Between Communist Internationalism and a 'New Humanism': Episodes in the Intellectual History of Twentieth Century Anticolonialism

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Abstract

Title: Between Communist Internationalism and a 'New Humanism': Episodes in the Intellectual History of Twentieth Century Anticolonialism

This project is principally an investigation into how the concept of "humanism" has been engaged by different radical thinkers, and encompasses critical examinations of the works of Karl Marx, the Indian communist turned "radical humanist," M.N. Roy, and the Martinican revolutionary, Frantz Fanon. This project examines how these thinkers understood the relationship between national, anticolonial movements and the international class struggle against capitalism. Humanism is a theme worth investigating not only because all these thinkers used it in different moments, but also because the concept is often taken to signify a kind of internationalism in its own right and is likewise often treated as a theme that unites the concerns of twentieth century Marxism and anticolonialism. Drawing on the methodological tools of intellectual history, I argue that humanism is an extremely mutable concept that should be approached with a sensitivity to its use in specific contexts. In the first three chapters of this dissertation, I point to significant differences in how each of these thinkers understood the concept and seek to draw lessons from their respective critical engagements with it: from Marx we can take a wariness of humanism's depoliticizing potential, from Roy a staunch critique of nationalism, and from Fanon a creative, revolutionary appeal to a "new" humanity. The fourth chapter turns to the exhaustion of the "national liberation sequence," in which I draw attention to the shifts in political possibilities that followed the achievement of national independence. Considering selected works by David Scott, Michael Neocosmos, Nandita Sharma, Salar Mohandesi and others, I argue that while this historical trajectory represents the defeat of a "Fanonian" or "Leninist" aspiration to transcend the nation by *deepening* nationalism, defending the subjective novelty captured in Fanon's call to "invent" a new human being is both a viable possibility and urgent necessity. Cautioning against both uncritical embraces or sweeping rejections of humanism in the fields of political theory and philosophy, I argue that the humanist thematic is best approached with close attention to the context or conjuncture of its articulation, and with equally close attention to those other commitments that necessarily accompany any appeal to humanism.

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INTRODUCTION

Reanimating the revolutionary experience – reading its texts, recovering its language – is never a futile endeavor

—Sophie Wahnich

The anticolonial revolutions of the twentieth century were not narrow movements for national liberation. Many of their participants and most insightful theorists, whose writings we return to today to understand the promise of that moment, looked far beyond a national horizon, and nurtured aspirations for global transformation. The national liberation movements represent the most recent sequence of attempts at global, emancipatory transformation, where it seemed, for some decades, that the world might be fundamentally reordered. In many ways it was. In our current moment of rather reduced horizons, wherein our political imaginations feel constrained, and our present seems inevitable, it is heartening to see a resurgence of interest in the *internationalism* of the anticolonial sequence.[1] Recent years have seen an incredible flourishing of interest in revisiting the visions of the future cherished and fought for by previous generations of revolutionaries. This dissertation joins in this work.

Among of the striking features of this ever-expanding body of scholarship are the manifold connections between anticolonial liberation movements and Marxism. Many of those who went on to participate in and lead struggles for national liberation were familiar with Marxism, had spent time in European communist circles (one of the few organized, metropolitan

[1] Such works include, but are hardly limited to the following: Adom Getachew *Worldmaking After Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton University Press, 2019); Michael Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis: Interwar Paris and the Seeds of Third-World Nationalism* (Cambridge University Press, 2015); Hakim Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism: The Communist International, Africa and the Diaspora, 1919-1939* (Africa World Press, 2013); Gary Wilder, *Freedom Time: Negritude, Decolonization, and the Future of the World* (Duke University Press, 2015); Salar Mohandesi, *Red Internationalism: Anti-Imperialism and Human Rights in the Global Sixties and Seventies* (Cambridge University Press, 2023); Aurito Majumder, *Insurgent Imaginations: World Literature and the Periphery* (Cambridge University Press, 2020); Michele Louro, Carolien Stolte, Heather Streets-Salter and Sana Tannoury-Karam, *The League Against Imperialism: Lives and Afterlives* (Leiden University Press, 2020); Minkah Makalani, *In the Cause of Freedom: Radical Black Internationalism from Harlem to London, 1917-1939* (University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Tim Harper, *Underground Asia: Global Revolutionaries and the Assault on Empire* (Allen Lane, 2020); Robin D.G. Kelley, "The Third International and the Struggle for National Liberation in South Africa," *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies* 38, no. 1 (2014); Manu Goswami, "Imaginary Future and Colonial Internationalisms," *American Historical Review* 117, no. 5 (2012): 1461-85.

constituencies intent on overthrowing European empires) and were, in some cases, members of communist parties themselves.[2] The encounter between Marxism and anticolonialism was not written in the stars: for most of their lives Marx and Engels had their attention quite firmly fixed on a specific historical protagonist: the European working class. Although Marx, especially towards the end of his life, devoted more attention to "peripheral" struggles, including national struggles for independence, the first generations of Marxists did not necessarily continue this line of thought. It was, especially, the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 that forged a link between the fight against capitalism and the aims of anticolonial revolution.

The much-anticipated Marxist revolution had not been won in Paris, London, or Berlin, but in a country whose social conditions were, as Vladimir Lenin put it, more "Asian" than "European."[3] It was not just the fact that revolution had succeeded in a "backwards" rather than "advanced" society that inspired anticolonial revolutionaries, but even more so the Bolsheviks' commitment, under Lenin's leadership, to link national struggles for self-determination to the emancipation of the world's labouring classes from poverty and exploitation. These commitments were given organizational form in the Communist International, a body devoted to spreading anti-capitalist revolution around the world. As Ho Chi Minh, a founding member of both the French and Vietnamese Communist Parties put it, "until the October Revolution, socialist theories were regarded as theories particularly reserved for the Whites, a new tool for deceit and exploitation. Lenin opened a new era, which is truly revolutionary."[4] Ho's sentiments were echoed by many others, including the German communist Clara Zetkin, who argued that

[2] We can point here to notable figures like M.N. Roy, who I consider at length in this dissertation, as well as figures like Vietnamese President Ho Chi Minh, the "father of Algerian nationalism" Messali Hadj, South Africa's J.T. Gumende, Senegal's Lamine Senghor, Aimé Césaire of Martinique, Trinidadian George Padmore, and the Syrian founder of Ba'athism, Michel Aflaq. We might also point to Black radical thinkers and writers from the United States such as Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, and W.E.B. DuBois. Many other anticolonial leaders, including Jawaharlal Nehru, participated in the Soviet-sponsored "League Against Imperialism." A great many of these thinkers, it should be noted, later abandoned their communist affiliations. On the League Against Imperialism, see Frederik Petersson, "Hub of the Anti-Imperialist Movement: The League Against Imperialism and Berlin, 1927-1933," *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 16, no. 1 (2014): 49-71.

[3] Lenin, "Democracy and Narodism in China" [1912], https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1912/jul/15.htm

[4] Ho Chi Minh, "Lenin and the East" [1926], in *Selected Works of Ho Chi Minh, Volume One* (Foreign Languages Press, 2021), 356.

theirs was "the first International to embrace all humankind."[5] M.N. Roy likewise asserted that the "formation of a *genuine* international" represented Lenin's "greatest deed."[6]

This is not to say that Marxism provided the only vision of national liberation. There were, of course, other competing visions of anti-imperialism, national liberation, and internationalism.[7] The Comintern nonetheless played a significant role in shaping the form anti-imperialist struggles took in the twentieth century, namely, as struggles for *national self-determination.* A staunch opposition to nationalism has often been attributed to Marxism, and in the broad strokes we can certainly say that Marxism urges that allegiances of *class* should triumph over those of *nation*. However, as Lenin, Roy, and others recognized, empire and colonialism divided the global working class, and they thus argued that national independence for colonized peoples would be necessary to realize a more fulsome internationalism. Although Lenin and Roy both endorsed a national right to self-determination, they were generally wary of lending too much support to *nationalism.* One of the ironies of the Comintern's history, however, was that their vision of anti-imperialism nonetheless "presupposed a world of nation states."[8] Moreover, despite the communist movement's general wariness of nationalism, their vision of anti-imperialism also helped to popularize the language of nations and national struggles. Indeed, as Michael Goebel observes of the interwar period: "communists tended to be more nationalist than those whom they denigrated as 'bourgeois nationalists'"—at least on the question of

[5] Clara Zetkin, "Third Congress of the Communist International: From the Minutes" [1921] in *Liberate the Colonies! Communism and Colonial Freedom 1917-1924,* eds. John Riddell, Vijay Prashad, Nazeef Mollah (Lefword Books, 2019), 177.

[6] Roy, "Lenin's Greatest Deed" [1924] in *Selected Works of M.N. Roy, Volume 2*, ed. Sibnarayan Ray (Oxford University Press, 1988), 285.

[7] After World War One, American President Woodrow Wilson's public support for the principle of national self-determination was met with enthusiasm by many in the colonized world, although this enthusiasm faded considerably as it became clear that America's support would be reserved for Europe's national minorities and *not* extended to colonized peoples. Other visions of internationalism, particularly the "Pan-movements" flourished as well, and were often the dominant idiom of anticolonial struggle, possessing a history that preceded both Wilson and Lenin. Pan-Asianism, Pan-Islamism, Pan-Arabism, Pan-Africanism, among other movements, were both significant ideological rivals to communist internationalism even as their adherents were, at times, both significant strategic allies and important sources of recruits for Communist parties. On Wilsonian internationalism, see: Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford University Press, 2007). On the Pan-Movements, see useful commentary in Michael Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis,* 261-269 and Cemil Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought* (Columbia University Press, 2007).

[8] Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis,* 286.

national independence.[9] Following Lenin's death and Stalin's rise, the tensions between patriotic nationalism and communist internationalism would be further downplayed and minimized.[10]

The relationship between Marxism (which was, for many, defined by the Soviet example) and anticolonial movements was often a fraught one.[11] It remains the case, however, that Marxism was one of many possible horizons for anticolonial revolution and postcolonial reconstruction. For many of its adherents it provided the most attractive form of anticolonial struggle, entailing a commitment to wage a class struggle *within* the nationalist movement and to maximally empower the poorest and most exploited strata of the colonized population, linking the struggle for national independence to a global effort to overthrow capitalist property relations. Even movements with a fairly ambivalent relationship to Marxism were still often informed, as Sara Salem puts it, by a popular "socialist imaginary"—apparent in the efforts to articulate *specific* forms of socialism (such as "African Socialism" or "Arab Socialism") in critical dialogue with Marxist ideas.[12] If Marxism provided one notable source of inspiration for anticolonial revolutions, and helped define its horizons of possibility, Marxism also drew validation from the anticolonial movements. As Alain Badiou argues, Marxism emerged as a "singular force" in the twentieth century for three reasons: the existence of socialist states, the persistence of a militant workers movement in Europe, and, crucially, the wars for national liberation being fought around the world.[13] Despite the condescending attitude many European socialists adopted towards national liberation movements, Marxism in the twentieth century was also, and even perhaps *predominantly*, as Walter Rodney put it, a "Third World Ideology."[14]

In this project I approach the encounter between Marxism and anticolonialism by revisiting, in turn, the works of three important political thinkers: Karl Marx, M.N. Roy, and

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[9] Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis*, 286.

[10] Mohandesi, *Red Internationalism*.

[11] Many of those who participated in Communist Parties in the 1920's and 30's later left the movement, disappointed with the Soviet Union's great power aspirations and vacillating commitment to national struggles, including figures such as George Padmore, Messali Hadj, and Michel Aflaq. Links would be forged again, however, in the 1960's, as the Soviet Union, and later China, Vietnam, Cuba, as well as Yugoslavia, provided diplomatic, financial, and military assistance to anticolonial movements. At the same time, the Soviet Union often pursued alliances with nationalist movements that repressed domestic communist parties, such as Nasser's government in Egypt.

[12] Sara Salem, "Gramsci in the Postcolony: Hegemony and Anticolonialism in Nasserist Egypt," *Theory, Culture & Society,* DOI: 10.1177/0263276420935178

[13] Alain Badiou, *Can Politics be Thought?* [1985], trans. Bruno Bosteels (Duke University Press, 2018), 41-43.

[14] Walter Rodney, "Marxism as a Third World Ideology" in *Decolonial Marxism: Essays from the Pan-African Revolution,* eds. Asha Rodney, Patricia Rodney, Ben Mabie, and Jesse Benjamin (Verso, 2022).

Frantz Fanon. I am specifically interested in how these thinkers engaged and employed the term "humanism." Humanism is a theme worth investigating and interrogating because it signifies a kind of internationalism in its own right—gesturing towards humanity as whole, beyond divisions of nation, race, or class—and is often treated as a theme that unites the concerns of Marxism and anticolonialism.[15] However, I argue here that we see considerable divergence in how these thinkers invoke this term. I explore how these thinkers defended, or rejected, the language of "humanism" in their own respective political contexts, devoting particular attention to how they addressed the relationship between national anticolonial movements and struggles for social emancipation, especially the class struggle. I will offer here a highly abridged overview of the intellectual history I chart in this project with the aim of clarifying the dissertation's argument, and will return to a more detailed chapter summary at the end of this introduction.

In the mid-1840's Marx abandoned the "humanism" that informed his earliest intellectual forays. He defended a militant program of international class struggle which he thought would be ill served by the humanistic rhetoric of his Young Hegelian contemporaries, identifying in their project both a misplaced emphasis on religious critique and a politically disabling aspiration for class reconciliation rather than class struggle. In the 1870's Marx devoted new attention to national independence movements, endorsing the Irish movement for independence from Britain without, however, turning back to the language of humanism. Marx's support for Irish nationalism would be generalized by Lenin in 1917, when he argued that the Bolsheviks should throw their weight behind movements for national self-determination around the world. In his famous 1920 debate with Lenin, Roy pressed for a more discriminating position on nationalist movements, arguing that the Comintern should only support revolutionary struggles for independence that were led by the working class. Following his ouster from the Comintern in 1928, Roy lamented the erosion of internationalism in the Soviet Union and became increasingly wary that Indian nationalists were flirting with fascism. In his later years Roy developed a "new humanism" that advanced an even more strident critique of nationalism and earlier practices of

[15] Timothy Brennan, *Borrowed Light* (Stanford University Press, 2014); Robert Alderson and David Spencer, eds. *For Humanism: Explorations in Theory and Practice* (Pluto Press, 2017); Drucilla Cornel and Stephen D. Seeley, *The Spirit of Revolution: Beyond the Dead Ends of Man* (Polity, 2016); Elizabeth Portella, "The Weapon of Theory Reconsidered: Anti-Colonial Marxism and the Post-Cold War Imaginary," *Radical Philosophy Review* 25, no. 1 (2022): 83-110.

internationalism but also rejected the politics of class struggle. Writing in the 1950's, Fanon took up a line of argument highly reminiscent of Roy and Lenin's earlier debate, insisting that the national struggle in Algeria and elsewhere should eschew bourgeois leadership of the national struggle and be guided, instead, by popular forces.[16] Fanon defended an inclusive vision of the nation that was grounded above all in an ethos of political commitment, and argued for a "new humanism" that would emerge from the national struggle itself and yet transcend the narrow logic of nationalism.

In this trajectory running through Marx, Roy, and Fanon, we see a common investment in *linking* the cause of national liberation to anti-capitalist class struggle and a shared sense that national liberation movements ought to be a springboard for broader, internationalist solidarities. We also see, however, rather different understandings of humanism. Marx rejected the language of humanism for what he saw as its depoliticizing potential; Roy embraced a "new humanism" that offers a vociferous critique of nationalism, but which also marks a retreat from a class problematic, falling back instead on the Young Hegelian humanism Marx abandoned; and Fanon, like Roy, endorsed a "new humanism" that aspired to transcend nationalism, but only by first embracing nationalism and working *through* it. Fanon's "new humanism" remains an important gesture towards novelty and creation. In Chapter 4 I consider the work of the anthropologist, David Scott, who offers an insightful critique of the humanism that animated previous anticolonial thinkers (particularly those of Fanon's generation) and argues that attempting simply to revive these humanisms for our moment rather underestimates our contemporary distance from these lapsed revolutionary horizons. While I find much to endorse in Scott's reservations, I also offer an alternative account of the revolutionary closure he identifies, arguing that it represents the conclusion of a particular political sequence in which nationalism was linked to a broader struggle for socialism or communism. I argue that there are important insights to be retained from all of these thinkers: from Marx, a wariness that humanism can serve to downplay social and political antagonism, particularly the necessity of class struggle; from Roy, an ardent critique of nationalism and fascism and a well-informed skepticism that nationalism can be surpassed by fortifying it; and from Fanon, a call to human invention that

[16] As I discuss in Chapter 3, there is a strong possibility that Fanon was in fact familiar with Lenin and Roy's interventions as recorded in the minutes of the Second World Congress of the Communist International.

does lean on history or a fictious human essence but remains, rather, an aspiration towards novelty and invention.

Having stated the scope and argument of this study, the structure of this introductory chapter will now be laid out. The first section elaborates the intervention of this project and situates it in debates concerning the relationship between Marxism and anticolonialism, and over the political significance of humanism. The second outlines the contextualist methodology of this project and discusses the significance of contextualism for the study of political thought, devoting attention to how contextualist concerns can inform a critical engagement with anticolonial politics. I also discuss some significant limitations of a contextualist approach. A brief genealogy of humanism in the Marxist and anticolonial traditions follows, intended to underscore the term's capacity for wide-ranging appropriations. After this genealogical overview, I then offer a breakdown of the dissertation chapters.

Before proceeding further, I should comment on a crucial limitation of this study. This is a project largely focussed on three particular men. In some respects, this focus on (typically male, as is the case here) "great thinkers" stands at odds with promising trends in the study of political theory: there has been a considerable push within the discipline to focus less on individual theorists and more on how popular political movements have been shaped by their participants.[17] Scholars have thus shifted their attention to collectively authored manifestos, organizational and party histories, and attention to daily practices of politics. This is, to my mind, a very important and promising tendency. Politics is, after all, a *collective* practice, and focussing on individuals, even individuals as prolific and insightful as Marx, Roy, and Fanon, somewhat occludes other voices. Nonetheless, it is also my belief that we still have much to learn from these figures. They were insightful and perceptive critics of the movements that shaped them, and their works still offer distinct insights into debates and struggles that changed the world. Their thinking would, in turn, be taken up by popular movements in their wake. I attempt in this project to situate these thinkers in their appropriate contexts—contexts shaped by countless other

[17] This is a line of critique Massimiliano Tomba takes up at length in *Insurgent Universality: An Alternative Legacy of Modernity* (Oxford University Press, 2019). See also Rocío Zambrana, *Colonial Debts: The Case of Puerto Rico* (Duke University Press, 2021), which thinks with feminist anti-debt activists in Puerto Rico. In a further turn, Partha Chatterjee has embraced the analysis of "un-heroic everyday politics" that directs its attention to quotidian experience of political society rather than extraordinary acts of resistance and dramatic moments of contestation. Partha Chatterjee, *Lineages of Political Society: Studies in Postcolonial Democracy* (Columbia University Press, 2011), 149.

interlocutors, far more than I can adequately address here. This is, nonetheless, a limitation of this study and should be acknowledged as such.

Part One: The Intervention

This project addresses itself principally to two literatures. The first is a growing field of intellectual history and political theory that is revisiting the anticolonial past and the revolutionary movements of the twentieth century.[18] This literature is concerned with understanding and reconstructing the political coordinates and ambitions of anticolonial movements. Intellectual historians and political theorists have also been increasingly attentive to how anticolonial theorists and political figures understood and deployed concepts like "nationalism," "humanism," and "socialism." This intellectual history has a great deal of resonance with contemporary concerns. As Dipesh Chakrabarty underscores, "anti-colonial, utopian humanism remains valuable as an archive precisely because this humanism turns around certain axes—the universal versus the particular, the ideal versus the pragmatic, the past as a resource … versus the need to overcome the past—that often act as organizing themes for contemporary debates as well."[19] Chakrabarty is quite right on this score; and I would also add that this history is particularly worthy of consideration because it represents the last moment where global transformation seemed, to many, to be genuinely within reach.

This literature raises the thorny question of assessing what lessons we can revive from the anticolonial past, and which are worth leaving *in* the past. As I discuss in Chapter 4, Scott has made a persuasive case that our distance from this history is too great to offer much guidance in the present.[20] Others, like Adom Getachew, Gary Wilder, and Salar Mohandesi, have turned to this history not only to identify the limits and contradictions such movements and thinkers confronted, but to seek to draw more affirmative lessons from the past as well. Despite significant differences in scope and approach, these scholars (Scott included) share a sense that

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[18] See, for instance, Getachew, *Worldmaking After Empire,* Mohandesi, *Red Internationalism,* and Wilder, *Freedom Time*.

[19] Dipesh Chakrabarty "Humanism in a Global World," in *Humanism in Intercultural Perspective: Experiences and Expectations*, Jörn Rüsen and Henner Laas, ed. (Transaction Publishers, 2009), 27.

[20] See David Scott, *Refashioning Futures: Criticism After Postcoloniality* (Princeton University Press, 1999), Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Postcolonial Enlightenment* (Duke University Press, 2004), and Scott, *Omens of Adversity: Tragedy, Time, Memory, Justice* (Duke University Press, 2014).

there are important connections between Marxism and twentieth century anticolonialism, and that one of the great difficulties these movements confronted lay in the tensions between nationalism and more expansive socialist, communist, and internationalist commitments. There has thus been considerable effort to revisit past visions of internationalism, cosmopolitanism, and humanism to loosen the grip of the national imaginary on this history.[21] This is a problem I confront directly, devoting attention in this project to what Lenin and Roy called "the national and colonial questions." Despite important differences between them, I argue that we see in Marx, Roy, and Fanon alike a common effort to *link* struggles for national self-determination to a collective emancipatory project that aspires to transcend nationalism and create a freer and more equal world. We also see in these thinkers, especially in Roy's case, a recognition of the tensions between these projects.

This project also attends to long-running debates over "humanism." Humanism emerged as the subject of considerable controversy within post-war European philosophy.[22] Although the European post-war philosophical debate over humanism is often presented in isolation from critical anticolonial articulations of humanism, I share Gili Kliger's view that these two trajectories can be productively thought alongside each other, as part of a broader post-war interrogation of humanism.[23] There have been some insightful intellectual histories that focus particularly on the political stakes of the "humanism debate" in post-war Europe, such as Stefanos Geroulanos's *An Atheism That is Not Humanist Emerges in French Thought* and Andreas Agocs's *Antifascist Humanism and the Politics of Cultural Renewal in Germany*, both of which draw attention to the concept's pronounced political ambiguity.[24] Although there have been intellectual histories of similar breadth and scope that consider the uptake of "humanism" among anticolonial activists in the twentieth century, such as Gary Wilder's *Freedom Time* or Aurito Majumder's *Insurgent Imaginations*, these works have been somewhat less critical and

[21] This is particularly true of Gary Wilder's *Freedom Time.* See also Partha Chatterjee, "Nationalism, Internationalism, and Cosmopolitanism," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 36, no. 2 (2016): 320-334 and Merve Fejzula, "Cosmopolitan Historiography of Twentieth Century Federalism," *Historical Journal* 64, no. 2 (2020): 477–500.

[22] Some of the key figures in this debate include thinkers like Jean-Paul Sartre, Martin Heidegger, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida.

[23] Gili Kliger, "Humanism and the Ends of Empire: 1945-1965" *Modern Intellectual History* 15, no. 3 (2018): 773-800.

[24] Stefanos Geroulanos, *An Atheism that is not Humanist Emerges in French Thought* (Stanford, 2010); Andreas Agocs, *Antifascist Humanism and the Politics of Cultural Renewal in Germany* (Cambridge University Press, 2019).

more predisposed to defend these espousals of humanism.[25] My hope is that this dissertation might serve as a contribution to such an undertaking.

It should be acknowledged that "humanism" has become a much-maligned, disparaged, and caricatured term in current scholarship—for a certain "posthumanist" tendency, humanism is identified with a reckless, violent anthropocentrism, responsible for the destruction of the planet and non-human life.[26] An even more ardent opposition to humanism informs the intellectual school known as Afropessimism, whose adherents argue that the very category of the "human" is one invariably defined in opposition to Black suffering.[27] Although these two emergent traditions have very different intellectual coordinates, we see in both a pronounced aversion to political universalism, a skepticism about collective political action, and a lack of attention to shifting historical context, often using the term "humanism" in a totalizing a manner as some defenders of humanism. While these tendencies may serve a useful function insofar as they chip away at the rotten edifice of a liberal, white, bourgeois humanism and draw attention to the exclusions of the hegemonic understanding of the "human," I think they have very little potential for politicization. Indeed, thinkers from both camps seem not overly interested in "human" political struggles as such.

In response to such critiques, humanism has received some recent vigorous defences—in both the political and philosophical terrain and from both Marxist and antiracist/anticolonial thinkers, who have, broadly speaking, insisted on the concept's relevance to contemporary political struggles.[28] While I share considerable political sympathy with these thinkers, who deploy the term to name a vision of universal emancipation, I also take a certain cue here from Louis Althusser, well-known for his theoretical critique of Marxist humanism. Althusser is often

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[25] Aurito Majumder, *Insurgent Imaginations;* Gary Wilder, *Freedom Time.*

[26] Cary Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010). I share Karen Ng's view that the equation of "humanism" and "anthropocentrism" is misleading. As Ng argues, humanistic concerns about human life need not entail any disparagement of non-human life or preclude raising ethical questions about the needs of animals. Karen Ng, "Humanism: A Defense" *Philosophical Topics* 49 no. 1 (2021): 145-163.

[27] Frank B. Wilderson, *Red, White, And Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* (Duke University Press, 2010).

[28] See, among other works, the following: Timothy Brennan, *Borrowed Light* (Stanford University Press, 2014); Robert Alderson and David Spencer, eds. *For Humanism: Explorations in Theory and Practice* (Pluto Press, 2017); Drucilla Cornel and Stephen D. Seeley, *The Spirit of Revolution: Beyond the Dead Ends of Man* (Polity, 2016); Ato Sekyi-Otu, *Left Universalism: Africacentric Essays* (Routledge, 2019); Himani Bannerji, *Decolonization and Humanism: The Postcolonial Vision of Rabindranath Tagore* (Tulika Books, 2024); and Elizabeth Portella, "The Weapon of Theory Reconsidered: Anti-Colonial Marxism and the Post-Cold War Imaginary," *Radical Philosophy Review* 25, no. 1 (2022): 83-110.

associated with a sweeping rejection of humanism, but he was, in fact, attuned to the political effects of humanism and recognized its value in certain contexts. As he acknowledged, humanism could serve a useful rhetorical and political role, signalling an exhortative commitment to collective liberation. And yet he also recognized that it could also exert a depoliticizing force and seek to effect a premature reconciliation as a way of bypassing or avoiding political conflict. As he warned, "revolutionary" appeals to humanism could, "given a favourable conjuncture" be wielded to different ends, and "set in motion" a more "reformist" and "opportunistic" logic.[29] Put simply, the dilemma might be framed thus: movements for justice and liberation aspire to realize a better future for humanity as a whole, and while they might embrace the language of "humanism," the same term can often be used to blunt their revolutionary aspirations, appealing to the shared humanity of oppressor and oppressed, exploiter and exploited alike. Althusser's caution is a useful way of framing my own intervention. Rather than taking a firm position in favour of or against "humanism" (which is, ultimately, a rather supple and ambiguous theme), my more modest argument is that those invested in recovering humanism in service of contemporary political struggles should be attentive to the term's *use* and *effects* in particular conjunctures or contexts. In short, humanism need not be rejected outright, but it should be approached warily.

My stress in this dissertation is on understanding appeals to humanism as different forms of *political interventions*, and I do not attempt to construct a general, consistent theory of humanism. My reluctance to develop a "theoretical humanism" is informed not only by my methodological orientation, but also by a skepticism that a robust theory of the human essence, or theory of human nature, is necessary for emancipatory politics. Indeed, a "theoretical humanism," based in a theory of a universal human nature can be, as Étienne Balibar cautions, perfectly compatible with a racist nationalism. As Balibar argues, even "scientific, biological" forms of humanism can naturalize racial antagonism as part of an innate *human* characteristic.[30] In this light, "theoretical racism is in no sense the absolute antithesis of humanism."[31] My view is that emancipatory political struggles are, in the broadest sense, not so much about "realizing" an innate human nature or essence but are rather about asserting and defending egalitarian

[29] Louis Althusser, *Reading Capital* [1965], trans. Ben Brewster and David Fernbach (Verso, 2015), 293.

[30] Étienne Balibar, "Racism and Nationalism" in Étienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class*, (Verso, 1991), 56.

[31] Balibar, "Racism and Nationalism," 63.

propositions about the organization of human life and intervening in particular situations with the general aim of creating a better future for humanity. In this sense, such movements no doubt embody a "practical humanism," but they may be well or poorly served by appeals to "humanism" itself.

Part Two: On Method—Contextualism, Decolonization, Universalism

This project is situated principally in the fields of intellectual history and political theory. The meeting ground of intellectual history and political theory has been profoundly shaped by the interventions of Quentin Skinner and his colleagues in the "Cambridge School."[32] My own methodological approach owes much to this tradition. Skinner's signature intervention, first elaborated in his influential 1969 article "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," is to insist on the primacy of *context* in the interpretation of texts. Skinner and his colleagues have pursued a research agenda that approaches the classic texts of political theory not as singular contributions to a static set of "timeless" canonical questions, but as *interventions* engaged in particular, historically bounded debates, addressing specific political contexts. As Skinner argues, to imagine that historical thinkers are addressing "timeless questions" about the nature of political life is really to impose our own, not so timeless, questions and concerns on them.[33] Drawing on R.G. Collingwood's theorization of the "logic of question and answer," Skinner argues that the task of the intellectual historian is to reconstruct the historical and intellectual context, i.e., the historically contingent *questions* that a given thinker is responding to. If every claim is an answer to a particular question, or set of questions, these exercises in historical reconstruction help us arrive at a deeper understanding of an author's *intentions* in making certain political/theoretical claims.[34] In practical methodological terms, this approach

[32] Other influential practitioners of the Cambridge School approach include J.G.A. Pocock, John Dunn, and James Tully. I take Skinner's positions as largely representative of the Cambridge School's methodological orientation, but this is not to discount considerable internal debate within the "school."

[33] Quentin Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," *History and Theory* 8, no. 1 (1969): 3-53. See also Skinner's *Visions of Politics, Volume One: Regarding Method* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), which includes a revised version of the earlier essay.

[34] Skinner's focus on "intentions" has been justly critiqued for its own investment in a certain naïve (humanist) concept of the authorial subject. See for instance Peter E. Gordon, "Contextualism and Criticism in the History of Ideas" in *Rethinking Modern European Intellectual History*, eds. Darrin M. McMahon and Samuel Moyn (Oxford University Press, 2014),

foregrounds questions of political context, audience, language, biography, as well as debates with often neglected interlocutors in the interpretation of texts.

The methodological contextualism of the "Cambridge School" has well served efforts to foreground the place of empire and colonialism in the study of political thought.[35] The canon of European political theory was shaped against the background context of colonial expansion, and empire was often a *central,* not marginal, preoccupation for European political and legal theorists. Many thinkers, such as John Locke, Hugo Grotius, Edmund Burke, and Alexis de Tocqueville, were deeply invested in the imperial ambitions of their respective countries, and the context of imperial expansion profoundly informed their ideas about sovereignty, property, and political legitimacy.[36] Scholars drawing attention to the colonial context of European thought have also unearthed a neglected tradition of European *criticism* of colonialism.[37] This research agenda, broadly conceived, has done much to foreground the centrality of colonialism to the canon of European political thought especially, but not exclusively, in the liberal tradition. One of the missing pieces of this literature, however, is that it has remained rather centred on a critique of Europe and European thinkers without much substantive engagement with the affirmative projects of anticolonial thinkers.[38]

Contextualist approaches have, however, also been productively extended to the world of anticolonial political thought, particularly by Scott. In an excellent trilogy of works, *Refashioning Futures* (1999)*, Conscripts of Modernity* (2004)*,* and *Omens of Adversity* (2013), Scott repurposes Skinner's methodological prescriptions to articulate his own concept of the "problem-space."[39] Scott's formulation of the "problem-space" retains Skinner's emphasis on the

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[35] Jennifer Pitts, "Political Theory of Empire and Imperialism," *Annual Review of Political Science* 13, no. 1 (2010), 211-235. See also Inder Marwah et al. "Empire and Its afterlives: Critical Exchange," *Contemporary Political Theory* 19 (2020), 274-305.

[36] For works that adopt a recognizably Cambridge School approach to the study of empire, see the following: Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (Cambridge University Press, 1982); James Tully, *An Approach to Political Philosophy: Locke in Contexts* (Cambridge University Press, 1993); and David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[37] Sankar Muthu, *Enlightenment Against Empire* (Princeton University Press, 2003); Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (University of Chicago Press, 1999).

[38] In particular, see Robert Nichols's comments in Inder Marwah et al., "Empire and its afterlives: Critical Exchange."

[39] Scott, *Refashioning Futures: Criticism After Postcoloniality* (Princeton University Press, 1999), Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Postcolonial Enlightenment* (Duke University Press, 2004), Scott, *Omens of Adversity: Tragedy, Time, Memory, Justice* (Duke University Press, 2014). Scott himself has not explicitly branded this set of works a "trilogy," but I share Brian Meeks's view that this is a useful way to understand them. Brian Meeks, "After Tragedy, Searching for Liberation," *Cultural Critique* 93 (2016), 212-220.

importance of context and the interventionary character of political theorizing. As Scott argues, the specific "problem-space" of twentieth century anticolonialism was one in which political decolonization and the achievement of political sovereignty emerged as the paramount demand; anticolonial critique of this period should be read as a dynamic reservoir of various ways into this central animating problem. It should also be noted that Scott's concept of the "problem-space" also effectively overcomes some of the limitations of the Cambridge School's somewhat circumscribed understanding of "context." Over the years, many critics have noted that the Cambridge School operates with a rather idealist, textual, and discursive understanding of context, privileging intellectual debates and the interventions of individual authors as the most relevant "context" worth investigating, with relatively little attention to questions of social history and political economy.[40] Scott's idea of the "problem-space" is more attuned to these concerns and more attentive to what we might call the popular, social imaginary.

Scott's theorization of the "problem-space" has proven incredibly generative and has informed some of the most fruitful recent investigations into anticolonial politics and criticism.[41] Anticolonial thought has also received a much broader uptake in scholarship, particularly in the service of a broad effort to "decolonize" social and political theory. Adom Getachew and Karuna Mantena have recently made a convincing defence for the value of contextualism, arguing that "as the field of political theory begins to engage more routinely with anticolonial thought, we should remember the importance of the specific context or problem space of anticolonial argument."[42] Getachew and Mantena are particularly concerned to navigate some of the pitfalls that have emerged in recent efforts to "decolonize" social and political theory that has taken many forms but is generally animated by three main impulses: to revive marginalized and subaltern cultural and intellectual traditions; to critique the coloniality of European thought; and

[40] One can find such critiques in Ellen Meiskins Wood, *Liberty and Property: A Social History of Western Political Thought from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment* (Verso, 2012); Samuel Moyn, "Imaginary Intellectual History" in *Rethinking Modern European Intellectual History*, eds. Samuel Moyn & Darrin McMahon (Oxford University Press, 2014), 112-130; and Robert Nichols and Onur Ulas Ince's pertinent comments in Inder Marwah et al., "Empire and its afterlives: Critical Exchange."

[41] Alongside Getachew's *Worldmaking After Empire* and Wilder's *Freedom Time,* I am also thinking of Sara Salem, *Anticolonial Afterlives in Egypt: The Politics of Hegemony* (Cambridge University Press, 2020) and Fadi A. Bardawil, *Revolution and Disenchantment: Arab Marxism and the Binds of Emancipation* (Duke University Press, 2020).

[42] Getachew and Mantena, "Anticolonialism and the Decolonization of Political Theory," *Critical Times* 4 no. 3 (2021) 361.

to emphasize the originality of anticolonial actors, rather than an intellectual indebtedness to European philosophy.

In many respects, this trend is a wholly welcome development. Colonial powers imposed a hierarchy of knowledge on the world, one which devalued and diminished native intellectual and political traditions and cultures. It is quite understandable that scholars would want to challenge these assumptions. Such approaches upend a longstanding tendency to read anticolonial politics and theory as basically derivative of European influences. Intellectual history has traditionally prioritized motifs of influence, diffusion, and derivation—an impulse which has proven particularly problematic when extended to the non-European world. This "diffusionist" approach is one in which ideas are *generated* in Europe, and then *applied* and *redeemed* in the colonies. Samuel Moyn has dubbed this a model of "universal truncation and subaltern fulfillment," in which "Europe" develops "universal" concepts—such as "human rights"—but fails to extend them in a fully inclusive way. The role of non-European agents, then, is reduced to "that of *realizing the concept's already built-in potential*," effectively sidelining the creativity of subaltern actors.[43]

Getachew and Mantena are certainly no devotees of the "truncation and fulfillment" model but are also skeptical of some elements of the "decolonizing" project.[44] Their critique suggests that similar preoccupations with lineage and influence also dominate many decolonial perspectives. They argue that decolonial scholarship often risks imposing a rather anachronistic set of concerns on the anticolonial figures of the past, reading them principally as *critics* of Eurocentrism, and evaluating their intellectual projects by the extent to which they succeed, or fail, to overcome their European influences.[45] As they point out, this presumes that thinkers like

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[43] Samuel Moyn, "On the Non-Globalization of Ideas" in *Global Intellectual History*, eds. Samuel Moyn and Andrew Sartori (Columbia University Press, 2013), 190. This Eurocentric mode of intellectual history is also critiqued in Dipesh Chakrabarty's essay (later integrated into the book of the same name), "Provincializing Europe: Postcoloniality and the Critique of History," *Cultural Studies* 6, no 3 (1992): 337-357.

[44] Getachew offers her own poignant critique of the "truncation and fulfillment" approach in her insightful article, "Universalism After the Postcolonial Turn: Reinterpreting the Haitian Revolution," *Political Theory* (2016) DOI: 10.1177/0090591716661018

[45] A different tendency, part of this broad effort, instead quite openly acknowledges and revels in "anachronistic" study: I am thinking here particularly of the "creolizing" methodology developed by thinkers affiliated with the Caribbean Philosophical Association such as Jane Anna Gordon, Neil Roberts, and Michael Monahan, among many others. Rather than treating intellectual traditions as siloed and discrete, these thinkers stage dialogues between unexpected thinkers, bringing Rousseau, for instance, into dialogue with Fanon. This is not, as Gordon and Roberts put it, "merely a 'compare and contrast' exercise … but a more robust theoretical *métissage* that yields new modes of thought that, at their best, are more than the sum of their parts." Although my approach is somewhat more "historicist" and "contextualist" than that of these scholars, they are not overly prescriptive on

Fanon or Gandhi (Getachew and Mantena's examples) were principally motivated by "overcoming" a European intellectual inheritance. As they point out, while such figures certainly were pointed critics of Eurocentrism, correcting European hubris was not necessarily foremost among their concerns; anticolonial actors were also engaged in passionate debates about the aims and strategy of liberation struggles and about the organization of post-independence society. They were, in short, engaged in far more politically inventive work than simply criticizing the coloniality of European philosophy. As such, Getachew and Mantena argue for a more contextualist approach that foregrounds the *political problems* anticolonial thinkers confronted, rather than focussing too much on questions of intellectual lineage and inheritance, prioritizing either fidelity to, or rejection of, "European thought." It is this approach that I favour in this dissertation.[46]

Anticolonial thinkers did, of course, make use of many political concepts and ideas first articulated in a European context (including, for instance, concepts like "nation," "socialism," or "humanism"). But rather than treating such concepts as foreign imports, to be celebrated or deplored on that basis, the contextualist approach advocated by Getachew and Mantena focusses instead on contingency and the *strategic* appropriation of ideas in different contexts. We should be attentive to *why* these thinkers may have found certain concepts useful, and *how* they deployed them in the service of their own *political projects*, often imbuing these ideas with new

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methodological questions. They lay heavy stress on the importance of interdisciplinary/transdisciplinary inquiry and are committed to staging dialogues between thinkers from diverse contexts. In this sense, my project, which is interdisciplinary in the sense of bringing together intellectual history and political theory, and engages thinkers from very different contexts, shares a certain affinity with the aims of the "creolizing" approach. See Jane Anna Gordon and Neil Roberts, "Introduction: The Project of Creolizing Rousseau" in *Creolizing Rousseau*, eds. Gordon and Roberts (Rowman & Littlefield International, 2015), 3. See also Jane Anna Gordon, *Creolizing Political Theory: Reading Rousseau Through Frantz Fanon* (Fordham University Press, 2014), and others works published in the "Creolizing the Canon" series published by Rowman & Littlefield in association with the Caribbean Philosophical Association.

[46] Getachew and Mantena do not cite any practitioners of this argument, although I believe they are right that these kinds of arguments enjoy a wide circulation. They are not altogether new—we see, for instance, similar commitments in some of the early Subaltern Studies work, such as Partha Chatterjee's argument that anticolonial nationalism was a "derivative discourse." One finds a similar argument in Cedric Robinson's *Black Marxism,* which, despite its title, is really an argument *against* Black Marxism, arguing that the real force of Black radical thought is a (rather essentialized) "African Cultural tradition," and evaluates thinkers like C.L.R. James and W.E.B. DuBois by the extent to which they were able to get out from under the influence of Marxism. A similar tendency is present in the decolonial theory associated, for instance, with Walter Mignolo. See the following: Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse* (University of Minnesota Press, 1993); Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radial Tradition* (Zed Books, 19983); Walter Mignolo, "Delinking: The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality and the Grammar of D-Coloniality," *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2 (2007): 449-514.

meanings. As David Temin puts it, affirming many of Getachew and Mantena's concerns, to treat certain conceptual vocabularies as tainted by virtue of their initial European provenance "inadvertently reifies a domain of contestable political vocabularies *as Eurocentric* that actors at the periphery reworked for their own purposes. In such cases, the critique of Eurocentrism can discredit the very possibility of anticolonial interpretive originality."[47]

A contextualist sensibility also helps explain the attraction to Marxism among twentieth-century anticolonial thinkers. Colonialism was an animating force in the development of capitalism, and Europe's colonies were subject to novel, capitalistic forms of exploitation and domination. It is not surprising, then, that anticolonial revolutionaries should have reached for extant critiques of capitalism. As Roy argued in his 1922 *India in Transition*, it took a peculiar nationalist conceit to imagine that the *Vedas* offered a more fulsome guide to twentieth century India's economic reality than did Marxism.[48] The fact that industrial capitalism developed first in Western Europe (a process propelled by colonial exploitation and slavery in the Americas) is certainly no evidence of some unique European genius, but it is a historical fact of great consequence. This meant, for one, that European thinkers like Marx and Engels had begun analysing capitalism at an earlier stage in its development, and thus critiques of capitalism were already at hand for a later generation of anticolonial revolutionaries. More significantly still, this meant that capitalism developed in Western Europe *without* other competing capitalist powers. As Robert Nichols argues, "this has enormous implications for the shape, speed, and character of capitalist development in all other locales, because in all other places it was structurally affected by already-existing capitalism in Western Europe."[49] It was the *context* of colonial capitalism, not Marxism's "Europeanness," that both attracted anticolonial thinkers to Marxism and led them to *creatively* engage with the tradition in order to address the distinct dynamics and contradictions of capitalist social relations in the colonized world, and to think about how national movements related to anti-capitalist struggle.

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[47] David Myer Temin, "Development in Decolonization: Walter Rodney, Third World Developmentalism, and 'Decolonzing Political Theory," *American Political Science Review* 117, no. 1 (2023), 236. See also Shruti Kapila, "Global Intellectual History and the Indian Political," in *Rethinking Modern European Intellectual History*, eds. McMahon and Moyn, 253-274.

[48] Roy, *India in Transition* [1922] in *Selected Works of M.N. Roy, Volume One*, ed. Sibnarayan Ray (Oxford University Press: 1987).

[49] Robert Nichols, "Disaggregating Primitive Accumulation," *Radical Philosophy* 194 (2016), 21.

