once again does not have to lead to a romantic, conservative clinging to the past, but can be seen as an element of the re-appropriation of historical agency by those to whom it was denied in the age of colonialism. Here we might cite Cabral once more, who claimed:

“The important thing is not to waste time in more or less hair-splitting debates on the specificity or non-specificity of African cultural values, but to look upon these values as a conquest by a part of mankind for the common heritage of all mankind, achieved in one or several phases of its evolution.” (Cabral 2007: 180)

These words make it clear that taking up one’s role in the global postcolony, in the historical situation of reflectively dealing with colonialism and its globalizing movements, means making an effort of overcoming the racist Enlightenment and its parochialisms, and moving towards a more truthful historical position. We should leave behind the Hegelian idea that historicity entails being aware of one’s role in (Western) history, and come to accept that it means being connected with a specific place and time (spatialization and temporalization) on the one hand, as well as with a shared place and time on the other. Such a position would return agency to all those struggling to find their identity in the global postcolony.



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