RECERCA, 12. 2012. ISSN: 1130-6149 - DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.6035/Recerca.2012.12.9 - pp. 143-161

Humanism Reconsidered: Post-colonial Humanistic Proposals

El humanismo reconsiderado: propuestas humanísticas postcoloniales

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Resumen

El artículo tiene como objetivo reflexionar sobre el 'humanismo' y presentar propuestas humanistas desde una perspectiva post-colonial. Comienza por examinar los supuestos que subyacen en la ciencia moderna e ilustrada para poner al descubierto su complicidad en la práctica colonial. A continuación, se analiza el humanismo para mostrar cómo se ha utilizado una noción altamente politizada del humanismo para justificar las prácticas y estructuras deshumanizantes del colonialismo. Este ejercicio crítico se complementa con la discusión de dos propuestas humanistas que tratan de presentar un humanismo alternativo que tiene como objetivo posibilitar una comunicación y entendimiento inclusivo, humanista y transcultural en un mundo que se hace cada vez más interrelacionado.

Palabras clave: ilustración, colonialismo, humanismo, estudios post-coloniales, ciencia.

Abstract

The article aims to reconsider 'humanism' and to present humanistic proposals from a post-colonial perspective. It begins by examining the assumptions underlying the modern and enlightened science to expose its complicity in the colonial enterprise. It then analyses humanism to show how a highly politicised notion of humanism has been deployed to justify the dehumanising practices and structures of colonialism. This critical exercise is complemented by the discussion of two humanistic proposals that seek to present an alternative humanism that is geared to enabling an inclusive and humanistic trans-cultural communication and understanding in an increasingly interrelated world.

Keywords: Enlightenment, Colonialism, Humanism, Post-colonial Studies, Science.

Introduction: Enlightenment, Science and Colonialism

The multiple and complex realities of globalisation, cross-cultural encounters and conflicts as well as the new and renewed critical methodologies have highlighted the inadequacy of the grand narratives of European Enlightenment scientific and social paradigms to account for the complexity and plurality of the social and

cultural realities of our present-day world. It has become clear, therefore, that the traditional modes of doing and thinking knowledge, scientific or otherwise, and the underlying conception of science need to be critically revised and transformed. This critical revision also underscores the need for new epistemologies and methodologies that could provide grounds for an inclusive and humanistic trans-cultural communication and understanding in an increasingly globalised and interrelated world.

It is commonly assumed that the European colonialism, which began in the late fifteenth century, owed at least some of its manifestations to the violent and expansionist energies of European nationalism or the scramble for raw materials overseas. As Edward Said (1978) has argued, what underpinned the colonial enterprise and Europe[1]'s will to power however was the idea that European identity was superior to all the non-European peoples and cultures. This idea, which was nurtured and supported by an array of supposedly scientific systems of natural and social knowledge, seems to be, as Said suggests, «the major component in European culture [that] is precisely what made that culture hegemonic both in and outside Europe» (1978: 7).

To understand the cultural and institutional authority of science and its place within the ideologies and instrumentalities of the colonial enterprise, we perhaps need to go back in history, precisely to the Age of Enlightenment (Age of Reason) of the eighteenth century, and the metanarratives to which it gave rise. From this historical perspective, one can see that a founding ideal of the enlightened project was the strong belief in a modern scientific rationalism capable of changing the world for good and improving the human existence in almost all its dimensions. In this culturally specific worldview, modern science was projected as a universal, value-free system or knowledge, which by the logic of its method claimed to explain events by universal causal laws based on experimental testing to arrive at objective conclusions about life, the universe and almost everything (Shiva, 1993: 22). Practicing scientists and researchers were also thought to be free from the constraints of the conceptual boundaries of their intellectual disciplines and from the worldly and political concerns of their times. Furthermore, the distinction between scientific and practical knowledge gave rise to the idea that scientific knowledge was universal, explanatory, demonstrated to be true by a standard method, teachable and learnable. Consequently, science has to be detached from practical life or the life-world (Hadorn and others, 2008: 20).

From a historical perspective, with the rise of the liberal market economy in the nineteenth century, the instrumental interest in scientific knowledge from economics and society became an external driving force for the investment of resources in

1 It is to be noted that I understand 'Europe', 'West', 'Non-West' and 'Orient' as highly complex and heterogeneous entities that do not lend themselves easily to simple generalisations. I will therefore be using these terms loosely and in non-essentialist terms to indicate what is commonly perceived as spaces defined along certain historical, geopolitical and cultural lines.

the progress of modern science and its experimental, quantitative and mathematical perfection. The purpose of improving the standard of living by improved quality, and increasing quantities of goods has been uncontested in society for a long time. As a result, many have come to see scientific activity as free from extra-scientific societal values (Hadorn and others, 2008: 21).