It should be noted that this implies a departure from certain assumptions of the "Cambridge School" approach to intellectual history. As I have noted above, Skinner and his colleagues operate with an understanding of "context" that is principally *discursive* and *rhetorical* and not particularly concerned with the dynamics of capitalism or class struggle.[50] When extended to the study of empire, scholars working within this paradigm have tended to focus on how European philosophers have *represented* colonized peoples in their works.[51] As Marxist critics have long lamented, an analogous problem informs certain strands of postcolonial and decolonial scholarship, in which colonialism is often understood principally as a cultural and epistemological imposition, rather than also, and perhaps more importantly, as a material process of extraction, exploitation, and dispossession.[52] These dynamics, however, were not lost on the thinkers I consider here. There has been a promising turn in intellectual history to develop a more "materialist" approach to the study of ideas, devoting more attention to the influence of capitalism as a force in the generation of concepts, without returning to a crude simplification of Marxism that sees ideas as simply the "superstructural" expression of the economic "base." As Andrew Sartori argues in *Bengal in Global Concept History*, one can observe the spread of similar ideas about culture and property across global contexts in the nineteenth century because they are all reacting to an increasingly global phenomena: capitalist property relations.[53] Sartori's intervention is, I think, very promising, but I would also echo Moyn's caution that we would do well to retain a strong sense of historical contingency in the global uptake of ideas: if capitalism

[50] See again Robert Nichols and Onur Ulas Ince's contributions in Inder Marwah et al. "Empire and it's afterlives: Critical Exchange." For another "materialist" critique of Skinner and the Cambridge School see Ellen Meiskin Woods, *Liberty and Property: A Social History of Western Political Thought from Renaissance to the Enlightenment* (Verso: 2012).

[51] This point is particularly well-made in Onur Ulas Ince, *Colonial Capitalism and the Dilemmas of Liberalism* (Oxford University Press, 2018).

[52] See for instance the following: Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London: Verso, 1994); Benita Parry, *Postcolonial Studies: A Materialist Critique* (Routledge, 2004); Arif Dirlik, "The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism," *Critical Inquiry* 20, no. 2 (1994), 328-356; and, more recently, Vivek Chibber, *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital* (Verso, 2013). It bears noting, however, that postcolonial theorists like Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak are also deeply informed by Marxism, and I think Rahul Rao's recent effort at a "reparative" reading of Marxism and postcolonial is an admirable one. Rao, "Recovering Reparative Readings of Postcolonialism and Marxism," *Critical Sociology* 43, no. 4-5 (2016), 587-98.

[53] Sartori is particularly focused on the "Culture concept" which, as he documents in his study, is adopted by Bengali intellectuals in the nineteenth century in a similar fashion to thinkers around the world—not only in Europe, but in other parts of Asia as well. Sartori does not frame this as an epistemic imposition of colonial rule; rather, he argues that "culturalism" became an increasingly attractive *global* concept in the late nineteenth century due to global changes in property relations—"culturalist" discourse was a way of responding to and interpreting capitalist property relations, even if it did not always identify its object as such. Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History: Culturalism in the Age of Capital* (University of Chicago Press, 2008).

generates certain pressures for more "global" or "universal" ideas, there remains considerable ideological competition in terms of *which* ideas will be taken up *where* and *why*.[54] The uptake of a particular political ideology or concept cannot simply be read off the extant class and property relations, and requires a contextualist inquiry.

Indeed, an attention to context and contingency can well inform investigations into the revolutionary tradition, perhaps especially Marxism. Although Marx developed an insightful and enduringly valuable critique of capitalism, it was hardly a given that Marxism would have taken off as a *political force* in the manner it did. The global spread of Marxism in the twentieth century can be credited largely, although not exclusively, to the Russian Revolution—a highly contingent, not inevitable, event. However, Lenin's successor, Josef Stalin, was eager to portray the Russian Revolution as a confirmation of the universal applicability of Lenin's theories. Stalin is likewise owed the dubious credit of synthesizing Lenin's various "short, fragmentary, polemical interventions" which were, as Salar Mohandesi reminds us, responding to "distinct conjunctural debates," into a set of formal, universal laws for how to pursue revolutionary, anti-imperialist politics in *any* context.[55] Although "Leninism" ended up being a remarkably potent force in twentieth century anti-imperialism, this was achieved at the expense of an appreciation for the contextual specificity of Lenin's political interventions; just as Marx had never aspired to create "Marxism," neither had Lenin aspired to create "Leninism." In our moment, where Marxism-Leninism, among other previous revolutionary projects, seem to have lost their purchase, an attention to the *conjunctural* features of Marxist and anticolonial politics might well be worth remembering to develop strategies up to the tasks of our present.

Despite considerable insights, the form of contextualism advocated by Skinner and Scott also faces certain shortcomings. Both Skinner and Scott alike are preoccupied with underscoring the *distance* between past and present thinkers, drawing a clear line between *their* problems, questions, and aspirations, and ours. As Skinner puts it: "any statement is inescapably the embodiment of a particular intention on a particular occasion, addressed to the solution of a particular problem, and is thus specific to its situation in a way that it can only be naïve to try to transcend."[56] Likewise, for Scott, the lesson of re-visiting the anticolonial radicalism of the mid-

[54] Moyn, "On the Non-Globalization of Ideas," in *Global Intellectual History*, eds. Samuel Moyn and Andrew Sartori (Columbia University Press, 2013), 187-204.

[55] Mohandesi, *Red Internationalism,* 38.

[56] Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding," 50.

twentieth century is to recognize that "the questions that define our conjuncture have perhaps changed fundamentally." Equally, addressing this new set of problems demands a critical distance from those of a previous generation, and their "devotion to the cultivation of an enlightened, humanist, and morally and socially reforming modernity."[57] The lesson Scott ultimately seeks to impress upon us today is not so different from Skinner's, namely: "we shall do better to learn to do our own thinking for ourselves," rather than seeking guidance from the past.[58] This approach to intellectual history has aptly been described by Peter E. Gordon as an effort at "containment," one that aspires to keep the past squarely *in* the past (this is a problem I take up at length in Chapter 4).[59]

There are, to my mind, at least two problems with this methodological containment of the past. First, it might well be the case that the *problems* confronted by the thinkers of the past are, in some sense, still *ours*. This is perhaps more true of nineteenth and twentieth century thinkers than the early modern thinkers who have been the predominant focus of Skinner's studies. The problems that preoccupied the thinkers I consider in this dissertation, such as capitalism, nationalism, colonialism, and fascism, are ones we still confront today, notwithstanding major transformations in the global order. In a world still structured by capitalism, Karl Marx will remain an indispensable resource. Likewise, in a world still profoundly shaped by the legacies of colonialism and anticolonial nationalism, the writings of thinkers like Fanon and Roy still contain valuable lessons. It would be a grave mistake to imagine that our problems are *so novel* and so far removed from the experiences of thinkers past, that can find no guidance in, or inspiration from, their efforts to change the world.

Second, we might also, in some broad sense, share their *answers* or, at least, their *aspirations* for a freer, more just and equal world. Marx, Roy, and Fanon, notwithstanding significant differences in their understandings of how this might be achieved, all fought for a world free of exploitation, oppression, and misery—a world in which human beings might order their relations more rationally, for the good of all, not for the benefit of a few. For those of us who still share these aspirations, the turn to the past is not simply an exercise in underscoring our contemporary distance from these projects, but one that shares something of these "freedom

[57] Scott, *Refashioning Futures,* 18; 190.
[58] Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding," 52.
[59] Peter E. Gordon, "Contextualism and Criticism in the History of Ideas," in *Rethinking Modern European Intellectual History*, eds. Darrin M. McMahon and Samuel Moyn (Oxford University Press, 2014), 32-55.

dreams."[60] This would likely seem an impermissibly romantic notion to Skinner or Scott; however, I think there is something ineffable that links all fights for liberation throughout history, and that permits us to affirm some kind of transhistorical solidarity with all such struggles—struggles that are still irreducibly particular, contingent, and always articulating specific, context-dependent demands. I find some guidance here in Fanon's conclusion to *Black Skin, White Masks*, where he asserts that "the past can in no way be my guide in the actual state of things." And yet, on the following page, Fanon also affirms that "every time a man has said no to an attempt to enslave his fellow man, I have felt a sense of solidarity with his act."[61] Correcting for Fanon's gendered language—itself a product of linguistic and cultural context—I think his dual statements offer a valuable guide for an approach to history that is at once mindful of context and the gulf that separates the past from the present, but which remains *partisan* and *motivated*.

For these reasons, I share Peter Gordon's view that we should owe contextualism only a "qualified allegiance."[62] Recent works by Getachew and Wilder, which are important inspirations for this project, offer some useful examples of what this "qualified allegiance" might look like.[63] Too rigid a contextualism, after all, would foreclose the possibility of learning any lessons from the past at all, and would act as a stop on our historical and political imaginations. We could only approach the thinkers and activists of the past as objects of historical curiosity, who might help make our own present appear stranger and less inevitable, but would otherwise have no lessons to impart us. A "qualified allegiance" to contextualism is one that links contextualism to the project of critical theory, understood in its most expansive sense as a project of human emancipation, one that pursues criticism not for its own sake, but in the service of political transformation. The turn to the past, then, is one that aspires to learn from the triumphs and defeats of past thinkers and movements, and seeks, as Wilder puts it, to rediscover "alternatives that might have been and whose unrealized emancipatory potential may now be recognized and reawakened as durable and vital legacies."[64]

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[60] Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Beacon Press, 2002).
[61] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* [1952], trans. Richard Philcox (Grove Press, 2008), 200-201.
[62] Gordon, "Contextualism and Criticism," 32.
[63] Getachew, *Worldmaking After Empire*; Gary Wilder, *Freedom Time*.
[64] Wilder, *Freedom Time,* 16.

We might note another tendency of the "Cambridge School" methodology that is at odds with the sensibility of this dissertation. Skinner's approach to contextualism might not only be described as a strategy of "containment," as Gordon argues, but also a kind of *parochialization*. If every statement, every claim, is irreducibly particular to its context, there is a strong tendency to resist any kind of claim to *transcend* context, to make "universal" claims about human life as such. It is perhaps this methodological impulse that explains why a broadly "Cambridge School" form of contextualism has proven so generative for a literature that seeks to correct the hubris and exclusions of European thinkers. As I have suggested already, a similar impulse animates certain strands of postcolonial thought as well. Dipesh Chakrabarty's insightful *Provincializing Europe* provides an illustrative example. In this work, however, Charkabarty does not so much "provincialize Europe" as he does subaltern life and politics. Indeed, although Chakrabarty critiques a "hyper-real Europe," he implicitly identifies "Europe" itself *with* universalism (by associating "Europe" with the universalism of capitalism and the institutions of the modern state), and consequently identifies the non-European world by its capacity to puncture and resist assimilation into a "modernity" still implicitly understood as European. In short, European modernity, now globalized, retains its "universality" while the postcolonial world is defined by its "difference."[65] The present work has a different orientation—rather than seeking the *provincialization* of European thought, this dissertation aims instead at the *de-provincialization* of anticolonial thought.

We should, of course, recognize that the dominant conception of the human, that has emerged out of the European colonial experience, has been uniquely destructive and exclusionary. The specious universalism espoused by European colonial powers and their apologists was one which took conformity to a particular model of humanity as its basis: the ideal human subject was rich, white, European, Christian, male, and heterosexual, and condemned non-European humanity to what Michel-Rolph Trouillot called "the savage slot" in the gradations of humanity.[66] We should be careful, however, not to take this as a measure of universalism, or to assume that it has been so dominant as to exclude any possibility of different understandings of the human. Indeed, Sylvia Wynter has aptly described this specious

[65] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton University Press, 2000).

[66] Michel-Rolph Trouillot, "Anthropology and the Savage Slot: The Poetics and Politics of Otherness," in *Global Transformations* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 7-28.

universalism as an "ethnoclass (i.e., Western bourgeois) conception of the human, Man, which *overrepresents* itself as if it were the human itself."[67] However, the long, discontinuous history of revolutionary struggles offer different perspectives on universalism. We can see espousals of a different universalism, for instance, in countless mutinies, revolts and uprisings, as well as in the entwined French and Haitian Revolutions of the late eighteenth century. Although the legacy of the French Revolution, particularly, has been seen with great suspicion as the beginning of a "bad" universalism, we should be careful not to confuse those "defending the common rights of humanity," with those who dispensed with them and championed instead the "rights of northern men to dominate the world."[68] This was not the vision of universalism fought for in the working-class districts of Paris *or* on the Haitian plantations.

There has been excellent work in recent years insisting that "universalism" is not only a category of European thought and politics, but that there are indigenous traditions of universalism as well.[69] The broad enterprise known as "global intellectual history" has also drawn new attention to universalisms emerging in non-European contexts. There are, as Moyn and Sartori argue in their introduction to the volume titled *Global Intellectual History*, many different ways of writing a "global intellectual history," including many that take "the global" as a category of the *researcher* themselves, which is then *imposed* on various historical thinkers. The approach I favour is one that looks to how activists and thinkers themselves conceived of their projects as *global* in scope and ambition, an approach which, as Moyn and Satori suggest, "points towards alternative forms of universalism."[70] I have also been inspired by Massimiliano Tomba's recent reflections on what he calls *insurgent universality*.[71] These universalisms are not "natural," but *declared, fought for*, and *defended* through political struggle. Movements for emancipation are, invariably, context-specific and local, and always speak in their own particular idiom. Their claims, demands, and assertions are, however, capable of inspiring allegiances far beyond their immediate context. There is an implicit universalism present in any struggle for

[67] Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument," *The New Centennial Review* 3, no 3 (2003), 260. Emphasis mine.

[68] Florence Gauthier, "The French Revolution: Revolution of the Rights of Man and the Citizen," in *History and Revolution: Refuting Revisionism,* edited by Mike Haynes and Jim Wolfreys (Verso, 2007): 79; 91.

[69] See for instance Ato Sekyi Otu's *Left Universalism, Africacentric Essays* (Routledge, 2019) and Shozab Raza, "Conjugated Universalism: From Rural Pakistan to 'Worker-Peasant Rule,'" *Cultural Anthropology* 38, no. 3 (2023).

[70] Samuel Moyn and Andrew Sartori, eds. *Global Intellectual History* (Columbia University Press, 2013), 19.

[71] Tomba, *Insurgent Universality*.

liberation—a universalism that consists simply in extending the emancipatory propositions of a particular struggle to *everyone*. This kind of universalism has been defended under many different names before, including, occasionally, under the name *humanism*.

Part Three: On Humanism—Marxism, Anticolonialism, Nationalism

Although I have discussed a number of limitations with the contextualist approach, I find considerable value in the methodological reflections of Skinner and Scott for an investigation into how the term *humanism* has been deployed in Marxist and anticolonial thought. One of the advantages of Skinner's approach is its sensitivity to how the usage of concepts changes over time. Intellectual histories have often taken a particular "unit idea," which is traced through the ages, and is assumed to exhibit "sufficient identity over time as to survive its own variations."[72] Skinner has offered a valuable critique of this approach, cautioning that it would be to indulge in a "very misleading fetishism of words" to take on a particular idea and imagine it has any consistent history.[73] For Skinner, there are no linear "histories of concepts"; there are, rather, only discontinuous histories of concepts being *used* in particular ways as they are adapted and reinvented to answer the demands of different contexts.

Skinner's methodological warnings are relevant to any concept but are particularly opportune in any discussion of humanism. Humanism is a theme that seems to lend itself very easily to the "unit idea" approach, and for some of its proponents it is a term that names exactly the kind of grand historical narrative Skinner is rightly wary of—one where humanism is taken as a kind of guiding thematic arc of continuous progress and learning that can be retrospectively attributed to thinkers who would not have used the term themselves.[74] Despite the efforts of

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[72] Gordon, "Contextualism and Criticism," 35.

[73] Skinner's quite appropriate point is that there is no history of "concepts" outside of their *uses*, and that these usages can vary quite widely across geographic and historical context. At the same time, thinkers working within the predominantly German "conceptual history" tradition, such as Reinert Koselleck, have also been quite sensitive to shifting usages of concepts and terms. Although Skinner's 1969 intervention was initially received by some as a critique of Koselleck, he has since clarified he was unfamiliar with Koselleck's work at the time, and that he sees considerable affinity, at least on this question, between his work and Koselleck's. This affinity is apparent in the fact that many thinkers, including Scott, draw liberally from both. See: Skinner, "Retrospect: Studying Rhetoric and Conceptual Change" in *Visions of Politics, Volume One*, 187. See also Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* [1979] trans. Keith Tribe (Columbia University Press, 2004).

[74] Even the common expression "Enlightenment humanism" is something of a misnomer: although the Enlightenment thinkers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries frequently referred to related concepts like "Man" and "humanity" they did not speak of *humanism*, a conceptual innovation of the nineteenth century. This

some scholars to offer a robust definition of "humanism," it has proven an extremely mutable, capacious term. It is also a rather slippery term that is often *claimed by* or *attributed to* different projects, without much discussion of what exactly the label means. Given its almost inherent vagueness, especially in the field of politics (what political project does not, after all, address itself *to human beings*?) humanism has been appropriated by all manner of irreconcilable projects. Commenting on the sheer range of political and intellectual movements that have adopted the mantle of "humanism," Michel Foucault once warned that "the humanistic thematic is in itself too supple, too diverse, too inconsistent to serve as an axis for reflection."[75] In some sense my project flies in the face of Foucault's caution: I do, after all, take humanism as a central theme for investigation in this project. And yet, my argument rather confirms his cautions against treating humanism as a concept that possess any coherent, stable meaning.

While I do offer a critical analysis of humanism here and seek to draw certain lessons from the thinkers I engage, my argument is, to a considerable extent, a contextualist and descriptive one. I do not attempt to construct a consistent theory of "humanism" that links these thinkers, but instead I consider how their respective appeals to, or rejections of, humanism should be understood as politically situated *interventions.* The first three chapters of this dissertation consist of discrete case studies, examining how Marx, Roy and Fanon employ the term and what meaning and significance they attach to it. We will see that although these thinkers are certainly linked by an aspiration for an emancipated human future, they often mean quite different things by "humanism." My aim here is not to evaluate which thinker offers the most "genuine" or "authentic" humanism, but rather to examine how they *use* the term, and to reconstruct the *problems* and *questions* to which they adopted or rejected humanism *as an*

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approach is, as we will see later, adopted by Roy himself. More recently, it is exemplified in Timothy Brennan's recent writings on humanism. Brennan is keen to frame humanism as a term that possesses a consistent meaning throughout history, one attached to secular human understanding, freedom of thought, and the discipline of philology. For Brennan, the concept is one that can be attached, retrospectively, to contexts where the specific term "humanism" was not in use, and he generally takes "humanism" to be a concept consistently on the side of the oppressed. While I am sympathetic to certain aspects of Brennan's project, particularly his insistence on the links between Marxism and twentieth century anticolonialism, I am wary of others. Although Brennan laments in his 2014 *Borrowed Light* that "We have a great deal of 'theory' … but very little intellectual history," he avoids any sustained engagement with the field of intellectual history and its methodological debates. He is, instead, rather attached to an older Hegelian idea of intellectual history that sees history itself as a continuous, progressive process of human learning. Brennan, *Borrowed Light: Vico, Hegel, and the Colonies* (Stanford University Press, 2014), 1. See also Brennan, "Humanism's Other Story" in *For Humanism*, eds. David Alderson and Robert Spencer (London: Pluto Press, 2017), 1-17.

[75] Michel Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (Pantheon Books, 1984), 44.

answer. Although humanism is often taken as a theme that implies a high degree of *continuity* in its use, my goal here is to emphasize significant *discontinuity* in how the term is invoked by these thinkers. For instance, while Roy and Fanon alike champion a "new humanism," they enlist this humanism in service of rather different political projects. I will lay out the arguments of these chapters momentarily, but it is worth spending a moment on the range of uses that are associated with the term "humanism," particularly in Marxist and anticolonial thought. This brief genealogy will serve to underscore this discontinuity.

The term "humanism" was coined by the German philosopher and educational reformer Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer in 1808.[76] By invoking the term "humanism" (*Humanismus* in German), Niethammer was referring to an earlier tradition—that of the Italian Renaissance. Renaissance thinkers called themselves *humanists* or *umanisti*, after their curriculum: the *studia humanitas*, defined by its recovery of Greek and Roman antiquity.[77] The Renaissance humanists were certainly not secular or atheistic thinkers as we would recognize these terms today, but they did emphasize the role of human action and influence over worldly affairs in a manner at odds with the relative fatalism of medieval scholasticism and sought to learn from "pagan" antiquity in a manner that conflicted with the religious doctrine of the period. The Italian humanists were, typically, tutors of princes, whom they hoped to spur to glory through tutelage in the ancient virtues and rhetorical brilliance of Roman antiquity.[78] Nineteenth century German humanism was conceived of as a somewhat more democratic venture and was addressed to a wider audience than princes, but retained the *studia humanitas*'s investment in classical antiquity; the pedagogical program advocated by Niethammer was one that upheld the study of Greco-Roman philosophy and culture as essential to "developing" or "realizing" the "full humanity" of the pupil.

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels attended schools that had been informed by this "new humanism" and were among the early heirs to the pedagogical tradition named by Niethammer.

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[76] Vito R. Giustiniani, "Homo, Humanus, and the Meanings of 'Humanism,'" *Journal of the History of Ideas* 46, no. 2 (1985), 172.

[77] The Italian humanists of the sixteenth century were particularly attracted to Ancient Roman moral and political philosophy and turned especially to the Roman philosopher-statesman Cicero. Nineteenth century German humanism, in contrast, much favoured Greek, rather than Roman, philosophy. Skinner, "Introduction: The Reality of the Renaissance" in *Visions of Politics Volume Two: Renaissance Virtues*, (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 2. Giustiniani, "Homo, Humanus, and the Meanings of 'Humanism,'" 172.

[78] The classic genre of humanistic writing in the Renaissance period was the handbook for princes, of which Machiavelli's *The Prince* is by far the most famous, if idiosyncratic, example.

In the same period, however, the term "humanism" was leaving the walls of the German *gymnasium*, and by the 1840's had acquired a broader range of associations: the Young Hegelians used the term to criticize religion and religious belief, and the term was also increasingly invoked in the popular German press to name an attitude of sympathy for human suffering.[79] Marx and Engels were deeply influenced by these notions of humanism, and in some of their earliest writings they identify "communism" with "humanism." By the late 1840's, however, references to humanism almost entirely disappear from their writings, for reasons I will explore in Chapter 1.

Marx's earliest writings went mostly unpublished in his lifetime, and early twentieth century Marxists, including figures like Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Kaustky, and Vladimir Lenin, did not describe Marxism or communism as a "humanism." Humanism only emerges as a prominent theme in Marxist theory after the rediscovery of these early texts, most notably the 1844 *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, first published in 1932. The publication of Marx's early works coincided with Stalin's tightening grip on power in the Soviet Union and, as a result of this historical coincidence, "humanism" became, for a certain "Western Marxist" tradition, quite associated with a dissident Marxist critique of Stalin and the Soviet Union. This Marxist humanism was also linked with the concepts and themes present in Marx's early works such as "alienation" and "species-being" and these thinkers placed great stock in the Hegelian influence on Marx. Indeed, for thinkers like Raya Dunayevskaya and Erich Fromm, these themes seemed to speak to everything that had gone wrong in the Soviet Union under Stalin.[80]

For some German intellectuals, the encounter between Marxism and humanism was also staged in terms that harkened back to the humanist tradition inaugurated by Niethammer and his contemporaries, which prioritized not just Greek and Roman antiquity but also, increasingly, German bourgeois literary culture. Thinkers like the liberal writer Thomas Mann invoked the term "humanism" to defend German classical culture from its Nazi appropriations. In 1927 Mann

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[79] Heidi Hakkarainen, "Contagious Humanism in Early Nineteenth-Century German-Language Press," *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 15, no. 1 (2020).

[80] Dunayevskaya seems to grant an astonishing significance to the Hegelian influence on Marx and Marxism and suggests that the Soviet leadership were threatened by Hegel's enduring relevance, claiming that Soviet Marxists had to "turn Hegelian dialectics into gibberish" into order to "stifle the new society striving to be born." Likewise, she suggests that "the totalitarian rulers of Russia … *must* destroy the Humanism of Marx if they are to maintain themselves in power." Dunayevskaya, *Marxism and Freedom… From 1776 Until Today* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1958), 40, 63. See also Erich Fromm, who in his *Marx's Concept of Man* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1961), essentially charges Soviet Marxists with having *misunderstood* the humanistic import of Marx's theories.

argued for an alliance between German high culture and the worker's movement, an alliance he described as a "pact between the idea of a *conservative culture* and the idea of a *revolutionary society.*"[81] Thomas Mann's son, Klaus, would coin the term "socialist humanism" a few years later at an antifascist conference in Paris in 1935, using the term to argue for a similar united front between bourgeois literary culture and socialist politics.[82] As Andreas Agocs argues, this German "anti-fascist humanism," suffered from a certain political ambiguity: its investment in a *national* literary culture and dedication to an ideal of cultural renewal and defence of Western civilization was one shared (albeit with very different political goals in mind) by fascist intellectuals as well.[83] As Suzanne Marchand details, German humanists, i.e., academics devoted to humanistic scholarship, did *not* prove a significant source of opposition to Hitler and the Nazis, notwithstanding significant dissenting voices such as the Manns and others.[84] As she details, German humanists and humanities departments were, on the whole, quite willing collaborators with Nazism.

A similar problem confronted the efforts of mid-twentieth century left intellectuals like Dunayeskaya and Fromm to enlist the concept of "humanism" into a critique of Soviet Marxism. "Humanism," and more specifically a "proletarian humanism," was also, for some time, a common term in the Stalinist political vocabulary.[85] It was also a central term in Nikita Khrushchev's program of *De-Stalinization*, where it was used in service of an ideological pivot away from Stalin's rule. The twentieth century then sees a curious situation in which "humanism," once embraced by Stalin, is taken up with great verve in the post-Stalinist Soviet Union, even while it comes to name, especially in Western Marxism, a critique of the Soviet Union as such. This is not the place to engage in the vexed debates over the legacy of the Soviet Union and its relationship to the Marxist tradition—the point I wish to register here is, simply,

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[81] Thomas Mann quoted in Agocs, *Antifascist Humanism and the Politics of Cultural Renewal in Germany*, 24.

[82] Agocs, *Antifascist Humanism,* 25.

[83] Agocs, *Antifascist Humanism*, 178-185.

[84] Suzanne Marchand, "Nazism, 'Orientalism,' and Humanism," in *Nazi Germany and the Humanities: How German Academics Embraced Nazism*, eds. Wolfgang Bialas and Anson Rabinach (Oneworld, 2014), 267-305.

[85] As Alexander McConnell details, although "humanism" was derided in the early Soviet Union for its imputed "softness" and "bourgeois individualism," it was revived in the 1930's and entered Stalinist discourse largely through the works of the writer Maxim Gorky. During the Popular Front period (1935-39), "socialist humanism" was considered a core concept of Soviet Marxism. See: Alexander McConnell, "A Humanism of Hatred, a Humanism of the Heart: Political Language, Public Morality, and Socialist Personhood in the Soviet Union." PhD Diss., (University of Michigan, 2023).

that the complicated history of the term "humanism" vitiates against treating "humanism" as a kind of conceptual master key that can unlock the true emancipatory potential of Marxism, a view which still seems to hold among contemporary proponents of a Marxist humanism.[86]

The *anti-humanist* reading of Marxism has generally become associated with Louis Althusser's interventions in the 1960's and 1970's. A certain methodological contextualism is helpful in approaching Althusser's anti-humanist critique, which was, as he stressed, a "conjunctural" intervention in a situation where the interpretation of Marx's writings had definite political stakes.[87] In the 1960s, the French Communist Party (PCF) was enshrining "humanism" as official party doctrine, mirroring intellectual trends in the Soviet Union under Khrushchev's leadership. The PCF's pivot to "humanism" was a deliberate move to facilitate broader alliances with liberal, Catholic, and social democratic factions in French politics, and to render the PCF more ideologically palatable to these constituencies. Althusser supported the pursuit of such alliances on a *strategic* basis but was wary that the turn to humanism risked sacrificing Marxism's intellectual and political autonomy and would leave aside other central theoretical concepts, mostly notably the "dictatorship of the proletariat."[88] Due to his continued membership in the PCF, Althusser was somewhat more attuned to intellectual trends in the Soviet Union than some of his English critics, where Khrushchev's appeals to "humanism" were accompanied by a claim that the class struggle in the Soviet Union had concluded.[89]

Althusser's interventions were at least partly inspired by the Chinese Communist Party's rejection of Khrushchev's turn to humanism. A 1963 editorial in the CCP's official paper charged that the Soviet position "substitutes humanism for the Marxist-Leninist theory of class

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[86] This is the sense one gets from the contributions to the recent volume, *For Humanism: Explorations in Theory and Politics*, eds. David Alderson and Robert Spencer (London: Pluto Press, 2017). Although "humanism" in the West is most associated with a *criticism* of the Soviet Union, "humanism" could just as easily be invoked in *defence* of the Soviet Union. See for instance Maurice Merleau-Ponty's fascinating *Humanism and Terror: An Essay on the Communist Problem* [1947] (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), a tortured humanistic defence of Stalin's show-trials. Jean-Paul Sartre likewise is another advocate of a "Marxist humanism" with a rather complicated, oscillating relationship to the Soviet Union.

[87] As Althusser put it, "this debate and argument are, in the last resort, political… this is not a debate about philology!" Althusser, "Elements of Self-Criticism" in *Essays in Self-Criticism,* 114-115. By focussing on the *political* significance of Althusser's intervention, I am admittedly neglecting his important *theoretical* critique of humanism, one intent on rooting out all sources of historical teleology in Marx's work.

[88] See G.M. Goshgarian's "Introduction" to Louis Althusser, *The Humanist Controversy and Other Writings, 1966-67* (London: Verso, 2003). Althusser's fears would be confirmed when, in 1976, the PCF formally rejected the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat.

[89] As Kate Soper argues in her brilliant *Humanism and Anti-Humanism*, "humanism" also possesses somewhat different connotations in Anglophone and Francophone contexts, which may have also shaped the English reception of Althusser's work. See: Soper, *Humanism and Anti-Humanism* (Hutchinson and Co.: 1986).

struggle and substitutes the bourgeois slogans of 'freedom,' 'equality' and 'fraternity' for the ideals of communism."[90] Althusser's fear, likewise, was that appeals to "humanism" drew Marxism back to a basically liberal thematic and was driven, in the French context, by an effort to position the PCF as a *reformist* rather than *revolutionary* party. Althusser's anti-humanist interventions (which he often preferred described as an "a-humanism") were somewhat less categorical than the CCP's, at least when it came to the *political* use of "humanism." He conceded, for instance, that appeals to humanism could in some contexts serve a "genuinely revolutionary" purpose, including in the anticolonial struggles, to which I will return momentarily.[91] It would be simplistic in the extreme to identify "humanism" with reformism and "anti-humanism" with revolution. Althusser's point was certainly not that every expression of humanism is necessarily a liberalism—he claims, rather, that the humanistic thematic exerts a pull in this direction; and this was, indeed, how the term was being used in his context. Although the interpretation of Marx's humanism no longer holds the same political stakes it once did, one valuable lesson of Althusser's intervention is that we should pay close attention to those moments when the conversation about "humanism" is really a debate about other strategic and political questions.

Humanism also has a distinctive purchase in mid-twentieth century anticolonial thought, and was a term employed by political leaders and intellectuals as varied as Jawaharlal Nehru, Michel Aflaq, and Leopold Senghor.[92] In contemporary scholarship (due in part, I suspect, to a growing interest in Fanon's writings) anticolonial humanism has become most commonly associated what we might call the *counter-humanism* of Fanon, his teacher Aimé Césaire, and their contemporaries.[93] This counter-humanism, defined by a biting criticism of European humanism and a *reclamation* of humanism in anticolonial letters and politics seems to have had particular appeal for thinkers hailing from France's African and Caribbean colonies—the French

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[90] Editorial Departments of *Renmin Ribao* (*People's Daily*) and *Hongqi* (*Red Flag*), "The Origin and Development of the Differences Between the Leadership of the CPSU and Ourselves: Comment on the Open Letter of the Central Committee of the CPSU" September 6, 1963. From Marxists.org: https://www.marxists.org/subject/china/documents/polemic/cpsu.htm

[91] Althusser, "The Object of *Capital*" [1965] in Reading *Capital: The Complete Edition*, trans. Ben Brewster (Verso, 2015), 292.

[92] For a discussion of Aflaq's humanism, see Spenser R. Rapone, "The Metaphysical Universe of Michel 'Aflaq and his Party: A Re-Appraisal of the Ba'ath," *Modern Intellectual History* 21 (2024), 118-212.

[93] I borrow the phrase "counter-humanism" from Zimitri Erasmus's discussion of Sylvia Wynter, a thinker who, perhaps more than any other, has followed this line of thinking from Fanon and Césaire. Erasmus, "Sylvia Wynter's Theory of the Human: Counter-, not Post-humanist," *Theory, Culture & Society* 37, no. 6 (2020), 47-65.

imperial project had, after all, explicitly branded itself a "humanist" enterprise.[94] Césaire's 1950 *Discourse on Colonialism* is a resounding indictment of the arrogance, hypocrisy, and racism of this specious colonial humanism. Césaire offers an *immanent critique* of this humanism, drawing attention to its own violated and degraded principles, and is accompanied by an equally powerful appeal to a more inclusive humanism. As Césaire puts it: "at the very time when it most often mouths the word, the West has never been further from being able to live a true humanism—*a humanism made to the measure of the world*."[95] Appeals to a "true" or "new" humanism on the part of thinkers like Césaire and Fanon are, perhaps above all, expressions of a universalistic anti-racism, one that rejects European racism while affirming that Europe has never had the final word on "humanism" or "the human."

Thinkers like Césaire and Senghor were invested not only in rejecting an exclusionary humanism, but in affirming a humanism located in African tradition and values. As Césaire put it: "I make a systematic defense of the non-European civilizations," arguing that these were, invariably "communal," "democratic," and "anti-capitalist" societies.[96] The humanism espoused by the *Négritude* poet-politicians and in the later discourse of "African Socialism" was one which championed a humanism located in African cultures and traditions. Such romantic invocations of a pre-colonial humanism were common to many African independence leaders, including Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah, Senegal's Senghor, and Tanzania's Julius Nyerere, and were often accompanied by a political assertion that African society was essentially communal and socialistic. Of course, appeals to humanism can also signal much different attitudes towards "traditional values," and the two thinkers I consider here, Roy and Fanon, are both in their own ways quite skeptical of the turn to tradition. Roy is very critical of Hindu nationalism, and grounds his "new humanism" in the intellectual heritage of the Enlightenment (while subtly undermining its "European" pedigree), while Fanon's "new humanism" is searching for something more novel still, a humanism which would only to emerge through the fight for liberation.

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[94] In particular, "humanism" was used in French colonial discourse to name a "liberal" colonialism that claimed to promote the "welfare" of the colonized population. See: Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude and Colonial Humanism Between the Two World Wars* (University of Chicago Press, 2005).

[95] Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* [1955], trans. Joan Pinkham (Monthly Review Press, 2000), 73.

[96] Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism,* 44.

There are strong connections between anticolonial and Marxist invocations of humanism. For some thinkers, such as Leopold Senghor of Senegal, a broad concern with humanism was precisely what linked Marxism and the struggle for decolonization. Writing on the eve of Senegal's independence, Senghor argued that "the philosophy of humanism … is the basic character and positive contribution of Marxian thought."[97] The Trinidadian Marxist C.L.R. James went further still: commenting on Nyerere's efforts to create a co-operative village economy in Tanzania (defended with the language of "humanism"), James asserted that "'Marxism is a Humanism' is the exact reverse of the truth. The African builders of a humanist society show that today *all humanism finds itself in close harmony with the original conceptions and aims of Marxism*."[98] However, despite James's effort to link anticolonial humanism and Marxism, "humanism" was often used by postcolonial leaders and intellectuals in ways that signalled a far more ambivalent relationship to Marxism. Nyerere himself would clarify that he "was not a Marxist,"[99] and even Senghor's affirmation of Marx's humanism is revealing also in what it denies: Senghor affirms the "humanism" of Marxism while rejecting the materialism of Marx's philosophy and denying the relevance of class struggle to African society.[100]

Indeed, humanism was often invoked to signal a distance from Marxism, or at least a more uneasy relationship to the tradition. In his *Autobiography* Nehru noted that his formation in the "humanist liberal tradition" set him apart politically from India's communists, despite his own appreciation for Marx's thought.[101] In many contexts "Humanism" was used to claim a kind of ideological and political independence from both the Soviet Union and the West, with political coordinates that map on somewhat to the Non-Aligned Movement. One finds a curious example of this use of humanism from Fidel Castro in the months immediately after the Cuban

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[97] Leopold Senghor, "Nationhood: Report on the Doctrine and Program of the Party of African Federation" [1959] in *On African Socialism,* trans. Mercer Cook (Frederick A. Praeger, 1964), 34.

[98] C.L.R. James, "Epilogue: A History of Pan-African Revolt: A Summary, 1939-1969," in *A History of Pan-African Revolt* (PM Press, 2012), 136. In this essay James identifies, in particular, Nyerere's efforts to empower the Tanzanian peasantry with Lenin's interventions during the Russian Revolution.

[99] Nyerere quoted in Fanon Che Wilkins, "'A Line of Steel': The Organization of the Sixth Pan-African Congress and the Struggle for International Black Power, 1969-1974," in *The Hidden 1970s: Histories of Radicalism*, ed. Dan Berger, (Rutgers University Press, 2010), 108.

[100] It should be noted that is in fact quite is a common use of "humanism" in the discourse of African socialism—by affirming that African pre-colonial societies were, as a rule, cooperative and humanistic, leaders like Nyerere and Senghor sought to downplay the fact that African societies were also defined by class division. Figures such as Walter Rodney and Kwame Nkrumah (in a kind of self-criticism of his earlier, similar claims) became extremely critical of this tendency. See Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* [1972] (Verso, 2018).

[101] Nehru, *An Autobiography* [1936] (Oxford University Press, 1982), 591.

Revolution before he pledged himself, and by extension Cuba, to socialism and an alliance with the Soviet Union. As Castro put it:

> We are going to bring this about by entirely humane and democratic measures, a goal which we believe we will achieve because we are moving toward it very definitely. For this reason we say that we are waging a humanistic revolution, that our revolution is humanistic because it humanizes man.[102]

If humanism named here a kind of intellectual independence and general commitment to "humanizing man," what precise social and political arrangements this entailed were often left rather vague. There were certainly significant experiments that were defended under the banner of humanism—particularly in Tanzania's cooperative village economy, a case that had aroused so much enthusiasm in James and many others. But these were not of course defended as "humanism" alone—Nyerere's "humanism" was frequently invoked in service of a much broader theoretical apparatus of *Ujamaa.* But as critics observed of leaders like Senghor who sought a "humanist" path that was neither capitalist *nor* socialist, this was, implicitly, capitalism.

Anticolonial thinkers and leaders invoke the term humanism with just as much variation as we see in the thought of European writers. Appeals to humanism could be grounded in an appeal to local tradition, defend a radically novel vision of liberation, or could signal a kind of fidelity to European intellectual traditions as well—Nehru's "scientific humanism" did not, for him, entail any great split from the Enlightenment; Senghor's appeals to humanism were likewise intended not only to defend African tradition, but were also an expression of loyalty to French culture and civilization. The most consistent association I think we see with humanism is a commitment to a kind of cosmopolitan, inclusive vision of national liberation, one that positions the national revolutions not only as narrow movements for the inhabitants of a particular territory, but a struggle for *humanity* itself (often accompanied by a strong claim that the colonized would *realize* their humanity through the achievement of national independence). At the same time, however, expressions of humanism could, in Europe as in the non-European world, become quite easily attached to narrow, national identities and causes and serve a more conservative function.

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[102] Fidel Castro, Press Conference 26 July 1960 in Havana. In Castro Speech Database, Latin American Network Information Center. http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/castro/db/1960/19600726.html

As the discourse of anticolonial humanism attests to, the relationship between nationalism and humanism is far from straightforward. In a certain sense the discourse of "humanism" clearly addresses itself to a "human" subject beyond national boundaries. Of the thinkers I consider here, Roy goes especially far in defining his humanism in stark opposition to nationalism. But humanism has also proven quite amenable to nationalist appropriations as well (indeed, the origins of modern nationalism can, arguably, be located in the scholarly humanism of the Renaissance).[103]Although Marx principally rejected humanism for its depoliticizing potential (as I argue in Chapter 1), he also faced off against German humanists who, deeply convinced of Germany's philosophical superiority over the other European nations, linked their philosophical humanism to German nationalism. We see a rather different linkage between nationalism and humanism in Fanon's writing: Fanon's humanism, like Roy's, gestures *beyond* the narrow loyalties of nationalism, but, as we will see, he also clearly links the emergence his "new humanism" to the cause of national independence.

Although nationalists often seek to locate national origins and identities in a distant, misty past, the concept of the "nation," like humanism, possesses a much debated and distinctly modern genealogy. There have been countless attempts to offer a formal definition of the nation—in twentieth century Marxist thought there was none more influential than Stalin's effort to define the "nation" by a static set of characteristic features, including a common language, culture, territory, and economic life.[104] Nations are, however, much more nebulous categories; as Benedict Anderson has argued, they are "imagined communities" which, as Nandita Sharma stresses, invariably produce, and constantly re-produce, a distinction between a national *inside* and a non-national *outside*.[105] None of the thinkers I consider in this project attempted to offer a formal definition or theory of the nation—in part, perhaps, because "nations" were, to all of these thinkers, clearly contested, fluid, and emergent categories. Nationalism only emerged as a significant political force in the divided German kingdoms within own Marx's lifetime, and while it gripped many of his contemporaries, he turned his attention instead to the workers

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[103]Alen Patten, "The Humanist Roots of Linguistic Nationalism," *History of Political Thought* 27, no. 2 (2006): 223-262. For a perceptive critique of "national-humanism," see Jacques Derrida, "Onto-Theology of National-Humanism (Prolegomena to a Hypothesis)," *Oxford Literary Review* 14, no. 1/2 (1992): 3-23.

[104] J. V. Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question" [1913], https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1913/03a.htm

[105] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* [1983] (Verso, 2016); Nandita Sharma, *Home Rule: National Sovereignty and the Separation of Natives and Migrants* (Duke University Press, 2020).

movement. Roy was a committed anticolonial nationalist in his early years but came to thoroughly reject nationalism in favour of first communist internationalism, and later a liberal cosmopolitanism. Fanon, for his part, defended the national character of anticolonial struggle but recognized that this nationalism was being invented and imagined through the fight for independence itself. In this project I approach the nation in much the same way I do humanism, that is, I consider how these thinkers *engaged* the "nation" as a political problem, or opportunity, in the contexts they were intervening.

Chapter Outlines:

Chapter 1: Karl Marx: From Humanism to Communist Internationalism

The first chapter of this dissertation turns to Karl Marx. In this chapter I affirm the thesis that Marx makes a break with a Young Hegelian humanism, and I consider the political transformation the break represents. The humanism espoused by the Young Hegelians, particularly under the influence of Ludwig Feuerbach, was one based principally in a critique of religion, which imagined that overcoming religious belief was the key to resolving all social antagonisms, which would disintegrate in the face of a universal human reconciliation. I argue that as Marx and Engels become politically engaged with the working-class movement, they come to reject this humanism for its ineffectiveness and depoliticizing potential, embracing instead an internationalism grounded in global class struggle (rather than abstract appeals to "humanity"). To the extent that Marx retains a "theoretical humanism" I argue this is not always to the good—here I address Marx's engagement with the non-European world, arguing that some of his more problematic claims about colonialism were informed by a lingering theoretical humanism still indebted to the Young Hegelian project and a confidence in the "civilizing" and "humanizing" influence of capitalism. I also argue, however, that Marx broadens his understanding of the class struggle towards the end of his life, assigning a more significant role to agrarian revolution in Russia and the Irish national movement, without, however, returning to the humanist problematic he rejected in the 1840's. Of the thinkers I consider here it is Marx who is wariest of appeals to humanism, and we can retain from him an insightful skepticism about humanism's depoliticizing potential.

Chapter 2: M.N. Roy: From Anticolonial Marxism to a "New Humanism"

In the second chapter, I engage the colourful career of the Indian nationalist turned communist turned "radical humanist" M.N. Roy. I address especially Roy's communist and humanist periods, arguing that his embrace of a liberal humanism was informed by a strident opposition to nationalism but also a rejection of class struggle. In my discussion of Roy's early communist period, I devote particular attention to his pivotal 1920 debate with Lenin, in which he advocated a turn away from bourgeois leadership and towards the working class and peasantry. I also engage his insightful analysis of colonial capitalism (which challenges Eurocentric accounts of capitalist development) and the critique of the Indian nationalist movement which he developed over the course of the 1920's. I argue that Roy's break with communism was informed by a disappointment with the Comintern's retreat from its internationalist ambitions, a loss of confidence in the revolutionary will of the Indian working class, and, above all, a fear that Indian nationalism was enabling the spread of fascism in India. I offer a largely critical perspective on Roy's pivot to a "new humanism," arguing that it represents a rejection of his earlier revolutionary ambitions and is grounded in a pessimism about proletarian and peasant agency—standing in stark contrast to his earlier interventions at the Comintern. Roy instead comes to invest his hopes in middle class secular reformers and argues that education in "human values" constitutes a necessary precursor to any radical social and political transformation. To this extent, then, Roy's humanism can be read as a confirmation of Marx's fears that appeals to humanism risk abandoning the class struggle in favour of a premature attempt at human reconciliation. Roy's humanism, nonetheless, contains many insights and commitments worth retaining. Most significantly, he continues to propound an uncompromising critique of nationalism and fascism, and his cosmopolitan critique of internationalism insightfully identifies a contradiction in trying to overcome nationalism by *supporting* it.

Chapter 3: Frantz Fanon: "New Humanism" Through and Beyond the Nation

The third chapter takes up the work of Frantz Fanon. In contrast to Roy's, Fanon's "new humanism" is more firmly anchored to a revolutionary horizon, grounded particularly in the aspirations of the peasantry. I chart how Fanon makes a case for the specifically "national"

character of anti-colonial struggle and articulates a "new humanism" in service of a deeply politicized understanding of the nation, one that pushes beyond the closure of a narrow, racial, nationalism, towards a more open-ended and inclusive understanding of national identity.
In this chapter I argue that Fanon's relationship to Marxism can be productively elucidated through the 1920 Roy-Lenin debate and point to certain affinities between how Fanon and Roy (especially during his communist period) advance a critique of the national bourgeoisie and make a case for a national movement that will simultaneously become a class struggle and the launching pad for broader, internationalist solidarities. I engage how Fanon sees the emergence of a "new humanism," touching on important themes such as the role of violence and political education. Fanon's humanism, I argue, both represents an internationalist gesture *beyond* nationalism and a rebuke to the class aspirations of the national bourgeoisie, but also remains firmly attached to the nation as its animating force. In this sense Fanon, unlike Roy, argues that the *nation* can only be overcome by *deepening* national attachments. I argue that while Fanon's "new humanism" contains certain political ambiguities, his humanism is also clearly oriented towards an emergent novelty and the prospect of a new human future that has not yet emerged. While the nation may no longer be a viable engine for this humanism, this exhortation to political novelty and creation remains worth defending and affirming today.

Chapter 4: Humanism After National Liberation

The fourth and final chapter is, principally, an attempt to reckon with the legacy of anticolonial humanism of the twentieth century. This chapter begins by discussing David Scott's perceptive critique of anticolonial humanism. As already mentioned, Scott's project is concerned with emphasizing our contemporary distance from the revolutionary horizons of the twentieth century and informed by a wariness that the strategies of humanist critique that informed Fanon and his generation no longer have the same purchase they once did. Scott's intervention is invaluable in that he draws attention to the link between the discourse of anticolonial humanism and the problem-space of national independence struggles. While I affirm Scott's argument that many of the theoretical assumptions that informed anticolonial humanisms may be exhausted (including, for instance, its investment in a progressive philosophy of history), I depart from some of his political conclusions, which seem resigned to what Bonnie Honig has called a

"mortalist humanism," one grounded in human frailty and vulnerability.[106] In this chapter I present an alternative account of the exhaustion of the national liberation sequence, drawing attention particularly to how the political coordinates of these movements changed dramatically after the achievement of national independence. In dialogue with thinkers including Michael Neocosmos, Salar Mohandesi, and Nandita Sharma, I argue that the exhaustion of the emancipatory promise of this moment was tied to its emphasis on nationalism and the nation-state. This, I argue, is less a story about the end of revolutionary possibility *as such* than it is a story about the end of a particular revolutionary period, and the closure of a "Fanonian" or "Leninist" aspiration to *surpass* nationalism by *deepening* it. I conclude this chapter by returning to the insights of the thinkers I took up in the three preceding chapters and offer some critical reflections on the problematic legacy of the "new man" (drawing here also on the insights of Alain Badiou) and defend the affirmative vision of radical human transformation represented by Fanon's call to invent a "new humanity."

Conclusion:

In the conclusion I walk back through the arguments of the preceding chapters, and close with some final reflections on how the thinkers I have engaged speak to the entwined themes of "internationalism" and "humanism," considering what lessons they might impart to us today. In the conclusion and throughout this dissertation I often defend the aspirations these thinkers and others have attached to "humanism," but I also seek to draw attention to humanism's political ambiguities (as I have in this Introduction). My aim is to caution against both uncritical embraces or sweeping rejections of humanism and to suggest that the humanist thematic is best investigated with equally close attention being paid to those other commitments that necessarily accompany any appeal to humanism.

[106] Bonnie Honig, *Antigone, Interrupted* (Cambridge University Press, 2013).

Chapter One
Karl Marx: From Young Hegelian Humanism to Communist Internationalism

No one is deceived by this humanity farce.
—Karl Marx

In the years leading up the 1848 Revolutions the term "humanism" was gaining a newfound popular currency, signifying both a distinct kind of atheism, as well as a sympathy for suffering humanity, with connotations not dissimilar from what we might today call "humanitarianism."[1] In precisely the same period Marx and Engels, who had once enthusiastically embraced the term, were now rapidly distancing themselves from it. This was no mere iconoclasm on their part (although Marx and Engels were ever iconoclasts) but was motivated by pointed political concerns. As they became more engaged in the class struggle, they argued that the working class should eschew the vague, reconciliatory language of "humanism" for a more militant vocabulary. The working-class movement could not succeed, they argued, by appealing to a shared humanity, but only through an unwavering commitment to the end of class domination across all national boundaries. And yet, although they abandoned appeals to "humanism," Marx and Engels also clearly remained convinced that the success of the proletarian struggle portended a more general "human emancipation." As Marx put it in the Introduction to the Programme of the French Workers' Party in 1880, "the emancipation of the class of producers is that of all human beings, without distinction of sex or race."[2] It is this project of human emancipation, which nonetheless shuns the language of humanism, that I attend to here.

In this chapter I approach Marx and Engels's rejection of humanism as one principally motivated by political concerns. I do not treat the rejection of humanism as simply a question of abstract, theoretical reflection, but instead I track Marx and Engels's shifting attitudes to humanism alongside the conflicts and debates they were engaged in and the problems they were

[1] On the uptake of "humanism" in the years surrounding the 1848 Revolutions see: Heidi Hakkarainen, "Contagious Humanism in Early Nineteenth-Century German-Language Press," *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 15, no. 1 (2020): 22-46.

[2] Karl Marx, "Introduction to the Programme of the French Workers' Party," [1880] in *The First International and After, Political Writings: Volume 3,* ed. David Fernbach (Verso, 2010), 376.

grappling with. As elaborated in the introduction, this approach is inspired in part by the methodological contextualism advocated by Quentin Skinner and other members of the "Cambridge School," who argue that works of political theory are best understood as *situated interventions*. As Michael Heinrich observes in his recent biography of Marx, many treatments of Marx are prone to a "teleological tendency" to read Marx's thought as one long effort to work through the consequences of his earliest philosophical writings, such as the 1844 *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts.*[3] This approach stands at odds with an attention to shifting historical context and the interventionary character of political thought. As I suggested in the introduction to this dissertation, *humanism* is a theme that often serves to treat the history of political thought as one lengthy, continuous process of thinking through "humanity." It is no coincidence that the "humanist" Marx is, for many readers, also the "consistent" Marx, who may *change his mind* about specific topics, but who remains consistent in his *way* of thinking.[4] As Heinrich observes, Marx's work is characterized both by "important continuities as well as multiple strong ruptures," ruptures which were often in response to shifting political circumstances.[5] Notwithstanding certain undeniable continuities in Marx's thought, I think that Heinrich, following Louis Althusser, is right to identify one such "strong rupture" in Marx's break with humanism.

I consider the stakes of Marx's break with humanism by considering a number of different moments in his intellectual and political life, which I outline below. In this chapter I also devote particular attention to Marx and Engels's "communist internationalism," which I counterpose to their earlier "humanism." Although both terms signal concerns that transcend national boundaries, Marx and Engels were at pains to clarify that their project was one grounded in *class struggles* which traverse the borders of state and nation, not an abstract concern for "humanity." As Erica Benner observes of Marx and Engels's reflections on nationalism and internationalism, there has been a longstanding, unfortunate tendency to "reconstruct Marx and Engels' views on national issues from their most abstract statements of theory, while overlooking

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[3] Michael Heinrich, *Karl Marx and the Birth of Modern Society: The Life of Marx and the Development of His Work, Volume 1: 1818-1841*, trans. Alexander Locascio (Monthly Review Press, 2019), 336.

[4] For a characteristically measured survey of the "break" vs. "continuity" debate, see Marcello Musto, "The 'Young Marx' Myth in Interpretations of the *Economic-Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844,*" *Critique* 43, no. 2 (2015), 233-260. Proponents of the "continuity" thesis include figures like Georg Lukacs, Herbert Marcuse, Bertell Ollman, Jean Hyppolite, Robert Tucker, and Shlomo Aveniri.

[5] Heinrich, *Karl Marx,* 27-28.

the concrete strategies they recommend in specific political contexts."[6] Much the same could be said of their political thought more generally, including their reflections on "humanism." Benner's methodological recommendation applies well to both themes: we cannot rely only on famous quotations from canonical texts like *Capital* or the *Manifesto* but must also turn our attention to relatively "minor" texts, including various articles, internal communiques, speeches, and letters. These texts, which attend to distinct contexts and specific struggles are not "untheoretical" but are rather evidence of a "strategic theory of politics centered on, but not reduced to, the analysis of class conflicts."[7]

The chapter is divided into four parts of similar length. Part one considers Marx's early humanism, beginning with his 1842 articles on the "Theft of Wood" debates in the Rhineland Diet, which I situate within the broader concerns of the Young Hegelian movement. This section concludes with a discussion of how and why Marx makes a decided break with his early humanism as he and Engels become politically involved with the workers' movement in the mid-1840's. Marx comes to see his contemporaries' humanism as motivated by a misplaced focus on religious criticism and grounded in a politically disabling hope for class reconciliation (rather than class struggle). Part two considers how this political antihumanism informed their approach to communist internationalism, even while a lingering "theoretical humanism" shaped some of their more troubling conclusions about colonialism and their conviction that the "most advanced" peoples necessarily stood at the forefront of this internationalist project. I turn to Marx's articles on India and his notes on "Pre-capitalist Formations" in the *Grundrisse* to clarify the thinking that informs these assumptions. In part three, I focus on the reception of Marx's *Capital* in Russia and his late correspondence with Russian interlocutors. This represents a crucial turning point in Marx's intellectual development, capturing a pivot away from his earlier confidence that capitalism necessarily represents a "humanizing" and "civilizing" influence. The fourth part of this chapter, which brings us towards a conclusion, considers how Marx's approach to the Irish national cause represented a renewed appreciation for the potentially emancipatory role of nationalism, which presages important themes taken up in more depth in the following chapters. I conclude with some brief reflections on political antihumanism and the politics of solidarity

[6] Erica Benner, *Really Existing Nationalisms: A Post-Communist View from Marx and Engels* (Verso, 2018), 50.

[7] Benner, *Really Existing Nationalisms,* 95.

and emphasize that although Marx embraces a more capacious understanding of revolutionary possibility (and largely sheds his troubling confidence in capitalism's "humanizing" significance), he does so without returning to the humanist problematic he had abandoned in the 1840's.

Before we begin, a note regarding Marx's relationship with Friedrich Engels is warranted. Marx's intellectual and political trajectory was shaped profoundly by his collaboration with Engels. Marx predeceased Engels by twelve years, and in the years following Marx's death in 1883 Engels worked tirelessly to defend and popularize Marx's thought. These efforts proved deeply influential to the generation of Marxists who formed the Second International in 1889. The twentieth century, however, saw a reaction against Engels's influence; a generation of Western Marxist intellectuals blamed Engels for the "dogmatism" of Soviet Marxism, and led a return to Marx *without* Engels.[8] Despite the unfortunate tendency to downplay Engels's contributions, it is important to recognize that their perspectives on various matters were not always aligned. I cover some such subjects here. For instance, as Stathis Kouvelakis demonstrates convincingly, the young Engels had his own distinct relationship to socialism and the Young Hegelian movement.[9] In my discussion of this period, I focus particularly on Marx and do not bring Engels into the picture until their collaboration begins in 1844. Their views also diverge on other consequential matters covered here: in the 1840's Engels was more willing than Marx to endorse, outright, colonial conquest, and in later years did not entirely share Marx's enthusiasm for the prospect of an agrarian socialist revolution in Russia. Notwithstanding these differences, the fact remains that Engels is often (and I think more often than not) expressing views both men shared. As such I cite Engels freely here whenever I take his thinking to align with Marx, and acknowledge, where relevant, points of divergence between the two.

[8] For a useful survey of this tendency, alongside a defence of Engels's contributions to Marxist thought, see: Paul Blackledge, "Engels vs. Marx?: Two Hundred Years of Friedrich Engels," *Monthly Review* 20, no. 1 (2020): https://monthlyreview.org/2020/05/01/engels-vs-marx-two-hundred-years-of-frederick-engels/

[9] See Chapter Four of Stathis Kouvelakis, *Philosophy and Revolution: From Kant to Marx*, trans. G.M. Goshgarian (Verso, 2003), 167-231.

PART ONE: THE YOUNG MARX AND THE 'BREAK'

In 1842 a young Karl Marx penned a series of articles for the *Rheinische Zeitung*, a liberal Cologne newspaper, covering a long-running debate in the Rhineland Diet (Parliament).[10] The Diet had recently passed a new set of laws at the behest of local feudal lords who sought to have their hereditary titles recognized in modern legal terms as an *exclusive* right to private property, carving up the Rhineland's woodland into privately held plots. In validating these claims, the Diet simultaneously criminalized the longstanding customary rights of the local poor, who had for centuries enjoyed common access to the forest for gathering wood, acorns, and berries. Any unfortunate soul now caught "stealing" dead wood from the forest would be required to pay an exorbitant fine, and those unable to pay would be forced to work for the lord they had "stolen" from. As Marx observed, the laws turned the "citizen" into a "thief," and the "thief" into a "serf."[11]

Marx's articles capture an important and awkward moment in the intellectual development of this precocious, liberal-minded Young Hegelian.[12] Marx deplored the fact that state power had been captured by the landowners, but welcomed the clarification of opaque, medieval property arrangements. It is only with the institution of the modern state and its legal order, Marx argued, that human beings are recognized as formal equals and the authors of their own laws. Marx contrasts the modern, "human" order to the "animal" order of the feudal system, in which human beings are divided according to their birth. As Marx puts it:

> *Feudalism* in the broadest sense is the *spiritual animal kingdom,* the world of divided mankind, *in contrast to the human world that creates its own distinctions and whose inequality is nothing but a refracted form of equality*. In the countries of native feudalism, in the countries of the caste system, where in the literal sense of the word *people are put in separate boxes* and the noble, freely interchanging members of the great sacred body, the holy Humanus, are sawn, wedged, torn apart by force, we find therefore also the

[10] These articles have received scant attention in Anglophone Marx scholarship. Robert Nichols's recent commentary and updated translation of these articles, included alongside a translation of Daniel Bensaïd's 2007 essay "The Dispossessed" will hopefully help to correct this neglect. See: Daniel Bensaïd, *The Dispossessed: Karl Marx's Debates on the Wood Theft and the Rights of the Poor*, trans. Robert Nichols (University of Minnesota Press, 2021).

[11] Marx, "Proceedings of the Sixth Rhine Province Assembly, Third Article: Debates on the Law Concerning the Theft of Wood" [1842], in Bensaïd, *The Dispossessed,* 97.

[12] Marx would later recall his initial "embarrassment" at "having to take part in discussions on so-called material interests." Marx, "Preface to *A Critique of Political Economy*," in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings,* ed. David McLellan (Oxford University Press, 2011), 424.

> *worship of animals*, animal religion in its primitive form, for man always regards as his highest being that which is his true being.[13]

While Marx recognizes that social inequality might persist in the "human world" of the modern state, this inequality is offset, at least theoretically, by a formal, legal equality. This marks a crucial difference, for Marx, from the "animal world" in which the human is divided by *inherited* feudal or caste distinctions into the categories of "predator" and "prey."[14] Marx's antipathy towards any social order that treats its hierarchies as natural and ordained by birth—a position which we can understand as a fidelity to the principles of the French Revolution—will prove an enduring feature of his politics.[15]

The scandal of the "Theft of Wood" debates, as Marx sees it in this moment, is that the local lords and lawmakers had *misunderstood* the purpose of the modern state. By appealing to their feudal privileges as the basis for modern property rights, Marx argues that the Rhineland's landowners were dressing up illegitimate titles in modern legal language and "demanding, instead of the human content of right, its animal form."[16] The Diet's lawmakers, by succumbing to the interests of the landowners and acting on their behalf, had failed to connect the law to the inherent universality of the state, to its "general reason and morality."[17] Drawing on a recognizably Hegelian and humanistic vocabulary, Marx insists that a more universal "human" interest should have triumphed over the particular and one-sided interests of the lords. Marx also singles out the religious hypocrisy of the Diet's representatives, counterposing their ostensible religious devotion to their neglected duty to humanity, admonishing that "it is easy to be holy if you don't want to be human."[18]

Marx is outraged that at these developments, which elevated the "arbitrary pretensions" of the privileged estates and offered no replacement for the "accidental concessions" the feudal order had once afforded to the poor.[19] But while Marx defends the customary rights of the "poor, politically and socially propertyless multitude," in this "liberal rationalist" moment of his intellectual trajectory he has not yet embraced the terms of class struggle, and there is little sense

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[13] Marx "Theft of Wood," 66. Emphasis mine.
[14] Marx, "Theft of Wood," 66.
[15] On Marx's fidelity to the French Revolution, see: Kouvelakis, *Philosophy and Revolution*, 298-300.
[16] Marx, "Theft of Wood," 66.
[17] Marx "Theft of Wood," 105.
[18] Marx, "Theft of Wood," 100.
[19] Marx, "Theft of Wood," 68.

in these articles that the poor might be able to resist their dispossession.[20] Likewise, Marx does not yet understand these events as part of a process of capitalist development. In this moment, Marx can do little more than appeal to the reason and humanity of the landlords and lawmakers, and ultimately lament that "the human being ought to have been victorious over the forest owner."[21] This, however, would soon change.

Marx and The Young Hegelians

Marx's attention to the *property* question in the "Theft of Wood" articles hints at a coming break with his Young Hegelian contemporaries, but the substance of Marx's critique, especially his frustration that the state was not living up to its universal, "human" potential, still captures something of the mood and humanistic aspirations of the Young Hegelian movement to which he belonged. The Young Hegelians, a group of young radical intellectuals, had come of age in a feudal and fractured Germany, and were deeply convinced of the divided German principalities' almost irredeemable backwardness in comparison to a more economically advanced Britain and a more politically advanced France. As Marx put it in 1843, the German condition was one which combined "the *civilised shortcomings of the modern political world*, the advantages of which we do not enjoy, with the *barbaric deficiencies of the ancien regime*, which we enjoy in full."[22] Their *question*, as Stathis Kouvelakis argues, can be summarized as: "how to repeat the emancipatory act of the French Revolution in order to put an end to Germany's *ancien regime.*"[23] To answer this question they turned not to politics, as the French had, but to the one arena in which they believed the Germans outpaced the other European nations: philosophy. In particular, they turned to the highly ambiguous legacy of their departed mentor, G.W.F. Hegel.

Before his death in 1831, Hegel had espoused a teleological and idealist philosophy of history. For Hegel, history *moves* in a progressive direction through the operation of the *Geist* (or Spirit), which realizes itself through human activity, and is eventually revealed, especially through the Christian faith, to be the "progress of the *consciousness* of human freedom."[24] For

[20] Marx, "Theft of Wood," 65. The description of Marx's "liberal rationalist" moment comes from Louis Althusser, "Marxism and Humanism" [1965] in *For Marx*, translated by Ben Brewster (Verso, 2005), 223-224.

[21] Marx, "Theft of Wood," 104.

[22] Marx, "Contribution to Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law: Introduction," [1843-44] in *MECW* 3, 183. Emphasis mine.

[23] Stathis Kouvelakis, *Philosophy and Revolution,* 235.

[24] Hegel, *Reason in History: A General Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, trans. Robert S. Hartman (Prentice-Hall, 1997), 24. Emphasis mine.

Hegel, history is a rational process unfolding towards this goal. The political orders of all peoples and nations throughout history, Hegel claims, are an *expression* of the extent to which this *consciousness* of freedom has been realized.[25] In his *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel describes the modern Germanic, Christian state as the high point in this development. For Hegel, the state is the realm of freedom, in which individuals, *knowing* themselves to be free, can then willingly subordinate their own interests to the general reason of the state, reconciling their particular wills with the universal. Hegel's more conservative readers accepted this as a *fait accompli* and believed, as Hegel himself implied, that the extant Prussian state was the end of history achieved. The Young Hegelians, however, possessed with a radical democratic sensibility informed by the French Revolution, believed that the state's immanent universality and rationality had yet to be realized, and saw the enduring influence of the church as the chief barrier to this development.[26] As such, in the late 1830's and early 1840's they set their minds to theological critique and the secularization of Hegel's philosophy.

Ludwig Feuerbach's attempt at a "materialist" repurposing of Hegel's philosophy is a key moment in this trajectory. Retaining the general teleological structure of Hegel's system, Feuerbach claimed that the driving force of history was not Geist, operating at a lofty height above human experience, but was rather *humanity* itself and the progressive realization of humanity's own true essence. Feuerbach's distinctive claim was that the real, unrecognized subject of religious belief was in fact humanity itself. In brief, Feuerbach claims that God did not make humanity is *his image*; rather, humanity has made God in *ours*. When human beings worship God, Feuerbach argues, they are really worshipping their own human nature, displaced and projected onto a divine entity. As such, he claimed that religious worship was an *alienated* form of devotion that should be re-channelled towards its true source and object: the human

[25] Hegel's philosophy of history is, as many subsequent critics have observed, racist and Eurocentric. Hegel claims that African and "Oriental" societies possess no consciousness of freedom and thus stand outside of history. There are countless texts one could cite criticizing Hegel's philosophy of history, but I have found the following from Robert Bernasconi insightful: Bernasconi, "With What Must the Philosophy of Universal History Begin? On the Racial Basis of Hegel's Eurocentrism," *Nineteenth Century Contexts* 22 no. 2 (2000): 171-201.

[26] Engels famously describes this as a dispute over Hegel's dictum in the Preface to the *Philosophy of Right* that "what is rational is actual; and what is actual is rational." A conservative Hegelian, Engels points out, could read this as saying that the established order, by virtue of its actuality, is historically necessary and rational. The Young Hegelians, on the contrary, took this passage as a *directive to transform* the existing order, to *make* it rational. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, edited by Allen Wood, translated by H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge University Press, 1991), 20. Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy* [1888], ed. C.P. Dutt (International Publishers, 1941), 10.

being. Preaching a universal love for humanity, for a time Feuerbach even preferred to describe his philosophy as *anthropotheism* rather than atheism, for he believed that humanity should be worshipped in its own right.[27] Feuerbach's secularized reading of Hegel, which placed humanity firmly at the centre of history and offered the basis for a new humanistic project, proved immensely influential in the Young Hegelian milieu.

Feuerbach, and the Young Hegelians more generally, are sometimes charged with neglecting or evading politics for religious criticism. This is somewhat misleading. Operating in a heavily censorious and oppressive climate, in the 1830's and early 1840's, the Young Hegelians did tend to shy away from direct political confrontation with the Prussian state. However, as Heinrich points out, religious criticism was a charged subject in the Prussian context, and its political implications were widely recognized by the state and the reading public. Prussia was, after all, an officially Protestant kingdom in which Christianity was taken as the foundation of the state, the King was the head of the church, and Jews were not formally emancipated.[28] The charge that the Young Hegelians were evading political criticism also rests on a misunderstanding of their politics. Feuerbach, for instance, was sincerely convinced that religious belief was the crucial prop upon which all other forms of inequality rested, and he believed that if humanity no longer subordinated its innate capacity for reason to religion, a universal love of humanity would necessarily flourish, leading to the establishment of a democratic state and the consequent erosion of social and political antagonism.[29]

State censorship led to the shuttering of the *Rheinische Zeitung*, prompting Marx to leave Prussia for Paris in 1843. In this period Marx undertakes an intense period of political study, which sees him re-evaluate the French revolutionary legacy. The Young Hegelians still took the secular republic established by the Revolution as their horizon of political possibility and believed they could achieve it not through political revolution, but through religious criticism. But as Marx observes in his 1843 "On the Jewish Question," not only did the establishment of a secular state *not* depend on a prior, popular embrace of an atheistic humanism (as Young Hegelians like Bruno Bauer believed), it also represented a fundamentally *incomplete* project.

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[27] Todd Gooch, "Ludwig Andreas Feuerbach" *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2023): https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ludwig-feuerbach/

[28] Michael Heinrich, *Karl Marx and the Birth of Modern Society*, 229-230.

[29] For an excellent discussion of Feuerbach's politics, see: David Leopold, *The Young Karl Marx: German Philosophy, Modern Politics, and Human Flourishing* (Oxford University Press, 2007), 203-218.

The French and American Revolutions, Marx argues, had achieved *civic* or *political* emancipation, instituting a democratic state which stripped both property rights and religion of their directly political character. Marx hails this as a "big step forward," but also claims that it fell short of a more far-reaching "human," or "real" emancipation.[30] Political emancipation, Marx argues, is founded on a split between "man" and "citizen"; the citizen, as member of the democratic state is emancipated, but "man" still lives in the competitive and oppressive sphere of "civil society," dominated by the self-interest of others. Political emancipation, Marx argues, is thus only the emancipation of "*egoistic* man."[31] *Real* or *human* emancipation, Marx argues in somewhat elliptical terms, will only be achieved by overcoming this competitive "egoism," and by organizing human powers as "social forces."[32]

In this same moment Marx breaks decisively with the Young Hegelian movement over the primacy they afforded to religious critique.[33] In his 1844 "Introduction to the Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right," Marx claims that the Young Hegelian critique of religion is misdirected. Religion is not the *source* of human misery, an illusion which, once dispelled, will lead to universal human reconciliation and love for mankind. Rather, religion is an "*expression of*" and a "*protest against*" real human misery, poverty, and oppression; it is "the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world."[34] Religious criticism thus only gets at the real problem indirectly, fighting religious belief without enquiring into its social origin and function. For criticism to serve a truly emancipatory purpose, Marx claims, it must turn from "criticism of heaven" to "criticism of earth."[35] The task, as he understands it, is to squarely confront, and put an end to, the *material* conditions that produce a *need* for religious relief, namely "*to overthrow all relations* in which man is a debased, enslaved, abandoned, despicable essence."[36] Marx certainly still accepts, and never reneges on, the atheistic insight that "man makes religion," but he no longer sees atheism as a political end in of itself.

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[30] Marx, "On the Jewish Question" [1844], in *MECW*, Vol. 3, 155.
[31] Marx, "On the Jewish Question," 162. Emphasis mine.
[32] Marx, "On the Jewish Question," 168.
[33] For an incisive commentary see: Alberto Toscano, "The Clash of Abstractions: Revisiting Marx on Religion" in *Fanaticism: On the Uses of an Idea* (London: Verso, 2017), 172-202.
[34] Marx, "Introduction to the Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right" [1843], *Marx-Engels Collected Works, Volume 3* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1975), 175. Emphasis mine.
[35] Marx, "Introduction to Critique of Philosophy of Right," 176.
[36] Marx, "Introduction to Critique of Philosophy of Right," 182. Emphasis mine.

In this moment Marx identifies an emergent political agent capable of carrying out this elusive "human emancipation": the proletariat. No longer appealing to the immanent universalism and human potential of the state, Marx now invests his hopes for transformation in the social and political struggles of this class. Inspired, in part, by the 1844 uprising of the Silesian weavers in Prussia, who attacked not only their employers, but also the bankers that stood behind them, Marx identifies in the proletariat an opposition to the social order as such.[37] As Kouvelakis argues, the proletariat as they first appear in Marx's work are not defined "sociologically" but "politically", and are characterized above all by their radical *negativity* towards the existing order.[38] Unlike the bourgeoisie, who fought to defend *private* property against the hereditary entitlements of *feudal* property, and thus won its victories *as* bourgeois, the proletariat has no propertied interests or estates of its own to defend. Their emancipation lies in the *abolition of private property,* as such, and thereby the *end* of their own existence as proletarians. This is a class, Marx argues, shackled with "radical chains," which "cannot emancipate itself without thereby emancipating all other spheres of society."[39] Their victory, which will be both "social" and "political," Marx argues, will put an end to class antagonism and realize "the emancipation of the human being."[40]

Marx and Engels in the workers' movement

Marx and Engels begin their lifelong collaboration in Paris in 1844, where they simultaneously become politically involved with the city's radical workers' movement. In this moment of rapid intellectual development, they clarify their departure from the Young Hegelian

[37] Marx, "Critical Marginal Notes on the Article 'The King of Prussia, and Social Reform. By a Prussian'" [1844] in *MECW 3,* 201.

[38] Kouvelakis, *Philosophy and Revolution,* 330. As Kouvelakis observes, this "negative" definition of the proletariat marks a significant distance from Feuerbach. Although Marx still leans on a Feuerbachian vocabulary of the "human essence," Marx is less inclined to define this in positive, anthropological terms. As Kouvelakis observes, "when it is a question of determining, in a positive fashion, the ultimate human essence, Marx becomes highly elliptical, precisely where Feuerbach … is prolix." Kouvelakis, *Philosophy and Revolution,* 307. Although he departs from Kouvelakis insofar as he argues the young Marx "did not entirely escape" the Feuerbachian temptation to treat the proletariat as the expression of an "anthropological foundation," Asad Haider also narrows in on a tension between Marx's early *negative, political* definition of the proletariat, and his humanistic tendency to identify the proletariat with a more substantive anthropological content: i.e. the "human essence" or "species-being." In short, this is a tension between the "proletariat as negation and the proletariat as foundation." See: Haider, "Emancipation, Political, and Real." In *Domination and Emancipation,* edited by Daniel Benson (Rowman & Littlefield, 2021), 69-88.

[39] Marx, "Introduction to Critique of Philosophy of Right," 186.

[40] Marx, "Intro to Critique of Philosophy of Right," 187.

project, and develop their own distinctive political approach, one opposed to the then-dominant humanistic currents of the existing workers movement. The liberal humanism of Feuerbach and the Young Hegelians was hardly alien to the working-class organizations of the time. Rather, as Kouvelakis points out, this humanism, which preached reconciliation between workers and capitalists in the name of social harmony and a universal love for humanity, was "the *fountainhead of the 'common sense'* of the workers movement."[41] Indeed, Marx and Engels had both recently subscribed, in different ways, to just such a project of trying to *convince* the bourgeoisie to demonstrate its humanity.[42] But as they sharpen their own political perspective, they will soon quite fiercely reject any such appeals.

Marx and Engels entered the workers movement not as passive observers, but as partisans, trying to win over the movement to their own point of view. They became especially involved with the League of the Just, an organization made up of German *émigré* artisans living in Paris. Their political break with humanism was elaborated in these years principally through sarcastic and withering polemics against many now-long-forgotten interlocutors orbiting this scene. In 1846, for instance, they circulate a blistering takedown of Herman Kriege, a New York-based German radical who had recently opened a paper in the League's name. Kriege espoused a recognizably Feuerbachian "love of mankind," extended to bourgeois and proletarian alike. As Marx and Engels observe, Kriege's appeal to the "human" as a political subject introduces all manner of confusions. For instance, when Kriege claims in a typically "extravagant" passage that the "proletariat *is* mankind," Marx and Engels point out the absurdity of the claim—the communists seek the *abolition* of class (and thereby the proletariat), but they are decidedly not thereby "aiming at the abolition of mankind."[43] They also note the peculiar intolerance of Kriege's willingness to treat the enemies of his project as "enemies of mankind"—a posture, which as Marx and Engels observed, recalled the worst forms of religious intolerance and threatened the spirit of open debate they believed the proletarian movement should

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[41] Kouvelakis, *Philosophy and Revolution,* 236. Emphasis mine.

[42] Kouvelakis attributes this perspective exclusively to the young Engels. As Kouvelakis argues, Engels had been won over to socialism before Marx, but this was a distinctly *anti-political* socialism that saw an appeal to social harmony as a way of bypassing political conflict. Kouvelakis is right that Marx's early intellectual development followed a different, more "political" course. While Kouvelakis's account is quite convincing overall, the thrust of Marx's interventions in the "Theft of Wood" debates suggest that the young Marx was not quite so immune to this reconciliatory humanism as Kouvelakis claims. See chapters Four and Five of Kouvelakis, *Philosophy and Revolution*.

[43] Marx and Engels, "Circular Against Kriege" [1846], in *Marx & Engels Collected Works, Volume 6* (Lawrence & Wishart, 1976), 48.

cultivate.[44] Perhaps most damningly, as they note in Kriege's case, and emphasize again in another polemic against the similarly-minded Karl Heinzen, the anti-political appeal to social harmony and mutual reconciliation only play into the hands of the bourgeoisie. At best, such appeals are politically "vaporous" and depoliticizing; at worst, they "advocate 'bourgeois' interests in the guise of 'human' ends."[45]

Marx and Engels's politics on the eve of the 1848 revolutions can be summarized thus: with no cause to be nostalgic for the bonds of feudalism, the proletariat should welcome and support any bourgeois struggle against the *ancien regime*. Bourgeois victories, leading to the establishment of liberal democracy and the development of industry, would both facilitate open political organizing and swell the ranks of the working class. After the *minoritarian* bourgeois revolution, the proletariat should prepare to conquer political power for themselves in the name of the *majority*, instituting a radical program with the ultimate aim of abolishing private property and establishing collective organization of industrial production. In the meantime, the proletariat should be careful to maintain its political *and* intellectual autonomy, arming itself not only with weapons but with a clear-sighted understanding of political economy and the capitalist system they were up against. They should be careful, likewise, to resist any sentimental humanism that would seek reconciliation with other contending classes. The fruits of this political antihumanism can be seen in the transformations Marx and Engels were able to effect within the "League of the Just," which in 1847 abandoned its earlier, conciliatory slogan "all men are brothers" for the more militant "workers of the world, unite!", and assumed a new name: The Communist League.

Political and Theoretical Antihumanism

In the years following the failure of the 1848 Revolutions and their consequent move to England, Marx and Engels come to rethink many of their earlier political assumptions. In particular, they become increasingly disillusioned with the revolutionary political capacity of the bourgeoisie. But they never walk back on the definitive *political* break with humanism that they make in the mid-1840's. In all subsequent writings they studiously avoid the terminology of the

[44] For more commentary on Marx's politics in this period, see William Clare Roberts, "Marx's German and British Political Encounters" in *The Bloomsbury Companion to Marx,* eds. Jeff Diamanti, Andrew Pendakis & Imre Szeman (Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 231-240; and Richard Hunt, *The Political Ideas of Marx and Engels, Volume 1* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1974).

[45] Marx and Engels, "Circular Against Kriege," 47.

Young Hegelians, and likewise try to avoid any sentimental or moral language that would threaten to pull the proletarian struggle back towards a bourgeois, liberal humanism.[46] Indeed, the concept virtually disappears from their work. As they see it, the depoliticizing rhetoric of humanism and its implicit hope that capitalism can be overcome by a mutual embrace of a shared humanity, can only undermine the class struggle. The proletariat should not seek *human reconciliation* but should instead pursue *self-emancipation*; they must win political power for themselves and wield it against their class oppressors. As Engels puts the task clearly in an 1871 speech: "We want the abolition of classes. What is the means of achieving it? The only means is political domination of the proletariat."[47] In the 1875 *Critique of the Gotha Program* Marx would call this period of political domination the "revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat."[48]

The fact that Marx and Engels make a political break with humanism is, or at least should be, uncontroversial. This remains, of course, a somewhat paradoxical antihumanism; Marx and Engels remained deeply convinced that the proletarian class struggle was a struggle for a more general, universal human emancipation, and believed that communism—the ultimate end of this revolutionary process—would finally create a global order free of class antagonism, in which human powers could be developed to their greatest extent and directed to the benefit of all. But they were also convinced that this project was threatened by any *premature* appeal to a common humanity that would try to create a more "humane" world within the narrow horizons of the reigning social order. Engels's 1892 reflections on his 1845 *Condition of the Working Class in England* capture something of this reassessment. As Engels notes, his earlier text had stressed that communism was "not a mere party doctrine of the working class," but a movement that would free *bourgeois* and *proletarian* alike from the "narrow conditions" of capitalist society. Criticizing his earlier view, Engels notes that it remains "*true enough in the abstract, but absolutely useless, and sometimes worse, in practice.*" As he continues: "Those who preach to the workers a Socialism soaring high above their class interests … tending to reconcile in a

[46] Not only does the language of humanism, as they see it, tend towards a reconciliatory vision of social harmony, its implicit ethical or moral posture betrays an inadequate understanding of capitalism. What Marx's *Capital* aims to demonstrate is not that capitalists are necessarily "immoral," but that their continued existence as capitalists depends on their ability to turn a profit. However much some individual capitalists may wish to treat their workers "ethically," they operate within a system in which production must yield a surplus, exerting a downward pressure on wages. What Marx wants to impress upon the working class is that they confront a crisis-prone and antagonistic set of social relations that cannot be overcome by any narrow appeal to ethics.

[47] Engels, "On the Political Action of the Working Class" [1871] in *Marx & Engels Collected Works, Volume 22* (Lawrence & Wishart, 1986) 417.

[48] Marx, "The Critique of the Gotha Program" in *The First International and After*, 355.

higher humanity the interest of both the contending classes—these people are either neophytes, who have still to learn a great deal, or they are the worst enemies of the workers—wolves in sheep's clothing."[49]

Marx and Engels's reservations about the political *effects* of rhetorical appeals to humanism are clearly attuned to contextual concerns; their fear was that emphasizing the shared "humanity" of bourgeoisie and proletarian during the class struggle threatened to disarm the revolutionary ambitions of the proletariat. We might even observe that Marxism has *always* been a kind of "contextualism," linking the generation of ideas and concepts to the "context" of class relations and the material production of life.[50] In the *Communist Manifesto*, for instance, Marx and Engels famously identify the "ruling ideas" of any historical period as those of its "ruling classes."[51] Marx and Engels recognized that the proletarian struggle was one *produced by* and *responding to* capitalist social relations. The proletariat had, likewise, inherited a certain political vocabulary from their class antagonists, the bourgeoisie. Phrases like *freedom, justice, morality, rights,* and *humanism*, can thus, as Marx observed, mean "something quite different to different classes."[52] Marx and Engels were keenly attentive to the difficulties of inheriting a political language from the world they were trying to overthrow, sought to limit the use of ambiguous language that could be accepted by both sides of the class struggle, and devoted considerable attention to developing an *autonomous* political vocabulary. These concerns, I believe, count foremost among the reasons why they dispense with "humanistic phraseology" and insist instead upon the "concrete" demand: "the abolition of all class rule."[53]

In short, while Marx and Engels never *deny* that communism would entail a broader human emancipation, they are very wary of the *effects* of any political appeal to humanism. In a 1968 interview Althusser returns to a similar point:

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[49] Engels, Preface to the English Edition of *The Condition of the Working Class in England* [1892], (Oxford University Press, 1993), 317. Emphasis mine.

[50] To be sure, Marxism operates with a more "materialist" understanding of context than more idealist contemporary thinkers like Skinner, and some more dogmatically minded Marxists have tended to dismiss the ideas of earlier thinkers as simply an expression of their class position, effectively treating thought itself as entirely socially determined. The Cambridge School's emphasis on the independent role of discourse and can be read, in part, as a reaction against Marxist historiography.

[51] Marx and Engels, *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* [1848] in *The Revolutions of 1848, Political Writings, Volume 1*, edited by David Fernbach (London: Penguin, 1973), 85.

[52] Marx, "Letter to the French-Swiss Federal Council" [1870] in *The First International and After*, 119.

[53] Marx, "Appeal of the Democratic Congress to the German People" [1848], in *MECW 7*, 492; Marx, "Letter to the French-Swiss Federal Council," 119.

> Communists struggle for the suppression of *classes* and for a communist society, where, one day, all men will be free and brothers. However, the whole classical Marxist tradition has refused to say that Marxism is a *Humanism.* Why? Because *practically*, i.e., in *the facts*, the word Humanism is exploited by an ideology which uses it to fight, i.e., to kill, another, true, word, and one vital to the proletariat: the *class struggle.*[54]

I take Althusser to be entirely consistent here with Marx and Engels's own reservations about the role of humanism within the workers movement. But if the *political* break with humanism is clear, as I have argued here, Althusser's intervention also points us to a thornier and enduringly controversial question: that of a *theoretical* break with humanism in Marx's work. Addressing this calls for a brief digression.

Marx initially begins to critique capitalism in language heavily inspired by Feuerbach. In the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* of 1844, which went unpublished in Marx's lifetime, Marx argues that capitalism *alienates* humanity from its *essence* or *species-being*, and that communism represents the *restoration* or *realization* of this human essence. However, Marx and Engels quite quickly distance themselves from this mode of critique and soon describe the "human essence" as an ideological concept which, they argue, exists only in the "misty realm of philosophical fantasy."[55] As they settle their accounts with the Young Hegelian movement in texts like the (also unpublished) manuscripts that make up the *German Ideology,* they no longer treat German philosophy's investment in elaborating this essence as a mark of Germany's unique philosophical genius, but rather as indicative of a baleful failure to investigate Germany's material conditions.

As Marx points out in the "Sixth Thesis" on Feuerbach, Feuerbach's philosophy takes as its foundation the "abstract—*isolated*—human individual."[56] In the *German Ideology*, the first attempt to articulate their own "materialist" critique, Marx and Engels assume a radically different point of departure. Any truly critical insight into modern capitalist society, they argue, cannot begin with the "abstract individual," or "the human," but with "real men," who are embedded in particular *social relations*, and who "work under definite material limits,

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[54] Althusser, "Philosophy as a Revolutionary Weapon" [1968] in *New Left Review* 64 (Nov/Dec 1970). Emphasis in original.

[55] Marx and Engels, "The Manifesto of the Communist Party," [1848] in *The Revolutions of 1848, Political Writings: Volume 1,* edited by David Fernbach (Penguin, 1973), 91.

[56] Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach" [1845] in *Marx & Engels Collected Works, Volume 5* (Lawrence & Wishart, 1976), 4.

presuppositions and conditions independent of their will."[57] These social relations and material conditions *produce* human beings as particular kinds of subjects, possessed with distinct ideological conceptions of themselves and of "humanity." As Marx will expound with increasing clarity in later work, most notably the *Grundrisse*, the abstract, isolated individual, whom the liberal political economists (like the Young Hegelians) treated as an *ahistorical* subject, was in fact a distinct *product* of capitalist dynamics, namely, the destruction of the commons, the deepening division of labour, and the consequent isolation of the wage-labourer.[58] Anti-capitalist struggle, as Marx and Engels see it, does not represent the realization of a "fantastical" human essence that *precedes* capitalism; rather, the working class movement is the result of contradictions *internal* to the development of capitalism. Above all, they expect that the material conditions of the working class will lead them to develop an *antagonistic* class consciousness directed against a capitalist system that immiserates them while enriching the capitalist at their expense.

The lingering difficulty, however, is that even after Marx largely abandons any ahistorical concept of the "human essence," he still often yokes his appeal to historical specificity to a teleological philosophy of history, in which the particular and specific mode of subjectivity engendered by capitalist social relations still represents the outcome of an evolutionary, unilinear historical process which has as its *goal* the full "development" of humanity. Althusser's intervention contains a most perceptive criticism, namely that the most deterministic formulations of historical materialism, in which history advances through "stages" determined by the development of the "productive forces" (alongside which humanity "develops" in tandem), drink from the same well as Marx's early Hegelian-Feuerbachian humanism in that the "productive forces" assume much the same role in Marx's philosophy of history as the "Geist" did for Hegel, or the "human essence" did for Feuerbach.[59] It is this confidence in history that licensed Marx and Engels's often strong, if fallacious, claims that the victory of the proletariat was guaranteed by the course of history.