Post-colonial historians and critics have nonetheless shown that, far from its self-declared political disinterestedness and putative objectivity and neutrality, modern science is a significantly social activity that reflects as much as informs the values, practices and the worldly interests of the society in which it is produced. This way, modern science is shown as a social practice that is embedded in economic activities, cultural orientations and political measures that shape and legitimatise its conception and role in society. Science thus reveals itself as much more culturally specific as it was once assumed to be (Stepan, 1991: 10), and as an intellectual field, with interests, conflicts and hierarchies analogous to other cultural fields (Bourdieu, 1975). Post-colonial critics of science and colonialism have also emphasised not only the ideological and cultural embeddedness of Western scientific knowledge, but also its constitutive role in colonialism (Seth, 2009: 374-5), in the sense that it functioned not merely as a 'tool' for a project already underway, but as a means of conceptualising and bringing into being the colonial enterprise itself. Londa Schiebinger (2005: 52) has even argued that it has become clear that the history of almost all modern science must be understood as «science in a colonial context».

Within this broad context of interrogating the mutually constitutive relationship between modern science and colonialism, post-colonial critics also centre their critique on the genesis and evolution of the Western modern project itself. Aníbal Quijano (2007: 171) has argued that during the same period as European colonial domination was consolidating itself, the cultural complex known as European modernity/rationality was being constituted. Moreover, since there is no modernity without coloniality (Escobar, 2007: 184), there is a need to recognise that Europe's acquisition of the adjective 'modern' for itself is a piece of global history of which an integral part is the story of European imperialism (Chakrabarty, 1992: 352).

The post-colonial critique has thus showed that the scientific and pseudoscientific knowledge systems and socio-political institutions, which emerged in the wake of the Enlightenment, have been one of the instruments that enabled Western powers to secure economic gains, political control and cultural hegemony in the non-West. As outlined above, modern science was not only a tool for the colonial enterprise, but was constitutive of the discourse and practice of colonialism, which in turn was the offspring of the modern project itself. As Iskandar and Rustom (2010: 417-418) have argued, the ideas, ideals, institutions, and practices that have shaped

modern Western society (and reverberated to the non-West thanks to imperialism) have come into being by virtue of an unacknowledged, and often disastrous, synthesis of idealism and empiricism, understood as modes of intellection and (by extension) philosophical/cultural traditions.

The trained physicist and environmental activist, Vandana Shiva (1993: 22), argues that the dominant stream of modern science is a specific projection of Western 'man' that originated during the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries as the much-acclaimed Scientific Revolution. She characterises this special epistemological tradition as 'reductionist' because «it reduced the capacity of humans to know nature both by excluding other knowers and other ways of knowing», and «by manipulating it (*sic*) as inert and fragmented matter, nature's capacity for creative regeneration and renewal was reduced» (1993: 23). The multidimensional ecological crisis all over the world, in her view, is an eloquent testimony to the havoc wrought by the modern reductionist science.

Shiva (1988) also argues that this quintessentially reductionist science also perpetrates what she calls 'epistemological violence', manifest in its suppression and dismissal of local knowledge and experiences in favour of a totalitarian and reductionist science that presents itself as the only legitimate mode of knowing. This violence is inflicted on the subject socially through the sharp divide between the expert and the non-expert, a divide that converts the vast majority of non-experts into non-knowers even in those areas of life in which the responsibility of practice and action rests with them. The putative object of knowledge is violated when modern science, in a mindless effort to transform nature without a thought for the consequences, destroys the innate integrity and regenerative capacity of nature. Contrary to the claim of modern science that people are ultimately the beneficiaries of scientific knowledge, Shiva argues, people –particularly the poor– are its worst victims; they are deprived of their life-support systems in the reckless pillage of nature. Seen through Foucault's hypothesis about dominant knowledge systems, modern science can be said to function, «as a double repression: in terms of those whom it excludes from the process and in terms of the model and the standard (the bars) it imposes on those receiving this knowledge» (Foucault, 1977: 219).

With an understanding of discourses as heavily policed cognitive systems which control and delimit both the mode and the means of representation in a given society (Gandhi, 1998: 77), the post-colonial critique interrogates the European scientific knowledge as a grand narrative through which Eurocentric worldview has been 'totalised' as the hegemonic and proper mode of knowing for all humanity. Accordingly, as will be discussed in detail later, the aim of post-colonial critique is to deconstruct and question this totalising account with the voices of all those unaccounted for 'others' who have been silenced and domesticated under the sign of Europe.