However, as Althusser argues, this is hardly the final lesson of Marx's work. One of Marx's great "scientific" insights, Althusser claims, is his discovery that history is a "*process*

[57] Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology* [1845], in *MECW 5,* 35-36.
[58] Marx, "Introduction" to *Grundrisse* [1857-58], trans. Martin Nicolaus (Penguin, 1973), 81-112.
[59] The classic exposition of the deterministic view comes in Marx's "Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy."

without a subject or goal."[60] Far from implying any "determinism" or denial of "human agency" on Althusser's part (as he has often been misread), Althusser's point is that this insight forces a recognition of the relative *autonomy* of political action.[61] The properly Marxist dialectic, as Althusser describes it, is not characterized by the progressive development of a singular contradiction advancing at its highest point towards a predetermined goal (i.e. "the 'beautiful' Contradiction between Capital and Labour"), but by an uneven accumulation of contradictions at both the level of the political "superstructure" and the economic "base," neither of which are reducible to the other.[62] The task of revolutionaries is thus to *actively intervene* in the conjuncture in all its circumstantial complexity, not to ride the wave of history. Marx's later writings are, compared to his earlier works, considerably less invested in the progressive course of history. However, a certain confidence in historical guarantee remains detectable in his later work as well. Thus, although Althusser initially casts his theory of Marx's "epistemological break" in rather categorical terms, asserting that Marx breaks decisively with Hegel and Feuerbach in 1845, he later describes this as a much more protracted process, acknowledging that traces of a "Hegelian evolutionist" tendency remains present in later texts.[63] Rather than being a clean break, we should understand this as an enduring tension in Marx's later works; a "process" rather than an "event."[64]

In the remaining discussion of the chapter, I loosely adopt Althusser's characterization of the "break." That is, I treat the *political break* with humanism as a clear and decisive moment, and the *theoretical* break with humanism as a more protracted, and never entirely complete *process*.[65] In what follows I consider how Marx and Engels's *political antihumanism*, which shuns the reconciliatory language of humanism while remaining no less committed to human emancipation for that move, and the lingering influence of a *theoretical humanism*, informed

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[60] Althusser, "Remark on the Category: Process without a Subject or Goal(s)" [1972] in *Essays in Self-Criticism,* trans. Graham Lock (Verso, 1976), 94-100.

[61] The most famous of these critiques is English historian E.P. Thompson's polemic "The Poverty of Theory or an Orrery of Errors," which also mistakenly brands Althusser a "Stalinist." See: Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays* (Merlin, 1978), 1-210.

[62] Althusser, "Contradiction and Overdetermination" in *For Marx*, 104.

[63] Althusser, "Preface to *Capital: Volume One*" in *Lenin and Philosophy*, trans. Ben Brewster (Verso, 1971).

[64] Etienne Balibar, "From Bachelard to Althusser: the concept of the 'epistemological break.' *Economy and Society* 7 no. 3 (August 1978), 220.

[65] As Althusser concedes, Marx's *political* break with humanism precedes the theoretical break. Kouvelakis develops this point very effectively. See: Althusser, "On the Evolution of the Young Marx," *Essays in Self-Criticism*, 158-159; Kouvelakis, *Philosophy and Revolution*, 235.

their conception of communist internationalism. In particular, I argue that this lingering theoretical humanism informed some of Marx and Engels's more problematic conclusions about colonialism and the destruction of pre-capitalist societies, but I also consider the extent to which this is overcome, or at least challenged, in later work.

PART TWO: COMMUNIST INTERNATIONALISM AND PRE-CAPITALIST FORMATIONS

Marx and Engels recognized early on that capitalism was a global system that had created conditions of universal interdependence around the world. The fate of all peoples and nations were now bound together through the capitalist world market. In the opening pages of the 1848 *Communist Manifesto,* they describe the growth of the world market in laudatory terms, crediting the colonization of the Americas and growing trade with Asia for the rise of the bourgeoisie and the disintegration of the feudal regime. As Marx and Engels observe, the bourgeoisie is constantly compelled, by the unceasing search for profit, to revolutionize techniques of production, and to continually seek new markets for growth. In the process, they undermine all existing national isolation: "in the place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal interdependence of nations." There is no hope of opting out of this process—the bourgeoisie "batters down all Chinese walls" and "compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the bourgeois mode of production." In the process, Marx and Engels anticipate, the bourgeoise likewise erodes all existing national loyalties and prejudices: "national differences, and antagonisms between peoples, are daily more and more vanishing."[66]

The capitalist world market establishes the arena of struggle in which the proletariat must fight.[67] The proletarian struggle, as they describe it in the *Manifesto*, is one of gradually expanding scope, beginning with local workplace disputes. Through these clashes, trade unions are formed to protect the interests of workers. As proletarian organization grows, these

[66] Marx and Engels, "Communist Manifesto," citations in this paragraph are from pages 71 & 85.

[67] For a good discussion of the relationship between the capitalist world market and internationalism, see: Sandro Mezzadra, "Karl Marx and the Theoretical Foundation of Internationalism" in *The Comintern and the Global South: Global Designs/Local Encounters*, eds. Anne Garland Mahler and Paolo Capuzzo (Routledge, 2023), 47-67.

workplace struggles increasingly take the form of "collisions between two classes" on a national scale. The initial demands of the class struggle are, Marx and Engels claim, national. The proletariat must "settle matters with its own bourgeoisie" and "acquire political supremacy" in a national context. At the same time, these struggles also increasingly acquire an *international* dimension, and must form alliances linking with each other across national boundaries. Indeed, in the *Manifesto* Marx and Engels argue that the *communists* are only distinguished from the existing working class parties in that they *continually impress* upon the working class movement an awareness its goals and ends are *international*: "In the national struggles of the proletarians of the different countries, [the communists] *point out and bring to the front the common interests of the entire proletariat*, *independently of all nationality*."[68] In this sense, they insist the communists are not a separate party at all, but simply represent the international consciousness of the extant working class movement.

Given that proletarian internationalism follows in the wake of the global market, and represents an antagonistic response to it, Marx and Engels conclude in this moment that the spread of "free trade" should be welcomed by the working class. In an 1848 speech in Belgium, Marx argues in favour of free trade, welcoming the global spread of capital for its "revolutionary," "destructive" effects.[69] The unimpeded acceleration of capitalist accumulation, as they see it, will "simplify" class antagonisms, and further weaken national allegiances. Of course, the proletariat cannot for a moment be satisfied with capitalist cosmopolitanism: "to call cosmopolitan exploitation universal brotherhood is an idea that could only be engendered in the brain of the bourgeoisie."[70] Although the bourgeoisie commends itself for its "cosmopolitanism" (a term Marx and Engels associate with capital, while they tend to reserve "internationalism" for the proletariat), theirs is only, Marx observes, "the brotherhood of the oppressors against the oppressed."[71] The proletariat's task, as Engels puts it, is to "oppose the brotherhood of the bourgeoise of all nations with the brotherhood of the workers of all nations."[72]

It bears stressing that the "internationalism" Marx and Engels come to embrace in the 1848 period does not return to the "humanism" of their earlier works. This is due, as I have

[68] Marx and Engels, "Communist Manifesto," 76, 78, 84, 79. Emphasis mine.
[69] Marx, "Speech on the Question of Free Trade" [1848], in *MECW 6,* 465.
[70] Marx, "Speech on Free Trade," 464.
[71] Marx, "Speeches on Poland" [1847], in *The Revolutions of 1848,* 99.
[72] Engels, "Speeches on Poland" [1847], in *The Revolutions of 1848*, 101.

argued above, to the fact that they see in the rhetoric of humanism a misplaced desire for class reconciliation, but also because of the distinctly German nationalistic baggage of humanism. In the *German Ideology* and again in the *Manifesto* they take aim at the proponents of a "true socialism," whose advocates included figures like Moses Hess and Karl Grün. Where the "true socialists" sought to improve upon French socialist ideas by translating them into a German philosophical idiom, Marx and Engels charged these thinkers with obscuring and diluting the radicalism of French socialism by proffering "humanism" as a pacifying alternative to socialism or communism.[73] They denounce this tendency not only for its humanistic confusions, but also for what they identify as its German nationalism. The "true socialists," who, like Marx and Engels, emerged out of the Young Hegelian milieu, shared the common belief in Germany's philosophical superiority; Germany, they believed, was *the* philosophical nation *par excellence*. Having once shared this belief themselves, Marx and Engels now upbraid the "narrowly national outlook which underlies the alleged universalism and cosmopolitanism of the Germans." Denouncing the nationalist complicity of this philosophical humanism, they insist that "national narrow-mindedness is everywhere repellent."[74] The real overcoming of national antagonisms, they argued, could not be achieved by the self-flattering philosophical mystifications of the German philosophers, but only by an organized, international proletarian movement.

The proletarian internationalism advocated by Marx and Engels is no mere appeal to a "human" subject across borders but is formed through a *class struggle* waged both *within* and *beyond* national boundaries. Marx dismisses the "humanistic phraseology" that appeals not to any concrete struggle or class interests but draws instead "into the cosmopolitan, misty land of 'noble hearts' in general."[75] A genuine internationalism, Marx argues, can only exist where a "common interest" is present. As they see it at this time, the proletariat (who by this point is more narrowly defined as industrial wage-labourers) is *uniquely* capable of acting on a common interest.[76] The salutary conclusion Marx draws is that the proletariat is invested with a universal

[73] In the *German Ideology* they offer a biting critique of an article by the "true socialist" writer Friedrich Semmig who "having thus dismissed communism and socialism … introduces us to the higher unity of the two, to *humanism*." Their criticism is on the mark. As they quote Semmig: "All quibbles about names are resolved in *humanism*; wherefore communists, wherefore socialists? We are *human beings*." Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology* in *MECW* 5, 468.

[74] Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 470.

[75] Marx, "Appeal of the Democratic Congress to the German People" [1848], in *MECW 7*, 492.

[76] Marx, "Speeches on Poland," 100. Marx and Engels are particularly pessimistic, for instance, about the capacity of peasant struggles: as they see it, peasant struggles have their natural resolution in the achievement of property rights—not in the overturning of private property as such.

political responsibility that far exceeds its own immediate demands, arguing that "the victory of the proletariat over the bourgeoisie also signifies the emancipation of all downtrodden nations." By way of example, Marx's enduringly valuable advice to English workers outraged at Tsarist oppression of Poland (a cause dear to Marx, Engels, and the broader nineteenth century European left) is that they could best serve Polish liberation not by expressing "pious wishes" for its liberation, but by fighting their *own internal enemies*: the English bourgeoisie. The more problematic conclusion Marx draws, however, is that revolutionary political agency is assigned principally (if perhaps not exclusively) to the industrial proletariat of the "advanced countries." As Marx puts it of the Polish national struggle, with a rhetorical flourish: "Poland must be freed not in Poland, but in England."[77] It is critical to note here that Marx is *addressing English workers*, not Poles, to whom he did not counsel resignation until they were freed by the English.[78]

Marx later came to rethink many of the assumptions that informed his thought in this moment, including his belief that free trade should be encouraged, his conviction that revolutionary agency was the unique prerogative of the industrial working class, and his confidence that the proletariat would prove immune to nationalism. At the same time, Marx and Engels never abandoned their conviction that the class struggles of the "advanced" countries would prove decisive for the global overthrow of capitalism. As I see it, the most defensible feature of the priority granted to the "advanced" proletariat rests on this class's distinct strategic position within the global economy and the fact that they had certain *means* at their disposal that were absent in other contexts. It is true that nineteenth-century factory workers, concentrated in great industrial cities like London and Manchester, with their hands, literally, on the levers of the global industrial economy, were in a unique position to bring capital to a grinding halt in a way that was simply not true of peasant farmers in Egypt or India. These considerations do not, however, exhaust the reasons for Marx and Engels's investment in the "advanced" countries, especially in the 1848 period.

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[77] Marx, "Speeches on Poland," [1847], 100.

[78] Marx's advice to focus on the nearest enemy, rather than expressing impotent demands for the freedom of others, remains a powerful political insight. Marx does not advise the Poles that they should simply wait for the British proletariat but encourages their own democratic revolution. In another speech delivered the following year, Marx hails the "heroic" Polish example as "a point of honour for all the democrats in Europe." Marx, "Speeches on Poland" [1848] in *The Revolutions of 1848*, 105.

In terms quite compatible with a liberal, Enlightenment narrative of historical progress, in the *Manifesto,* Marx and Engels credit capitalism with the development of humanity's productive powers, thus cementing the species' mastery of nature and establishing the necessary conditions for human life to flourish. Marx and Engels also praise capitalism for its role in developing human consciousness, for stripping away all "religious and political illusions," degrading all traditional sources of authority, undermining national and rural isolation, and reducing humanity to the bare facts of its existence.[79] They also see the spread of capitalism as having a kind of flattening effect; *within* the nation, capitalism reduces the proletariat to a common standard of existence, obliterates sources of social division, and creates a situation in which the proletariat's collective interests are automatically realized. The story is much the same on the global stage, with the bourgeoisie creating "a world after its own image."[80] On this reading, capitalism represents a "civilizing" force that flattens and enfolds all nations into a singular path of development. Where this universal process is at its most "advanced" point, i.e., in the most industrialized, European economies, also home to the most "enlightened" proletarians, the *means* and the *will* for revolution necessarily align. On these and other questions, the *Manifesto* appears in retrospect rather optimistic and even cavalier in its embrace of capitalism as a revolutionary force.

One of the early distinguishing features of Marx and Engels's thought viz-a-viz other socialist tendencies, especially in the 1848 moment, is precisely their conviction that the development of capitalism is the necessary precondition for socialism. Although they had their eyes fixed on the socialist horizon, in 1848 Marx and Engels were arguably more preoccupied with *anti-feudal* struggles than the anticipated anti-capitalist movement. Prominent currents of the 1848 Revolutions, also known as the "Springtime of Nations," combined anti-feudalism with a politics of nationalism and national unification. As Erica Benner argues, Marx and Engels never aspired to theorize nationalism with any particular consistency, and their approach to national causes was principally strategic and dictated by how they mapped on to class struggle.[81] Thus, during the 1848 Revolutions, they identified *some* national movements as anti-feudal, democratic struggles that would institute private property and create large, national states with a

[79] Marx and Engels, "Communist Manifesto," 70.
[80] Marx and Engels, "Communist Manifesto," 71.
[81] Benner, *Really Existing Nationalisms*.

common market—essential preconditions, they believed, for socialism. Thus in 1848, they supported the ambitions of Polish and Hungarian nationalists, whom they took to be liberal revolutionaries fighting against Russian and Austrian absolutism. However, they took a much dimmer view of those smaller nations, such as the Czechs, Croats, Serbs, and Slovaks, whose leaders threw in their lot with the Austrian monarchy.[82] But if Marx and Engels were consistently opposed to the Russian, Prussian, and Austrian empires, i.e., the "Holy Alliance" that constituted the axis of post-Napoleonic European reaction, they were often more equivocal, and sometimes outright supportive of (particularly in Engels's case) British, French, and American "liberal" imperialism.

If Marx and Engels celebrated every liberal, capitalist blow against the *ancien regime*, the great difficulty with their thought in the late 1840's and early 1850's is that they saw colonial conquest as basically analogous to bourgeois struggles against European feudalism. The non-European pre-capitalist world, as they saw it, had no more redeeming value than the European *ancien regime*. As such, they saw the colonial ambitions of countries like Britain and France as inroads against "backward" social orders by more "advanced" countries. On such grounds, for instance, Engels would celebrate the French conquest of Algeria and the American invasion of Mexico.[83] So too would Marx, as we will see in more depth momentarily, offer a somewhat more qualified and ambivalent endorsement of the effects of British rule in India. It should be noted, of course, that even in Engels's case, these were only provisional endorsements of temporary bourgeois victories, and they expected that capitalism would, in the colonies as in Europe, breed its own "gravediggers." Moreover, if in this period Marx and Engels welcomed the wholesale destruction of pre-capitalist societies and imagined that capitalism was producing more or less

[82] During the 1848 Revolutions Engels wrote a number of repugnant articles about these "non-historic" peoples, arguing that due to their small populations, Serbs, Czechs and others were *inevitably* consigned to a "counter-revolutionary" existence, and would, at every moment, align themselves with reactionary forces. Engels was understandably outraged at the crushing of democratic revolutions, but his willingness to throw entire peoples into the dustbin of history is hardly a reasonable conclusion. Marx himself does not adopt Engels's crude, deterministic notion of the "non-historic peoples," but while Michael Lowy concludes that Engels's views are thus "fundamentally foreign to Marxism," I think Erica Benner is closer to the mark when she claims that Engels's positions "cannot be written off as mere anomalies bearing no relation to his and Marx's general theory." As she observes, although Engels's pronouncements are (thankfully) far from the final word on Marxism's approach to nations and nationalism, they nonetheless reflect a deterministic and teleological strand of their thinking and can "easily be tacked on to the general notion of historical progress." Benner, *Really Existing Nationalisms,* 166-167. Lowy, "Marxists and the National Question," *New Left Review* 96 (1976), 83.

[83] Engels, "The Movements of 1847" in *MECW 6,* 527; Engels, "Extraordinary Revelations.—Abd el-Kader.—Guizot's Foreign Policy" in *MECW 6*, 471-472.

uniform "progressive" effects, these assumptions would be subject to serious revision later on. For now, however, let us first consider Marx's line of argument in more detail, with particular attention to the "humanistic" resonance of his appraisal of colonial rule and the destruction of the pre-capitalist world.

Marx on India

A series of articles on India published in the *New-York Tribune* in 1853, Marx's first serious reflection on a non-European society, have proven an enduring touchstone in debates concerning Marx's attitude towards colonialism. In these articles Marx is unambiguous about the horrors of East India Company rule and treats the entire colonial enterprise as evidence of the "profound hypocrisy and inherent barbarism of bourgeois civilization."[84] And yet Marx's broader appraisal of colonial rule is not one of a straightforward rejection. While recognizing that Britain had imposed a unprecedented order of violence in India, Marx welcomes the anticipated effects of British rule, concluding that "England has to fulfill a double mission in India: one destructive, the other regenerating, the annihilation of old Asiatic society, and the laying the material foundations of Western society in Asia."[85] The changes welcomed by Marx include the political unification of India, the development of a native standing army, and the (as he expected inevitable) industrialization of the country.[86] While Marx embraces these developments, he is also clear that they will ultimately serve to undermine British rule and will only be of any real benefit to Indians when they "throw off the English yoke altogether," or a proletarian revolution carries the day in Britain.[87]

Marx's writings on India have attracted particular attention ever since the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* in 1978.[88] In his brief critical remarks on Marx, Said rebukes him for failing to foreground a moral sympathy for Indian victims of colonialism in these articles, a

[84] Marx, "The Future Results of British Rule in India" [1853], in *Marx & Engels Collected Works, Volume 12.* (Lawrence & Wishart, 1979), 221.

[85] Marx, "Future Results of British Rule in India," 217-218.

[86] As Marx would later recognize, Britain in fact deliberately resisted the industrialization of India for many decades, preferring to treat the colony as a source of raw material for British manufacturing. The question of industrialization under colonialism will prove a significant issue for M.N. Roy, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

[87] Marx, "Future Results of British Rule in India," 221.

[88] Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (Vintage Books, 1978).

failure Said attributes to the influence of Orientalist thinking on Marx.[89] However, this apparent failure is one that Marx wears on his sleeve. Marx remains decidedly unsentimental about the destruction of pre-capitalist societies and does not see India's experience as particularly unique in this regard. As he reflects in one of these articles: "Has the bourgeoisie ever done more? Has it ever effected a progress without dragging individuals and people through blood and dirt, through misery and degradation?"[90]

Marx's equally unsentimental assessment of what he would come to call "primitive accumulation" in European countries should be enough to clear him of a unique indifference towards Indian suffering.[91] But I do not think that Marx's problem here really stems from a lack of sympathy for Indian victims of colonial violence, but rather from his confidence that this suffering will eventually be redeemed in the name of "progress." To put the point clearly, the problems reflected in Marx's articles on India stem not from a particular antipathy towards Indian suffering *per se*, but from a philosophy of history that sees the violent destruction of pre-capitalist societies as a necessary pain to be suffered for the promise of capitalist modernity and future socialist emancipation. The justification for this view has a consistently "humanistic" resonance in Marx's work, as in his claim that "although at first the development of the capacities of the human species takes place at the cost of the majority of human individuals and whole human classes, in the end it breaks through this contradiction and coincides with the development of the individual."[92]

While Said counterposes Marx's humanism (which he finds wanting) to his historicism, an adequate diagnosis of Marx's attitude requires that we understand his humanism and historicism *together*. If Marx's interventions on India are clearly "anti-humanist" in one sense, steering clear of a sentimental, moralizing critique of British rule, they are also recognizably

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[89] Said, *Orientalism*, 153-156. Said is certainly correct that Marx's view of Indian society is deeply shaped by the broader discourse of Orientalism and reflects the prejudice of his sources. Somewhat oddly, Said attributes this Orientalist attitude chiefly to the poet Goethe, who Marx quotes briefly in one of these articles. There are other more obvious influences including not only Hegel, but also the British scholarship Marx was relying upon. For a considered response to Said, which integrates a useful commentary on the sources Marx was reading, see Kevin Anderson, *Marx at the Margins* (University of Chicago Press, 2010), 11-28. For another incisive critique of Said, see: Aijaz Ahmad "Orientalism and After: Ambivalence and Cosmopolitan Location in the Work of Edward Said" in *In Theory* (Verso, 1994), 159-220.

[90] Marx, "Future Results," 221.

[91] Marx, *Capital*, *Volume One* [1867], trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1976).

[92] Marx, "Theories of Surplus Value," [1862-1863] in *Marx & Engels Collected Works, Volume 31* (Lawrence & Wishart, 1989), 347-348.

humanistic insofar as he believes this destruction represents a necessary, if painful, stop on the road towards the full development of humanity itself. As Marx puts it in a passage advising readers not to lament the destruction of the Indian village, "sickening as it must be to human feeling":

> We must not forget that these little communities were contaminated by distinctions of caste and by slavery, that they *subjugated man to external circumstances instead of elevating man the sovereign of circumstances*, that they transformed a self-developing social state into never changing natural destiny, and thus brought about a brutalizing worship of nature, exhibiting its degradation in the fact that man, the sovereign of nature, fell down on his knees in adoration of Kanuman, the monkey, and Sabbala, the cow.[93]

As is clear from this passage, Marx sees India as a profoundly *anti-humanistic* society and Hinduism as a distinctly anti-humanist religion.[94] We might even say that Marx's conflicted justification for colonial rule is indeed motivated in part by a sense of "human sympathy" for those who he believed lived in a society that positioned them as natural inferiors with no control over their own destiny. We might also note here, in Marx's emphasis on religious critique, the influence of his earlier Young Hegelianism. The crucial difference, however, is that he no longer sees religious critique as the means of change, but now assumes that capitalism is a progressive and civilizing force that washes away naturalized forms of human inequality.

The *Grundrisse* and Pre-Capitalist Formations

We can productively turn to Marx's notes on the "Forms which precede capitalist production" in the *Grundrisse* for further elaboration of the theoretical assumptions undergirding this view.[95] In these pages Marx recognizes the allure that pre-capitalist life might still hold in

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[93] Marx, "The British Rule in India," [1853] in *MECW* 12, 132. Emphasis mine.

[94] This feature of Marx's analysis is noted in Anderson, *Marx at the Margins,* 15. Marx's opposition to the caste system is entirely appropriate, but the difficulty here is Marx's apparent inability to conceive of any indigenous resistance to the caste system.

[95] In these pages Marx considers, particularly, the "Roman," "Germanic," and "Asiatic" precapitalist formations. Marx, *Grundrisse,* 471-513. Marx's principal aim in considering these formations is to emphasize their collective difference from the mode of subjectivity that emerges under capitalist social relations. That said, it is nonetheless true that Marx at this point sees Asian society as distinctly "stagnant," and he subscribes to some variation of the "Oriental despotism" thesis, common to the European scholarship he was drawing from. For a critical reading of Marx's controversial and under-theorized "Asiatic Mode of Production" (AMP), which considers Marx's analysis in the *Grundrisse*, see: Gayatri Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Harvard University Press, 1999), 67-111. See also Samir Amin's brilliant replacement of the AMP with the "Tributary Mode of Production" in Amin, *Eurocentrism*: *Modernity, Religion, and Democracy: A*

the disenchanted capitalist present. After all, in all pre-capitalist societies, the individual's access to nature and its fruits is seemingly guaranteed by virtue of their belonging to a community—a sharp contrast to life under capital, where the worker's existence is contingent on their ability to sell their labour-power for a wage. As such, Marx acknowledges that the "the old view, in which the human being appears as the aim of production … seems to be very lofty when contrasted to the modern world, where production appears as the aim of mankind and wealth as the aim of production."[96] Marx is quick, however, to resist any nostalgic temptations. While the individual's living conditions were not contingent on their ability to sell their labour-power for a wage, they are also *constrained* by their particular place within the community and find themselves "imprisoned within a certain definition, as feudal lord and vassal, landlord and serf, as members of a caste, or as members of an estate."[97] These seemingly immutable, hierarchical arrangements do not impress upon the individual a recognition of their independence but have the air of "a presupposition regarded as divine."[98]

Marx's point in analyzing these distinct social formations is to emphasize their collective, radical difference from the distinct forms of subjectivity engendered by the capitalist mode of production. Here Marx credits capitalism with what we might call a Janus-faced "humanizing" effect. Wage labour rests on a kind of *formal* equality that is absent in pre-capitalist social arrangements. Under capitalism, the proletarian, dispossessed of their access to the commons, appears nominally as a free agent, responsible for their own survival. By selling a "particular expenditure of force" to the capitalist, whom they confront as another "independent individual", the waged worker enjoys a form of freedom and self-responsibility that does not exist for the serf, slave, or member of a commune.[99] The formal, contractual equality of worker and capitalist is of course "deceptive" and "illusory," but Marx also claims that the transformations of consciousness effected by capitalism represents an "enormous advance in awareness" for the worker, and fosters a knowledge that the domination of capital can be overthrown.[100]

Critique of Eurocentrism and Culturalism, translated by Russell Moore and James Membrez (Monthly Review Press, 2009[1988]), 221-238.

[96] Marx, *Grundrisse,* 487-488.
[97] Marx, *Grundrisse*, 163.
[98] Marx, *Grundrisse,* 475.
[99] Marx, *Grundrisse*, 464.
[100] Marx, *Grundrisse*, 463.

The changes introduced by capitalism, Marx argues, amount to nothing less than the birth of a new human subject. Previous social orders, Marx claims, are taken as permanent and divinely ordained, and limits on human capacity are implicitly understood as *natural*, unsurpassable limits. As such, Marx revels in capitalism's capacity to "[drive] beyond national barriers and prejudices as much as beyond nature worship, as well as all traditional, confined, complacent, encrusted satisfaction of present needs."[101] Marx is increasingly sensitive to how capitalism generates historically specific forms of human subjectivity, but he still enlists this insight into a progressive, teleological philosophy of history which also still implicitly presents this process as the realization of an innate human essence or nature. Capitalism, he argues, represents nothing less that the "complete working-out of the human content"—allowing for the "full development of human mastery over the forces of nature" as well as mastery of "humanity's own nature."[102] Of course, under capitalism this "complete working-out" is experienced by the isolated and exploited worker who, shorn of previous community bonds, labours to reap a profit for the capitalist, as a "complete emptying-out."[103] But this, Marx insists, is only a temporary condition. The isolated individual is but a prelude to and precondition for the subject of communism, namely: "universally developed individuals, whose social relations, as their own communal relations, are hence also *subordinated to their own communal control*."[104]

It must be stressed that Marx's analysis throughout the *Grundrisse* is above all intended to insist that capitalism is a historically specific*,* transitory, and impermanent mode of production. He has two targets in mind. Marx is principally concerned with refuting capitalism's liberal apologists, who took the self-interested, isolated producer as representative of "human nature," and who thereby *naturalized* capitalist social relations, assuming them to be eternal rather than recognizing them as a result of historical processes and hence subject to future transformation. Marx is also keen, however, to distinguish his critique from a conservative, romantic nostalgia for an unrecoverable and profoundly inegalitarian past. Marx's point that "it is as ridiculous to yearn for a return to that original fullness as it is to believe that with this

[101] Marx, *Grundrisse,* 410.
[102] Marx, *Grundrisse,* 488.
[103] Marx, *Grundrisse*, 488.
[104] Marx, *Grundrisse*, 162. Emphasis mine.

complete emptiness history has come to a standstill" is well-taken.[105] The political implication, made explicit in other texts, is that the proletariat should not fight in defence of a disappearing past, but on the terrain established by capital itself. As Marx put it years earlier in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*: "The social revolution of the nineteenth century cannot draw its poetry from the past, but only from the future."[106]

But while Marx remains radically oriented towards future possibilities, the philosophy of history expounded in the *Grundrisse* and applied in the pages of the *New-York Tribune* is one that remains overly enamoured with the form of progress capitalism is taken to represent, and Marx retains a tremendous confidence in capitalism's "humanizing" effects. Indeed, the *Grundrisse* expounds a vision of history in which the development of capitalism progresses hand-in-hand with (and is practically synonymous to) the development of humanity itself, equating the "highest development of the forces of production" with "the richest development of the individuals."[107] It is on this basis that Marx still hails "the great civilizing influence of capital" in the pages of the *Grundrisse*.[108]

PART THREE: THE 'RUSSIAN ROAD'

In the years following the publication of the *Grundrisse* Marx rarely writes about capitalism in such glowing terms. In *Capital* Marx does not applaud the progressive role of

[105] Marx, *Grundrisse,* 162. As Martin Nicolaus observes in an editorial footnote, Marx is responding here to European reactionaries like Thomas Carlyle, who criticized capitalism but pined for the hierarchical order of an earlier age.

[106] Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* [1852] in *Marx & Engels Collected Works, Volume 11* (Lawrence & Wishart, 1979), 106.

[107] Marx, *Grundrisse*, 541.

[108] Marx, *Grundrisse*, 409. Marx's notes on "pre-capitalist economic formations" in the *Grundrisse* have recently been celebrated as signalling a move towards a "multilinear" account of capitalist development. It is true that Marx's reflections here point to a diversity of pre-capitalist societies, including "Slavonic," "Germanic," "Asiatic" and "Ancient" (i.e., Greek and Roman) formations, which possess their own distinct property arrangements. This certainly represents a welcome departure from the more unilinear framing of successive modes Marx offers in, for instance, the 1859 "Preface to a Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy." What is important to underscore, however, is that this is a multilinearity that applies exclusively to the world *before* capitalism. Upon contact with capital, Marx's account becomes decidedly *unilinear*, with all societies embarking on a common "civilizing" course. In this sense, I am less convinced of Kevin Anderson's glowing assessment that these notes capture a "truly multilinear theory of history," and am rather more convinced of Eric Hobsbawm's view, although he does not intend it critically, that "the *Formen* seek to formulate the *content* of history in its most general form. This content is *progress*." See Anderson, *Marx at the Margins*, 238; Eric Hobsbawm, "Marx on pre-Capitalist Economic Formations," in *How to Change the World: Reflections on Marx and Marxism* (Yale University Press, 2011), 130.

capitalism in human history, but dwells instead on the destructive effects of capitalist exploitation on the labourer's body, which "converts the worker into a crippled monstrosity."[109] Marx's thought shifts in some other important respects. If the image of the *Manifesto* is one of humanity descending into a homogeneous condition, with all national, gendered, and other distinctions becoming increasingly irrelevant, *Capital* offers a more nuanced analysis of how capitalism exploits differences of gender, race, and age. As Mike Davis observes, the industrial proletariat of *Capital* is a more "heterogeneous" formation, surrounded by farm labourers, domestic servants, small shopkeepers, the itinerant unemployed who make up the "reserve army of labour," and many others.[110] In *Capital* Marx also proves more aware that capitalism does not necessarily *replace* pre-existing social formations with a more "advanced" and "enlightened" order, but unevenly integrates and subsumes them into its unrelenting drive for profit. As Marx observes, "the civilised horrors of over-work are grafted on the barbaric horrors of slavery, serfdom."[111] Marx has not yet, however, considered the possibility that surviving pre-capitalist social arrangements could be a basis for communism. His and Engels's attitude remained consistent with Marx's comment (apropos the German context) in the Preface to *Capital*: "alongside the modern evils, we are oppressed by a whole series of inherited evils, arising from the passive survival of archaic and outmoded modes of production."[112] In the years following the publication of *Capital*, however, Marx would revisit in a more positive light the question of surviving formations when considering not the colonial world, but the European periphery, specifically Russia.

Marx's re-assessment was informed by the interest Russians themselves had taken in his work. The first foreign translation of *Capital* was published in Russia in 1872, where it elicited an enthusiastic but unexpected response among Russian radicals. Russia, an overwhelmingly rural country, in which serfdom had only been abolished in 1861, seemed very distant from the industrial world described in Marx's work, and Marx and Engels had in fact long written off the country as an almost incurably reactionary bastion of absolutism. But in the 1860's and 1870's a

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[109] Marx, *Capital*, 481. Tomba, *Marx's Temporalities,* trans. Peter D. Thomas and Sara R. Farris (Haymarket Books, 2013), 90-91, 98-99. Roberts, Chapters Four and Five of *Marx's Inferno: The Political Theory of Capital* (Princeton University Press, 2017), 104-186.

[110] Mike Davis, *Old Gods, New Enigmas: Marx's Lost Theory* (Verso, 2018), 38.

[111] Marx, *Capital*, 345. This process, which Marx calls "formal subsumption" in the Appendix to *Capital*, is considered to great effect in Harry Harootunian's *Marx After Marx: History and Time in the Expansion of Capitalism* (Columbia University Press, 2015).

[112] Marx, *Capital,* 91.

new movement, the *Narodniks* ("populists"), were rapidly gaining popularity among Russia's disaffected intelligentsia. The *Narodniks* sought to build a revolutionary peasant movement and championed the Russian communal village (the *mir* or *obschina*) as the potential foundation for an agrarian socialism. In this context, *Narodnik* intellectuals like Nikolai Mikhailovskii were drawing novel lessons from Marx's work. Mikhailovskii and others received Marx's *Capital* as "a manual on how *'not to industrialize*,'" and took Marx's grim descriptions of English factory labour as a *warning* of what Russia must at all costs *avoid* rather than *endure* before enjoying the fruits of socialism.[113] Mikhailovskii assumed, not unreasonably, that he was reading Marx *against* Marx.[114] In an 1877 article defending Marx from another Russian critic, Mikhailovskii lamented that, as a "Russian disciple of Marx," that his teacher would see the destruction of the *mir* as a necessary pain to be suffered before socialism would be possible in Russia.[115]

Mikhailovskii's article caught Marx's attention, and in a (sadly unposted) reply, Marx protested that Mikhailovskii had mistakenly inflated his "historical sketch of capitalism in Western Europe into a historico-philosophical theory of the general course fatally imposed on all peoples."[116] Marx held that his account of primitive accumulation in *Capital* was *specific* to Western Europe and had in fact only been accomplished in a "radical" manner in England, where the peasantry had been thoroughly dispossessed and transformed into wage laborers. Insofar as his account concerned Russia at all, Marx noted that it only implied that *if* Russia were to continue along the capitalist path, this would likewise entail the mass dispossession and proletarianization of the Russian peasantry. Marx was adamant, however, that there was nothing "inevitable" about this process, and thought, on the contrary, that Russia had a unique opportunity to chart a different course, writing that: "I have come to the conclusion that if Russia continues along the path it has followed since 1861 [the year serfdom was abolished], it will lose

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[113] Albert Resis, "Das Kapital Comes to Russia," *Slavic Review* 29, no. 2 (1970), 232.

[114] After all, had Marx not insisted in the Preface to *Capital* that "the country that is more developed industrially only shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future"? *Capital,* 91. Although I think the conclusions drawn by Russian readers like Mikhailovskii are understandable, it bears remembering, as Kevin Anderson points out, that this Preface is directed specifically to a German audience, who Marx worried might see his analysis as pertaining exclusively to England without recognizing Germany was on the same course. Marx would qualify this statement in his revisions to the French edition of *Capital* (published in installments between 1872-1875), where it reads: "the country that is more developed industrially only shows, *to those that follow it on the industrial path*, the image of its own future" (Marx in Anderson, 178). Anderson 171-180.

[115] Nikolai Mikhailovskii quoted in Haruki Wada, "Marx and Revolutionary Russia" in *Late Marx and the Russian Road: Marx and 'The Peripheries of* Capitalism, ed. Thedor Shanin (Monthly Review Press, 1983), 57.

[116] Marx, "A letter to the Editorial Board of *Otechestvennye Zapiski"* [1877] in Shanin, *Late Marx and the Russian Road,* 136.

the finest chance ever offered by history to a people and undergo all the fateful vicissitudes of the capitalist regime."[117] In short, Marx agreed with Mikhailovskii that Russia might *avoid* the capitalist path and that the *mir* was not condemned to inevitable destruction but rather represented a viable basis for a new social order.

This sympathy for Mikhailovskii's position would lead Marx to disagree with some of his other self-described followers. Although Marx protested to Mikhailovskii that his work was decidedly *not* "the master-key of a general historico-philosophical theory, whose supreme virtue consists in being supra-historical,"[118] other Russians *embraced* precisely such a reading of his work and were convinced that Russia must patiently endure a period of capitalist development before socialist revolution would be possible. In 1881 one such reader, Vera Zasulich, who belonged to a group of Russian exiles in Switzerland, wrote to Marx hoping to settle what she described as "a life-and-death question" for her party.[119] Zasulich put the question to Marx directly: was the commune doomed to irrelevance (as Zasulich and her party believed), or did he share the *Narodnik* view that the commune could be a platform for socialist transformation? After writing four drafts, which reflect deep study of Russian social conditions, Marx answered in no uncertain terms that his discussion of *Capital* was specific to the West European experience and re-asserted his belief that "the commune is the fulcrum for social regeneration in Russia."[120] Informed by Marx's correspondence with his Russian readers, in their 1882 Preface to the second Russian edition of the *Communist Manifesto* Marx and Engels entertain the possibility that a Russian Revolution, animated by a defence of the *mir* might become the galvanizing "signal" for a complementary proletarian revolution in the industrial West.[121]

Marx arrived at these conclusions about Russia late in life, and never explicitly considered the prospect that pre-capitalist "survivals" might prove a foundation for communism in other contexts. In recent years, however, Marx's letters have aroused considerable interest especially among scholars defending Marx from charges of Eurocentrism (such as Said's).[122] Scholars such as Massimiliano Tomba, Harry Harootunian, and Kohei Saito have also rightly

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[117] Marx, "Letter to *Otechestvennye Zapiski*," 135.
[118] Marx, "Letter to *Otechestvennye Zapiski"* 136.
[119] Vera Zasulich, "A letter to Marx" [1881], in Shanin, 98.
[120] Marx, "Drafts of a Reply to Zasulich" [1881], in Shanin, 124.
[121] Marx and Engels,"Preface to the second Russian edition of the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* [1882] in *Late Marx and the Russian Road*, 138-139.
[122] This is particularly how Kevin Anderson employs these letters in *Marx at the Margins*.

observed that Marx's letters offer a more complex and layered account of historical development than we get in earlier works, in which pre-capitalist "survivals" not only co-exist in the capitalist present but may even serve emancipatory ends.[123] This has occasioned some debate over the possibility of extending Marx's insights towards the colonial world. Pointing to Marx's growing sympathies for "primitive communism" and his increasingly hostile attitude towards colonialism, in *Marx at the Margins* Kevin Anderson concludes that Marx "did not intend to limit his new reflections about moving toward a communist revolution on the basis of indigenous communal forms to Russia alone."[124] In a considered response to Anderson, Christopher Araujo makes the case for a more restricted reading of Marx's insights, arguing that Marx's openness to a Russian road is made *strictly* on the basis of Russia's "exceptional" situation, and that he could not have intended to extend these insights to colonized societies.[125]

Textual evidence can be marshalled for both views. While Marx's analysis seems at times amenable to a more open-ended application, he can also prove more restrictive. What distinguished the Russian commune, above all, from other cases, Marx argued, was that it *survived*. The destruction of the pre-capitalist commons, he believed, was a *fait accompli* in Western Europe. In the colonies, likewise, communal forms were being destroyed, although Marx now recognized that this was happening without necessarily leading to industrialization along the Western European model. In contrast to Western Europe and the colonized world, Marx argued that Russia possessed the unique advantage of *retaining* pre-capitalist communal forms *without* losing its independence to foreign conquerors.[126] Marx also implies that Russia's geographic proximity to the West, and the integration of Russian agriculture into European markets, would allow it to rapidly assimilate more advanced technology, and forge empowering alliances with Western European labour.

The debate over Marx's Russian correspondence has not hinged, however, simply on an assessment of late nineteenth century Russia's integration into the industrial economy of Western Europe, but also indirectly intersects with the debate over Marx's humanism. In making his case

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[123] Massimiliano Tomba, *Marx's Temporalities* (Haymarket Books, 2012); Harry Harootunian, *Marx After Marx* (Columbia University Press, 2015); Kohei Saito, *Marx in the Anthropocene* (Cambridge University Press, 2023).

[124] Anderson, *Marx at the Margins,* 236.

[125] Christopher Araujo, "On the Misappropriation of Marx's Late Writings on Russia: A Critique of *Marx at the Margins*" *Science & Society* 82, no. 1 (January 2018), 67-93.

[126] Marx, "Drafts of a Reply," 106.

for a more restricted reading of Marx's argument, Araujo insists that socialism cannot be achieved in any time or place but is a possibility which remains tethered to the development of capitalism. Defending the Hegelian insight that, as Araujo puts it, "*real possibility* always coincides with *historical necessity,*" he argues that it was only Russia's strictly exceptional incorporation into the more advanced capitalist economy of the West that Marx believed afforded this window of possibility.[127] He goes further, however, and recalls many of the passages I have previously quoted from the *Grundrisse*, affirming that it is only capitalism that allows for the "total development of the human personality" and the "complete working-out of the human content."[128] He likewise cites Marx's passing reference in these letters to the "higher culture" of the industrialized West to suggest that socialism only becomes a tangible possibility with the material *and* corresponding subjective transformations engendered by capital's advance.[129] The implication of Araujo's argument is that Marx has *not* abandoned a progressive philosophy of history in which revolutionary possibility remains firmly attached to the development of capitalism. In short, on this reading, the late Marx retains his confidence in the "great civilizing influence of capital" and still sees capitalism as inculcating a transformation in human subjectivity such that the individual becomes conscious of their individuality and agency in a manner which Araujo implies remained absent in other communal societies.

Araujo's argument rather underestimates the extent to which Marx had, by this point, thoroughly abandoned his earlier confidence in capitalism's "progressive" or "humanizing" significance, writing that "[capitalism's] history is no longer anything more than one of antagonisms, crises, conflicts and disasters."[130] For many years Marx had indeed welcomed the destruction of pre-capitalist communal property arrangements as an inevitable and salutary development. However, in the drafts of his letter to Zasulich, Marx takes the opposite view as entirely obvious. Drawing a direct comparison between India and Russia, Marx treats it as common knowledge that "the suppression of communal land ownership [in India] was nothing but an act of English vandalism which *drove the indigenous population backward rather than*

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[127] Araujo, "Critique of *Marx at the Margins*," 71.

[128] Marx, *Grundrisse*, 488; Araujo, "Critique of *Marx at the Margins*," 73.

[129] Marx does use the language of a "higher culture" in his drafts to Zasulich. But Araujo's reference to this terminology underplays, unlike Anderson's assessment, Marx's increasingly positive appraisal of what he calls "primitive communism." As Marx puts it in one of the drafts of the Zasulich letter: "the primitive communities had incomparably greater vitality than the Semitic, Greek, Roman, and *a fortiori* the modern capitalist societies." Marx "Drafts of a Reply," 107.

[130] Marx, "Drafts of a Reply," 102.

forward."[131] One might also note that Marx has by this point adopted a more positive appraisal of "primitive communism" suggesting that socialism will be a "return… to "the 'archaic' type of communal property."[132] Marx's claims to this effect seem to flirt with a restorative humanism that sees communism as the re-appropriation of our natural "human essence." However, if I were to register a more critical point here (amidst the considerable enthusiasm Marx's Russian letters have generated), this formulation both somewhat undersells the originality of "archaic" communisms (which were themselves not 'natural,' but political), as well as the inventiveness of potential communisms to come.

As David Wengrow and David Graeber have argued, such understandings of "primitive communism" rather underplay the creativity of our political ancestors.[133] As they demonstrate in their study *The Dawn of Everything*, which draws attention to the political diversity of ancient human societies, as well as Indigenous communities encountered by early European colonists, small "hunter-gatherer" communities adopted many distinct forms of political organization. Some were deeply inegalitarian and hierarchical, while others did organize themselves along more "communistic" lines. Their central claim is that such arrangements were not determined by the size of the community, or by their mode of production, but were *political choices* made by small and large communities alike, typically in response to experiences of oppression and domination. Even though Marx does not recognize the import of this insight when it comes his analysis of historical communities, he does, rightly, recognize the *political* significance of revolutionary possibility in his present. That is to say, regardless of whether or not the commune is understood as a teleological anticipation of the future society, the most consequential matter, for Marx, is that the commune requires a political defence. As he writes: "it is a question no longer of a problem to be solved, but simply of an enemy to be beaten."[134]

It is possible that either Araujo or Anderson may be right in their attempts to guess at Marx's own true "intentions" about whether he would have extended his positive appraisal of the Russian *mir* to other contexts. While I favour Anderson's more open-ended reading of Marx's insights, this can only be a matter of speculating on Marx's unwritten, private thoughts, to which we enjoy no access. We can, as I have suggested, likewise still find certain lingering elements of

[131] Marx, "Drafts of a Reply," [1881] in Shanin, 118. Emphasis mine.
[132] Marx, "Drafts of a Reply," 107.
[133] Graeber and Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity* (Allen Lane, 2021).
[134] Marx, "Drafts of a Reply," 116.

both a "restorative" humanism that sees the achievement of communism as one of the re-appropriation of our natural "essence" as well as a historicist humanism that sees capitalism as the force driving the development of humanity. The key question for our moment, however, is where we want to push Marx's analysis, and what lessons we wish to draw from it. It is noteworthy that Marx does not employ the language of "humanism" in his Russian correspondence, nor does he recommend this vocabulary to his Russian interlocutors. Impatient with those "Russian admirers of the capitalist system" Marx does not urge waiting for conditions to "mature" but emphasizes the autonomy of the political and urges immediate political action.[135]

Marx is adamant that there is nothing *inevitable* about the destruction of pre-capitalist communal forms, and he heaps scorn on those British colonial administrators who imagined that by destroying the social foundations of Indian society, they were simply "succumb[ing] to the spontaneous power of economic laws."[136] It is clear to Marx that the destruction of pre-capitalist social forms is not an inevitability, but a *political decision* made by a rapacious bourgeoisie. As Marx likewise concludes of the Russian context: "What threatens the life of the Russian commune is neither a historical inevitability nor a theory; it is state oppression, and exploitation by capitalist intruders whom the state has made powerful at the peasant's expense."[137] In short, Marx no longer treats the destruction of communal property as a progressive development to be celebrated, but as a loss to be mourned, or better yet, *resisted*. If the *threat* to the commune is chiefly political, then the commune also needed an immediate political defence. As Marx puts it: "to save the Russian commune, there must be a Russian Revolution."[138]

At the same time, however, Marx was no naïve defender of the commune. Although he grew more decidedly more appreciative of the *mir*'s revolutionary potential, assenting to the arguments of Russian populists that the rural commune could be the springboard for a broader revolutionary transformation, he remained unmoved by the claims made on the commune's behalf by some of its defenders, who imagined that the commune was evidence of some uniquely

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[135] Marx, "Drafts of a Reply," 106.

[136] Marx, "Drafts of a Reply," in Shanin, 107. Marx would make a similar point of French colonial efforts to uproot Algerian collective property arrangements, commenting: "The debates in this shameful assembly on the project for the introduction of private property in Algeria seek to hide the villainy under the cloak of the so-called eternal, 'inalterable laws of political economy.'" Karl Marx, "Excerpts from M.M. Kovalevskij (Kovalevsky" [1879] in *The Asiatic Mode of Production: Sources, Development, and Critique in the Writings of Karl Marx,* ed. Lawrence Krader (Van Gorcum, 1975), 410.

[137] Marx, "Drafts of a Reply," 104-105.

[138] Marx, "Drafts of a Reply," 116.

Russian or Slavic historical mission. Marx likewise recognized that the *mir*, like other pre-capitalist social forms, may have been *communal* but it was also profoundly *hierarchical* (on this point Engels's warning against treating Russian peasants as "born communists" is well worth remembering).[139] Marx clearly sees that the defence of the *mir*, and its enlistment in a revolution against Tsardom would also entail its transformation. As Marx observed of the Paris Commune, commenting on its apparent resemblance to the old medieval commune: "It is generally the fate of completely new historical creations to be mistaken for the counterpart of older and even defunct forms of social life, to which they may bear a certain likeness."[140] The *mir* turned towards new ends—the abolition of class rule—would likewise be the *mir* transformed. We can likewise turn this political novelty back to the question of humanism: this would neither be the restoration or re-appropriation of an innate human essence, or the progressive realization of humanity through the development of capitalism, but the *invention* of new forms of human life.

PART FOUR: THE 'IRISH LEVER'

Whatever Marx hoped to achieve through his Russian interventions, the impact of his correspondence was rather limited. Marx never posted his response to Mikhailovskii, his letter to Zasulich was shamefully covered up by Zasulich's party, and Engels, who worked tirelessly to propagate Marx's thought after his death, was never quite as committed to this line of thinking as was Marx.[141] But although Marx never developed these themes in any great depth, or applied them systematically to colonial contexts, it is noteworthy that these themes—the potentially emancipatory value of "anachronism" and the "progressive" role of capitalism—have a great resonance with the concerns of a later generation of anticolonial revolutionaries. I will turn to

[139] Engels, "Afterword to 'On Social Relations in Russia'" [1894], in *Marx & Engels Collected Works, Volume 27.* (Lawrence & Wishart, 1990), 422.

[140] Marx, "*The Civil War in France*: Address of the General Council" [1871], in *The First International and After,* 211.

[141] Engels had, however, encouraged Zasulich and her colleague Georgi Plekhanov to publish Marx's letters. They never did. Soviet scholar David Ryazanov found the drafts of Marx's letter to Zasulich in 1911 and he contacted Zasulich and Plekhanov to locate the original. Both claimed, astonishingly, to have no memory of the correspondence. As Ryazanov wryly observed, "in view of the exceptional interest which the letter must have aroused, such forgetfulness has a very strange quality." (Ryazanov in Shanin, 128-129). Ryazanov himself, however, also tends to downplay the letter's significance, attributing its conclusions to Marx's purported intellectual decline in his late years. For a wide-ranging refutation of this tendency to downplay and disparage Marx's later works, see Marcello Musto, *The Last Years of Karl Marx, 1881-1883: An Intellectual Biography,* trans. Patrick Camiller (Stanford University Press, 2020).

two such thinkers, namely M.N. Roy and Frantz Fanon, in the following chapters. If the Russian correspondence represents a kind of "lost" tendency of Marx's thought, which has only received sustained attention in recent years, the final section I now turn to addresses one particular case where Marx's interventions *did* have an impact on the course of twentieth century struggles, especially through the Bolshevik Revolution, namely Marx's interventions in support of Irish anticolonial nationalism.

As we have seen, Marx developed an increasingly critical attitude towards both capitalism and colonialism. In the years since Marx's 1853 articles on India, Marx and Engels had been inspired by anticolonial revolts like the Taiping Rebellion and the Indian Rebellion of 1857, and from about 1857 onward, both men consistently voiced support for anticolonial uprisings wherever they erupted, understanding such movements as distant allies of the proletarian struggle in Europe.[142] They recognized these struggles as *popular wars* in their own right, but also saw them from their European vantage point as movements that would bleed the bourgeoisie of resources that would otherwise be put towards domestic repression.[143] Unfortunately, they rarely developed these valuable but nonetheless often vague comments into any sustained analysis. An 1882 letter from Engels to Karl Kautsky sums up their late approach to colonial politics rather well. Here Engels predicts that a victorious English proletariat may find itself in the position of having to lead whatever colonies still Britain possessed "as rapidly as possible towards independence," insisting that "a victorious proletariat cannot forcibly confer any boon whatever on another country without undermining its own victory in the process."[144] He also anticipates, however, that indigenous revolutions like countries like India, Algeria, and Egypt may also win national independence in the meantime, which, he argues "would certainly suit us best."[145]

As Engels's point of reference suggests, his and Marx's political expectations were invested above all in England. Of course, they did not see the English class struggle in isolation, and since 1864 Marx and Engels had become deeply involved with the International

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[142] Even Engels, who had in 1847 praised the French invasion of Algeria, in 1857 denounced the "barbarous system of warfare" to which the French had subjected Algeria, and saluted the "Arab and Kabyle tribes, to whom independence is precious, and hatred of foreign domination a principle dearer than life itself." Engels, "Algeria," [1857] in *MECW 18*, 67.

[143] As Marx wrote to Engels during the 1857 Rebellion: "In view of the drain of men and bullion which she will cost the English, India is now our best ally." Marx, "Marx to Engels: 16 January 1858", *MECW* 40, 248.

[144] Engels, "Engels to Karl Kautsky, 21 September 1882" in *MECW* 46, 322-323.

[145] Engels, "Engels to Kautsky," 322.

Workingmen's Association, headquartered in London. Although the Association's orbit remained limited in practice to a small set of European countries and was, realistically, never more than a loose network of revolutionaries, the Association dedicated itself towards the grand ambition of building an international alliance of working-class parties around the world. Marx and Engels were resolutely committed to these aims and corresponded extensively with activists on the continent. But England retained a certain strategic priority in their thinking. Capitalism was most firmly entrenched in England, and the country was home to the world's largest, and most organized, industrial proletariat. The English proletariat was also uniquely politically empowered: legally protected freedoms of speech and assembly made open political organizing easier than in more repressive states like Germany or France. As such, England was one of the few countries where they believed the proletariat *might* be able to take political power peacefully. More significantly still, England was, as Marx put it, "the metropolis of landlordism and capitalism all over the world." [146] Given England's leading position in the global capitalist economy, Marx concluded that "it is the only country where any revolution in the economic system will have immediate repercussions on the rest of the world."[147] A proletarian victory in England, Marx expected, would act as a "lever" for the transition to communism, sending the global economy into turmoil and decisively strengthening the hand of other movements.

However, there was a significant barrier to this plan for an English Revolution: the English themselves. Despite the fact that the English proletariat had all the necessary material *means* at their disposal to overthrow capitalism, they did not appear possessed of a *revolutionary will*. As Marx observed: "What they lack is the sense of generalization and revolutionary passion."[148] The principal reason for the absence of this revolutionary will was, Marx believed, Britain's colonial occupation of Ireland. The proletariat in England, Marx argued, was not a unified class, but a class divided into two "hostile camps": an Irish working class and an English working class. As Marx observed, "the ordinary English worker hates the Irish worker as a competitor who brings down his wages and standard of living."[149] Marx identified this anti-Irish prejudice as the "secret of the impotence of the English working class."[150] Recognizing the depth

[146] Marx, "Letter to Laura and Paul Lafargue" in *MECW* 43, 449.
[147] Marx, "Letter to the French-Swiss Federal Council" [1870], in *The First International and After,* 115.
[148] Marx, "Letter to the French-Swiss Federal Council," 116.
[149] Marx, "Letter to the French-Swiss Federal Council," 117.
[150] Marx, "Letter to Meyer and Vogt: 9 April 1870," in *The First International and After,* 169.

of English hostility to Irish labour, and inspired by the renewed militancy of the Irish Fenians, in 1869 Marx concluded that Irish national liberation was the *precondition* for any revolution in England itself, declaring that "The English working class will never achieve anything before it has got rid of Ireland. The lever must be applied in Ireland."[151]

Marx details a number of reasons for this view. Ireland was an important base of power and wealth for Britain's propertied classes, many of whom held immensely profitable estates in the country's nearest and oldest colony. As Marx observes, "the domination over Ireland at present amounts to collecting rent for the English aristocracy."[152] The English tenancy system was simultaneously the engine of Irish peasant dispossession, sending waves of displaced and impoverished Irish workers to English shores, where they arrived desperate for work and ready to accept low wages. The presence of a poor migrant workforce, and the resultant animosity among English workers, both served the needs of English capitalists nicely. Moreover, in an analysis that anticipates what would later be called the "boomerang thesis," Marx also observes that the military occupation of Ireland represents "the only excuse the English Government has for keeping up a large standing army which can, as we have seen, in case of need attack the English workers after having done its basic training in Ireland."[153]

For these reasons and more Marx argues emphatically that English workers should embrace the Irish cause as *their own*. An Irish nationalist victory, which Marx predicted would simultaneously take the form of an *agrarian* revolution against the hated English landlords, would represent a serious blow against the English proletariat's *own* oppressors. By supporting Irish nationalism, English workers would not just be helping to free Ireland of colonial rule, they would also be liberating *themselves* of the colonial connection. Marx's political antihumanism reasserts itself here, and he argues repeatedly against framing this appeal to Anglo-Irish proletarian solidarity as a question of "sympathy for Ireland."[154] Rather, as he puts it, "quite apart from all 'international' and 'humane' phrases about Justice for Ireland . . . it is in *the direct and absolute interests* of the English working class to get rid of their present connexion with

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[151] Marx, "Letter to Engels, 10 December 1869" in *The First International and After*, 167. Marx and Engels had long recognized, and resisted, English hostility towards Irish workers, but they had also assumed that Ireland would be freed by the English working class and would also likely remain in some kind of federal arrangement with the rest of Great Britain.

[152] Marx, "Record of a Speech on the Irish Question, Delivered by Karl Marx to the German Workers' Educational Society in London on December 16, 1867," in *MECW* 21, 319.

[153] Marx, "Letter to the French-Swiss Federal Council," 118.

[154] Marx, "Letter to Kugelmann 29 November 1869" in *The First International and After,* 165.

Ireland."[155] Marx's appeal to the "self-interest" of the English workers is motivated on the one hand by a practical recognition that this will likely prove more effective than simply encouraging them to abandon their prejudices. There is also a sense, however, in which this is a far more *politicizing* exhortation: the English workers should embrace the Irish national struggle not for the sake of sympathy or pity, but rather with a recognition that they face a *common enemy* and share a "*common cause*."[156]

Reflecting on Marx's insistence that solidarity with Ireland should be grounded in an assertion of class power and a shared investment in "social emancipation" rather than couched in "'humane' phrases," Gary Wilder rightly underscores that "Marx's revolutionary internationalism was not a bourgeois humanism."[157] That is to say, Marx resists the depoliticizing language of abstract humanitarianism or pity, and remained as wary as ever of the "humanistic phraseology" which appeals not to concrete, political struggles but which instead takes flight "into the cosmopolitan, misty land of 'noble hearts' in general."[158] As I argued in the first part of this chapter, Marx and Engels eschewed the language of humanism largely on the grounds that threatened to dilute the class struggle in the name of human reconciliation. In his later years Marx remains keenly aware of the political ambiguity of abstract appeals to the "human." By the mid 1840's "Humanism" drops out of his vocabulary more or less entirely, and Marx's late references to related terms like "humanity" or "humanitarianism" are often witheringly sarcastic, drawing attention to the hypocrisy of the colonizing bourgeoisie who "boast of their English humanity."[159] As Marx wrote of English "humanitarian" sympathy for the Southern Confederacy, "no one is deceived by this humanity farce."[160] Aware of the malleability of these terms, Marx does not appeal to "humanity" or "humanism" in general, but to classes and movements. Although Marx certainly broadens his sense of revolutionary agency beyond the industrial proletariat in his later years, considering, for instance, the revolutionary potential of

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[155] Marx, "Letter to Engels, 10 December 1869," in *The First International and After*, 166.

[156] Marx, "Letter to Kugelmann," 165.

[157] Gary Wilder, *Concrete Utopianism: The Politics of Temporality and Solidarity* (Fordham University Press, 2022), 113.

[158] Marx, "Appeal of the Democratic Congress to the German People" [1848], in *MECW 7*, 492.

[159] Marx, "Marx to Engels, 27 July 1867," in *MECW 42,* 394.

[160] Marx, "English Humanity and America," in *MECW 19,* 211. This caustic article is, notably, often translated as "English *Humanism* and America," as in *Ireland and the Irish Question* (Progress Publishers, 1971), 107-108.

Russian peasants and Irish Fenians, he does not seem to have thought they would be any better served by this vocabulary.

Marx and Engels appeal to "class interests" rather than an abstract humanism, but as they also knew well, and as the "self-sacrificing heroism" of the Paris Commune attests to (among countless other examples), the legacy of revolutionary struggle is not one based only in the cold calculation of interests.[161] The revolutionary pantheon includes countless unknown heroes who risked everything to fight and die on barricades, standing in solidarity with people they have never met, for the emancipation of all. The record of international solidarity, in other words, is not one that can be reducible to interests. We might point to an only slightly more modest contemporaneous example that moved Marx and Engels, namely the inspiring case of Lancashire cotton mill workers, who at considerable cost to their own well-being and in open defiance of their employers, refused to process imports from the American South during the Civil War. In a collective letter to Abraham Lincoln, these trade unionists declared: "we would rather perish than band ourselves in unholy alliance with the South and slavery."[162] This episode counts as one in a long record of reminders that, in Robin D.G. Kelley's phrase, "solidarity is not a market exchange," an act undertaken only for immediate benefit.[163] As the recently departed Mike Davis reminds us:

> Proletarian subjectivity does not evolve by incremental steps but requires non-linear leaps, especially *moral self-recognition through solidarity* with the struggle of a distant people, even when this contradicts short-term self-interest, as in the famous cases of Lancashire cotton workers' enthusiasm for Lincoln and later for Gandhi. *Socialism, in other words, requires non-utilitarian actors*, whose ultimate motivations and values arise from structures of feeling that others would deem spiritual.[164]

Davis here touches on something essential—the role of organized solidarity in building political affiliations that are capable of enduring short-term individual sacrifice in the name of a longer-term collective interest. As Marx and Engels recognized as early as the *German Ideology,* under capitalism our individual "interests" are primarily realized in *competition* with one another, and

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[161] Marx, "The Civil War in France: Address of the General Council" [1871], in *The First International and After*, 226.

[162] In Kevin Anderson, *Marx at the Margins,* 107.

[163] Robin D. G. Kelley, "'Solidarity is not a Market Exchange': An *RM* Interview with Robin D. G. Kelley, Part 1" *Rethinking Marxism,* 30 no 4, 568-598.

[164] Mike Davis, *Old Gods, New Enigmas*, 146. Emphasis mine.

it is above all the "common battle" that binds a class together as a political formation.[165] Collective interests are thus not *given* by own's class position or shared humanity, but are *forged* through the experience of political organization and solidarity.[166] It is often through those political organizations built to assert a collective interest that individuals and groups find themselves, in rare, remarkable moments, acting *beyond* their interests. Davis is not wrong to call these affinities a kind of *faith* in collective action and an emancipatory future. Later thinkers may understandably wish to employ the term "humanism" to describe such solidarities, but Marx himself did not use the term to this effect.

Nationalism has, time and again, proven remarkably capable of commanding those loyalties which can trump individual self-interest. Marx and Engels have often been charged with a failure to understand the allure of nationalism, and the conventional view has long been that they straightforwardly opposed the *nation* with *class.* This is rather misleading. Marx and Engels never developed a consistent approach to what became known as the "national question" but we certainly find in their corpus a keen awareness of the debilitating power of nationalism and its potential for undermining class solidarity. This is particularly true of Marx's interventions on Ireland, where he observes that the English worker "cherishes religious, social, and *national prejudices* against the Irish worker," and "compared with the Irish worker *feels himself a member of the ruling nation* and for this reason he makes himself into a tool of the aristocrats and capitalists against Ireland." [167] Marx and Engels even occasionally come close to a "proto-Leninist" position, recognizing that the spoils of colonial exploitation, however unevenly distributed, can blunt the revolutionary ambitions of those relatively privileged segments of the working class who, despite their own oppression, might prefer to make peace with the imperial bourgeoisie rather than acting in solidarity with others.[168]

This is not, however, the whole story on nationalism. Marx and Engels recognized the ambiguous potential of nationalism, and its ability to serve reactionary *or* emancipatory ends in

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[165] Marx and Engels, "The German Ideology," in *MECW 5*, 77.

[166] As William Clare Roberts comments: "the reduction of all action to the pursuit of individual interests, however universal, makes horizontal solidarity and ideology disappear as motives and forms of human action. Solidarity means going out on a limb for one's fellows." Roberts, "The Idea of Emancipation After Postcolonial Theory" *Interventions* (2017), 11. See also Haider's insistence that the formulation and pursuit of collective interests is above all a "process of political practice." Haider, *Mistaken Identity: Mass Movements and Racial Ideology* (Verso, 2022), 50.

[167] Marx, "Letter to Meyer and Vogt, 9 April 1870," in *The First International and After*, 169. Emphasis mine.

[168] Benner, *Really Existing Nationalism,* 187.

different contexts. Thus while they resisted the national chauvinism of the English and Germans, they *encouraged* the growth of national consciousness among nations like the Irish or Poles, two nations who, as Engels put it, "not only have the right but the duty to be *nationalistic before they become internationalists*."[169] Anticipating Lenin's later, formalized distinction between "oppressor nations" and "oppressed nations," which he extended especially to the colonized world, Marx and Engels recognized that national oppression was an impediment to solidarity, and that national independence could be the necessary precursor for an internationalism that crosses national boundaries. As Gavin Walker puts it: "the goal of national liberation is not to enjoy one's own nationalism and eternalize it, but rather to create the proper conditions for *international* socialist revolution."[170] Despite their reservations about Irish nationalism (and they had many), Marx and Engels clearly recognized that Ireland's national emancipation was the precondition for a more fulsome solidarity between the English and Irish working classes.[171] Consistent with their insistence that socialism would be the *self-emancipation* of the working class, Marx and Engels also recognized that a victorious proletariat in Britain (or elsewhere) could not *impose* socialism on another people by conquest without undermining its own cause.

Far from the stereotypical "class first" argument often attributed to Marx and Marxism, Marx's Irish interventions are perhaps better characterized as a *class next* position. Rather than insisting on the priority of the English class struggle, Marx recognized that overcoming the *national* oppression of the Irish was the precondition for a united class struggle. Likewise in the United States, Marx saw the abolition of slavery as an obligatory first step towards any successful working-class movement.[172] Marx clearly saw that sources of colonial, national, or racial oppression are barriers towards a class struggle, and must be prioritized, not deferred. Movements against national or racial domination are no less "universal" in any abstract sense than movements against class oppression. Indeed, the prospects for international socialism, as Marx sees it in the late nineteenth century, rests on the shoulders of Irish nationalists! This is a

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[169] Engels, "Letter to Karl Kautsy, 7 February 1882" in Marx and Engels, *Ireland and the Irish Question* (Progress Publishers, 1971), 449.

[170] Gavin Walker, "Nationalism and the National Question" in *The SAGE Handbook of Marxism*, *Volume One*, eds. Beverley Skeggs, Sara R. Farris, Alberto Toscano and Svenja Bromberg (SAGE Publications, 2022), 370.

[171] Marx and Engels were privately wary that the Irish nationalist movement was dominated by an elite leadership that was hostile to socialism. They were also opposed to the common tactic of public bombings, which they feared would alienate the English working class. See: Benner, *Really Existing Nationalisms*, 194-196.

[172] As Marx famously put it in *Capital*: "Labour in a white skin cannot emancipate itself where it is branded in a black skin." *Capital*, 414.

very significant departure from Marx and Engels's earlier expectation that revolutionary initiative was the singular prerogative of the proletariat of the "advanced" countries. In the Irish as in the American case, Marx very clearly argues *against* treating "class" as an abstract, prior universal to which other "particular" struggles should be subordinated. In fact, out of Marx and Engels's engagements with the national question we see clear *universalizing* principles expounded, which, while articulated in relation to particular contexts of struggle, resound far beyond them. As Engels reminded German workers in 1847: "a nation cannot become free and at the same time continue to oppress other nations." And as Marx echoed Engels decades later, urging British workers to embrace the Irish cause as their own: "*a nation which subjugates another forges its own chains*."[173]

CONCLUSION

The principles Marx expounds in his interventions on Ireland would come to inform a global movement that he and Engels did not anticipate: the great anticolonial struggles of the twentieth century. After the Bolshevik victory in 1917, the Soviet Union declared itself committed to the liberation of all oppressed nations and championed a national "right to self-determination." In the years before the revolution Lenin had turned to Marx's interventions on the Irish question to justify his own positions, arguing in 1914 that "The policy of Marx and Engels on the Irish question serves as a splendid example of the attitude the proletariat of the oppressor nations should adopt towards national movements, an example which has lost none of its immense *practical* importance."[174] The Bolshevik Revolution thus forged an enduring political link between the *social emancipation* of the working classes, and the *national emancipation* of oppressed nations. In the following chapters, I will consider how these internationalist commitments were defended and rethought by M.N. Roy and Frantz Fanon.

These coming chapters will also consider how the word *humanism*, a term abandoned by Marx and Engels in the mid-1840's, re-emerged in the political thought of twentieth century anticolonial activists such as Roy and Fanon. This demands some concluding reflection. How do

[173] Engels, "Speech on Poland" [1847], 100; Marx, "Letter to the French-Swiss Federal Council," 118. Emphasis mine.

[174] Lenin, "The Right of Nations to Self-Determination" [1914] in *Questions of National Policy and Proletarian Internationalism* (Progress Publishers, 1970), 92.

Marx's late enthusiasms for unexpected movements—including the Russian *Narodniks* and the Irish Fenians—relate to his "humanism"? As ever, it depends on what we mean by the term. In his invaluable commentaries on Marx's Russian writings, Theodor Shanin claims that these late letters are a *reminder* of Marx's "humanistic" commitments. For Shanin, as for other twentieth century Marxist humanists, "humanism" is a term primarily defined in opposition to "determinism." Shanin rightly notes that Marx's late writings remind us of the *subjective* dimension of revolutionary action, and bring up questions of human choice, will, and commitment that cannot be derived from any laws of history. Marx was, as Shanin rightly observes, "a revolutionary who preferred revolutionaries to doctrinaire followers"—especially when doctrine licensed any complacent attitude towards existing struggles during the wait for conditions to "mature."[175] Marx was also, as Shanin tells us, a "humanist and an heir to the culture of the Enlightenment," whose "scholarship was a chosen tool in the service of a grand ethical design of liberation of human essence."[176] Notwithstanding his resort to concepts like the "human essence" which Marx clearly abandons, Shanin's portrait of Marx as a revolutionary intellectual who remained wedded throughout his life to a project of human emancipation, is both convincing and evocative. Marx was indeed a *fighter*, who loved Prometheus and Spartacus, and who believed, as Shanin puts it, in the "human capacity for creative invention breaking social continuities."[177] Marx was also, however, a man who chose his words carefully.

Strikingly, Marx himself does *not* re-adopt the term "humanism" to name his openness to the new revolutionary possibilities signalled by the Russian populists and Irish nationalists. Marx's enduring aversion to the language of humanism may be attributed in part to the fact that humanism meant something much more specific to him than what it comes to mean for later commentators, who imbue the term with more expansive and nebulous connotations. Marx would have associated the term "humanism" above all with the ambitions of the Young Hegelians, their belief in a mythological "human essence," and their confidence that an appeal to common humanity, grounded in a secularized "love of mankind," would prove sufficient to resolve all social and political antagonisms. Marx certainly never returns to this reconciliatory humanism. The terms of the twentieth century Marxist humanist discourse that Shanin is

[175] Shanin, "Late Marx: Gods and Craftsmen" in *Late Marx and the Russian Road*, 33.
[176] Shanin, "Late Marx," 32.
[177] Shanin, "Marxism and the Vernacular Revolutionary Traditions" in *The Late Marx and the Russian Road*, 262.

participating in (and which I discussed in the introduction) are not those of Marx. While some twentieth century thinkers defined humanism in opposition to a unilinear historical determinism, Marx adopts a multilinear approach to history and broadens his idea of anticapitalist struggle without any apparent rapprochement with humanism. In his treatment of the late Marx, Shanin echoes a familiar charge against anti-humanist Marxists (i.e., Althusser) who, he argues, leave no room for human agency, abandon any commitment to human emancipation, and are left in a position of apolitical scientism.[178] This is somewhat ironic, as Marx's skepticism of humanism is motivated, as I have tried to argue here, by a sense that humanism is, or at least can be, a *depoliticizing* concept.

Marx rejected the language of humanism for its depoliticizing effects even as he remained resolutely committed to the emancipation of humanity from all sources of domination and exploitation. As Alain Badiou reminds us, such a position is not as contradictory as it might seem.[179] It is worth remembering, however, that humanism acquired a very wide range of meanings in the twentieth century, many of which remain well worth defending. Despite Marx's own reservations about the term "humanism", it would be foolish to conclude that everything associated with the term should be rejected out of hand. Marx offers an invaluable caution, however, that humanism is a concept we should approach *warily*, mindful of its potentially depoliticizing effects. In the following two chapters I argue that Roy's turn to humanism is ultimately a cautionary tale, one which confirms many of Marx's reservations. Fanon, however, reminds us that humanism has, in some moments, retained a revolutionary, emancipatory significance.

[178] Shanin, "Late Marx," 27.
[179] Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil,* trans. Peter Hallward (Verso, 2001), 4-7.

Chapter Two

M.N. Roy: From Communist Internationalism to a 'New Humanism'

The masses of our people are striving for something human; there is nothing spiritual or sublime in it.

—M.N. Roy

Manabendranath Roy, born Narendranath Bhattacharya, better known simply as M.N. Roy, led a remarkable and intensely political life.[1] Born in 1887, Roy became a young nationalist militant during the Swadeshi insurgency that rocked colonial Bengal following the 1905 partition. In 1915, taking advantage of the First World War, Roy left India in the hopes of enlisting German support for a nationalist insurrection in India. While his mission proved unsuccessful, Roy would not return to India for fifteen years, over the course of which he abandoned his youthful nationalism, travelled to more than a dozen countries across Asia, North America and Europe, helped to found two Communist Parties (the Mexican Communist Party and the Communist Party of India), and served as a high-ranking member of the Communist International until his expulsion from the organization in 1929. Roy returned to India in 1930, where he was soon jailed on conspiracy charges, becoming a minor *cause celebre* of the Indian National Congress. Upon his release from prison in 1936, Roy joined the Congress, and organized a "League of Radical Congressman" within its ranks. He left the Congress during World War Two, adamant that the struggle against global fascism should take priority over Gandhi and Nehru's demands for immediate political independence. Roy's late years were relatively quiet; he retired from political activity in the years following India's independence in 1947 and devoted himself to philosophical pursuits, founding an "Indian Renaissance Institute" in Dehradun from which he championed and expounded a "new humanism." He died in 1954.

To the extent that he is remembered today, Roy is perhaps best known for the undeniable romance of his early travels. However, Roy remains on the whole largely forgotten (especially compared to the other central figures considered in this study: Marx and Fanon). This neglect is not entirely surprising; as a communist apostate and a ferocious critic of nationalism, neither

[1] Roy changed his name while living clandestinely in the United States in 1916.

communists nor nationalists in India have felt much compelled to commemorate him. Much of the extant secondary literature on Roy consists of highly sympathetic biographical studies written by friends and former collaborators devoted to carrying the torch of Roy's "new humanism."[2] Roy also invariably crops up in historical studies of the Swadeshi movement and of early Indian communism.[3]

Roy's strong commitments to modernism and Enlightenment liberalism, especially in his later years, seem at odds with contemporary academic sensibilities, speaking neither to the search for an inward-looking, "autonomous domain" that has defined much of the Subaltern Studies project, nor to an anticolonial thematic emphasizing politico-epistemic novelty and rupture.[4] And yet, a steady stream of recent works have been drawing renewed attention to Roy's political and intellectual career. This small but growing body of scholarship has brought new questions to bear on Roy's legacy, and reflects both a growing general interest in the history of anticolonial internationalism, as well as a particular concern with how Roy's political career embodies a tension between "Western" and "Indian" intellectual traditions.[5] This chapter shares with this literature an understanding that Roy's political career, which encompassed two radical shifts—from nationalism to communism, and from communism to liberalism—offers an illuminating window into the tensions within and between these distinct traditions.

This chapter is particularly concerned with the second of these great intellectual transformations: namely, Roy's gradual abandonment of Marxism and embrace of a liberal "new humanism." Consistent with the historical-contextualist approach to political theory elaborated in

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[2] Samareen Roy, *The Restless Brahmin: Early Life of M.N. Roy* (Allied Publishers, 1970), V.B. Karnik, *M.N. Roy: Political Biography* (Nav Jagriti Samaj, 1978), Sibnarayan Ray, *In Freedom's Quest: A Study of the Life and Works of M.N. Roy, 1887-1954* (Minerva Publishers, 1998).

[3] Gene D. Overstreet and Marshall Windmiller, *Communism in India* (University of California Press, 1959); John Patrick Haithcox, *Communism and Nationalism in India: M.N. Roy and Comintern Policy* (Princeton University Press, 1971); Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal: 1903-1908* (People's Publishing House, 1973); Leonard A. Gordon, *Bengal: The Nationalist Movement 1876-1940* (Columbia University Press, 1974).

[4] Shruti Kapila, "Global Intellectual History and the Indian Political" in *Rethinking Modern European Intellectual History,* eds. Darrin M. McMahon and Samuel Moyn (Oxford University Press, 2014), 253-274.

[5] Kris Manjapra, *M.N. Roy: Marxism and Colonial Cosmopolitanism* (Routledge, 2010); Timothy Brennan, "Future Interrupted: The Subjunctive Nationalism of M.N. Roy," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 122, no. 2 (2023); Aurito Majumder, *Insurgent Imaginations: World Literature and the Periphery* (Cambridge University Press, 2021); Disha Karnad Jani, "The Concept of Fascism in Colonial India: M.N. Roy and The Problem of Freedom," *Global Histories* 3, no. 2 (2017), 121-138; Christian Fuchs, "M.N. Roy and the Frankfurt School: Socialist Humanism and the Critical Analysis of Communication, Culture, Technology, Fascism and Nationalism" *TripleC* 17, no 2 (2019), 249-286; Isabel Huacuja Alonso, "M.N. Roy and the Mexican Revolution: How a Militant Indian Nationalist Became an International Communist," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 40, no. 3 (2017), 517-530; Michael Ortiz, "'Disown Gandhi or be Damned': M.N. Roy, Gandhi and fascism," *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 21, no. 3 (2020).

the introduction of this dissertation, addressing this shift in Roy's thought requires understanding the *problem*(s) to which Roy posed his new humanism as an answer. I am less concerned with evaluating the philosophical content of Roy's new humanism and rather investigate it as a *political intervention*. Roy's own positioning of his new humanism invites this kind of analysis: while Roy often frames his new humanism as a philosophical inquiry into "perennial" questions about human existence, he also clearly situates it as a political project oriented towards the problems of the mid-twentieth century, especially the rise of fascism, and he defines it against both nationalism and communism. In particular, I argue here that Roy's pivot to a new humanism can be understood particularly against the Soviet Union's retreat from communist internationalism, and Roy's consternation at the rise of fascism.

This chapter takes a critical look at Roy's "new humanism." In contrast to many works which emphasize various continuities in Roy's thought, and which often read his humanism in very positive terms, I treat Roy's humanism as a *break* with Marxism and emphasize some problematic features of this break.[6] I argue that Roy's humanism is defined, in part, by a near-total loss of confidence in the revolutionary potential of the Indian working class. As Roy begins to understand fascism as a problem which stems, basically, from the persistence of tradition and religious belief, he increasingly turns away from the language of class struggle and advocates instead a secularizing, liberal politics that defines itself against India's "cultural backwardness." The humanist Roy distances himself from Marx and embraces instead Ludwig Feuerbach's belief that a popular embrace of atheism and enlightenment will prove sufficient to resolve all social and political conflicts. Even if Roy's is not the final word on "humanism" (as we will see in the following chapter on Fanon), I take Roy's example as a confirmation of Marx's fears that humanism can prove a depoliticizing discourse leads to a rejection of class struggle and conciliation with liberalism.

The chapter unfolds in three parts. In order to understand Roy's rejection of Marxism, we first need to examine the nature of these early commitments. Part one addresses Roy's initial rejection of nationalism and embrace of communism, centring on Roy's famous 1920 debate

[6] This is the case of both Kris Manjapra and Timothy Brennan, who are, despite their very different readings of Roy, both enthusiastic about his late humanism. Roy also receives briefer treatments in Manu Goswami's *Producing India* and Andrew Sartori's *Bengal in Global Concept History.* Goswami is more positive about Roy's intellectual trajectory than Sartori, who offers a more critical treatment, both frame his intellectual career in terms of a thematic continuity. See Manu Goswami, *Producing India* (University of Chicago Press, 2004), 249-251 and Andrew Sartori, *Bengal in Global Concept History* (University of Chicago Press, 2008), 225-229.

with Lenin on the "national and colonial questions" and his major 1922 work *India in Transition.* I reconstruct Roy's insightful critique of colonial capitalism and of the national movement that emerged in response to it. I also explore Roy's confidence in the revolutionary capacity of India's labouring classes, his insistence on the mutual dependence of Indian and European struggles, and his enthusiasm for communist internationalism. As we will see, Roy's analysis is also attached to a certain confidence in the progressive force of capitalism, and he tended to exaggerate the extent to which the working class would prove immune to religious and nationalist appeals. We see these expectations come into crisis in part two, where I engage the critique of fascism that Roy develops in the 1930's and 1940's. While Roy still identified as an independent communist for much of this period, I argue that the roots of his liberalism are clear in his understanding of fascism, which he believed drew strength from India's cultural and intellectual "backwardness."

Part three of this chapter considers the politics of Roy's late new humanism, emphasizing the extent to which his humanism represents a break from his earlier Marxism. I argue that Roy abandons some of the more promising aspects of his earlier communist period, particularly his confidence in the revolutionary potential of the working classes, which he discards in favour of a liberal secularism. I also draw attention to a more salutary feature of Roy's late thought. Roy remained a hardened critic of nationalism throughout his post-Comintern political career, and in his later years he grew increasingly critical of the global communist movement's accommodations to nationalism. In his late years Roy embraces the language of "cosmopolitanism" rather than "internationalism"—arguing that the latter presupposes and depends on a prior embrace of nationalism and nation states. This discussion will prove relevant to the discussion of Frantz Fanon in the next chapter; Roy raises an important criticism of the idea that nationalism can be surpassed by working within and through it. While my discussion of Roy's humanism is largely critical, in the conclusion to this chapter I foreground a commendable feature of Roy's thought that unites his communism and humanism, namely his insistence on what we might call the generic humanity of the Indian struggle. I also respond to a tendency to malign Roy as a foreign interloper in Indian politics.

PART ONE: ROY IN THE COMINTERN

Roy arrived in Moscow for the Second World Congress of the Communist International in the summer of 1920. Roy, a recent convert to communism, was among the first of many anticolonial revolutionaries who would flock to Moscow in the years following the 1917 revolution, inspired by the Bolsheviks' commitment to global revolution and support for anticolonial struggles.[7] The Bolsheviks, and Lenin in particular, received Roy with enthusiasm, as they were eager to learn more about the Indian national struggle. After all, Roy possessed, despite his already deep-seated disenchantment with the nationalist project, an impeccable record of nationalist agitation: Roy had left India five years earlier as a representative of the Jugantar group, one of several clandestine cells that had sprung up in opposition to the 1905 British Partition of Bengal. These insurgent secret societies, or *samitis*, had resorted to more violent, conspiratorial tactics than the mainstream Swadeshi boycott movement, including political robberies, bombings, and (more often attempted than successful) assassinations. Their intellectual influences were multifaceted, but were anchored in a Hindu cultural nationalism; Aurobindo Ghosh, later Sri Aurobindo, played a crucial role in shaping *samiti* ideology*,* drawing on thinkers like Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) and Bankimchandra Chattopadhay (1838-1894) to craft a nationalistic political program grounded in Hindu history and theology.[8] The nationalist struggle was conceived of in explicitly religious terms, championing an assertive Hindu universalism against a spiritually bankrupt Western materialism.

The movement was also driven by a certain social idealism; as Roy would later reflect in his *Memoirs*, "[socialism's] utopian or humanitarian aspect was not altogether new to those who had drawn their revolutionary inspiration from [Bankim's novel] *Ananda Math.*"[9] But while the Samitis, made up largely of upper caste young Hindu men, upheld a vision of rural authenticity (counterposed against a corrupted, Westernized elite), and hoped that their acts of violence

[7] There are several figures we could mention here, including: Ho Chi Minh who, like Roy, played a founding role in two Communist Parties: the French and Vietnamese, the Tartar revolutionary Mirsaid Sultan-Galiev, who advocated a "Muslim national communism," the Indonesian revolutionary Tan Malaka, and the Trinidadian George Padmore.

[8] While religious influences predominated, Swadeshi revolutionaries were also attentive to nationalist struggles in Europe, drawing particular inspiration from figures like Giuseppe Garibaldi and Giuseppe Mazzini. Syndicalist influences were also present. Particularly fascinating is the case of Hemchandra Kanungo, a member of the Anushilan Samiti who travelled to Paris in 1906 to learn bomb-making techniques from European anarchists. See Sumit Sarkar, *The Swadeshi Movement in Bengal,* 478-484.

[9] M.N. Roy, *M.N. Roy's Memoirs* (Ajanta Publishers, 1984), 59.

would inspire a mass movement, their efforts at fomenting rebellion did not resonate with the vast class of peasant producers who eked out a precarious existence in rural Bengal. The Swadeshi movement's failure to connect with the Bengali peasantry proved pivotal to Roy's rejection of nationalism, and he distanced himself especially from the movement's cultural-religious rhetoric, which he argued alienated Bengali Muslims and held little appeal for peasants and workers who were more motivated by social and economic concerns than dreams of restoring India's spiritual greatness.

In his *Memoirs* Roy narrates his travels from 1915-1920 as a journey which pushed him beyond his youthful "cultural nationalism" and towards an abiding conviction that the coming Indian revolution must not be a merely *political* movement, with national independence as its only goal, but should rather be the prelude to a thoroughgoing *social* revolution capable of ending poverty and exploitation. Roy spent a year and a half travelling across East Asia, including Indonesia, China, Korea, and Japan, seeking contact with German agents. It was particularly Roy's time in the Indian nationalist underground in California and New York in 1916, and his contact with sympathetic American leftists, including his first wife Evelyn Trent, that gradually convinced him of the insufficiencies of a purely nationalist program.[10] In his *Memoirs* Roy recounts a formative episode in which he witnessed the Indian nationalist leader Lala Lajput Rai addressing a sympathetic crowd of American leftists. One of the audience members pressed Lajput Rai on the goals of the movement against the British, asking if his aim was simply to replace a class of foreign oppressors with a native capitalist class. Lajput Rai retorted, indignantly, that "it does make a great difference whether one is kicked by his brother or by a foreign robber."[11] Roy recounts being deeply unsettled by this response, and he drew closer to socialism. Roy soon abandoned the United States for Mexico in the summer of 1917, where put his budding leftist commitments into practice in Mexico City, where he was a founding member of the Mexican Communist Party. Roy's activities brought him to the attention of Mikhail Borodin, an agent of the recently formed Communist International on assignment in

[10] Roy met Evelyn Trent, a leftist American student, in Palo Alto, soon after arriving in the United States. They were married from 1917-1927. Trent goes unmentioned in Roy's *Memoirs,* as does his second wife, Ellen Gottshalk, although Roy's narrative breaks off before he meets Gottshalk. This is regrettable, as both women were important political collaborators for Roy and committed communists in their own right. For an excellent recent piece on Trent see Jesse Olsavsky, "Evelyn Trent Was One of America's Great Revolutionaries" *Jacobin* (March 9, 2024): https://jacobin.com/2024/03/evelyn-trent-india-mexico-revolution

[11] Roy, *Memoirs*, 28.

the Americas, who befriended Roy and urged him to travel to Moscow for the Comintern's Second World Congress in 1920. It was Borodin's political mentorship in Mexico, Roy claims, that finally led him to abandon his "faith in the special genius of India," describing his earlier cultural nationalism as "a prejudice that dies very hard."[12] Once free of these prejudices, Roy would remain an inveterate critic of nationalism for the rest of his life.

The Roy-Lenin Debate

When Roy arrived in Moscow the Bolsheviks were debating how to relate to nationalist movements of the kind Roy had recently been engaged in. In preparation for the Second World Congress, Lenin had drafted a set of theses on the "National and Colonial Questions"—a document laying out how the Bolsheviks, who had just seized control of Russia's massive, multi-national empire, should strategically engage with nationalist and anticolonial movements around the world. Lenin had long championed a right to national self-determination—a position that was far from universal within the European socialist movement. During the First World War, the national question had become a violently contentious issue: Europe's Social Democratic parties had lined up behind their respective national war efforts, bringing the Second International to a shameful end. Profoundly disillusioned by this experience, prominent communists such as Rosa Luxemburg opposed *any* concession to nationalist sentiment or separatism. For Luxemburg, any appeal to national independence and any war for national autonomy could only serve to align the proletariat with their class oppressors. Although Luxemburg vocally opposed colonialism, she also granted a Eurocentric priority to the struggles of the European working class, writing in her classic 1915 "Junius Pamphlet" that "Only from Europe … can the signal come for social revolution that will free the nations."[13]

Lenin had long argued for a very different approach to nationalist movements—one informed, in part, by Marx's interventions on the Irish question.[14] Although his political horizon was, like Luxemburg's, profoundly internationalist, Lenin was more discriminating in his approach to nationalist causes, drawing a distinction between "oppressor" and "oppressed"

[12] Roy, *Memoirs,* 219; 59.