The discussion on the notion of 'race' (and the concomitant racist ideologies), and how it has been 'invented' by various natural and social sciences over many centuries is an illustrating example of the way in which purportedly scientific knowledge associated with modern science provides socio-cognitive bases and rationalisation for certain beliefs and modes of conduct. Teun A. van Dijk (2005: 7) argues that racist philosophies and sciences (sometimes conveniently called 'pseudo-sciences' today, but quite respectable in their own times), developed especially in the nineteenth century, and we can still find remnants of such ideas in psychology and social science until today. He further points out that racism is unthinkable without this socio-cognitive basis of racist beliefs and ideologies of which a classical proposition was the alleged superiority of white Europeans in a global colour or 'race' hierarchy in which they invariably came out on top, black Africans at the bottom, and 'yellow' Asians in the middle (van Dijk, 2005: 7-8). In this ideological worldview, 'scientifically' legitimated imaginary differences between 'races' have thus been used to enslave, exploit, discriminate and dominate other peoples for centuries.

In short, as part of their on-going decolonising endeavours, post-colonial critics have forcefully called into question the vision of modern science as a positive and value-free activity that merely coincided with colonialism and had no role in rationalising and legitimising the colonial racist, discriminatory and inhumane practices. The post-colonial emphasis laid on revealing the extra-scientific societal values that inform modern science and its cultural and ideological embeddedness as well as the interested uses and abuses of scientific knowledge does not necessarily mean an anti-science stance. Rather, it is an attempt to examine critically modern science and the consequences of its applications in the life world of those 'others' that have been silenced and marginalised by its totalising and hegemonic power. This critical exercise implies, firstly, the need to demystify the claims about the self-declared political disinterestedness and putative objectivity and neutrality of modern science, to show that it is essentially a social activity that reflects as much as informs the values, practices and the worldly interests of the society in which it is produced. Secondly, it also entails the foregrounding of other conceptual alternatives and epistemologies that account for and celebrate the interconnectedness of our increasingly globalised world as a basis for a genuinely humanistic trans-cultural communication and understanding.

Reconsidering Humanism: a Post-colonial Approach

Against the backdrop of the preceding discussion of the relations between Enlightenment, science and colonialism, I shall now present an introduction to Post-

colonial Studies and its approach to humanism. As an important subfield of literary and cultural studies, which crystallised in the 1980s, Post-colonial Studies focuses particularly on investigating the intimate relationship between culture and politics, highlighting the interrelations between certain cultural forms and particular political and historical practices (Omar, 2008: 228). Departing from the assumption that Western power has always been as a symptom of the hegemony of Western epistemology and pedagogy (Gandhi, 1998: 54), Post-colonial Studies represents a scholarly and critical engagement with the systems of Western knowledge and the ideological interests that inhabit their production and reception. The prefix 'post' in the post-colonial, as Jean-Francois Lyotard (1992) suggests, indicates the conviction «that it is both possible and necessary to break with tradition and institute absolutely new ways of living and thinking» (1992: 90). Post-colonial Studies thus directs its critique against the cultural hegemony of European knowledges in an attempt to reassert the epistemological value of the non-European world (Gandhi, 1998: 44) and the wide range of illegitimate, disqualified or 'subjugated knowledges' (Foucault, 1980: 82) of the 'decolonised' peoples, which have been denigrated and silenced by colonial canonical systems.

A prime example of the post-colonial critique is Edward Said's *Orientalism* of 1978, which is commonly regarded as the principal catalyst and reference point for Post-colonial Theory (Gandhi, 1998: 23). Employing the insights of French post-structuralism, in particular those of Foucault, Said sets out to analyse a range of nineteenth-century European representations of oriental cultures, and to highlight the forms of language and knowledge that were intimately connected to, and colluded with, the history of European colonialism. Taking the late eighteenth century as a roughly defined starting point, Said argues that Orientalism (Occidental representations of the Orient) can be discussed and analysed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient by making statements about it, describing and authorising views of it, by teaching it and ruling over it. In short, Orientalism is «a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient» (Said, 1978: 3). For Said, therefore, Orientalism was not only an academic study of 'the Orient', but a discourse, which through the complicity of knowledge systems with political power, not only constructed but also was instrumental in administering and subjugating 'the Orient.' In other words, Orientalism was a form of epistemic or cultural violence in line with peace research terminology. The peace theorist, Johan Galtung (1990: 291), defines 'cultural violence' as "those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence […] that can be used to justify or legitimise direct or structural violence".

In sum, Post-colonial Studies is the generic name for a cross-disciplinary distinct set of conceptual frameworks and reading strategies that seek to engage with all cultural forms that mediate, resist and reflect upon the relations of domination

between and within nations and cultures that, while being rooted in the history of modern European colonialism, continue to operate in the post-colonial era.

In the context of this brief introduction, I shall now reconsider critically the concept of 'humanism' from a post-colonial perspective. There is no denying the fact that 'humanism' is a highly contentious term. However, as Leela Gandhi (1998: 27) points out, the various humanisms are unified in their belief that underlying the diversity of human experience it is possible, first, to discern a universal and given human nature, and secondly to find it revealed in the common language of rationality. Philip Bell (2010: 75) indicates that, in common parlance, 'humanism' refers to a range of overlapping views centred on the belief that human beings have value in themselves, and are not part of any divine plan. This, in that view, is the source of all civic values and rights. In this sense, science and reason are assumed to be capable of providing comprehensive explanations of the universe and human life itself. Admitting, however, that humanist values and ethical principles depend on a universalistic (or at least generalised) notion of the species called 'human', he points out that humanism is a contingent episteme or paradigm that is linked to actual techno-cultural conditions, and hence it represents «a historically grounded ideology or world-view» (Bell, 2010: 74).

Against this backdrop, Leela Gandhi (1998: 28-29) maintains that some critical methodologies associate humanism with the theory of subjectivity and knowledge philosophically inaugurated by Bacon, Descartes and Locke, and scientifically substantiated by Galileo and Newton. This philosophical and scientific revolution found its proper fulfilment in the eighteenth century, where it came to be embraced as the Enlightenment, or *Aufklärung,* defined by Immanuel Kant as «the possibility whereby *man* philosophically acquires the status and capacities of a rational and adult being» (cited in Leela Gandhi, 1998: 30; emphasis added).

However, many thinkers have critically revised this enlightened notion of rationality and humanity. Michel Foucault (1984), for instance, argued that the very project of Enlightenment rationality "did not make us mature adults" and hence it is far from conclusive (1984: 49). Projected as a reflection of the heterogeneity of human nature, the Enlightenment rationally in fact restricts the universal structures of human existence to the normative condition of adult rationality—itself a value arising from the specific historicity of European societies. It follows that this account of 'humanity' precludes the possibility of dialogue with other ways of being human and, in fact, brings into existence and circulation the notion of the 'non-adult' as 'inhuman'. This move also instantiates and sets into motion a characteristically pedagogic and imperialist hierarchy between European adulthood and its childish, colonised 'Other' (Gandhi, 1998: 31-32).

It is in this context that G.W.F. Hegel (1991: 91), for example, described Africa as «the gold-land compressed within itself—the land of childhood, which lying beyond

the day of self-conscious history, is enveloped in the dark mantle of Night». Pointing out that Africa has no place in 'human' history, which in Hegel's mind meant the European history, he further affirms that, «For [Africa] is no historical part of the world; it has no movement or development to exhibit» (Hegel, 1991: 92). This perception of the colonised culture as fundamentally childlike or childish clearly feeds into the logic of the colonial 'civilising mission' which is fashioned, quite self-consciously, as a form of tutelage or a disinterested project concerned with bringing the colonised to maturity.

An illustrating example that demonstrates the operation and ambivalences of the *mission civilisatrice* (civilising mission) is the French colonial experience in Algeria. The universal human rights enshrined in the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen,* adopted by the Constituent Assembly in June 1789, are considered the founding pillars of the modern French state. However, French universal rights found their severest test during the French occupation of Algeria, which began in 1830, where many atrocities were committed in the name of humanism and universalism. The French colonial experience in Algeria showed that the ideals of universal humanism, liberty, equality and fraternity only represented a narrow chauvinistic dogma and a mere ideological cover for colonialism and enslavement. Robert Young (1992) points out, in this context, that the formation of the ideas of human nature, humanity and the universal qualities of the human mind coincided with those particularly violent centuries in the history of the world now known as the era of Western colonialism. This, in his view, demonstrates humanism's involvement in the history of colonialism, and the fact that the two are not so easily separable. It was the recognition of this use of the 'human' as a highly politicised category, according to Young, that led to sustained critiques of this type of 'humanism' by a broad range of post-war thinkers including mostly non-European writers such as Frantz Fanon, as will be discussed later.

As Young (1990) stresses elsewhere, this criticism of humanism does not imply that it is less philanthropic or lacking in ethics. Rather, it is a critical interrogation of the use of the human as an explanatory category that claims to provide a rational understanding of 'man'—"an assumed universal predicated on the exclusion and marginalisation of his Others, such as 'woman' or 'the native'" (1990: 122). What these critiques have practically shown is that the category of 'human' was too often invoked only in order to put the male before the female or to classify other 'races' as subhuman, and therefore not subject to the ethical prescriptions applicable to humanity at large. In his preface to Frantz Fanon's book, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Jean-Paul Sartre spells out the implications of this statement, when he declares forcefully that:

> Liberty, equality, fraternity, love, honour, patriotism and what have you. All this did not prevent us from making anti-racial speeches about dirty niggers,

> dirty Jews and dirty Arabs. High-minded people, liberal or just soft-hearted, protest that they were shocked by such inconsistency; but they were neither mistaken or dishonest, for with us there is nothing more consistent than a racist humanism since the European has only been able to become a man through creating slaves and monsters (Sartre in Fanon, 1963: 22).