[13] Rosa Luxemburg, "The Junius Pamphlet" [1915], in *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader*, eds. Peter Hudis and Kevin B. Anderson (Monthly Review Press, 2004), 340.

[14] V. I. Lenin, "The Right of Nations to Self-Determination" [1914] in *Questions of National Policy and Proletarian Internationalism* (Progress Publishers, 1970), 92.

nations.[15] If the nationalism of oppressor nations (like the Russians or English) should be resisted in favour of class solidarity, the nationalism of *oppressed* nations (like the Poles or Indians) should be afforded some room to flourish. The historical experience of national oppression, Lenin recognized, produced a kind of resentment that made it difficult for oppressed peoples to see the working class of oppressor nations as their political allies. Lenin was wary of fanning the embers of nationalism too vigorously and had warned explicitly that "this task is largely a *negative* one … for going beyond that begins the 'positive' activity of the *bourgeoisie* striving to *fortify* nationalism."[16] As Lenin summed up his position in 1913: "Combat all national oppression? Yes, of course! Fight *for* any kind of national development, *for* 'national culture' in general?—Of course not."[17] Nonetheless, he saw communist support for national liberation and self-determination as a crucial means of overcoming national antagonisms and building an effective internationalism.

Lenin also strongly opposed Luxemburg's "undialectical" and "downright reactionary attitude of indifference" towards anticolonial struggles both within Europe and beyond, arguing that "to imagine that social revolution is *conceivable* without revolts by small nations in the colonies and in Europe, without revolutionary outbursts by a section of the petty bourgeoisie *with all its prejudices* … is to *repudiate social revolution*."[18] Lenin's position was informed by a pragmatic recognition that the anticipated global revolution would not be a "pure" struggle between capital and labour, but a far more complex process in which the proletariat would need to form broader alliances. Lenin hoped that by supporting the national aspirations of oppressed peoples, the communists might win sympathy for their own cause and be able transform these struggles from within. He also assumed, however, that these *national* struggles would be, in the first instance, liberal democratic movements under bourgeois leadership.

Roy was warmly received by Lenin, who invited the young Bengali radical to draft his own response to Lenin's own "Draft Theses on the National and Colonial Questions." In his document Lenin had argued that the colonized bourgeoisie, unlike their European counterparts,

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[15] V.I. Lenin, "Preliminary Draft Theses on the National and Colonial Questions" [1920] in *Lenin Collected Works, Volume 31* (Progress Publishers, 1966), 150.

[16] Lenin, "Critical Remarks on the National Question" [1913] in *Questions of National Policy and Proletarian Internationalism* (Progress Publishers, 1970), 27.

[17] Lenin, "Critical Remarks on the National Question," 28.

[18] Lenin, "The Junius Pamphlet" [1916], in *Lenin Collected Works, Volume 22* (International Publishers, 1964), 312; Lenin, "The Discussion on Self-Determination Summed Up" in *Lenin Collected Works, Volume 22*, 355. Emphasis in original.

remained a revolutionary class—both for the challenge they posed to imperialism, but also for their anticipated role in advancing capitalist production in the colonies, thus paving the way for future socialist revolution. On this basis, Lenin argued that Communists should enter into "temporary alliance with bourgeois democracy in colonial countries," while still "uphold[ing] the independence of the proletarian movement."[19] Roy agreed with Lenin that national movements possessed a dialectical significance insofar as they enabled social revolution. However, with the Indian National Congress in mind, Roy argued that the national bourgeoisie was not the progressive, heroic class Lenin imagined, but a weak and vacillating constituency, too concerned with protecting its own position as an exploiting class to mount an effective challenge to empire.[20] As such, Roy recommended the Comintern eschew alliance with bourgeois parties and collaborate with working class organizations from the outset, claiming (with considerable exaggeration) that "in most of the colonies there already exist organized socialist or communist parties, in close relation to the mass movement."[21]

At the heart of Roy's theses lay a sense of the mutual dependency and commensurability of European and Indian movements. Where many Comintern delegates were narrowly focused on the European working class, and believed, like Luxemburg, that the fate of the colonized world rested on the success of their own movements, Roy reversed the priority of struggle, arguing that "without the breaking up of the colonial empire, the overthrow of the capitalist system in Europe does not appear possible."[22] Throughout his years in the Comintern Roy would consistently push European communists to adopt a more stridently anticolonial politics. However, Roy also argued that this imperative, of "breaking up of the colonial empire," could not be undertaken with no regard to what replaced it, and he questioned the logic of attempting to overthrow capitalism in Europe while supporting its development in Asia. The development of bourgeois nationalism in India, Roy asserted, would be of no interest to *either* British or Indian workers, both of whom "must always be indifferent to purely nationalist inspirations."[23] While

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[19] V.I. Lenin, "Preliminary Draft Theses on the National and Colonial Questions" [1920] in *Lenin Collected Works, Volume 31* (Progress Publishers, 1966), 150.

[20] As Lenin had put it years earlier, commenting on Chinese nationalist leader Sun Yat-Sen: "in Asia there is *still* a bourgeoisie capable of championing sincere, militant, consistent democracy." Lenin, "Democracy and Narodism in China" [1912] in *Lenin Collected Works, Volume 18* (Progress Publishers, 1963), 165.

[21] Roy, "Original Draft of the Supplementary Theses on the National and Colonial Question" [1920] in *Selected Works, Volume One*, ed. Sibnarayan Ray (Oxford University Press, 1987), 167.

[22] Roy, "Draft of Supplementary Theses," 166.

[23] Roy, "An Indian Communist Manifesto" [1920], in *Selected Works, Volume One*, 161.

Roy conceded that the anticipated revolution in India "is not going to be a communist revolution in its first stages," he nonetheless insisted that a period of capitalist development was unnecessary, and that the leadership of the struggle should be in the hands of "the revolutionary masses" rather than "surrendered to the bourgeois democrats."[24]

At Lenin's behest, the Comintern passed revised versions of both sets of theses. The Roy-Lenin debate yielded two particularly significant innovations to the Comintern line that would shape the organization's engagement with national movements throughout the 1920s.[25] First, Lenin clarified that the Comintern should continue to pursue collaboration with bourgeois national movements but *only* "in cases when these movements are really revolutionary, when they are not opposed to our enlightening and organizing … the great masses of the exploited for revolutionary purposes."[26] Second, the Comintern abandoned the stageist view that the colonies would necessarily have to pass through a period of capitalist rule before embarking on socialist transformation. With his reputation bolstered by his exchange with Lenin, Roy would go on to enjoy a successful career in the Comintern, dedicated to supporting anticolonial communism, until his expulsion from the organization, by Stalin, in 1929.

Roy certainly shared Lenin's reservations about nationalism and likewise saw the project of national liberation as principally a "negative" task. In fact, Roy's "draft theses" seem to caution that Lenin's "concessions" to national aspirations might go too far, warning that "helping the growth of the national spirit … will surely obstruct the awakening of class-consciousness in the masses."[27] And yet, both men insisted upon *national* independence in opposition to another prominent tendency: the Pan-movements. Movements like Pan-Asianism, Pan-Arabism, Pan-Islamism, and Pan-Africanism were arguably the dominant current of anti-imperialist politics in this period.[28] These movements framed their opposition to imperialism not in *national* terms, but on the basis of broader racial, civilizational, or religious affinities. Roy and Lenin were united in their opposition to these "reactionary" tendencies, and the Pan-movements were judged to be

[24] Roy, "Draft of Supplementary Theses," 168.

[25] John P. Haithcox. "The Roy-Lenin Debate on Colonial Policy: A New Interpretation" *The Journal of Asian Studies* 23 no. 1 (1963): 93-101.

[26] V.I. Lenin, "From Proceedings of the Second Congress of the Communist International" [1920] in *Selected Works of M.N. Roy, Vol. One*, 173

[27] Roy, "Draft of Supplementary Theses," 168.

[28] Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia.*

futile endeavours that served the interests of traditional elites.[29] In practical terms, this meant that the Indian masses would first need to be turned to the *national cause*. One of Roy's first assignments for the Comintern brought him to Tashkent (now in Uzbekistan), where Roy and a small group of comrades founded the Communist Party of India in 1920. Some of the party's first recruits were Indian Muslim devotees of the Khilafat movement, who were passing through Tashkent on their way to support the crumbling Ottoman Empire. Roy and his colleagues tried to convert them, if not to communism, then at least to the cause of *national revolution*, and gave them military training to these ends.[30] Thus although Lenin and Roy had no wish to "paint nationalism red" (as Lenin once put it), their interventions also informed an approach to anti-imperialism that prioritized nations and took up the cause of national independence much more vigorously than the mainstream nationalist bourgeois movement.[31]

India in Transition & the Predicament of the Indian Bourgeoisie

Over the course of the 1920s Roy would continue to develop a Marxist critique of the Indian national struggle, expounded most remarkably in his landmark 1922 *India in Transition.* Roy's book posed a powerful rebuke to the commonly held view within the Comintern that India was a "feudal" or "semi-feudal" country in need of a bourgeois revolution to introduce capitalism. Rather, Roy insisted that India was *already* subject to a distinct form of capitalist exploitation that produced deurbanization and deindustrialization instead of centralization and industrialization. As he put it: "If capitalism has concentrated 67 per cent of the population of the British isles in the cities, *it is also capitalism* which has driven 75 per cent of the population of India to the soil."[32] In the eighteenth century British colonialists had deliberately destroyed Indian artisanal production, and had since then maintained India as a source of raw material for British manufacturing and a consumer market for British goods. But as Roy pointed out, this did not make India's economy any less defined by capitalist accumulation. Roy argued that while colonial India might have the *appearance* of a pre-capitalist society, with its propped up

[29] In his initial draft theses Lenin commented that "Pan-Islamism" served the interests of the "khans, landowners, mullahs, etc." Lenin, "Preliminary Draft Theses," 149.

[30] For a discussion of this episode see Chapter 62, "The Army of God," in Roy, *Memoirs*, 459-467.

[31] Lenin quoted in Roy, *Memoirs,* 395.

[32] Roy, *India in Transition* [1922], in *Selected Works of M.N. Roy, Volume 1: 1917-1922,* ed. Sibnarayan Ray (Oxford University Press, 1987), 251. Emphasis mine.

"princely states," aristocratic landlords, and a vast class of apparently "independent" peasant producers, India's economy was already thoroughly subject to capitalist dynamics.

India in Transition offers a brilliant and enduringly insightful analysis of how Indian workers and peasants were exploited by both British capital *as well as* by Indian landlords, merchants, and money-lenders. Roy devotes particular attention to India's rural economy, noting that while the techniques of production may have remained consistent from the pre-colonial economy, traditional agriculture's "social significance has undergone a radical change."[33] As Roy observed, through the cumulative pressures of taxation, rent, and debt, the Indian peasant producer had been forced into an economic relationship wherein they no longer grew for their own subsistence, but were instead producing cash crops like jute or cotton for the moneylender or landlord to sell on the global market. This immiserating cycle of debt left the peasantry constantly on the brink of dispossession and starvation, and thoroughly dependent on the market for their survival. As such, Roy argued "the peasant can by no means be called the owner of the product of his soil or toil," but was rather already effectively semi-proletarianized.[34] *India in Transition* effectively pushes against a still too common tendency to identify "capitalism" only with the industrialized economies of Western Europe, and points towards capitalism's *contemporaneity* with ostensibly "pre-capitalist" modes of production. Although Roy does not use this vocabulary himself, *India in Transition* represents an investigation into what Marx calls "formal subsumption," i.e., those processes through which capital takes over and exploits practices from prior modes of production. [35]

However, even as Roy recognized capitalism's contemporaneity with large-scale peasant production, he was also incredibly optimistic that capitalism would soon flatten these uneven patterns of development, and he believed that although capitalism had initially *underdeveloped* India, it was now moving into a more industrial phase. Roy was not unusual in attaching his faith in revolution to a confidence in capitalism's modernizing impulse. Contemporaries like Lenin, Trotsky, and Luxemburg, like Roy, recognized capitalism's unevenness and ability to assimilate

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[33] Roy, *India in Transition,* 214.

[34] Roy, *India in Transition*, 216.

[35] In his analysis of formal subsumption Marx himself describes the usurious exploitation of the Indian peasantry as a basically *capitalistic* relationship, noting that "the exorbitant interest which [the usurer] extorts from the primary producer, is just another name for surplus value." (Marx, *Capital Vol. 1*, 1023). For more on formal subsumption see Harry Harootunian, *Marx After Marx*, which takes the concept as a central theme, and Jairus Banaji, "Capitalist Domination and the Small Peasantry: The Deccan Districts in the Late Nineteenth Century," in *Theory as History* (Haymarket Books, 2010), 277-332.

extant social practices, while maintaining a somewhat paradoxical confidence in capitalism's ability to progressively overcome this unevenness. As Harry Harootunian notes of this generation: "there seemed to prevail an urgent desire to see capitalism rapidly remove the layered vestiges of prior pasts that marked the historical record until the capitalist mode of production appeared on the scene."[36] This is undoubtedly the case with Roy, who believed that India was undergoing rapid industrialization and modernization, and that prior forms of identification, especially caste and religious distinctions, were becoming increasingly irrelevant to Indian life. Indeed, we can read Roy's response to Lenin in large part as a claim that this process was more advanced in India than Lenin had appreciated.

Roy was indeed very optimistic that industrialization was developing considerably in early twentieth century India. This is, interestingly, an assumption he shared with Marx, who, in his 1853 articles on India, had predicted that despite their initial policy of deliberate underdevelopment, the British bourgeoisie would eventually give in to the temptation and industrialize the country (thus sealing the fate of their eventual expulsion).[37] Roy believed that by the early twentieth century Britain had finally succumbed to this apparent "inevitability," driven in part by the exigencies of WWI, and by the need to placate a rising Indian bourgeoisie who sought new outlets to invest their considerable landholding wealth. In *India in Transition* Roy claims that industrialization was, by the 1920's, proceeding at a remarkable rate, as could be observed in the development of steel mills, mining, railroads, jute and cotton manufacturing, and in the growth of an industrial, urban proletariat. Roy's pronounced insistence on the growth of Indian industry would prove a consistent feature of his interventions within the Comintern. If these claims were to some extent exaggerated (as Roy later acknowledged)[38], they also served a

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[36] Harootunian, *Marx after Marx,* 103.

[37] Karl Marx, "The Future Results of British Rule in India." It is unclear how much of Marx's work Roy had actually read by this point. Kris Manjapra cites a 1946 letter in which Roy claims to have written *India in Transition* before ever reading Marx. Roy directly contradicts this assertion in his own *Memoirs*, where he recalls reading Marx at the New York Public Library in 1917, five years before *India in Transition* was published. The two claims are, obviously, impossible to square. Although Roy would likely have read at least *some* Marx, it is unlikely that he would have yet found time by 1922 for any extended study of Marx's work, given his extensive travels and political activities. While *India in Transition* reveals a clear familiarity with Marxist debates and deploys a recognizably Marxist conceptual vocabulary, the work does not contain any direct references to Marx's own writings. See "Roy to Sushil Dey, 5 July 1946" in Manjapra, *M.N. Roy*, 51 and M.N. Roy, *Memoirs*, 29.

[38] Some industrial development certainly was occurring in India, but not to the extent Roy argues. In his *Memoirs*, Roy acknowledges that the figures concerning the extent of industrialization in *India in Transition* were false and inflated. Looking back, Roy blames these errors on his research assistant, Abani Mukherji, who is credited as a collaborator on *India in Transition.* Roy claims that Mukherji exaggerated the figures due to his over-eagerness "to prove that India was in the throes of a proletarian revolution." It bears noting, however, that the same position

clear political purpose: if industrialization was already underway in India, the Comintern could fully commit itself to an immediate peasants and workers revolution, rather than investing their hopes in a bourgeois revolution that would *bring* capitalism to India.

In Roy's view, the fact that this industrial modernization was being imposed by a foreign agent, rather than won by India's own "bourgeois revolution" against feudalism, represented the defining predicament of the Indian bourgeoisie. As Roy argued, India's elite, who hoped to win political independence for the sake of wresting for themselves a greater share of the surplus exacted from Indian labour, would be easily placated by economic concessions from Britain. To the extent that they *were* emerging as a revolutionary force against colonial rule, they had arrived "too late," their "historic tasks" already being realized by a more advanced foreign power, and historical initiative now lay with a growing mass of dispossessed labourers.[39] There were in fact *two* movements happening within the Indian independence movement, Roy argued: a struggle between competing English and Indian bourgeoisies, and a movement of India's poor and oppressed, standing opposed to both camps. As such, Roy believed the Indian bourgeoisie faced an insurmountable dilemma: their struggle for a political independence that would protect and expand their property rights could not succeed without the support of the masses, but empowering the masses threatened their own position as an exploiting class. Roy thus argued that the *national* revolution could only succeed by becoming a *social* revolution that transcended the interests of the bourgeoise.

Roy held that Gandhi's rise within the nationalist movement represented an attempt to manage these contradictions and to mobilize the masses on terms not threatening to bourgeois ambitions, channeling their radical socio-economic demands into a narrower political confrontation. In particular, Roy saw Gandhi's *satyagraha,* or what he called "the cult of non-violence," as a strategy which, by calling on the masses to refrain even from violence against property, "serve[d] the interests of those who have built castles of social privilege and economic exploitation."[40] For Roy, Gandhi's conservative role in the national moment was evidenced, perhaps above all, by his 1922 decision to call off the non-cooperation movement following the

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could be attributed to Roy, which perhaps explains why he did not look at them more skeptically. See: Roy, *Memoirs,* 552-555.

[39] Roy, *India in Transition,* 374.

[40] Roy "The Cult of Non-Violence: Its Socio-Economical Background" [1923], in *Selected Works of M.N. Roy, Vol. 2 1923-1927*, ed. Sibnarayan Ray, (Oxford University Press, 1988), 156.

burning of a police station in Chauri Chaura, a continual reference point in Roy's writings throughout the 1920s. While Roy possessed no illusions about the political efficacy of random acts of violence (an important departure from his Swadeshi days), he maintained that organized revolutionary violence was essential to a successful national independence movement. Thus, when violence did occasionally flare up and Gandhi rushed to denounce the perpetrators, Roy argued instead that the Congress should "show them the highroad of Revolution, instead of condemning them on moral grounds."[41]

Roy also objected to the rhetoric, common to both Gandhi and the wider nationalist movement, that framed the struggle between India and Britain in spiritual, civilizational terms. As Roy saw it, the discourse of India's "spiritual genius" nefariously fostered the impression that "the Indian upper classes do not care for material things."[42] Despite their attempts to frame the conflict between India and Britain as spiritual and civilizational, effectively downplaying the existence of class antagonism in India, the Congress showed their hand when their core demands concerned economic concessions from the British. As Roy put it, "it was the sordid material interest of the bourgeoisie … and not the 'spiritual uplift' of the people, that was the motive force behind the movement for national independence."[43] Roy conceded that Gandhi was himself likely sincerely dismayed by capitalism's impact on India, but dismissed his political vision as a "sanctimonious philosophy of poverty" that amounted to little more than a "petty-bourgeois humanitarianism."[44] Whatever Gandhi's intentions, Roy argued that *in effect* his real contribution to the national movement was to offer India's capitalists a strategy for mass mobilization that protected their class interests. Roy nonetheless saw such efforts as doomed, predicting that a violent revolutionary struggle waged by the working classes, immune to traditionalist arguments and motivated only by material demands, would inevitably overthrow the British and push the Indian bourgeoisie to the sidelines in the process.

Roy's interventions within the Comintern reflect many familiar Marxist assumptions. Although Roy pushed against the stageist, unilinear assumptions of the Comintern, arguing that there was no use in waiting for the bourgeoisie to impose capitalist property relations, Roy's analysis is still, in some sense, attached to a confidence in the progressive role of capitalism. Roy

[41] Roy, "Jawahar Lal's Speech" [1923], in *Selected Works, Vol. 2*, 150.
[42] Roy, "Bourgeois Nationalism" [1923], in *Selected Works, Vol. 2,*126.
[43] Roy, *India in Transition,* 335-336.
[44] Roy, *India in Transition*, 347.

believed, like the early Marx, that colonial rule in India would eventually produce capitalist industrialization. While Roy does not share Marx's view of pre-colonial Indian society's "stagnancy" (arguing in *India in Transition* that colonialism *arrested* rather than *spurred* India's economic development), he does share Marx's utter lack of nostalgia for the pre-colonial world. Roy welcomes the further capitalist erosion of traditional culture and authority and enthusiastically anticipates an egalitarian socialist future. He also believed, like the early Marx, that capitalism produced a certain homogeneity, that it inevitably undermined distinctions of nationality, race, religion, and caste. In retrospect, we can see that Roy and many of his contemporaries were unduly optimistic on this score.

Nonetheless, Roy's encounter with Marxism enabled an incisive critique of colonial capitalism and of the bourgeois nationalist movement. Roy's analysis cut through the civilizational rhetoric of the Congress, and exposed the material, profane interests at the heart of the independence struggle. Roy was also deeply committed to an idea of working-class self-emancipation that lies at the heart of any communist politics. Roy's writings from this period reflect a fervent revolutionary enthusiasm and a great confidence that the Indian masses would soon rise up in opposition, both against the British colonizers and the Indian bourgeoisie. Sure of the revolutionary will of the Indian proletariat, Roy's analysis often seems to imply a fairly minimal role for the Communist Party, writing in one pamphlet that "our task is to develop in the minds of the masses this consciousness of their own power … they will do the rest."[45] Roy's analysis in this period often speaks quite movingly to the secular, material and generically human demands of the Indian masses, which he opposes to the spiritualist rhetoric of Gandhian nationalism. As he put it in a political pamphlet from 1922:

> *The masses of our people are striving for something human; there is nothing spiritual or sublime in it*. They produce everything, but live in misery and die of starvation … [The labourer] has to struggle for his existence if he does not wish to die. The Indian people are no exception and if they are to live a human life, they must struggle to conquer that fight. This is the true nature of the struggle we are involved in—*to conquer the right to live as human beings.* This is the motive force of the movement for national liberation.[46]

[45] Roy, "What Do We Want" [1922] in *Selected Works, Vol. 1*, 531.
[46] Roy, "What Do We Want," 509. Emphasis mine.

It is these generic human aspirations—the struggle, as Roy puts it, "to live as human beings"—that united the struggles of the Indian masses with a common, global movement, encompassing all peoples struggling against oppression and exploitation. Although Roy does not use the language of "humanism" during his Comintern years and would only adopt this term in his later writings, this emphasis on the secular, generically human quality of the Indian masses will prove an enduring feature of his political thought, including his humanist period.

Roy's Ouster & the Retreat from Internationalism

Roy's writings from this period also represent an enduring testimony to the power of communist internationalism—commitments which Roy held very dear. After Lenin's passing in 1924, Roy hailed the birth of a "*true* International" as "Lenin's greatest deed."[47] Roy was deeply inspired by a sense of belonging to a global revolutionary movement, one in which anticolonial revolutionaries like himself stood alongside European communists as equals. In the years following Lenin's death, Roy would lament the erosion of the culture of open debate that once prevailed within the Comintern. If, in an earlier period, the delegates of national parties were often deferred to and could advocate for strategies appropriate to their own countries, by the late 1920's Comintern positions were increasingly dictated by the Russian party, under Stalin's leadership. As Roy observed, what he called "the Russian problem" had a deleterious impact on the practice of internationalism—after all, the Bolsheviks had won their revolution under circumstances that were distinct to the Russian context and, unlike the other communist parties who made up the Comintern, were already in power.[48] But as the Comintern was increasingly subordinated to Russian leadership, the Russian experience was increasingly taken as universally applicable. It was in part debates over the appropriate course of anticolonial activity in India that contributed to Roy's expulsion from the Comintern in 1929.[49]

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[47] Roy, "Lenin's Greatest Deed," [1924] in *Selected Works, Vol. 2*, 285.

[48] Roy, "The Russian Problem" [1929] in *Selected Works, Vol. 3,* 306-313.

[49] Roy's expulsion is a rather complicated episode with several contributing factors. Sibnarayan Ray suggests, convincingly, that the *immediate* cause for Roy's expulsion was almost certainly his involvement in the internecine politics of the Soviet leadership, particularly his support for Nikolai Bukharin against Stalin (who Roy was in fact once close to). Roy's criticism of Stalin was also informed, however, by his opposition to positions that had been imposed on the Indian Communist Party. In 1928, at Stalin's directive, Indian communists were instructed to eschew collaboration with any other parties or organizations. As Roy protested, this strategy left the small Indian party dangerously isolated from the broader movement for national liberation. Sibnararyan Ray, "Introduction" to *Selected Works of M.N. Roy, Vol. 3,* 3-9.

In the years immediately following his expulsion from the Comintern, Roy still clung firmly to the internationalism of the early Soviet moment, insisting in a rather poignant response to the Soviet leadership that the legacy of the Russian Revolution did not belong to them alone, but was the shared heritage of a global revolutionary movement. As he put it in 1930, "*Moscow is not a geographical but a political notion.*"[50] In an evocative passage from his *Memoirs* Roy recalls listening to Radio Moscow through WWII, and hearing the Soviet Union replace the *Internationale* with a new Russian national anthem, an episode which symbolized the rejection of communist internationalism for nationalism. Roy describes this as the event which finally sealed his disillusionment with the legacy of the Russian Revolution:

> As late as in the earlier years of the Second World War, I used to tune in Moscow every evening to hear the stirring music, which came thousands of miles over the Himalayas. Day after day came the news of the Red Army falling back before the Nazi war machine. On the outskirts of Moscow, it was touch and go; Leningrad might fall any day; the Ukraine was overrun; a whole army corps was trapped in Kiev; the Germans reached Stalingrad and the gates of Asia at the foot of the Caucasus. And every evening the music from the clock tower of the Kremlin restored my faith in the ultimate outcome of the War. Suddenly, one evening, the message of hope failed to come. I tuned in the next evening, and the next. The message of hope came no more. At the same hour, the bells in the Kremlin clock tower began playing the new Russian national anthem instead of the *International.* Not only was a hope dashed; a period of history was over; I lost my faith in the liberating significance of the Russian Revolution. So many things happened in the intervening period which, for me, closed in 1942.[51]

Given Roy was ousted from the Comintern a decade before the war began, this is a powerful testament to the enduring significance Roy attached to the internationalist ambitions of the Soviet project. This was not, however, the only factor that informed Roy's coming rejection of communism. Let us turn then to Roy's return to India, the critique of fascism he elaborated in these years, and his eventual turn to a new humanism.

PART TWO: THE PROBLEM OF FASCISM

Roy returned to India in 1930. The experience proved almost immediately disillusioning. Roy had spent much of the previous decade arguing that industrial capitalism was developing

[50] Roy, "The Follies of a Repentant Renegade" [1930], *Selected Works of M.N. Roy, Volume Three: 1927-1932*, ed. Sibnarayan Ray (Oxford University Press, 1990), 449.

[51] Roy, *Memoirs,* 330.

rapidly in India and that Indian workers and peasants were on the brink of revolutionary insurrection. As he toured the country in secret, trying to build up his own independent revolutionary organization, he found himself sorely mistaken on both counts.[52] In a later article reflecting on the experience of witnessing a lacklustre demonstration in Bombay in 1930, he acknowledged that newspaper reports of strikes and rallies had "aroused great expectations in me while I was abroad"—expectations he now found severely diminished.[53] Roy's clandestine efforts to tour the country were soon frustrated, however, and he was arrested, tried, and ultimately served six years in prison for "conspiracy to deprive the king of his sovereignty in India" (namely, for his role in founding and organizing the Communist Party of India years prior). Having grown accustomed to different customs in his years abroad, in prison Roy became increasingly preoccupied with India's intellectual and cultural "backwardness," lamenting the enduring influence of religion among the Indian working class. As he put it in a letter bemoaning the habits of a devout cellmate, Indian religiosity and superstition represented the vestiges of "a decayed civilization, awaiting a much delayed burial."[54] Roy would prove increasingly pessimistic, however, that capital could be counted on to "bury" these apparently archaic remnants.

Roy's years in prison (1930-1936) also corresponded with the Nazi's rise to power, and his prison letters, written to his soon-to-be-wife Ellen Gottshalk, a German Jew and radical in her own right, offer a powerful testament to Roy's deep consternation at events in Europe.[55] As the Nazi's consolidated their grip on power, Roy's own manuscripts in Germany were burned, and many of his closest comrades were driven underground or into exile, including Gottshalk herself.[56] Roy was profoundly distressed that the communist movement had failed to stop the tide of fascism; one of Roy's chief differences with Stalin, which had contributed to his expulsion, was his opposition to Stalin's "Third Period" line (1928-1935), which had directed European communists to reject any cooperation with social democratic parties, now branded

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[52] Haithcox, *Communism and Nationalism in India,* 179-180.

[53] Roy, *Scientific Politics* [1942] (Renaissance Publishers, 1947), 257.

[54] Roy, *Fragments of a Prisoner's Diary, Vol. 3: Letters from Jail* (Renaissance Publishers, 1943), 65.

[55] As Manjapra notes, Roy felt a particular affinity with Germany. Roy had spent a great deal of time in Germany as a representative of the Comintern and had settled there in the brief window between his expulsion from the Comintern and return to India (1929-1930). Manjapra, *M.N. Roy,* 70.

[56] Following Roy's release from prison Gottshalk joined him in India, where they wed in 1937. Gottshalk, later Ellen Roy, played a central role in establishing the Renaissance Institute, and was a significant writer and thinker in her own right. See *The World Her Village: Selected Writings and Letters of Ellen Roy*, ed. Sibnarayan Ray (Ananda Publishers, 1979).

"social fascists." Roy and others vociferously opposed this intransigent new strategy, arguing that it had abandoned the European middle-classes to fascist influence. While Roy initially understood his disagreements with the Comintern over how to respond to fascism as a *strategic* difference, he later argued that the communist failure to stop fascism in its tracks was the result of deep-seated theoretical problem. In particular, Roy held that the materialist interpretation of history had cultivated a cynical attitude towards the ethical and moral values necessary to stop fascism.

Ruminating from prison that "there is not one patented brand of fascism," Roy also became deeply concerned over this period that Indian nationalism, drawing strength from the country's apparent "cultural backwardness," could be moving in a troublingly similar direction to European fascism.[57] Indeed, Roy's concerns with India's traditionalism and religiosity, and his alarm at the rise of fascism, coalesce in this period; Roy came to understood fascism as an essentially religious mode of thought, which in the Indian context was the product of the "medieveal mentality of the culturally backward masses."[58] Roy also came to believe that Marxism was fundamentally unable to face or diagnose this problem. In the section that follows, I argue that the political stakes of Roy's new humanism can be productively understood through his analysis of fascism. Indeed, while Roy continues to identify as an independent communist throughout the 1930s and 1940s, only publicly rejecting Marx as a "false prophet" and communism as a "deceptive ideal" in 1947, I argue that the seeds of his later liberalism are visible in the analysis of fascism he begins elaborating in the 1930s.[59] As we shall see, Roy's diagnosis of fascism as a reactionary philosophical movement that needed to be fought through secular, liberal education (rather than class struggle) was core to his coming rejection of Marxism.

Fascism: Its Philosophy, Professions, and Practice

While in prison, Roy undertook a major study of fascism titled *Fascism: Its Philosophy, Professions, and Practice*, which was published in 1938 following his release. Still clearly the work of a self-understood communist, Roy describes his subject in conventionally Marxist terms

[57] Roy, *Letters from Jail*, 65.
[58] Roy, *Scientific Politics,* 230.
[59] Roy, *New Humanism: A Manifesto* (Renaissance Publishers, 1947), 23; 21.

as a counter-revolutionary movement intended to "suppress the revolt of the masses against the decayed system of class domination," and identifies the glorification of inequality, violence, and imperialist war as key to its appeal.[60] More distinctively, Roy also claimed that fascism was the outcome of a long, reactionary philosophical tradition, writing that "if Fascism is a socio-political reaction, its ideological foundation must have been laid by philosophical reaction," an assertion that assigns a far more significant role to the independent power of philosophy than might be expected of a Marxist argument.[61]

In this work, Roy frames fascism as a reaction against the humanism of the Renaissance and Enlightenment, displacing a confidence in science, reason, and human agency with a "super-religious self-effacement of man."[62] Roy singles out "irrationalist" European philosophers like Friedrich Nietzsche, Arthur Schopenhauer, and Henri Bergson for criticism on this score, but he also claims that fascism's philosophical antecedents can be traced as far back as *Bhagavad Gita,* devoting particular attention to the interest "reactionary" European thinkers took in Eastern philosophy. The *Gita,* one of the best-known Hindu scriptures, was a political touchstone for many Indians, including Gandhi, as well as the Swadeshi thinkers who had influenced Roy in his early years.[63] Roy now denounced the *Gita* as a malign and archaic influence, writing that: "The logical connection between the doctrine preached in the *Gita* and the Fascist neo-Hegelian metaphysical conception of the State" lay in their common "mysticism and spiritualism which represent reaction against the scientific view of life."[64]

In the early twentieth century some Indian nationalists were drawing explicit inspiration from European fascism, and Roy objected vigorously to those who saw in Hitler and Mussolini potential allies against Britain, writing: "Why prefer a Hitler or Mussolini to the British imperialist, while both sing the same song—'White Man's Burden.'"[65] However, Roy argued these apparent alliances of convenience were no accident, but were enabled by a shared nationalistic philosophy, noting that while many Indian nationalists were not yet fascists in *practice* they were nonetheless heading in that direction. As he warned: "Fascism is the

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[60] Roy, *Fascism: Its Philosophy, Professions, and Practice* (D.M. Library, 1938), 49.
[61] Roy, *Fascism*, 9.
[62] Roy, *Fascism*, 11.
[63] Shruti Kapila and Faisal Devji, eds. *Political Thought in Action: The Bhagavad Gita and Modern India* (Cambridge University Press, 2013).
[64] Roy, *Fascism,* 12-13.
[65] Roy, *Fascism*, 55.

monstrous manifestation of a philosophy which is cherished by the Indian intellectuals even to-day."[66] Roy identified in Indian nationalism and European fascism a common reaction against modernity that attempted to regenerate an idealised national community through "militant spiritualism," and also observed that the racial mythologizing of European fascism "sounds very much like the professions of the Indian orthodox nationalism."[67] While the racial discourse of Indian Aryanism (still a feature of Hindu nationalism) was certainly more central to figures like V.D. Savarkar, populariser of "Hindutva" and a keen supporter of fascism, than to figures like Gandhi, Roy identified an uncomfortable correspondence between fascist ideas and Gandhian rhetoric about reviving India's spiritual greatness.

In *Fascism* and elsewhere, Roy occasionally implies that Gandhi should be understood straightforwardly as a fascist, but for the most part makes the less extreme, although still clearly provocative, argument that Gandhi was unwittingly enabling the future success of fascism in India. Roy conceded vast differences between Gandhism and European fascism, writing that "Hitler and Mussolini…stand for everything that is opposed to India's message as delivered by Gandhi."[68] And yet, while their tactics and aims may have been antithetical, Roy argued that their common philosophical assumptions were likely to produce a similar outcome: namely, both movements represented attempts to reconcile the masses to exploitation by valorizing inequality. Roy identified the "the cult of service" (i.e., the caste system) as core to the "dogmas of Gandhism," writing that: "inasmuch as service is endowed with a metaphysical merit, slavery is raised to the dignity of honour."[69] For Roy, these apparent common grounds were such that he allowed for the possibility of a "non-violent fascism."[70]

Roy's political life after prison was largely defined by the struggle against fascism, both within India and abroad. Roy had joined the Congress (with Jawaharlal Nehru's encouragement) following his release from prison and organized a group of likeminded leftists known as the "Royists" within its ranks. Roy's relationship to the Congress leadership was always tense—although he was initially embraced by Nehru, Roy was always suspicious of Nehru's alliance

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[66] Roy*, Fascism*, 62.

[67] Roy, *Fascism*, 53-54. For a nuanced engagement with Indian nationalist 'volkish' discourses and their affinities with European fascism that does not reduce these connections simply to an imitation of Europe (and in this sense seems to share something with Roy's analysis), see Benjamin Zachariah, 'At the Fuzzy Edges of Fascism: Framing the Volk in India' *South Asia: Journal of South Asia Studies* Vol. 38, no. 4 (2015), pp. 639-655.

[68] Roy, *India's Message* (Renaissance Publishers, 1950), 161.

[69] Roy, *Fascism*, 40.

[70] Roy, *New Orientation* (Ajanta Publications, 1946), 119.

with Gandhi, which he took as evidence of Nehru's shallow commitments to modernism and socialism (Roy's antipathy towards Gandhi was reciprocated; upon Roy's release from prison Gandhi suggested he "render mute service to the independence struggle.")[71] Roy earned himself few friends in the Congress especially after the outbreak of WWII when he urged Indians to unconditionally back the British war effort. His exhortations fell on deaf ears and the Congress leadership insisted that Indian support for the war effort was conditional on Britain granting immediate independence. Roy opposed the brewing "Quit India" movement and maintained that India's independence was inevitable, predicting (correctly) that Britain would be unable to hold onto its vast empire regardless of the war's outcome. The question that weighed on Roy was this: even if they won independence from Britain, could Indians (or any peoples) really be free in a world where Nazi Germany triumphed? For Roy, the Congress position seemed motivated by a narrow nationalistic refusal to face a global fascist menace, and he left the organization in 1940.

Roy's concerns about fascism's potential success in India did not end with the Allied victory in 1944. Rather, with Indian independence on the horizon, the risk of fascism seemed more pressing than ever. By this point though, Roy was rather far removed from a Marxist theory of fascism, and he clearly understood fascism principally as a philosophical phenomenon, driven by ideas rather than class forces. This line of argument had important implications for Roy's understanding of antifascism and would prove key to his coming humanist conversion. As he put it in a 1946 speech:

> Fascism will adopt different methods in India. In addition to the nationalist sentiment, backwardness of the masses, and persistence of mediaevalist tradition in the intellectual and cultural life of the country, are the greatest assets of Indian Fascism. In order to fight it effectively, we shall also have to forge suitable weapons. […] With the weapons of enlightenment and rationalism, our vanguard will fight cultural backwardness, obscurantism and blind faith. In India, Fascism must be fought on the cultural and ideological front.[72]

In short, Indian fascism's "greatest assets," namely "cultural backwardness, obscurantism and blind faith" were all ideological conditions. Fascism was not only dependent on, but even equated with, traditionalism and superstition, and needed to be combatted above all by a secular

[71] Gandhi quoted in Manjapra, *M.N. Roy,* 116.
[72] Roy, "History Corroborates Radicalism" [1946] in *Beyond Communism* (Ajanta Publication, 1960), 61.

liberal education in the principles of "enlightenment and rationalism" rather than class struggle. Having diagnosed fascism in idealist terms as the manifestation of a reactionary anti-Enlightenment philosophical project, and insisting that "fascism was neither a class ideology nor economically determined," Roy believed that fascism needed to be fought, above all, by championing the liberal values he argued it was premised on rejecting.[73] This was the lesson Roy drew from the failure of the communist movement to arrest the rise of fascism in Europe, an outcome he feared and hoped to pre-empt in India.

PART THREE: A NEW HUMANISM

Roy's *New Humanism: A Manifesto,* published in 1947, lays out a rather different political project than that he had espoused in his Comintern years. With a clear sense of the fragility of the post-War peace and the enduring danger of fascism, Roy argued that the most urgent task of the twentieth century was the cultivation of a new radical vision that would champion individual freedom, human rationality, and "the cultural heritage of modern civilization."[74] Rather than Marxism, Roy calls for a return to the liberal tradition of the Enlightenment, describing his political vision as a "radicalism" that "thinks in terms neither of nation nor of class; its concern is man; it conceives freedom as freedom of the individual."[75] Ethics, morality, reason, and human freedom became the watchwords of Roy's political project.

Roy explicitly defines his new humanism against the Marxist tradition. Roy retained a certain appreciation for the humanist dimensions of Marx's thought, but distanced himself decisively from Marx's philosophy of history, arguing that historical materialism underrated the significance of human agency in the construction of socialism and devalued the importance of ethics and moral judgment.[76] Roy is at pains in the 1947 *Manifesto* and in later works to detach liberal values from the growth of capitalism, arguing that historical materialism had, by treating liberalism as the self-serving ideology of a rising bourgeoisie, allowed communists to assume a dismissive and scornful attitude towards so-called "bourgeois freedoms" and neglect the importance of individual rights. Revealing a penchant for explaining complex political

[73] Roy, *Reason, Romanticism, and Revolution* [1952-55] (Ajanta Publications, 1989), 438.
[74] Roy, *New Humanism,* 9.
[75] Roy, *New Humanism*, 49.
[76] Roy, *New Humanism*, 9.

developments in terms of intellectual influences, Roy charged Hegel's dialectical philosophy with fostering an "immoralism" in Marx's work that had led directly to the establishment of totalitarian regimes and the "moral degeneration" of the communist movement.[77] This tendency to reduce political events and outcomes to philosophical antecedents is a common and revealing feature of Roy's late work. Schopenhauer, for instance, is held responsible for the "revolt against reason" that led directly to fascism while the Jacobin "Reign of Terror" is pinned squarely on the influence of Rousseau's philosophical "irrationalism."[78] Likewise, whatever positive value Marxism retained could only be redeemed by re-situating Marx's work in the long tradition of Enlightenment liberalism.

Roy held that the communists' prioritization of economic questions and corresponding "cynical attitude towards cultural values" had been politically disastrous and had fatally isolated the movement from the middle class.[79] Roy went further and argued that it had been a mistake for the socialist movement to ground itself in the "crude," uneducated working classes in the first place, asserting that "proletarian culture is a contradiction in terms."[80] Roy championed instead a middle-class radicalism, asserting that the educated middle classes were defined by their superior appreciation for "cultural and moral values as the outcome of human civilisation," as opposed to the "cultural and intellectual backwardness" of the proletariat.[81] Roy argued that communism's "failure to appreciate the role of ideas in history" and concomitant isolation from the middle class had also been particularly disastrous for Marxists' ability to understand and fight fascism.[82] Creating a future safe from fascism demanded regenerating "the moral and spiritual values of the so-called bourgeois culture," a task for which he believed the proletarian movement poorly qualified.[83]

As the prior discussion implies, one of the most dramatic reversals following from Roy's rejection of Marxism was his near-total loss of confidence in the peasantry and proletariat as revolutionary subjects, and his favouring instead of an appeal to the educated middle-classes.[84]

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[77] Roy, *New Humanism,* 29.
[78] Roy, *Reason, Romanticism, and Revolution,* 438; 209.
[79] Roy, *New Humanism,* 41.
[80] Roy, *New Humanism,* 41.
[81] Roy, *New Humanism*, 37; 41.
[82] Roy, *Scientific Politics,* 67.
[83] Roy, *New Humanism*, 13.
[84] In the early 1940s, Roy argued that Indian radicals should embrace a "Twentieth Century Jacobinism" modeled after the French Revolution, not the Russian. See: Roy, *Scientific Politics* (Renaissance Publishers, 1942).

In another sense, revolutionary agency was not framed in terms of class at all, but simply as an individual, intellectual disposition—as Roy put it in a 1946 lecture (when he was still trying to square such claims with his lingering Marxism), "the appeal to revolt…must be addressed to individual men and women, particularly to *those who are qualified* to appreciate human values."[85] As Roy became almost single-mindedly focussed on combatting the influence of religion and spirituality in national politics—the source of strength for fascism—he decisively abandoned his earlier stress on *following* the energy of the revolutionary masses, and now insisted that a secular education and rejection of spiritualism was the *precondition* for social change. If Marx and Engels had once declared that "the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves," Roy was increasingly removed from this project.[86]

New Humanism: Marxism or Liberalism?