As part of its critique of Western hegemonic systems of knowledge, the approach of Post-colonial Studies to humanism therefore lies in unmasking what it considers to be the unstated presuppositions of the humanist tradition itself in order to bring to light its underlying ideological assumptions, and thus to reveal humanism's involvement in the history of colonialism. This way, it poblematises and calls into question the taken-for-granted concepts and notions, such as humanism, in light of the many forms of epistemological violence and otherwise with which they have been historically associated. Nonetheless, the post-colonial 'anti-humanist critique', as it were, tries to go beyond the mere act of problematization, and seeks to transform Western epistemological legacies to develop alternative modes of knowledge and a genuinely humanistic and inclusive notion of humanism.

This critical and transformative enterprise is based on the recognition that one cannot simply dismiss modern Western sciences and systems of knowledge as colonialist and irrelevant, because there are neither originary spaces outside the discursive universe delimited by the Western modern project nor privileged and uncolonised terrains from which to speak, including Post-colonial Theory itself (Venn, 2002: 51). As Ashis Nandy (1983) argues, colonialism has particularly helped to generalise the concept of the modern West from a geographical and temporal entity to a psychological category. In his view, «the West is now everywhere, within the West and outside, in structures and in minds» (1983: xi).

In the context of this overlapping of histories, geographies and systems of knowledge, I contend that any critique of Western modernity or the scientific knowledge associated with it should in no way mean a regression to cultural particularism or ethnocentrism. It can neither avoid dealing with the historical legacy and epistemological dominance of Western systems of knowledge, and the forms of epistemic and cultural violence that they may generate. However, it should assume the responsibility of subjecting these hegemonic modes of knowledge to critique and trying to radically transform them by integrating them with other forms of knowledge to enable the flourishing of a plurality of life-enhancing and non-coercive modes of knowledge in the interests of human freedom. As Young (1992: 250) points out, the legacy of colonialism is as much a problem for the West as it is for the scarred lands in the world beyond.

Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000: 16) argues that the "European thought is at once both indispensable and inadequate in helping us to think through the experiences

of political modernity in non-Western nations". Recognising that this thought is now a common heritage that affects us all, Chakrabarty maintains that the task of the post-colonial critic lies in investigating how this thought could be transformed and renewed from and for the margins. This position echoes the call made by Aníbal Quijano (2007: 177) who called for 'an epistemological decolonisation' to clear the way for a new intercultural communication and an interchange of experiences and meanings as the basis of another rationality which may legitimately aspire to some universality. Indeed, the notion of epistemological pluralism lies at the heart of the post-colonial task to restore other forms of knowledge, which have been dismissed as deviations from a European standard, and to develop alternative modes of knowledge and methodologies that could provide grounds for a genuinely inclusive and humanistic trans-cultural communication and understanding. It is in this context that I shall now present the humanistic proposals made by two major anticolonial and post-colonial critics, Frantz Fanon and Edward W. Said, respectively.

Frantz Fanon and the New Humanism

Frantz Fanon (1925-1961), the Martinican psychiatrist who became a militant in the Algerian revolution, is often known as an advocate of anti-colonial violence as exemplified in his much cited book, *Les damnés de la terre* (The Wretched of the Earth, 1963), which became an inspiration for the anti-colonial movement that swept the colonial world in the 1960s (Omar, 2009: 264). Less known of his writings, nonetheless, is his vision of a 'new humanism' that reflects his reconciliatory endeavour to envision an all-inclusive humanism that would go beyond the confines of the colonial conflictive situation.

Overall, Fanon's writings point to his constant longing to overcome the inhumane and disabling socio-political structures of the colonial situation and their ideological underpinnings. His desire to go beyond this situation by way of envisaging a more promising future of equitable human relations based on mutual recognition is what Fanon encapsulates in his notion of the need to create 'new men'. In his writing in general and particularly in his earlier works, Fanon shows that he was seeking to investigate colonialism in terms of its human impact, or more precisely the distortion of human relations that it engendered. In his first work, and precisely in the last chapter of *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Black Skin, White Masks), Fanon (1952) makes clear his humanist message and indicates the way out of the spiral of Manichean violence of the racist and colonial systems. As he puts it, only when both Whites and Blacks, colonisers and colonised, turn their backs on the inhuman voices of their respective ancestors, a birth of an authentic human communication becomes possible:

> It is through the effort to recapture the self and to scrutinise the self, it is through the lasting tension of their freedom that men will be able to create the ideal conditions of existence for a human world. Superiority? Inferiority? Why not the quite simple attempt to touch the other, to feel the other, to explain the other to yourself? (Fanon, 1967: 231).

Convinced that every struggle for human liberation was always a struggle for a liberated identity, Fanon believed in the need for decolonising action that would effectively liberate both the colonised and the coloniser from the Manichean world in which they were trapped. It was in this sense that for him liberation meant more than just political independence; perhaps more importantly, it symbolised the regeneration of individuals and of society. As Irene Gendzier (1973: xi) has noted, for Fanon liberation meant «…the travail of people undoing the effects of colonisation and restructuring their relations with one another and with the former colonising power on the basis of their new situation». It was also Fanon's understanding that racial and colonial oppression denied the dominated people even the notion of humanity that vigorously led him, precisely in the conclusion of *The Wretched of the Earth*, to set out to chart a new path that would transform the colonised—and the colonisers, for that matter—and bring them back their humanity.

If the evidence of the success of a struggle lies in an entire social structure being radically changed, Fanon argues, the ultimate goal of this arduous transformation is to «set a foot a new man» (Fanon, 1963: 316)—which is taken here to mean new and transformed men and women.[2] The creation of a new language and a new humanity is thus for Fanon the central thrust of any genuine struggle for human freedom.

Fanon argues that there can be no liberation of consciousness separate from the total struggle for social liberation. This means that no radical transformation of identity was possible without an entire struggle to radically transform the social order—encompassing both the coloniser and the colonised—and create new human and humanising relations. As Fanon says,

> The struggle for freedom does not give back to the national culture its former value and shapes; this struggle which aims at a fundamentally different set of relations between men cannot leave intact either the form or the content of the people's culture. After the conflict, there is not only the disappearance of colonialism but also the disappearance of the colonised man. This *new humanity* cannot do otherwise than define *a new humanism* both for itself and for others (Fanon, 1963: 245-6; emphases added).

2 This interpretation notwithstanding, I am also aware of the criticisms that have been levelled against Fanon for his use of a 'gender-blind' language.

Fanon's humanist vision thus stems from his conviction and understanding of humanity as one indivisible whole. That is why he stresses the need for reconsidering the common human condition and for inventing new plans for a humanity that Europe has proved «incapable of bring to a triumphant birth» (Fanon, 1963: 313). An indispensable task to undertake in this context is to rethink the very notion of humanism, in the name of which many crimes were perpetrated against humanity itself. In his case, Fanon sets out to read the history of European colonialism against the backdrop of this ethnocentric humanism, which he finds indefensible, leading him in the conclusion of his abovementioned book to urge his readers to:

> Leave this Europe where they are never done talking of Man, yet murder men everywhere they find them, at the corner of every one of their own streets, in all the corners of the globe. For centuries they have stifled almost the whole of humanity in the name of a so-called spiritual experience (Fanon, 1963: 312).

Fanon's relentless attack on the cruel nature of European humanism, however, should not be read as an attempt to dispose of humanism *per se*, but rather to bring into existence a new and true humanism. As Robert Young (1992) points out, Fanon's criticism of Europe does not stop at the violent history of colonial appropriation. For the effect of colonialism, as he suggests, is to dehumanise the native, a process which, paradoxically, finds its justification in the values of Western humanism. Fanon's humanist project lies thus in rethinking the very notion of humanism itself in order to lay bare and overcome its ethnocentric assumptions, and to envisage a new inclusive notion of humanity. He writes stressing that, «let us reconsider the question of mankind…whose connections must be increased, whose channels must be diversified and whose messages must be re-humanised» (Fanon, 1963: 314). In line with this indispensable reconsideration of humanism, Fanon clearly points out that the new history of humanity ought to be a history «which will have regard to the sometimes prodigious theses which Europe has put forward, but which will also not forget Europe's crimes, of which the most horrible was committed in the heart of man» (Fanon, 1963: 315). Paul Gilory (2010: 36) observes that Fanon's humanism represents a post-anthropological, postcolonial and post-exotic humanism that distinguished itself from the contending liberal and Cold War varieties of that creed by being self-consciously articulated as an acknowledgement of racism's debasement of humanity.

In a similar vein, Fanon strongly cautions his fellows from the Third World nations that they should not waste time imitating Europe, and be obsessed with the desire to catch up with it. Instead, their aim must be to seek to unite all human energies in one communion whose goal is to achieve human common progress. For this to

happen, he stresses that the human caravan should not be stretched out, «for in that case each line will hardly see those who precede it; and men who no longer *recognise each other* meet less and less together, and talk to each other less and less» (Fanon, 1963: 315; emphasis added).

Of course, in advancing his humanistic project, Fanon was aware of the gap between the realm of the desirable and that of the actual, to put it another way. His humanist appeal however is a direct call to individuals and groups to transform themselves in an effort to remake the world. Thus, Fanon conclusively leaves us all with a moral imperative that «we must turn over a new leaf;[3] we must work out new concepts, and try to set afoot a new man» (Fanon, 1963: 316). For him, it is the collective duty of all peoples across the colonial divide and beyond to create, invent and chart a new course for a new and inclusive humanity.