Timothy Brennan has recently championed a renewed appreciation for Roy's humanism, suggesting that "[Roy] forces us to ask, in short, what the relationship is between communism and humanism."[87] For Brennan, the answer is undoubtedly that Roy's humanism is a *continuation* of his Marxism, and that his example should serve to revive a kind of Marxist humanism. As Brennan argues, Roy's humanism "was an extension and refinement of the philosophical sources that informed his communist internationalism of the 1920s and 30s."[88] Elsewhere too he suggests that "humanism was for Roy the logical, secular, extra-party version of interwar Marxism."[89] If there are certain elements of continuity between Roy's Marxism and his humanism, this strong insistence on continuity can only be sustained by neglecting Roy's own account of his intellectual trajectory. If Roy was, for a time, as Brennan puts it, a "communist who was also a humanist," he later became a humanist who *was not* a communist, and one who understood his humanism precisely as a *rejection* of communism.[90] In short, Roy's

[85] Roy, *New Orientation,* 133. Emphasis added.

[86] Marx and Engels, "Circular Letter to August Bebel, Wilhelm Leibknecht, Wilhelm Bracke and Others" [1879] in *MECW 24*, 269.

[87] Brennan, "Future Interrupted: The Subjunctive Nationalism of M.N. Roy," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 122 no. 2 (2023), 308.

[88] Brennan, "Future Interrupted," 309.

[89] Timothy Brennan, "Introduction: Humanism's Other Story" in *For Humanism: Explorations in Theory and Politics*, eds. David Alderson and Robert Spencer (Pluto Press, 2017), 5.

[90] Brennan, "Future Interrupted," 308.

understanding of the relationship between communism and humanism differs substantially, I argue, from Brennan's.

Brennan subtly attempts to contain Roy's rejection of Marxism by treating it as a narrower rejection of *Stalinism*. Roy certainly was an astute critic of Stalinism and Stalin, who had driven Roy to flee the Soviet Union. Many of Roy former comrades would later fall victim to Stalin's brutal purges. As discussed already, Roy deplored the growing lack of democracy within the Soviet Union, and he was appalled, in particular, by the deleterious impact of this tendency on the practice of proletarian internationalism. He also objected to other features of Stalin's rule, particularly the "Third Period" policy of the late 1920's and early 1930's. But while Roy, to his credit, never became a rabid anti-communist Cold Warrior (unlike some contemporaries who followed a similar path), his critique of Marxism did not stop with Stalin. Roy does not only reject dogmatic interpretations of historical materialism, or the cult of personality, but abandons other core principles of the Marxist tradition, including the commitment to class struggle, revolutionary politics, and the self-emancipation of the working class. Roy deliberately frames his humanism as a *liberal* political project, not a communist one. His humanism certainly reminds us liberalism can be a "fighting creed," but it is a liberalism, nonetheless.[91]

Roy's humanism can be productively understood as a retreat to a Young Hegelian problematic. Roy held that Marx had fundamentally underappreciated the radicalism of the Enlightenment critique of religion (for Roy, this was another lamentable casualty of historical materialism), and he insisted that "to undermine [religious] authority … was a revolutionary act of fundamental significance."[92] Roy's late work increasingly returns to the writings of Feuerbach, whose work Roy believed to be of "immense value" for "backwards countries like India."[93] In a recognizably Feuerbachian register, Roy would often draw attention to the "rational" elements contained in Buddhist, Hindu, or Muslim philosophy, while insisting that this immanent rationality could only be realized through "the liquidation of the religious mode of

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[91] Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutman (Princeton University Press), 62.

[92] Roy, *Reason, Romanticism, Revolution*, 180. Roy's critique of Marx on this question is unconvincing—it is difficult to read the young Marx and come away thinking he underestimates the importance of religious criticism. It is, however, important to remember that Roy's access to Marx's works would have been much more limited than that of contemporary readers.

[93] Roy, *Letters from Jail*, 58.

thought," arguing that India must "come out of the darkness, if she desires to join the progressive march of humanity."[94] Like Feuerbach, Roy held that the real object of religious worship was humanity's own nature, which should be redirected towards a universal love of humanity itself. Roy's late humanism also shares in the Young Hegelian assumption that a popular embrace of atheism would lead, almost automatically, to the disintegration of all social and political antagonisms, which he imagined lay downstream of philosophical irrationalism and religious belief.

As I discussed in the previous chapter, Marx and Engels's reservations about humanism were motivated principally by a sense that humanism was a depoliticizing discourse that risked undermining the autonomy of the proletarian struggle and invited a conciliatory posture towards liberalism. Althusser would later echo Marx's fears while dissenting from a contemporary "humanistic" turn within Marxist thought in the 1960's (albeit one that tried to maintain the link to Marxism more strongly than Roy did). Althusser argued that "theoretical humanism" was not the *antidote* to a damaging teleological tendency within Marxist thought but its *source*; the teleology of the productive forces shared with the Young Hegelians a philosophy of history that saw "humanity" itself as the *subject* of a progressive historical trajectory.[95] To a considerable extent Roy confirms these political and theoretical fears. While Roy rejected an understanding of history as the progressive development of the productive forces, he substituted it for a reading of history as the progressive development of human nature and rationality. As I have noted already, Roy also explicitly positioned this as a reconciliation with liberalism.

Some readers have found it tempting to describe Roy's late humanism as a welcome break with Marxist materialist teleology.[96] There is no question that Roy rejected economic determinism, and in a certain sense his claim that "revolutions are heralded by iconoclastic ideas conceived by gifted individuals" along with his corresponding refusal to tether political and intellectual possibility to the development of the productive forces may, on a certain reading, seem to offer a way out of an evolutionist historical logic Dipesh Chakrabarty has critically

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[94] Roy, *Heresies of the Twentieth Century: Philosophical Essays* (Pradeep Karyalaya Publishers, 1940), 128-129.

[95] See especially Althusser's essays "On the Young Marx" [1960] and "Contradiction and Overdetermination" [1962] in *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (Verso, 2005).

[96] This is very much the thrust of Manjapra's biography which denies, in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, that Roy had any interest in "grand theory narratives." Manjapra, *M.N. Roy,* xvii.

referred to as "the waiting room of history."[97] But rather than abandoning a teleological philosophy of history, Roy falls back on an earlier Enlightenment narrative of history as the gradual, progressive triumph of "reason" over "irrationalism"—a view that Roy himself acknowledges, despite his distaste for the "immoralism" of Hegelian dialectics, is closer to Hegel's philosophy of history than Marx's.[98] In Roy's terms, the progressive course of history was not propelled by class struggle, the development of modes of production, or the rise and fall of nations, but rather, by the progressive development of reason, science and rationalism. As he put it, "the history of thought is key to the history of civilization."[99] In this sense, as Roy acknowledges, the "novelty" of his "New Humanism" was in fact fairly limited. Roy clarifies that his is a *new* humanism "because it is Humanism enriched, reinforced and elaborated by scientific knowledge and social experience gained during the centuries of modern civilisation."[100]

Roy's obsessive preoccupation with India's temporal "backwardness" underscores the teleological dimensions of his humanism. In his Comintern years, Roy had emphasized the *contemporaneity* of Indian and European struggles, insisting that European and Indian workers were united in a common revolutionary movement directed against a global process of capitalist exploitation. Roy now emphasized a great temporal distance between India and Europe, identifying India's present with Europe's past, writing that "in this country, we live in the atmosphere of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries."[101] Moreover, where Roy had once rightly maintained that "feudalism" was an inappropriate lens through which to understand a country in which agricultural production had been thoroughly integrated into the world market, he now emphasized the persistence of a "feudal mentality" as the source of a cultural and intellectual lag.[102] To clarify by way of a phrase from Harootunian, Roy's culturalist concerns can be read as a "substitution of modernity for capitalism," which enabled a framing of colonized societies as sites of a "premodern culture, whose distance [from Europe] could only be overcome by rejecting an indigenous heritage and embracing the promise of modern rationality."[103]

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[97] Roy, *Reason, Romanticism, Revolution*, 310; Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 8.
[98] Roy, *Reason, Romanticism, Revolution*, 5.
[99] Roy, *Reason, Romanticism, Revolution*, 6.
[100] Roy, *New Humanism*, 50.
[101] Roy, *Scientific Politics* (Renaissance Publishers, 1942), 180.
[102] Roy, *New Orientation,* 133.
[103] Harry Harootunian, "Some Thoughts on Comparability and the Space-Time Problem," *boundary 2* 32 no. 2 (2005), 32.

One of the ironies of Roy's late humanism, which goes unrecognized by many readers, is that Roy actually becomes far *more* rather than *less* committed to a teleological, stadial logic as a liberal humanist than he had been as a Marxist. Within the Comintern milieu Roy largely rejected the logic of "stages," appealing to the revolutionary agency of the Indian masses to leap ahead of the assumed developmentalist path, and he often advocated a fairly minimal role for the Communist Party. In his later years Roy became more, rather than less, insistent on the need for a quasi-Leninist vanguard of Enlightened radicals (albeit one shorn of any claim to represent the proletariat) tasked, above all, with steering India towards secular modernity. The result of all this, I claim, is that Roy's late humanism does not so much *reject* the evolutionary logic of what Chakrabarty has branded the "waiting room of history" as it *reconceives* the way out of it in *idealist* rather than *materialist* terms. India's "backwardness," Roy argued, would be overcome not by class struggle or the development of capitalism, but through the propagation of "modern" and "rational" ideas. It was this renewed confidence in the progressive, rational direction of history that licensed Roy's rejection of Marxist revolutionary politics, and in his *Reason, Romanticism, and Revolution,* he faulted Marxism for "laying too much stress on revolutionary action," concluding that "revolution only mars the salutary and uninterrupted progress instead of being truly beneficial for mankind."[104]

The Politics of New Humanism

Roy's new political vision had difficulty resonating as a popular project. In 1944 Roy drew up a "draft constitution" for India, which represents in many respects a rather radical and imaginative vision for the soon-to-be independent country, enshrining collective ownership of industry, strong provisions for labour, and a form of direct democracy based in local people's committees.[105] And yet Roy also made provisions for a "Council of State" made up of educated professionals from fields such as engineering, science, law, and medicine. In his *New Humanism: A Manifesto* Roy explains that he expected this Council to serve a transitional role until such a time as "the intellectual and moral level of the entire community [was] raised

[104] Roy, *Reason, Romanticism, Revolution*, 413.

[105] 'Constitution of Free India: a Draft,' [1944], Constitution of India Project [https://www.constitutionofindia.net/historical_constitutions/constitution_of_free_india___a_draft__m_n__roy__1944__1st%20January%201944, accessed 15 Aug. 2022]

considerably," and would thus be ready for democracy.[106] In Roy's view, "men of science, intelligence … and moral excellence" would, by virtue of their education in "human values," remain above base political motives and thus ably guide the citizenry towards "spiritual freedom."[107] This rather patrician vision of intellectual leadership underscores the extent to which the late Roy had decidedly abandoned his earlier investment in the revolutionary masses, and now saw secular education as a precondition for social change. Where Roy offered in many respects a more radical and egalitarian political vision of a post-independence India than many competing factions, his route to that end afforded little role for popular enthusiasm.

Roy's emphasis on the necessity of a secular, liberal education as the precondition for social change marks a considerable departure from the earlier kind of revolutionary political education he once championed. Any sense of the insurgent energy of the oppressed masses is conspicuously absent from Roy's late humanism. Where Roy had once insisted, in 1922, that "our task is to develop in the minds of the masses this consciousness of their own power … they will do the rest," by this period Roy's understanding of liberal education as a prerequisite for democratic participation has more in common with the liberal political philosopher John Stuart Mill's claim that India and other Asian societies were too backwards and bound by "the despotism of Custom" to be governed democratically, but needed instead, a period of "benevolent" tutelage to be prepared for self-rule.[108]

Roy was of course highly sensitive to the dangers of custom and tradition. He was particularly alive to the possibility that fascism, understood as "archaism self-consciously yoked to capital" (although he would increasingly emphasize the "archaic" over the "capitalist") could draw on the living memories of a precapitalist social world to deeply oppressive ends. Roy was also right to reject the highly instrumentalized and philistine approach to culture that prevailed under Stalin's rule, which subordinated art to propagandism. His own cultural investments, however, skew towards a pronounced elitism. Roy was hardly alone in framing his *humanism* as

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[106] Roy, *New Humanism,* 62.

[107] Roy, *New Humanism*, 62.

[108] Mill was for many years an agent of the East India Company. For an insightful discussion of Mill's "imperial liberalism" see: Jennifer Pitts, "James and John Stuart Mill: The Development of Imperial Liberalism in Britain" in *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 123-162. Roy discusses Mill and the Utilitarians quite favourably in *Reason, Romanticism, and Revolution*, but does not address Mill's justifications for colonial rule. Roy's arguments nonetheless resonate with Mill's suggestion in *On Liberty* that those living in "backwards states of society" must be "guided towards their own improvement by conviction or persuasion." Mill, *On Liberty* [1859], (Project Gutenberg, 2011), https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/34901; Roy, *Reason, Romanticism, and Revolution,* 345-346.

a kind of cultural allegiance towards a particular intellectual tradition and high literary culture.[109] Roy has decidedly less time for vernacular, popular, and traditional cultural production. As we have seen, he dismisses "proletarian culture" as "a contradiction in terms," and he sees little emancipatory value in a revival of local culture or institutions. He does not, for instance, entertain the possibility, as Marx once did in the case of the Russian *mir*, or as Fanon would in the context of Algerian struggle, that the "archaic" could prove the basis of a new liberated future.

In contrast to Roy's late political isolation, Gandhi—who Roy continued to see as a political rival—had infinitely more success than Roy as a leader of a mass movement. Gandhi ultimately understood much better than Roy the enduring appeal of popular social forms that had not been displaced by capital and which maintained an abiding life and promise in the present. As Ken Post puts it, Gandhi's "ability to interpellate his own discourse … far outstripped any other Indian movement."[110] After Gandhi's 1948 assassination, Roy would write positively, if backhandedly, of the "humanist" elements of the Gandhi's appeal, begrudgingly recognizing his success and concluding that he would "be remembered for having vaguely visualized a humanist idea, while groping in the twilight of medievalism."[111] Although Roy is in many respects an astute critic of Gandhi's political role, he could never quite grasp the source of Gandhi's appeal, which is less a problem in its own right than it is indicative of a more tragic resistance to any kind of spiritually-inflected politics from below, of the kind engaged at length by the Subaltern Studies historians.[112] As later biographers have suggested, Roy's inability to engage with political currents that did not measure up to his standards of secular rationality surely contributed in some part to his own political alienation in India.[113]

The Cosmopolitan Critique of Internationalism

[109] Although Roy takes a much broader, more cosmopolitan view of culture, his sense of humanism is quite consistent with the original German humanists of the nineteenth century, who championed the traditions of classical Greece as essential to realizing the "humanity" of the pupil.

[110] Ken Post, *Revolution's Other World,* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1997), 134.

[111] Roy, 'The Message of the Martyr' in *Men I Met* (Lavani Publishing House, 1968), 29; 31.

[112] See for instance: Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working-Class History: Bengal 1890 to 1940* (Princeton University Press, 1989).

[113] Haithcox, *Communism and Nationalism in India: M.N. Roy and Comintern Policy 1920-1939* (Princeton University Press, 1971), 257-258.

Before moving to a conclusion, I want to address a final aspect of Roy's late critique of his earlier Marxist commitments. Having once bemoaned the Soviet retreat from internationalism, Roy later strongly rejected the language of internationalism for what he saw as its complicity with *nationalism.* In the years following Lenin's death in 1924, Stalin sought to formalize Lenin's interventions into a system of thought branded "Leninism," sanding down some of the nuance of Lenin's earlier arguments.[114] Leninism downplayed tensions between communist internationalism and patriotic nationalism, shunting aside Lenin's reservations about nationalism and his caution that support for national liberation be a "negative" project. In the years following WWII, Roy lamented this trajectory, arguing that the Soviet Union, under Stalin's leadership, had been "supporting colonial nationalism indiscriminately."[115] He likewise charged the European communist parties with having become "rabid protagonists of nationalism" for the purposes of maintaining political support in their respective countries.[116] In Roy's view, this "indiscriminate" support for nationalism had profoundly damaged the prospects for global communism.

In his "new humanist" period Roy abandons the language of internationalism altogether, embracing instead the term "cosmopolitanism" and its more liberal connotations. Roy's cosmopolitan humanism has been read by some thinkers, like Brennan, as a logical outcome of his earlier communist internationalism.[117] To be sure, Roy's vision of a liberated human future is, in the final analysis, not altogether different from what the communists dreamed of: Roy defends a vision of an egalitarian world without exploitation, no longer divided by the borders of nation states, in which human reason, not the imperatives of capital, guides our social and political lives. However, the emphasis on continuity elides the fact that Roy's cosmopolitanism is no longer articulated in terms of global class struggle, but gestures instead towards a global network of enlightened, secular intellectuals. Claims for continuity not only obscure this unfortunate feature of Roy's late political thought but also miss a perceptive criticism Roy makes of how internationalism had come to be understood. In his *New Humanism: A Manifesto,* Roy asserts that his "cosmopolitan humanism" is *opposed* to "internationalism," arguing that the

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[114] Salar Mohandesi, *Red Internationalism: Anti-Imperialism and Human Rights in the Global Sixties and Seventies* (Cambridge University Press, 2023), 37-40.

[115] Roy, *If I Were Stalin* [1946] (Renaissance Publishers, 1988), 28.

[116] Roy, *If I Were Stalin,* 25.

[117] Brennan argues that "the [intellectual] space Roy created was very specifically internationalist." Brennan, "Future Interrupted," 304.

latter "presupposes the existence of autonomous National States." Roy asserts, in contrast, that his ideal of a "World Government … is not compatible with the continuation of National States."[118] His humanist ideals, Roy argues, "can be realized only … in a cooperative commonwealth embracing the whole human race."[119] While Roy's vision of a "World Government" beyond the nation state does not receive much elaboration, nor does he offer a clear route towards its realization, his work does nonetheless contain a prescient warning that "a solution of the world crisis cannot be found within the boundaries of National States."[120]

As Roy critically recognized, the vision of internationalism expounded by the Comintern, which Roy once championed, was one which sought to overcome nationalism by first *promoting* it, at least among the "oppressed nations." It had become, largely, an *internationalism* of *nationalisms*. Thus, after the Russian Revolution, the Soviet leadership went about fostering and promoting the growth of national consciousness among different peoples within the Soviet Union, organizing the federation along national lines, and encouraging communities who had not previously done so to think of themselves as belonging to "nations."[121] This vision of internationalism, which Roy had some hand in shaping, proved, for a time, remarkably politically effective. It enabled anticolonial communists to align themselves with popular nationalist movements, and to conceive of their struggles for the *nation* as simultaneously a fight for *communism.* As we will see in the following chapter, Frantz Fanon's idea of national struggle follows something of the same dialectical logic: one can only realize a *post-national* future by way of fostering a "national consciousness." In short, one can only transcend the nation by going *through* it. Even Gandhi shared, to some extent, a similar understanding of internationalism, writing in 1925 that "it is impossible for one to be internationalist without being a nationalist. Internationalism is possible only when nationalism becomes a fact."[122] Roy registers an important doubt here, noting that strengthening national identities and building national states will not necessarily lead beyond the nation. In fact, as the national liberation sequence wound down, the alliance with nationalism quite often ended up turning communists into nationalists, rather than nationalists into communists. Roy ends up quite critical of this dialectical logic and

[118] Roy, *New Humanism,* 50.
[119] Roy, *Beyond Communism,* 135.
[120] Roy, *Beyond Communism,* 135.
[121] Yuri Slezkine, "The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism," *Slavic Review* 53, no. 2 (1994), 414-452.
[122] Gandhi, "Nationalism v. internationalism" [1925] in *Young India: 1924-1926* (S. Ganesan, 1927), 1292.

favoured a vision that offered no concession to nationalist conceits. Roy's position is, however, certainly informed by his own context: India won its independence in 1947, and Roy saw no use in fanning national sentiment any further.[123] But India's independence was only an early victory amidst a growing wave—the era of national liberation struggles was just beginning, and the Leninist vision of internationalism was yet far from exhausted.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has been largely critical of Roy's late humanism. In many respects I take Roy's intellectual trajectory as confirming Marx's fears that the language of humanism signals an aversion to class struggle and a conciliation with liberalism. Indeed, Roy explicitly argues as much, although he sees this in much more positive terms. Roy was, of course, reacting to a political trajectory that Marx could not have anticipated, and he was right to argue that many aspects of Marxism would need to be rethought in light of twentieth century experience. Roy witnessed the political exhaustion of the Comintern project firsthand, and his humanism reflects in many ways a response to that story. While Roy's life and work is in part a testament to the failures of twentieth century communism, especially the betrayal of internationalism, I think Roy ultimately abandons too much of the tradition. But while my approach to Roy's humanism has been largely critical, I would like to draw attention to a feature of his thought that unites Roy's Marxist and humanist periods, namely Roy's insistence on the generic human quality of the Indian freedom struggle. I will also first respond to a tendency to depict Roy as a "foreign" or even "colonizing" figure in Indian political life.[124]

Some readers have had a difficult time facing up to some of the challenges Roy's late work presents. Kris Manjapra, for instance, frames Roy as a figure animated throughout his life by "religious sensibilities" whose work "blurs distinctions…between the 'spiritual' and the 'secular.'"[125] Manjapra describes Roy, quite bizarrely, as a consistently "Swadeshi-

[123] Michael Goebel comments that Roy was, despite his undeniable internationalist commitments, and inveterate opposition to nationalism, always something of a "methodological nationalist" insofar as his primary political interests were focussed on India. Goebel, "Transnational solidarity or diaspora nationalism? The global career of M.N. Roy, 1915-1930," *European Review of History—Revue européene d'histoire* 21, no. 4 (2014), 495.

[124] This is the argument of, for instance, Michael Ortiz, "'Disown Gandhi or Be Damned': M.N. Roy, Gandhi and fascism," *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 21, no. 3 (2020).

[125] Manjapra, *M.N Roy,* 168.

Luxemburgist" thinker, a designation intended to signal both an ongoing debt to religious sensibilities and commitment to the revolutionary agency of India's oppressed.[126] This framing tells us more about who Manjapra *wishes* Roy was than it clarifies Roy's own commitments; after all, these are two features of Roy's earlier nationalist and communist periods that he most decisively *abandons* in his later years. Rather than "blurring" distinctions between the spiritual and the secular, Roy became preoccupied above all on *clarifying* and insisting upon this distinction—to the extent that he almost completely abandons his earlier confidence in the revolutionary potential of the masses.

While I do not share Manjapra's somewhat fanciful and hagiographic reading of Roy, I am nonetheless sensitive to an intellectual dilemma to which Manjapra seems to be responding.[127] Manjapra's efforts to illustrate a thematic continuity across Roy's life, focussing especially on his Swadeshi origins, are best read as an attempt to refute the long-standing image of Roy as a foreign interloper in the Indian political scene. I am wholly in agreement with Manjapra when he claims that Roy's internationalism challenges the fixation with an inward-looking cultural authenticity (often juxtaposed against a foreign "universalism") that has become a common theme, for instance, in the scholarship of the Subaltern Studies collective.[128] And yet Manjapra's often strained attempts to make Roy a consistently "neo-Swadeshi" thinker seems to betray its own insecurities about Roy's "authenticity"—as if to say that Roy's Marxism perhaps *should* be read as foreign and colonising, if it was not in fact a re-articulation of his Swadeshi commitments.

We should reject any reading that positions Roy as a kind of "foreign" or "colonizing" figure simply by virtue of his Marxism or humanism, and we need not twist our reading of him

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[126] Both labels are somewhat confounding, even as descriptions of Roy's earlier communist period. Although Manjapra frames Roy's interventions in his debate with Lenin as essentially consistent with his Swadeshi ambitions, it is difficult to get any sense from Roy's own writing that he thought of Marxism as a way of rehashing his earlier Swadeshi commitments. In contrast to Manjapra's reading of the Swadeshi movement as a "deterritorialized" project that looked far beyond a nationalist horizon, Roy's writings from the period largely reject the movement for its "political nihilism, social confusion and mystic religious orthodoxy" (Roy, *India in Transition*, 339). And while Manjapra insists on labelling Roy a "Luxemburgist" throughout his book as a way of highlighting Roy's undeniable early confidence in proletarian spontaneity (which is true only of his Comintern years, not his later life), Roy himself never acknowledged any great debt to Luxemburg. Manjapra's comparison also misses the fact that Luxemburg's own confidence in spontaneous mass action *extended only to the European working class*. On this score, Roy was undoubtedly closer to Lenin.

[127] Sanjay Seth identifies a hagiographic bent to Manjapra's treatment of Roy. See: Seth, Review of *M.N. Roy: Marxism and Colonial Cosmopolitanism* by Kris Manjapra, *The American Historical Review* 116, no. 4 (2011), 1110.

[128] Manjapra, *M.N. Roy,* xiii.

in order to do so. Such treatments not only replicate, as Manjapra puts it, a fundamentally colonial distinction between "the radically local nature of Indian societies versus the universality of Western civilization," but threaten to disqualify countless Indians besides Roy from the position of legitimate interlocutor in Indian politics.[129] This approach can only leave us with an impoverished understanding of anticolonial intellectual history. Such readings also generally depend on a rather idealist understanding of colonialism, abstracted from material struggles against empire. After all, the British obviously did not think Roy a reliable ally of a colonial episteme when they threw him in jail for six years. While for many Indian nationalists the struggle against Britain was a spiritual and civilizational undertaking, Roy's *India in Transition* makes an enduringly powerful case to the contrary.

Marxism offered Roy a way of writing India's history that was opposed to both colonialist propaganda and nationalist myth making. As Roy argued in *India in Transition*, both nationalists and imperialists were united in a shared assumption that the conflict between India and Britain stemmed from an unbridgeable cultural or civilizational difference. Both camps, Roy claimed, were "bad readers of history," noting that "the imperialist distorts history to serve the purposes of insidious propaganda; while the nationalism of a subject people is naturally on the defensive."[130] Roy had little time for the defensive nationalism he had once espoused in his earliest years of political activism. He observed that the desire to refute colonial propaganda had led Indian nationalists into what we might call a self-Orientalizing position, bent on affirming India's essential difference from the West, defending long-dead kings, or vindicating India's spiritual superiority. Roy was critical of this fixation with recovering the "greatness" of India's past which offered little understanding of the basic economic facts of colonial rule. As he put it, sarcastically:

> Thanks to the painstaking researches of some modern historians, one can learn how many sacks of kishmish the great Aurangzeb consumed in his life or how the noble Shirajadawlla has been painted in such a black colour by the English writers; but a scrutinizing study of such impressive volumes provides one with but little information as to the economic condition of the toiling masses.[131]

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[129] Kris Manjapra, "Introduction," in *Cosmopolitan Thought Zones: South Asia and the Global Circulation of Ideas*, ed. Kris Manjapra and Sugata Bose (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 5.

[130] Roy, *India in Transition,* 295.

[131] Roy, *India in Transition*, 186.

Roy argued that by accepting a distinction between Indian "spiritualism" and Western "materialism," Indian nationalists had also unproductively disavowed the intellectual tools necessary to address and overcome India's situation. Just as India's conquest had not been due to any spiritual failing, neither were Europe's technological or political achievements the mark of any civilizational superiority. As Roy insisted, and would continue to insist long after he had abandoned Marxism, Europe's "achievements" were not "the outcome of a particular European civilization," but belonged, rightly, to "every human community." [132] *India in Transition* concludes with an enduringly powerful argument against nationalist narrow-mindedness, insisting that there was no shame in learning from European intellectual traditions, especially Marxism, which offered an analysis of the capitalist transformations India was going through.

Much contemporary post/decolonial critique frames colonialism as a homogenizing force and locates anticolonial resistance in the endurance of cultural practices that resist assimilation. Roy and others of his generation advanced a very different argument. As Manu Goswami has argued, anticolonial internationalists of Roy's generation "sought to establish commensurability across worlds conventionally deemed discrete and disparate."[133] This is certainly true of Roy, who was always adamant that "the struggle between India and Britain is not a cultural one, as Imperialism likes to preach."[134] Noting that colonialism itself relied on a logic of cultural incommensurability, Roy saw little liberatory value in affirming Indian difference. Roy insisted on Indian and European *commensurability*, united by generic human commonality. Long after he had abandoned his confidence in history's "material laws," in his *Memoirs* Roy still admired the way his *India in Transition* depicted India "not only as the land of Gods and Saints, but also as populated by mortal human beings with identical sorrows, hopes and aspirations as their kind throughout the world had."[135] Although he would soon abandon his faltering revolutionary aspirations, for a brief window in the mid 1940's, Roy attached his humanism to a revolutionary struggle for freedom, one which recalled, and reinterpreted, the spark of his earliest Swadeshi radicalism. As he put it in 1946:

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[132] Roy, *India in Transition,* 320.

[133] Manu Goswami, "Imaginary Futures and Colonial Internationalisms," *American Historical Review* 117, no. 5 (2012), 1464.

[134] Roy, "On Patriotism," in *Selected Works*, *Vol. 2*, 226.

[135] Roy, *Memoirs*, 555.

> The old fashioned revolutionaries thought in terms of freedom. In those days, we had not read Marx. We did not know about the existence of the proletariat. Still, many spent their lives in jail and went to the gallows. There was no proletariat to propel them. They were not conscious of class struggle. They did not have the dream of Communism. *But they had the human urge to revolt against the intolerable conditions of life*. They did not know exactly how those conditions could be changed. But they tried to change them, anyhow. I began my political life with that spirit, and I still draw my inspiration rather from that spirit than from the three Volumes of *Capital* or three hundred volumes by the Marxists.[136]

In my view, Roy was unable to hold on to this revolutionary spirit due to its tension with his rather elitist approach to secularism—Roy invested his political hopes above all in those he thought adequately educated in "human values," rather than all who might be animated by the "human urge to revolt."

While Roy's philosophical humanism ultimately marks a retreat from active political life, its interventionary intent should still be appreciated and underscored. Roy's heavy stress on the universal significance the Enlightenment is motivated, in part, by a clear rejection of a cultural nationalism that upheld Hinduism's unique spiritual superiority and understood intellectual traditions in national terms. One also detects in Roy's late work a rebuke to anti-Muslim sentiment in India. *Reason, Romanticism, and Revolution* draws repeated attention to the contribution of Islamic thinkers and recognizes that Islamic polities were havens for free thought in the medieval period, subtly undermining the European identity of the humanist tradition.[137] These commitments are more clearly laid out in his 1939 book, *The Historical Role of Islam: An Essay on Islamic Culture,* a work which explores the intellectual and political history of Islam with the clear aim of rescuing India's Islamic past from the denigration of Hindu nationalists.[138] Such commitments have an enduring value today; Roy was an early and perspicacious critic of the Hindutva ideology which is now so deeply and perniciously embedded in Indian political life. Roy was undeniably prescient about Hindu nationalism's rightward trajectory, and his work offers an invaluable reminder of fascism's ability to draw on and mobilise different traditions in

[136] M. N. Roy, *New Orientation* (Ajanta Publications, 1982), 121-2. Emphasis mine.

[137] As Timothy Brennan puts it, "everywhere one turns in Roy's ostensibly Eurocentric study, the intellectual mongrelization of 'Europe' is underscored." Brennan, "Future Interrupted," 314.

[138] Roy, *The Historical Role of Islam: An Essay on Islamic Culture* [1939]: https://www.marxists.org/archive/roy/1939/historical-role-islam/index.htm

different contexts, cautioning that an appeal to civilizational difference offers a weak bulwark against this threat.

Despite these and other salutary aspects of Roy's late political thought, however, his pivot to humanism nonetheless abandons some of the most inspiring features of his earlier Marxist period. In particular, Roy decidedly sheds his earlier confidence in the insurgent energies of the labouring classes and invests his hopes in middle class reformers who were steeped in "human values." Some Marxists have remained stubbornly unwilling to grant much legitimacy to the critique expounded, for instance, by the Subaltern Studies group, who have interrogated the exclusionary effects of post-Enlightenment thought in South Asia and the wider colonial world. Roy's example is one well worth considering in the context of these debates. Roy was, after all, an original and insightful Marxist revolutionary whose commitment to Enlightenment humanism proved, in the end, *so dear* that it led him away from Marxism entirely.

Marxists no doubt have a point when they fault postcolonial theorists for an overinvestment in critiquing "modernity" while neglecting colonialism's very material processes of exploitation, extraction, and dispossession. Although they defend, rather than reject it, Marxists have, perhaps, been less aware of their *own* investment in "modernity" as an "aesthetic, moral category."[139] Roy's example should complicate a simplistic opposition between "material conditions" and "culture." In his Comintern period Roy was wholly convinced that the Indian masses would prove immune to the appeal of culturalist arguments and would be motivated only by "material" demands. With his expectations confounded upon his return to India, Roy ultimately abandoned his commitment to class struggle and revolutionary politics altogether. Although there are many valuable insights to be gleaned from Roy's adamant critique of nationalism and his vigorous commitment to practicing a form of intellectual history that firmly resisted any "national" or "civilizational" enclosures, we should also be aware that Roy's example also rather reveals the depoliticizing potential of "humanism" on the grounds Marx and Engels so feared. However, if Roy's example ultimately attests to the depoliticizing potential of appeals to humanism, we will see in the next chapter how Frantz Fanon articulates a "new humanism" wedded to a decidedly revolutionary perspective.

[139] Himani Bannerji, "Building from Marx: Reflection on 'Race', Gender and Class," in *The Ideological Condition: Selected Essays on History, Race and Gender* (Brill, 2020), 8.

Chapter Three

Frantz Fanon: New Humanism Through and Beyond the Nation

For Europe, for ourselves, and for humanity, comrades, we must make a new start, develop a new way of thinking, and endeavor to create a new man.

—Frantz Fanon

Fanon's 1952 *Black Skin, White Masks* opens with an appeal to a "New Humanism" and concludes by decisively rejecting the search for a "Black past" that preoccupied the poets of the Negritude movement. As Fanon writes: "I am not a prisoner of History. I must not look for the meaning of my destiny in that direction." *Black Skin, White Masks* is a decidedly rebellious and defiant text, which anticipates a future in which humanity is free from the "alienation" of race and racism. Fanon, like the subjects of his book, "is looking for a fight." Although Fanon asserts that "*genuine disalienation* will have been achieved only when things, in the most materialist sense, have resumed their rightful place," the route to this "disalienation" is, in this early text, rather unclear. Fanon makes some brief gestures towards collective movements, such as the Vietnamese struggle against French colonialism, but *Black Skin, White Masks* does not devote any particular attention to questions of political form or organization; Fanon's rebellion in *Black Skin, White Masks* remains largely a question of personal, existential commitment. As he puts it: "If the white man challenges my humanity I will show him by weighing down on his life with all my weight of a man that I am not this *Y a bon Banania* figure that he persists in imagining I am."[1]

These features of *Black Skin, White Masks* have led to some pointed criticism over the years. Cedric Robinson, for instance, once lamented the "petit-bourgeois stink" of *Black Skin, White Masks*, as compared to the more revolutionary *Wretched of the Earth*.[2] While I do not share Robinson's harsh assessment of *Black Skin, White Masks,* it is certainly true that many features of Fanon's later, Algerian writing are notably absent in this early text.[3] In particular,

[1] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* [1952], trans. Richard Philcox (Grove Press, 2008), 204,197, xv, 203. "Y a bon Banania" was the slogan associated with a well-known racist caricature of a Senegalese soldier, used to sell breakfast food in France. See; David Macey, *Frantz Fanon: A Biography* (Verso, 2012), 28-29.

[2] Cedric Robinson, "The Appropriation of Frantz Fanon" *Race & Class* 35, no. 1 (1993), 82.

[3] For an insightful response to Robinson's critique see Lewis Gordon, *Fanon and the Crisis of European Man: An Essay on Philosophy and the Human Sciences* (Routledge, 1995), 89-93.

Black Skin, White Masks makes no demand for political independence for France's colonies. Even Fanon's 1952 article, "The 'North African Syndrome,'" which discusses colonial Algeria with great sensitivity, takes no stance on independence. Here Fanon concludes simply by stating that "over the whole territory of the French nation (the metropolis and the French Union), there are tears to be wiped away, inhuman attitudes to be fought, condescending ways of speech to be ruled out, men to be humanized."[4] As David Macey observes, the young psychiatrist who arrived in Algeria the following year was not yet "armed with any decisive truths or revolutionary doctrines … The Fanon of *Les Damnés de la terre* was a product of Algeria and its war of independence."[5]

Fanon's political horizons indeed changed dramatically after his move to colonial Algeria in 1953, where he witnessed the outbreak of the war for independence in 1954 and joined the Algerian National Liberation Front (FLN) in 1956. After resigning from his posting at Blida-Joinville Hospital, Fanon found himself immediately exiled from the colony. After a brief return to France, Fanon moved to Tunis, where he joined the FLN in exile. Here Fanon wrote for the FLN's paper *El Moudjahid* and later became a kind of roving diplomat for the Algerian cause, travelling to meetings in Rome, Accra, Bamako, and Conakray. Through his participation in the FLN Fanon became a fierce advocate for national independence, led by a national party, which he calls "the instrument of modern resistance."[6] Fanon's conception of the nation is decidedly forward-looking, inclusive, and primarily defined by a political commitment to liberation. Fanon's hope, made clear in the conclusion to *Wretched of the Earth*, is that the national struggle for independence would also be the impetus for a "new humanism"—a humanism which both represents a *pivot* away from a narrow, racial nationalism, but which is also realized *through* the national project. Although Fanon had also called for "new humanism" in the opening pages of *Black Skin, White Masks,* the vehicle of this new humanism is, in *Wretched of the Earth*, much more clearly defined.

Fanon's vision of a national revolution that would also become a *social* revolution and move towards more universalistic ambitions was one shared by many within the FLN. As Jeffrey James Byrne details, while the FLN's revolution began as a strictly "political" movement bent

[4] Fanon, "The 'North African Syndrome'" [1952] in *Toward the African Revolution*, trans. Hakoon Chevalier (Grove Press, 1964), 16.

[5] David Macey, *Frantz Fanon: A Biography* (Verso, 2000), 202

[6] Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth* [1963], trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 64.

only on achieving independence, the party was pulled towards a more socialist orientation through the diplomatic and material support communist countries offered their cause.[7] The Vietnamese communists, nodded to by Fanon in both *Black Skin, White Masks* and *Wretched of the Earth,* proved an especially inspiring example.[8] During their wars against France and the United States, the Vietnamese Communist Party positioned themselves as both *patriots* and *communists*. They saw little tension between these two orientations, as they were working within a "Leninist" tradition that "treated communism and nationalism as part of the same emancipatory process."[9] Although neither the FLN nor Fanon explicitly adopted a *communist* politics (in part due to their tense history with the French Communist Party), this vision of national liberation that linked patriotic nationalism to socialist transformation came to deeply inform their own politics.

Fanon had his own intellectual encounter with the Leninist tradition. Fanon spent January 1957 in France, before making his way to Tunis. Fanon's former colleague and biographer Alice Cherki reports that during this brief (and final) return to France, Fanon spent two weeks with Jean Ayme, a French psychiatrist, Trotskyist, and long-standing supporter of the Algerian cause. While hosting Fanon, Ayme reportedly lent his guest a copy of the transcripts of the first four Congresses of the Communist International. According to Cherki, "these documents had a special fascination for Fanon, and they accompanied him through many long nights."[10] In these pages Fanon would have encountered a communist tradition rather different from the one he knew, against which the Parti Communiste Français (PCF) of the 1950's could only be judged

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[7] Jeffrey James Byrne, *The Mecca of Revolution: Algeria, Decolonization and the Third World Order* (Oxford University Press, 2016).

[8] In 1954 the Viet Minh dealt a crushing blow against the French at Dien Bien Phu. The FLN began their own insurgency just months later. As Fanon put it in *Wretched of the Earth*: "the great victory of the Vietnamese people at Dien Bien Phu is no longer strictly speaking a Vietnamese victory. From July 1954 onward the colonial people have been asking themselves: 'what must we do to achieve a Dien Bien Phu? How should we go about it?'" *Wretched*, 30-31.

[9] Mohandesi, *Red Internationalism*, 46.

[10] Alice Cherki, *Frantz Fanon: A Portrait,* trans. Nadia Benabid (Cornell University Press, 2006), 93. Biographical details are drawn here from Cherki's memorable personal recollections. It is worth noting a discrepancy between biographical accounts: Cherki has Fanon staying with Ayme for two weeks in January 1957 before moving to the home of his friend Marcel Manville, a Martinican lawyer and member of the Parti Communiste Français (PCF), and arriving in Tunis in late February/March 1957. David Macey does not mention Fanon's time with Ayme and dates Fanon's arrival in Tunis to late January 1957. Cherki's recollections are, however, confirmed by Ayme himself, who in a 2007 interview recalled both that he hosted Fanon for a few weeks after his expulsion from Algeria and that he had lent Fanon the Comintern transcripts. Michel Minard and Jacques Tosquellas, "Entretein avec Jean Ayme" *Sud-Nord* 1, no. 22 (2007): https://doi.org/10.3917/sn.022.0119; Macey, *Frantz Fanon,* 299-305.

poorly. I think it reasonable to speculate that, given his own political commitments, Fanon would have been especially drawn to the debate between Roy and Lenin at the Second World Congress of the Comintern in 1920. We do know, at the very least, that Fanon read Lenin's writings on the "national question" with great attention.[11] Although Fanon never refers to Roy or Lenin directly in his writings, I argue here that some of his formulations in *Wretched of the Earth* indicate a clear familiarity with the terms of this earlier debate. In particular, Fanon's insistence that slogans of national liberation must come *before* social demands, and his criticism of the national bourgeoisie, are evidence that Fanon took an interest in and drew certain lessons from this revolutionary history. I will deal with these connections at more length in what follows.

This framing helps us contextualize Fanon's much-debated relationship to Marxism somewhat differently than other common approaches.[12] Scholars have often foregrounded a philosophical trajectory running from Hegel, the young Marx, the existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre (occasionally including Simone de Beauvoir), through to Fanon.[13] This is certainly a legitimate framing and these influences are clearly present in Fanon's work. However, this focus has tended to obscure a different lineage, one gestured to in Mohammed Harbi's postface to the 2002 French edition of *Les damnés de la terre*, which runs from the *late* Marx, through Lenin and proto-Third Worldist communists like M.N. Roy, Sultan Galiev and Tan Malaka, to Fanon and Mao.[14] This is more a lineage of political affinity than of direct textual influence—Fanon

[11] Fanon's personal library included a closely annotated volume of Lenin's writings on the "national question." Alongside other volumes of Lenin, Fanon's library also includes works by Marx, Engels, and Mao. We also know that Fanon was familiar with the writings of Leon Trotsky. "Frantz Fanon's Library" in *Alienation and Freedom*, eds. Jean Khalfa and Robert J.C. Young, trans. Steven Corcoran (Bloomsbury, 2018), 761-762; Cherki, *Frantz Fanon*, 16.

[12] This debate can be pithily summarized with reference to Fanon's measured insistence, early in *Wretched of the Earth,* that "a Marxist analysis should always be slightly stretched when it comes to addressing the colonial issue." Some believe that Fanon effects a far more dramatic departure from Marxism than is implied by a "stretching." Others argue, I think rightly, that Fanon's phrasing indicates an important fidelity to the Marxist tradition (a "stretch" is after all not a "break"). Fanon's distance from Marxism has been emphasized both by Africana as well as Afropessimist thinkers. For two such contributions see Reiland Rabaka, *Africana Critical Theory: Reconstructing the Black Radical Tradition, From W.E.B. DuBois and C.L.R. James to Frantz Fanon and Amilcar Cabral* (Lexington Books, 2009) and David Marriott, *Whither Fanon? Studies in the Blackness of Being* (Stanford University Press, 2018). For two works which situate Fanon's thought as a creative contribution to Marxist thought, see Nigel C. Gibson, *Fanon: The Postcolonial Imagination* (Polity, 2003) and Ato Sekyi-Otu, *Fanon's Dialectic of Experience* (Harvard University Press, 1996).

[13] See Lou Turner, "On the Difference Between the Hegelian and Fanonian Dialectic of Lordship and Bondage" in Lewis R. Gordon, ed. *Fanon: A Critical Reader* (Oxford, 1996); Peter Hudis, "Frantz Fanon's Contribution to Hegelian Marxism" *Critical Sociology* 43, no. 6 (2015); and Gibson, "Fanon and Marx Revisited," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 51, no. 4 (2020).

[14] Harbi, "Postface à l'édition de 2002," *Les damnés de la terre* (La Découverte, 2002), 309-310.

had likely not read the late Marx, nor was he necessarily familiar with figures like Galiev or Malaka.[15] He did, nonetheless, take a clear interest in the history of communist internationalism, and was attuned to currents of Third World Marxism which had been shaped by this earlier generation.[16] Although I situate Fanon in this line of revolutionary thinkers, my question is not whether or not Fanon is a "Marxist" or a "Leninist." Rather, I see Fanon engaging a set of political questions and problems which preoccupied this set of thinkers.