Edward Said and Secular Humanism

In one of his readings of the contemporary world realities, Edward W. Said (1935-2003), the Palestinian-born American scholar and critic, saw a world that was no longer under the unopposed thrall of Eurocentrism and in which a panoply of literatures and civilisations that have emerged from the blight of colonialism were challenging Western modes of thought and epistemology. Instead of musing on 'the clash of civilisations', he argued that it would certainly be better to expand our understanding of human history to include all those 'Others' constructed as dehumanised, demonised opponents by imperial knowledges and a will to rule. As he put it, "civilisations have never occurred or survived for long simply by fighting off all the others: beneath a superficial level of defensive propaganda, every great civilisation is made up of endless traffic with others (Said, 2000a: 291).

Said's posthumously published book, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (2004), draws on the above insights to present a notion of a secular humanism and cosmopolitanism that aims to bridge cultural fissures and 'civilisational' cleavages and to celebrate and emphasise interconnectedness and humanistic dialogue. Despite his methodological reliance on some thinkers associated with the poststructuralist school of thought, a trend that is decidedly marked by its 'anti-humanism', Said retained a strong belief in the ideals of human freedom and human agency as the core of any humanistic exercise. It is in this sense that he defines humanism as «disclosure, it is agency, it is immersing oneself in the element of history, it is recovering

3 In the original French version, Fanon says literally, «*il faut faire peau neuve*», which could be translated as «there is a need to make new skin». This interpretation implies, in my view, that people need to free themselves from the complexes and ideologies of skins, as he explains en *Peau noire, masques blancs*, so that they can begin to perceive and see each other with only one human skin.

rationality from the turbulent actualities of human life, and then submitting them painstakingly to the rational processes of judgment and criticism» (Said, 2000b).

Aware of the tremendous potential of the complex Western hegemonic systems of corporate knowledge to infuse institutions and discourses with ideology and purpose, he agreed with Raymond Williams (1958: 376) that these meta-level epistemologies and inherent dominative modes are not ontologically fixed and are therefore subject to reconfiguration, unlearning and dismantling. It is in this sense that he set out to challenge the 'Western canon' and its monopoly of the category 'humanism'. While asserting that humanism is hardly a pure product of the West, he argues that humanism cannot be truly humanist if it does not account for humanistic production outside the Western canon (Said, 2004). In making the case for his secular humanism, Said encourages intellectuals to tear open the canon to allow texts from multiple traditions, cultures, and locales to commune alongside the Western classics (Iskandar and Rustom, 2010: 11).

Combining socio-political and intellectual history, philosophical reflection and ideology critique, Said's various writings and his particularly 'technique of trouble' (Iskandar and Rustom, 2010: 415) were above all intended to 'dedomesticate' criticism and to turn its potentially corrosive power into a mechanism of radical social change. At the heart of his humanistic approach is his strong belief in an oppositional and secular humanism that is geared to furthering human (rational) enlightenment and liberty. Emphasising his humanistic advocacy of alternatives, he contends that «for intellectuals, artists, and free citizens, there must always be room for dissent, for alternative views, for ways and possibilities to challenge the tyranny of the majority and, at the same time and most importantly, to advance human enlightenment and liberty» (Said and Barenboim, 2002: 181). For him, intellectuals therefore should represent a contrarian force in a world that has too often seen the unscrupulous exercise of power:

> The intellectual . . . [represents] an individual vocation, an energy, a stubborn force engaging as a committed and recognisable voice in language and in society with a whole slew of issues, all of them having to do in the end with a combination of enlightenment and emancipation or freedom (Said, 1994: 73).

Many of Said's works—especially *Beginnings: Intention and Method*; *The World, the Text, and the Critic;* and *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, among others—demonstrate his endeavour to reengage the enormous emancipatory potential of a critical and secular humanism hat accounts for and reflects the interconnectedness of the increasingly globalised world. At the same time, he also tries to expose and to scrutinize the abuses and the unacknowledged or deliberately suppressed barbaric and violent aspects of ethnocentric humanism. Said's aim was to open humanism up to

its own potential, to let hitherto 'subjugated knowledges' transform humanism in the name of all humanity, and to decolonise humanism as a Eurocentric construct. Iskandar and Rustom (2010: 445) argue that Said's rhetoric renders humanism accountable to its Eurocentric past, and only when it accepts such accountability can humanism begin to measure up to the 'human.' In his reconstructive attempt to rethink humanism in the name of its better half, he points out that:

> I believed then, and still believe, that it is possible to be critical of humanism in the name of humanism and that, schooled in its abuses by the experience of Eurocentrism and empire, one could fashion a different kind of humanism that was cosmopolitan and text-and language bound in ways that absorbed the great lessons of the past from, say, Eric Auerbach to Leo Spitzer and more recently from Richard Poirier, and still remain attuned to the emergent voices and currents of the present, many of them exilic, extraterritorial, and unhoused, as well as uniquely American (Said, 2004: 10-11).

This stance resembles Frantz Fanon's call for a new humanism, as outlined above, which is based on the deconstruction not only of the coloniser-colonised binary but also the colonialism system as such. In his description of the cultural decolonising practices, Said also emphasises a 'transnational humanism' that should entail that pervasive and noticeable pull away from separatist nationalism toward a more integrative view of human community and human liberation. Despite the many post-colonial critiques of 'universal humanism' as a cloak for Eurocentrism that effaces cultural specificity, Said asserts that transnational secular humanism is crucial to «a more generous and pluralistic vision of the world» (1993: 230).

His proposal of secular humanism also breaks with essentialised notions of 'difference' and builds on a philosophy of critical cosmopolitanism (Mbembe and Posel, 2005: 283-284). He understands difference in a way contrary to the common practice in which difference is employed to affirm identity, often with a tendency toward domination or subjection. He clearly opposes the conceptualisation of differences (identities or traditions) as pure or things that should be made 'pure'. For him, an identity «is itself made up of different elements. But it has a coherent sound and personality or profile to it» (Said and Barenboim, 2002: 155). In this sense, a humanist community is one that overcomes divisions without destroying the differences.

Said's emphasis on the need to «acknowledge the massively knotted and complex histories of special but nevertheless overlapping and interconnected experiences» (Said, 1993: 32) led him to provide, in *Orientalism,* a compelling narrative of European humanism's complicity in the colonial project of subjugating and misrepresenting the Orient, as explained above. This is based on his strong belief that the constitutive relation and complicity between cultural products and certain

political and historical practices, such as colonialism and imperialism, has to interrogated with the utmost rigor and in utter accountability. Nevertheless, he stresses that such a critical project, by definition, has to be contrapuntal, in the sense that it has to acknowledge the potential for good and the harm done, and to try to transform that experience for the common good. Because he was self-consciously positioned within the Western culture and scholarship, Said was confident that he could read the Western culture against itself and use its considerable resources selectively to interrogate its history and politics. In short, as Iskandar and Rustom (2010: 446) have argued, he set to himself the important task of «translating the West to itself, despite itself». In sum, Said's proposal of a secular humanism reads contrapuntally the historical experiences of cultural encounter and exchange with an appreciation of the increasing interconnectedness of the world to reconstruct the humanistic and reconciliatory spirit inherent in those processes as a basis for enabling trans-cultural communication and understanding in the interest of human freedom and enlightenment.

Conclusions

Based on critical insights developed under the rubric of Post-colonial Studies, the article has sought to reconsider critically some of the underlying assumptions of Western scientific and social knowledge along with the humanist ideas and values associated with it. The aim was to demonstrate the implication of that knowledge in providing ideological basis for the violent and dehumanising practices and structures of colonialism. It has been made clear that this critical exercise is inseparable from the attempt to restore the delegitimised and marginalised forms of knowledge and to develop alternative modes of knowledge, epistemologies and visions that could provide grounds for a genuinely inclusive and humanistic trans-cultural communication and understanding. It is in this context that a critical reconsideration of humanism was introduced through the proposals made by Frantz Fanon and Edward Said.

Although Fanon, as the rest of his anti-colonial contemporaries, lived under colonial domination and his works were greatly informed by the characteristically binary and so often violent colonial confrontation, he never lost sight of the need to overcome the colonial inhuman and disabling situation. His vision of a new humanism epitomises his fervent endeavour to go beyond the dehumanising colonial relations to envision more humanising modes of cultural exchange and encounter and to create a new language and an inclusive notion of humanity capable of uniting all human energies to further the common struggle for human freedom.

On the basis of a critical appraisal and a contrapuntal reading of the overlapping histories, geographies and the endless traffic between cultures in the contemporary

world as a result of the colonial and other globalising experiences, Edward Said puts forth his vision of a secular humanism, as an ethico-political worldly stance, which celebrates and emphasises interconnectedness and humanistic dialogue. The vision is also grounded on the strong belief in the ability of human agency and the potential of humanistic critical analysis to intervene and transform human and social realities. In sum, departing from different historical and cultural perspectives, both Fanon and Said tried to interrogate and decolonise humanism, which has often been appropriated ideologically, and to open it up to its own emancipatory potential and to other knowledges and experiences. Their aim was, thus, to envisage an alternative notion of humanism that is geared to furthering human enlightenment and liberty and enabling an inclusive and humanistic trans-cultural communication and understanding in an increasingly interrelated world.

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