One of the questions I believe Fanon inherits from this tradition concerns the relationship between nationalism and socialism. Marx, Lenin, and Roy all saw national liberation as an important step towards internationalism and communism. Although he is less explicitly dedicated to a communist politics, Fanon has an important place in this tradition. It is striking that, like Roy, Fanon also turns to a "new humanism" that is defined against a narrow racial nationalism and (much more so in Fanon's case than Roy's) colonial racism. As we saw in the previous chapter, however, Roy's "new humanism" decisively rejects *any* rapprochement with nationalist ideology. Fanon is also very aware of the destructive potential of nationalism but, as we will see, he hews closer to a dialectical logic that tries to work *through* a nationalist program with the expectation that it will in its course transform into a more universal political project. There are other important differences between Roy's humanism and Fanon's. Whereas the content of Roy's new humanism is developed at great length, Fanon's new humanism does not receive similar elaboration. This is, as I will argue here, both a strength and a weakness in Fanon's thought. Fanon's most significant point of difference from Roy is that where Roy positions his humanism as a rejection of revolutionary politics, and comes to espouse a kind of middle class, Young Hegelian liberalism (of the sort which Marx feared would be the fruit of a "humanist" politics), Fanon's humanism retains a decidedly revolutionary orientation.

My approach throughout this dissertation has been to understand this set of thinkers' relationships to "humanism" principally through their political interventions. This stands at odds with prominent trends in Fanon scholarship. Some commentators, especially since the 1980's, have been eager to dispense with Fanon's humanism. In the 1980's such efforts were largely

[15] Cherki suggests that Fanon had not read much of Marx's work at all, beyond a handful of the early texts. Cherki, *Fanon*, 16.

[16] We know, for instance, that Fanon also took a particular interest in Trotskyism, and asked fellow Martinican Marcel Manville, a lawyer and member of the French Communist Party, to find him the proceedings of Trotsky's Fourth International. See: Irene Gendzier, *Frantz Fanon: A Critical Study* (Pantheon, 1973), 20.

associated with postcolonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha, whereas today an antihumanist reading of Fanon is largely the province of Frank Wilderson and the Afropessimist school. These approaches differ dramatically: for Bhabha, Fanon is a thinker of cultural hybridity, whose value lies in the *destabilization* of Manichean categories, whereas Wilderson is a staunchly Manichean thinker, who reads Fanon as a theorist of Black suffering whose insights apparently expose the impossibility of political solidarity between Black and Non-Black subjects. Still, Bhabha and Wilderson have some common ground: they both prefer the psychoanalytic drama of *Black Skin, White Masks* to the political theory of *Wretched of the Earth*, and they equally share a desire to divorce Fanon from his humanism and revolutionary internationalism. Neither is much concerned with understanding Fanon's political context, and they are united, moreover, in a conviction that Fanon's "true radicalism" lies not in his own professed convictions and commitments, but in those brief moments where he seems to support their own intellectual projects.[17] While there is nothing inherently objectionable about reading a thinker against themselves, I find that both tendencies ultimately dispense with some of the most valuable aspects of Fanon's thought. For these reasons I will not dwell on them further here.

My approach also implies a methodological departure from some works with which I have considerably more political sympathy, such as Ato Sekyi-Otu's 1996 *Fanon's Dialectic of Experience*. In this book, to which I owe a great intellectual debt, Sekyi-Otu very effectively elucidates the universalistic and emancipatory impulse of Fanon's writings and offers a still-resonant caution against taking those moments where Fanon seems to embrace a violent particularism as his final judgment on questions of violence or nationalism. Sekyi-Otu's exegetical approach, which largely confines itself to an internal analysis of Fanon's texts, nonetheless faces certain contextualist limitations. Sekyi-Otu reads the *whole* of Fanon's work as a "united dramaturgical narrative," and argues we should approach his various texts "*dialectically* rather than sequentially, or as discrete entities."[18] This helps us make sense of the

[17] Both Bhabha and Wilderson begrudgingly acknowledge Fanon's distance from their own theoretical aspirations. For Bhabha, Fanon's exhortative appeals to a "new humanism" represent moments where "Fanon is afraid of his most radical insights." Likewise, Wilderson suggests that these are instances where "Fanon finds his own flames too incendiary." See Bhabha, "Remembering Fanon: Self, Psyche, and the Colonial Condition" [1986] in *Rethinking Fanon: The Continuing Dialogue*, ed. Nigel Gibson (Humanity Books, 1999), 190; Wilderson, *Red, White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* (Duke University Press, 2010), 338.

[18] Sekyi-Otu, *Fanon's Dialectic of Experience,* 22. Like Sekyi-Otu, George Ciccariello-Maher has also recently argued that "those who would divide Fanon's oeuvre—distinguishing *Black Skin, White Masks* from *Wretched of the Earth*—often do so by neglecting his decolonized dialectical vision." Ciccariello-Maher, *Decolonizing Dialectics* (Duke University Press, 2017), 71.

internal structure of certain texts, especially *Wretched,* but it is more problematic when applied across Fanon's work: these *are,* after all, distinct texts intervening in distinct contexts. Sekyi-Otu's approach, which smooths over the differences between texts and unites them into a cohesive narrative, also leads him to take certain concepts, such as the *nation*, for granted. While Sekyi-Otu concedes that the nation is an artificial construction, he nonetheless leaves it more or less uninterrogated and proposes simply to "take it for what it is," that is, the "concrete existential universal" of the postcolonial world.[19] But by simply "taking the nation for what it is," we lose a sense that Fanon was actively intervening *on behalf of the nation-form* and arguing against competing visions of anticolonialism. A more contextualist approach can help correct against taking such concepts for granted, and ultimately serve Sekyi-Otu's admirable goal of recovering the "illocutionary" character of Fanon's work.

I am particularly focused here on texts written after Fanon's embrace of the Algerian cause, i.e., material from 1956 to 1961. I grant a certain priority to *Wretched of the Earth* which Fanon knew would likely be his parting message to the decolonizing world. *Wretched of the Earth* is also the text where Fanon takes the greatest distance from the FLN's official positions, and where we get the clearest sense of Fanon's own views. Other key texts from this period of Fanon's life include his 1959 *A Dying Colonialism* and various speeches and articles written for *El Moudjahid*. These pieces are significant as they capture Fanon responding in real time to political events surrounding the Algerian war. It is important to recall, however, that these articles were also the outcome of a collective editorial process and, while they no doubt bear the imprint of Fanon's lucid and original thinking (often presaging lines of analysis that would be further developed in *Wretched of the Earth*), these articles were also obliged to reflect an "official" position. Fanon's articles for *El Moudjahid* incessantly both assert the existence of Algerian nation and refer to the inevitability of Algerian independence—indeed, the whole enterprise of *El Moudjahid* was an effort *to write an Algerian nation into existence*, an objective that was not lost on Fanon.[20]

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[19] Sekyi-Otu, *Fanon's Dialectic,* 38.

[20] *El Moudjahid*, which was published in French and Arabic editions, was a part of a broader strategy of seeking diplomatic recognition for the Algerian nation. The FLN had set up a diplomatic office in New York not far from the United Nations where they lobbied for international recognition and sought to isolate France as far as possible from its allies. The French edition of *El Moudjahid*, which Fanon wrote for, helped the FLN to reach Western audience; the *New York Times,* for instance, began citing *El Moudjahid* as a source in 1958. On *El Moudjahid*, see: Andrea L. Stanton, "The Changing Face of El Moudjahid During the Algerian War of Independence," *The Journal of North African Studies* 16, no. 1 (2011): 59-76. On the FLN's diplomatic efforts, see

The chapter is divided into two broad parts. In part one, I address Fanon's engagement with the "national question." An adamant insistence on the specifically *national* character of anticolonialism is a near-constant theme in Fanon's Algerian writings. I address Fanon's arguments for the national form by considering how Fanon deals with alternative horizons, considering, in turn, his critique of the PCF and other "federalist" projects, the Negritude and Pan-Arab movements, as well sub-national challenges to the nation grounded in local identities and traditions. While Fanon is insistent on the necessity of the nation, which he defines primarily in terms of *political commitment*, he also identifies important limits to the national project and its bourgeois leadership. It is at this juncture in the analysis, where Fanon seeks to move beyond the nation towards more internationalist horizons and offers a vociferous critique of the national bourgeoisie, that his connection with Lenin and Roy becomes clearest, and I conclude this section with a discussion of Fanon's relationship to the positions elaborated by Lenin and Roy some decades earlier.

In part two, I consider Fanon's "new humanism." Humanism occupies a curious place in Fanon's work—on the hand, humanism points to a universal horizon *beyond* the nation, but this humanism can only be realized *through* the nation, which is framed as the necessary precondition for an internationalist humanism. I first chart how Fanon sees the emergence of this "new humanism" and "new man," addressing his arguments about violence, political action, and education. Second, I consider how Fanon's new humanism is defined against racial nationalism and points towards a more inclusive understanding of national identity. Third, I situate Fanon's humanism in the broader discourse of "African Socialism," arguing that Fanon's humanism is less nostalgic than that of many of his contemporaries but retains a certain ecumenism and political ambiguity. Finally, I consider how Fanon positions his new humanism in relationship to the hypocrisies of European humanism and draw attention to his political appeals to the European working class. The conclusion offers some brief thoughts on the contemporary relevance of Fanon's writings, which I take up in more depth in the next chapter, considering how this vision of a new humanism might continue to resonate, or not, in the present.

Matthew Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria's Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post-Cold War Era* (Oxford University Press, 2002).

PART ONE: "SLOGANS OF NATIONAL LIBERATION SHOULD COME FIRST"

In the opening pages of *Wretched of the Earth* Fanon takes a clear stand on the priority of the national struggle, taking to task those colonized subjects who agitated for *economic* reform without first demanding political independence, effectively seeking social improvement within the structures of colonial rule. With the Communist Party clearly in mind, Fanon observes that many members of the colonized community may belong to metropolitan political parties, and he criticizes those who "are militant activists under the abstract slogan: 'Power to the proletariat.'" In the colonial world, Fanon insists: "*slogans of national liberation should come first*."[21] Fanon identifies social demands with a kind of political immaturity, one which entails far greater risks than simply wasting time in futile unions with metropolitan parties. As Fanon warns: "The danger is that very often they [the colonized] *reach the stage of social consciousness before reaching the national phase*. In this case the underdeveloped countries' violent calls for social justice are combined, paradoxically enough, with an often primitive tribalism."[22] It is only *national independence,* Fanon insists, that can deliver any form of progress. Although Fanon clearly recognizes that the national movement must, in its course, become a social struggle, he is unrelentingly insistent on the priority of the national demand. To adapt the old Bolshevik slogan, Fanon's advice might be put thus: "Land, *then* peace and bread."

Before proceeding further, it is worth situating Fanon's claims in their political context. Fanon's insistence that "slogans of national liberation should come first" and *deferral* of a united class struggle, has a very clear resonance with the Comintern line that emerged from Roy-Lenin debate. Consistent with early Comintern policy, the French Communist Party (PCF) had in fact once played an important role in the development of Algerian nationalism, but by 1954 had long

[21] Fanon, *Wretched*, 22. Emphasis mine.

[22] Fanon, *Wretched*, 143. Emphasis mine. This is, on the face of it, a somewhat puzzling claim. It is not clear why "social consciousness" and demands for "social justice" should be combined with a "primitive tribalism," and Fanon does not provide any examples here. However, it seems that Fanon does not mean "social consciousness" in a more fulsome sense, as is indicated in the following sentence where he claims that "the underdeveloped peoples behave like a starving population." I think Fanon is describing here not so much "social consciousness" but something closer to a generalized bread riot—a demand for food and poverty relief, with little political consciousness.

since abandoned these efforts.[23] In 1939 PCF leader Maurice Thorez denied the existence of an Algerian nation and claimed instead that Algeria was a "nation in formation," arguing, in a stunning denial of the apartheid colonial reality, that native and settler populations were mixing to form a new nation which had not yet emerged. In the meantime, the PCF and the Algerian Communist Party (which was for many years subordinate to the French party) championed a program of social reform within the political structure of the French empire. The PCA, which included *pied noir* settlers and Algerian members in its ranks, gradually grew more independent of the French party especially after WWII, and in 1956, two years into the war for independence, the party voluntarily dissolved itself into the FLN. The PCA's previous positions, however, did little to endear them to Algerian nationalists, and although many communists proved courageous militants of the independence struggle, they were still treated with suspicion by many in the FLN. For its part, the PCF adopted some truly ignoble positions during the war and continued to advocate for enduring "special links" between France and Algeria—to the disdain of Fanon and the FLN.[24]

Before the outbreak of war, however, the existence of an Algerian "nation" (long denied by the French) was hardly a settled question, and the PCA was certainly not the only constituency to nurture a vision for transformation within a basically imperial, or federal, political structure. As it was, European settlers and Algerian Jews enjoyed the rights of French citizenship, while the majority Muslim population, which included Arabs and well as a number of Berber peoples, were disenfranchised. In the early twentieth century prominent Algerian reformers, as in other colonial contexts, held out hope that Muslims might gain greater rights within the French empire. Significant scholarly attention has recently drawn attention to similar

[23] In the early 1920s the PCF had been an important patron of Messali Hadj, the "father of Algerian nationalism." The Vietnamese revolutionary Ho Chi Minh was also a founding member of the PCF, drawn to the movement precisely because of its internationalist orientation. The PCF's abandonment of its earlier commitments can be attributed to many factors, including the broader Soviet retreat from revolutionary internationalism. In the years leading up to WWII, the PCF had increasingly rebranded itself as a loyalist French national party and, following the Soviet position, prioritized a united struggle of the entire French empire against the threat of fascism. It continued to maintain this posture in the years after the war, especially in Algeria, which was home to a large settler population (a crucial difference from other French colonies in Africa or Asia). The history of PCF's positions on Algeria, as well as the PCA, are well-documented in Allison Drew's *We are no Longer in France: Communists in Colonial Algeria* (Manchester University Press, 2014), which I am draw from throughout this paragraph.

[24] Most notoriously, the PCF voted in support of French Prime Minister Guy Mollet's request for "emergency powers" in 1956. The party also consistently opposed the practice of draft evasion. Although the PCF would grow more critical of the war as it dragged on, its calls for peace never included any straightforward endorsement of Algerian independence or the FLN.

efforts among Caribbean and West African elites.[25] However, such reformist, federalist aspirations had a shorter shelf life in Algeria than in other French colonies, as even painfully moderate efforts at enfranchising small minorities of Muslims were routinely rebuffed by the viciously racist *pied noir* community, eventually turning moderate reformers into committed nationalists.[26]

The FLN, who burst suddenly onto the scene with their audacious declaration of war on November 1, 1954, soon sidelined these currents. The FLN were as committed to *asserting* the existence of an Algerian nation as they were convinced that revolutionary violence was the only way of achieving it. Fanon was wholly aligned with the FLN on both counts. The FLN took a different tack than earlier nationalists; in the interwar years, a budding religious nationalist movement projected an Algerian nation backwards into the distant historical past, anchored to an Arab-Muslim identity. This approach posed certain difficulties for the FLN, which included Arabs and Berbers in its leadership, and was eager to avoid religious and inter-ethnic conflict. In the end the FLN proved tremendously capable of building a large ideological coalition, attracting religious nationalists, staunch leftists, and former moderates. This was made possible by the FLN leadership's flexible approach to defining Algerian nationhood. The "Soummam Platform," which remained the organization's guiding political document throughout the war, avoided defining Algerian nationhood in terms of a long historical past, or by a static set of "characteristic features" (as in Josef Stalin's influential definition of the nation).[27] Abbane Ramdane, the driving force of the Soummam Platform, asserted instead that a sense of Algerian nationhood would be an *outcome* of the united armed struggle itself. Fanon follows Ramdane (an important political mentor for Fanon) in defining the nation in fundamentally open-ended *political* terms, the measure of belonging to which was, above all, the commitment to

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[25] See Frederick Cooper, *Citizenship between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa, 1945-1960* (Princeton University Press, 2014) and Gary Wilder, *Freedom Time*. Similar efforts were common to other colonized contexts as well. For instance, the young Roy's frustration with the Indian National Congress was informed, in part, by its similarly reformist orientation.

[26] The career of Ferhat Abbas is revealing here. In 1936 Abbas, a well-known pharmacist in the city of Constantine, penned an article "La France, c'est moi!" arguing in favour of Muslim enfranchisement while denying the historical existence of an Algerian nation (to the dismay of religious nationalists). His hopes for reform were continually disappointed, and by 1942 Abbas was calling for Algerian independence. By 1956, despite his initial misgivings about violence, Abbas joined the FLN and in 1958 was appointed President of Algeria's Provisional Government in exile. On Abbas, see: Byrne, *Mecca of Revolution*, 24-25.

[27] Congrès de la Soummam, "Extraits de la Platforme de la Soummam" [26 August 1956] https://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/Congr%C3%A8s_de_La_Soummam; Josef Stalin, "Marxism and the National Question" [1913] https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1913/03a.htm

liberation.[28] As Fanon put it: "*The existence of a nation is not proved by culture*, *but in the people's struggle against the forces of colonialism*."[29] From this fight a new culture and a new sense of national belonging, he hoped, would emerge.

Securing the nation

Fanon vociferously defended the priority of the national demand and championed an understanding of the nation defined, fundamentally, by political commitment rather than by extant cultural identity. Fanon was extremely wary that appeals to existing culture could in fact license a drift away from the national cause. In 1959 Fanon would expound the FLN position at the Congress of Black Writers and Artists in Rome where, addressing "certain pharisees," he opposed any retreat from nationalism for the sake of broader allegiances, grounded in a transnational African or Arab culture. As he put it:

> Humanity, some say, has got past the stage of nationalist claims. The time has come to build larger political unions, and consequently the old-fashioned nationalists should correct their mistakes. We believe on the contrary that the mistake, heavy with consequences, would be to miss out on the national stage. If culture is the expression of the national consciousness, I shall have no hesitation in saying, in the case in point, that *national consciousness is the highest form of culture*.[30]

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[28] Fanon and Ramdane enjoyed a close relationship—it was Ramdane who recruited Fanon to the FLN and brought him on at *El Moudjahid*. It was not only Ramdane's secularist and multicultural approach to national identity that resonated with Fanon; Ramdane had a reputation as a militant hardliner within the FLN, committed to achieving Algeria's independence by any means necessary. Ramdane, who always insisted that the FLN should have a political, civilian leadership, was murdered in December 1957 by men acting under the orders of FLN colonel Abdelhadif Boussof. His death weighed heavily on Fanon, but none dared speak out for fear of their own lives. Despite Fanon's anguish over Ramdane's death, he did not waver in his conviction that the FLN was the sole legitimate representative of the Algerian people; a testament to the bitter compromises Fanon and others would make for the sake of the national struggle. Many studies of Fanon suffer from a tendency to neglect the politics of the FLN and Fanon's Algerian comrades. Biographical studies such as Macey's and Cherki's tend to be the exception. See also Belaid Abane, "Frantz Fanon and Abane Ramdane: Brief Encounter in the Algerian Revolution" in *Living Fanon: Global Perspectives,* ed. Nigel C. Gibson (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) and Lou Turner, "Fanon and the FLN: Dialectics of Organization and the Algerian Revolution" in *Rethinking Fanon: The Continuing Dialogue*, ed. Nigel C. Gibson (Humanity Books, 1999).

[29] Fanon, *Wretched*, 159. Emphasis mine.

[30] Fanon, *Wretched*, 179. Emphasis mine, Fanon was putting these arguments directly to many luminaries of the Negritude movement (Leopold Senghor was absent, but thinkers such as Alioune Diop, Cheikh Anta Diop, Amadou Hampaté Bâ were present). As David Macey recounts, Fanon's insistence on the specifically *national* character of anticolonialism "struck a rather discordant note" amidst the delegates' rhapsodic appeals to African cultural unity. Fanon's speech is included at the end of the chapter "On National Culture" in *Wretched of the Earth*, pages 170-180 in the 2004 Philcox translation. See also Macey, *Frantz Fanon,* 386.

This national culture, Fanon insists, does not predate the fight for national independence but *results from it*. As he asserts in the same speech: "national liberation and the resurrection of the state are the preconditions for the *very existence* of a culture."[31] Taken as abstract pronouncements, Fanon's efforts to define "culture" as invariably "national" do not actually make sense. Why, after all, should culture necessarily be national? When understood as a *political intervention*, however, Fanon's claims become much more legible.

Fanon's claims were made in direct opposition to the *Negritude* movement and likeminded intellectuals, who upheld, in Fanon's view, a rather essentialized and nostalgic understanding of "Negro-African" culture.[32] He identifies a similar tendency among Arab intellectuals as well. Fanon credits these intellectual movements with a certain dialectical significance, acknowledging that since colonialism denigrates African and Arab cultures *as a whole*, it is unsurprising that the colonized intellectual might initially reject colonialism with an "unconditional affirmation" of African or Arab culture. While he concedes that this is a welcome break with colonial ideology, he nonetheless claims that "this historical obligation to racialize their claims, to emphasize an African culture rather than a national culture leads the African intellectuals into a dead end."[33] In particular, he argues that the appeal to culture takes no coherent political form, and directs intellectuals *away* from the national struggle and the "objective problems" of distinct colonial contexts. Far better to begin here, Fanon argues, than by responding to colonial racism on the cultural terrain. As he puts it of the Negritude movement:

> The only common denominator between the black from Chicago and the Nigerians or Tanganyikans was that they all defined themselves in relation to the whites. But once the initial comparisons had been made and subjective feelings had settled down, *the black Americans realized that the objective problems were fundamentally different*. … The problems for which Richard Wright or Langston Hughes had to be on the alert were fundamentally different from those faced by Léopold Senghor or Jomo Kenyatta.[34]

[31]Fanon, *Wretched,* 177. Emphasis mine.

[32] Fanon's reservations about the Negritude movement were longstanding, and his critique in *Wretched of the Earth* to some extent reiterates (and develops) arguments made in *Black Skin, White Masks*.

[33] Fanon, *Wretched,* 151-152.

[34] Fanon, *Wretched,* 153-154. Emphasis mine.

This insistence on beginning with the distinct "objective problems" faced in a colonized territory shaped also Fanon's attitude towards the federalist aspirations that were popular in this period, advocated by the "Pan-movements." Fanon was not entirely opposed to the effort to build larger federations among former colonies (albeit certainly not unions with the colonial power) but argued that a national foundation had to be secured *first*.[35] For an illustration of Fanon's thinking on this question we can turn to a rare discussion of Caribbean politics in a 1958 *El Moudjahid* article. Reflecting on the possibility of a united Caribbean federation, Fanon insists on the priority of specific *national* struggles, writing that "each [Caribbean people] *must first adapt its effort to the particular enemy it must conquer*." Fanon goes on to cite approvingly the policies of Caribbean leaders like Michael Manley and Eric Williams who, in Fanon's estimation, "*consider it wiser that each people begins to gain independence within the framework of its situation* so that the federation of all the Caribbean is not a rapid, artificial and fragile construction, but a confederation of mature states."[36]

Fanon intervenes not only against a premature federalism that would bypass the nation for the sake of broader allegiances; he also attempts to contain *sub-national* threats from below by *integrating* local traditions and identities into the new nation. Fanon is well aware that religious, regional, tribal or ethnic affiliations can also exert a strong pull on the loyalties of the colonized. In *Wretched of the Earth* the tensions between the new nation and local tradition are dramatized principally through Fanon's depiction of the encounter between young nationalist militants and the rural peasantry. Facing repression in the city, the urban revolutionaries flee to the countryside, where they find shelter among the rural population.[37] This pivotal encounter is initially characterized by mistrust; the precocious urban revolutionaries are put off by the "backwardness" and "obscurantist traditions" of the peasantry, and behave in a clumsy,

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[35] In a private notebook from 1960 Fanon ruminated on the prospect of moving towards larger unions, writing that "African Unity is a principle on the basis of which it is proposed to achieve the United States of Africa without passing through the middle-class chauvinistic national phase with its procession of wars and death-tolls." This is certainly evidence of a wariness with nationalism and a sympathy for federalism. It is worth remembering, however, that these were private notes, not a public pronouncement. In *Wretched of the Earth*, his parting message to the Third World, Fanon is a clear advocate of the national stage, albeit one which should be quickly transcended. Fanon, [1960] "This Africa to Come," in *Toward the African Revolution*, 187.

[36] Fanon, "In the Caribbean, birth of a nation?" [*El Moudjahid* 1958] in *Alienation and Freedom,* 585, 589. Emphasis mine.

[37] This is one of those moments where Fanon is narrating a moment from Algerian history, although he frames it as a general feature of anticolonial struggles. The Battle of Algiers which lasted from September 1956 to September 1957, was a highly urban campaign, spearheaded by Ramdane. Its brutal defeat sent the FLN running to the countryside.

condescending fashion, offending peasant sensibilities. Despite these initial tensions, however, Fanon argues that the encounter between the urban militant and rural masses ultimately proves mutually enriching and transformative. Under the placid surface of rural life roils a violent, popular resentment towards the settler, and memories of precolonial life and long histories of resistance survive in the traditions of the village, where "mothers still hum to their children the songs which accompanied the warriors as they set off to fight the colonizer."[38] The urban militants thus find in the peasantry a people who, despite their "petrified state," have kept alive "their attachment to the nation," and who thus represent a font of revolutionary enthusiasm.[39] The peasantry finds, through the revolutionary intellectuals, a productive, organized outlet for their rebellion, and new, national solidarities.

Fanon claims that the "minor local histories" and traditions of the rural masses are, at least initially, "the only thing relevant to the nation's actuality."[40] However, he is also adamant that they be transformed and integrated into a *new* history of the nation, one defined above all, as I have stressed, by the *fight for it.* Indeed, mere pages later Fanon describes the national project as a "new reality" that exists by "action alone."[41] Fanon's narrative captures a process of radical self-transformation within the village: traditional leaders lose the authority they once commanded, and the peasantry take it upon themselves to repurpose and reimagine traditional institutions and assemblies to meet the demands of the revolutionary movement. As Fanon puts it: "traditional institutions are reinforced, expanded, and sometimes *literally transformed*."[42] Although Fanon clearly recognizes the emancipatory potential of the ostensibly "archaic"—he is equally reluctant to make conformity to tradition the measure of a new, national universalism. The nation remains, for Fanon, a fundamentally novel political project that cannot be judged by its fidelity to existing arrangements or allegiances. Thus, Fanon asserts that "integrating the history of the village" into a *new* political identity is a vital necessity.[43]

Fanon's insistence on the novelty of the emergent national culture has aroused some controversy over the years. Some have seen in Fanon a ruthless modernizer who "leaves no room

[38] Fanon, *Wretched,* 69.
[39] Fanon, *Wretched,* 79.
[40] Fanon, *Wretched,* 68.
[41] Fanon, *Wretched,* 95-96.
[42] Fanon, *Wretched*, 92-93. Emphasis mine.
[43] Fanon, *Wretched,* 68.

for local knowledge."[44] In his 2014 *Red Skin, White Masks,* which deploys Fanon to great effect in an analysis of contemporary Indigenous struggles against settler colonialism in Canada, Glen Coulthard offers a more subtle and sympathetic version of this argument. Coulthard notes that Fanon's dialectical ambition is to enfold local knowledges and traditions into a national culture, prioritizing the *formation of the new* over the *preservation of the old* in a manner that Coulthard sees as fundamentally at odds with the spirit of Indigenous anticolonialism.[45] Coulthard is more or less correct that this is what Fanon is trying to do, but he underplays the distance between his own contextually-specific problems and those Fanon is responding to. It seems to me entirely plausible that the approach to culture and tradition which Fanon developed in the context of the national liberation wars of the 1950s and 1960s might not neatly map on to Indigenous struggles against settler colonialism in twenty-first century Canada and elsewhere.

One revealing point of contextual difference between Coulthard and figures like Fanon or Amilcar Cabral lies in their respective attitudes towards cultural "recovery." *Red Skin, White Masks* concludes with an appeal to what Coulthard calls "Indigenous resurgence," a movement which encompasses a critical revival of cultural practices and languages that have been threatened with extinction by Canada's history of cultural genocide and assimilation. In many African contexts, however, "tradition" had not faced quite the same pressures; while Europeans certainly saw African cultures as decidedly inferior, there was, on the whole, less effort to "assimilate" large African majorities.[46] For figures like Fanon and Cabral, the question of "reclamation" or "return" was one that preoccupied only a small minority of urban, Westernized elites who had been educated to serve the colonial administration. Questions of identity posed less of a problem for the rural masses, who had no need to "reclaim" traditions they were simply *living*. The problem, as Fanon sees it, is that the intellectuals are "out of step"—they go looking

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[44] Christopher Miller, *Theories of Africans: Francophone Literature and Anthropology in Africa* (University of Chicago Press, 1990), 50. See Sekyi-Otu for a thorough rebuttal to Miller. As he puts it with characteristic eloquence: "*pace* Miller, Fanon would not have joined shock troops deployed by Enlightenment nationalists to smash into submission all recalcitrant figures of tradition, ethnicity, difference." Sekyi-Otu, *Fanon's Dialectic of Experience*, 38-44.

[45] Glen Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (University of Minnesota Press, 2014), Chapter Five: "The Plunge into the Chasm of the Past: Fanon, Self-Recognition, and Decolonization," 131-150.

[46] As Mahmood Mamdani has argued, colonial powers in Africa typically sought to preserve and exaggerate "traditional" differences between ethnic communities rather than eliminate them. Both British "indirect" rule and French "association" were governed, Mamdani argues, by a logic of segregation, not assimilation. See Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton University Press, 1996).

for a timeless cultural authenticity but instead find a people already on the move, transforming and sometimes abandoning customs to meet the needs of the liberation struggle. Thus, Fanon concludes, "seeking to stick to tradition or reviving neglected traditions is not only going against history, but against one's people."[47]

Fanon's reservations about the turn to tradition must also be read alongside the problems the FLN and similar movements confronted. Anticolonial struggles in Africa and Asia typically pitted large, diverse native majorities against small minorities of colonial occupiers, often making for fragile ethnic coalitions. *Wretched of the Earth* is replete with warnings that colonialism might "revive tribal identities," stoke religious divisions, and encourage regional secessionist movements against radical anticolonial governments.[48] The Belgian-backed Katangan secessionist movement in the Congo, which culminated in the assassination of the country's first president, Patrice Lumumba, loomed especially large over Fanon and the FLN leadership.[49] In the Algerian context too, many clan leaders *did* use their traditional authority to pull entire communities to the side of collaboration.[50] In light of these problems, Fanon's reluctance to make a defence of "tradition" the *point* of the liberation struggle is quite understandable. It is worth recalling here Stuart Hall's reminder that "tradition" itself has "no fixed political inscription," and can take on progressive or regressive roles in different contexts.[51] Fanon himself was clearly aware of this dualism, recognizing that while a defence of tradition can prove a source of revolutionary enthusiasm, it can equally prove a source of revanchist opposition to a revolutionary movement. Fear of secessionism undoubtedly led to serious abuses by postcolonial states, including in post-independence Algeria.[52] Still, it is worth remembering

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[47] Fanon, *Wretched,* 160. See also Amilcar Cabral's distinct but similar reflections on the "return to the source" in Cabral, "Identity and Dignity in the Context of the National Liberation Struggle" in *The Return to the Source: Selected Speeches of Amilcar Cabral* (Monthly Review Press, 1973), 57-74.

[48] Fanon, *Wretched*, 67, 72, 87.

[49] Fanon, who knew Lumumba, was particularly distraught at his assassination, and even blamed himself for it. When he met with Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir in Rome in 1960, Fanon reportedly confided to de Beauvoir that "I have two deaths on my conscience that I will never be able to forgive myself for: Abbane's and Patrice Lumumba's." Fanon seems to have believed that he should have advised both men better. Fanon never addressed Ramdane's murder in writing, but for his comments on Lumumba's assassination, see: Fanon, "Lumumba's Death: Could we do Otherwise?" [1960] in *Toward the African Revolution*, 191-197; Simone de Beauvoir, *Hard Times: Force of Circumstance 1952-1962* [1963]*,* (Paragon House, 1992), 317.

[50] Fanon notes this in *Wretched*, 87. See also Fanon's reference to Nkrumah's conflicts with the traditional chiefs in Ghana: *Wretched,* 67.

[51] Stuart Hall, "The Multicultural Question" [2000] in Stuart Hall, *Essential Essays, Volume Two: Identity and Diaspora*, ed. David Morley (Duke University Press, 2019), 103.

[52] For instance, after independence Algerian President Ahmed Ben Bella bombed Kabylia, home to the Berber Kabyle people, fearing that the region would prove Algeria's Katanga. See discussion in Byrne, *Mecca of*

why Fanon and like-minded militants within the FLN saw the cultivation of a new, inclusive national identity as a far more urgent task than encouraging local particularism.

Fanon is consistently attentive to the need to form *broader* not *narrower* allegiances. Although Fanon is at pains to insist on the priority of the national struggle, and the necessity of forging a new national identity, his conception of the nation is also fundamentally internationalist. Indeed, he sees the national foundation as the basis for broader loyalties and solidarities, writing that "national consciousness … is alone capable of giving us an international dimension." He even identifies this national consciousness itself *with* internationalism, asserting that "it is at the heart of national consciousness that international consciousness establishes itself and thrives."[53] Fanon's internationalism is in fact quite in keeping with his emphasis on beginning with the specific *problems* faced in particular territories. Colonialism was, after all, not merely an Algerian problem, but an African and global problem, and the Algerian fight, like others, was dependent on international solidarity and support. Fanon's politicized sense of the nation is linked not only to domestic allegiances, but also to an identification with other struggles for liberation. As Fanon put it to the All-African Peoples' Conference in Accra in 1958: "An Algerian cannot be really Algerian if he does not feel in his innermost self the indescribably horrible drama that is unfolding in Rhodesia or in Angola."[54] In quite a profound sense, Fanon hoped that Algerian nationhood itself would be defined by not only its own struggle for independence, but by its solidarity with other likeminded movements.

Fanon and the Roy-Lenin Debate

There are clear Leninist undertones in Fanon's framing of national independence as the condition of possibility for internationalism, but it is above all Fanon's critique of the national bourgeoisie that most clearly echoes the terms of the Roy-Lenin debate. As we saw in the previous chapter, this debate hinged principally on the role of the bourgeoisie: Lenin maintained that anticolonial uprisings would initially be "bourgeois-democratic" revolutions that would lead to liberal democracy and capitalist industrialization, whereas Roy argued that this period of bourgeois leadership should be bypassed from the outset. Although he does not refer to it

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Revolution, 90-97; 294. See also discussion of Katanga crisis in Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking After Empire,* 100-106.

[53] Fanon, *Wretched*, 180.

[54] Fanon, "African Countries and Their Solidary Combat" [1958] in *Alienation and Freedom*, 634.

directly, Fanon clearly accepts the terms of this earlier debate. In a passage which implies some awareness of the exchange between Lenin and Roy, and reflects, at the very least, Fanon's better documented familiarity with Lenin, Fanon asserts:

> The theoretical question, which has been posed *for the last fifty years* when addressing the history of the underdeveloped countries, i.e., whether the bourgeois phase can be effectively skipped, must be resolved through revolutionary action and not through reasoning. The *bourgeois phase in the underdeveloped countries is only justified* if the national bourgeoisie is sufficiently powerful, economically and technically, to build a bourgeois society, *to create the conditions for developing a sizeable proletariat*, to mechanize agriculture, and finally pave the way for a genuine national culture.[55]

Although Fanon claims that this question can only be resolved through "revolutionary action" rather than "reasoning," he immediately offers his own answer, arguing emphatically that the national bourgeoisie would prove incapable of delivering on these promises.

Fanon clearly shares the early Roy's dismal assessment of the colonial bourgeoisie, and he is, if anything, even more critical of this class. Both men see the colonial bourgeoisie as a weak constituency, which aims to supplant the foreign bourgeoisie as an exploiting class while containing radical challenges to their authority from below. Roy thought that the colonial bourgeoisie was at least interested in industrialization, but Fanon's bourgeoisie does not even have this to commend it; his is a bourgeoisie simply waiting to assume the role of middlemen in the circuit of global capital.[56] While they differ in emphasis, both Fanon and Roy share a sense that colonial bourgeoisie would prove unable to fulfill the vaunted tasks of the "bourgeois revolution"—as Fanon puts it, in terms strongly reminiscent of Roy's, the national bourgeoisie suffers from an "incapacity … to fulfil its historic role as bourgeoisie."[57] Both also reject the notion that the liberated nation must undergo a period of bourgeois rule before moving to socialism. Like Roy, Fanon rules out the possibility of a bourgeois stage, arguing that "in the undeveloped countries *a bourgeois phase is out of the question*. A police dictatorship or a caste

[55] Fanon, *Wretched*, 119. Emphasis mine. As readers will recall, this "theoretical question" was posed most significantly at the Second World Congress of the Communist International.

[56] Their positions on this matter surely stem in part from their respective contexts—the Indian bourgeoisie were relatively more involved in industrial production than the bourgeoisie of other colonized countries.

[57] Fanon, *Wretched*, 101.

of profiteers may very well be the case but a bourgeois society is doomed to failure."[58] As such, Fanon urges popular forces to "bar the way to this useless and harmful bourgeoisie."[59]

Who does Fanon imagine is up to this task? Fanon calls here upon the "the masses, regimented by a party, and keenly conscious intellectuals, armed with revolutionary principles."[60] Notably absent here is the proletariat, a significant point of difference between Fanon and both Lenin and Roy. Although the proletariat are likely included in Fanon's "masses," in one of the more unfortunate, and notorious, passages of *Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon implausibly suggests that the "embryonic proletariat" of the colonies, including miners, dockworkers, tram drivers, and others are "relatively privileged" and even "pampered" by the colonial regime, and concludes that their interests are therefore aligned, at least during the independence struggle, with the colonial bourgeoisie.[61] In contrast, Fanon asserts that "it is obvious that in colonial countries only the peasantry is revolutionary."[62] Fanon is not wholly dismissive of the proletariat; he knows that after independence they will have to contend with the bourgeoisie, and he draws attention to their dangerous isolation from the rural population, advocating an alliance between the urban working class and the peasantry (a common position in Marxist thought). Still, I think Fanon overestimates the "privileged" position of the proletariat (in stark contrast to Ramdane, for instance), and pays little attention to class distinctions *within* the peasant population.[63] As Harbi argues, Fanon's claims concerning the proletariat are best read not as a sociological analysis, but rather as a somewhat ill-judged polemical attempt to distance himself from a certain Marxist "orthodoxy."[64]

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[58] Fanon, *Wretched*, 118. Emphasis mine.
[59] Fanon, *Wretched*, 119.
[60] Fanon, *Wretched*, 119.
[61] Fanon, *Wretched*, 64.
[62] Fanon, *Wretched*, 23.
[63] In a striking contrast to Fanon's analysis, Ramdane's "Soummam Platform" counts dock workers and miners, along with agricultural labourers, among the "most exploited" strata of the colonized population. https://fr.wikisource.org/wiki/Congr%C3%A8s_de_La_Soummam. Fanon also makes little effort at class differentiation among the peasantry, which appears as a far more amorphous class in his work than in the writings of, for instance, Lenin or Mao, who are keenly attentive to class difference in rural communities.
[64] Harbi, "Frantz Fanon et le messianisme paysan" *Tumultes* no. 30 (2008): 11-15. Harbi, a former FLN member himself, has been a pointed critic of Fanon on this and other questions—as Harbi observes, Fanon's eagerness to distance himself from a "European Marxist" position led him to some misguided political judgments. As Harbi notes, the Algerian bourgeoisie adopted a romantic vision of an "authentic" national peasantry as a rhetorical cudgel with which to beat the urban proletariat after the revolution. Fanon would, without question, have been dismayed by this turn of events, and he draws attention to the perils of the urban labour movement's isolation from the peasantry as they face off against the ascendant bourgeoisie. See: Fanon, *Wretched*, 75-76.

Fanon's attention to the class struggle *within* the nationalist movement nonetheless represents an important dissension from the official FLN position. The FLN consistently framed their struggle as one of an *indivisible* Algerian nation. In his articles for *El Moudjahid* Fanon generally adopts this position, describing the Algerian revolution as a "democratic revolution" embodying the "deepest aspirations of *all strata* of the Algerian people."[65] This framing is actually not altogether different from Lenin's initial position in his debate with Roy, in which he asserted that anticolonial struggles are in the first instance, national democratic struggles for self-determination. Although *Wretched of the Earth* eventually arrives at a class critique of the national project, one of the features of Fanon's dialectical perspective, is that he still endorses this undifferentiated nationalist framing in the opening stages of the movement for liberation. An awareness of class antagonism, Fanon argues, will be arrived at *through* the experience of national struggle.

Fanon's political horizon is, in some notable respects, distinct from Lenin's and Roy's. Fanon's investment in a "genuine national culture," for instance, is quite foreign to the concerns of either earlier thinker, for whom the nation served a more instrumental role. Lenin, as we have seen, defended a "national right to self-determination" but argued this should be defended as a *negative* right to be free of national oppression, warning that "going beyond that begins the 'positive' activity of the *bourgeoisie* striving to *fortify* nationalism."[66] Roy shared these reservations and believed that a communist-led struggle for independence could avoid the contamination of nationalist ideology. As such, Roy warned *against* fostering a nationalist tendency among workers and peasants, noting that "helping the growth of the national spirit … will surely obstruct the awakening of class consciousness in the masses."[67] In stark contrast to Roy, as we have seen, Fanon identifies an opposite danger, advising *against* the early cultivation of a purely "social" consciousness and insisting that the movement must *first* acquire a national consciousness. He also consistently defends "national culture" in more "positive" terms. Fanon certainly shared many of Roy's long-term reservations about nationalism; at one point warning that "nationalism is not a political doctrine," and offering a somewhat vague distinction between

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[65] Fanon, "A Democratic Revolution" [*El Moudjahid* 1957] in *Alienation and Freedom*, 573. Emphasis mine.

[66] Lenin, "Critical Remarks on the National Question" [1913] in *Questions of National Policy and Proletarian Internationalism* (Progress Publishers, 1970), 27. Emphasis in original.

[67] Roy, "Draft Theses," in *Selected Works, Vol. 1,* 168. Unfortunately, this passage was among those Lenin advised Roy to cut in his revised theses.

"national consciousness" and "nationalism."[68] However, Fanon also maintains that there is no way *beyond* nationalism but *through* it. As he describes the necessary shift in program: "If nationalism is not *explained, enriched, and deepened,* if it does not very quickly turn into a *social and political consciousness, into humanism*, then it leads to a dead end."[69]

In Fanon's terms, it is precisely this inability to "enrich" and "deepen" nationalism, to turn it into a "humanism" that represents the most glaring failure of the colonial bourgeoisie. As he puts it: "achieving power in the name of a narrow-minded nationalism, in the name of race … [the bourgeoisie] proves itself incapable of implementing a program with even a minimum humanist content."[70] By a "minimum humanism," Fanon seems to have something in mind like a basic liberal democratic platform.[71] Elsewhere too Fanon identifies humanism with the classic democratic freedoms: i.e., "freedom of the individual, equality of rights and duties of citizens, freedom of conscience, of assembly, etc. all that permits the individual to blossom, advance and exercise his personal judgment and initiative freely."[72] In the absence of a bourgeoisie that can deliver on this minimal humanism, however, Fanon clearly has something far grander and more ambitious in mind. Consistently defined against a narrow, racial nationalism, and against the exclusions and hypocrisies of European humanism, *Wretched of the Earth* concludes with a stirring, utopian call to a *new humanism*. It is to this new humanism that I now turn.

Part Two: "There Must be a Concept of Man"

Humanism has several different connotations in Fanon's work. As we have seen, it is occasionally linked to a liberal democratic ideal. His humanism is also a call to action—an appeal to human will and agency. His humanism is also attached to an ideal of a "New Man," sharing a certain confidence in human perfectibility common to the post-Jacobin revolutionary tradition. The emergence of this "new humanism" and "new man" can be traced to different moments in the narrative of *Wretched of the Earth*. The "new man" seems, in the first instance, to be simply an achievement of violence. It is also occasionally dated to the achievement of

[68] Fanon, *Wretched,* 179, 142.
[69] Fanon, Wretched, 144. Emphasis mine.
[70] Fanon, *Wretched,* 109.
[71] Here Fanon associates "humanist ideology" with the "universal democratic ideals" of a "strong bourgeoisie," i.e., not the weak, colonial bourgeoisie. Fanon, *Wretched,* 109.
[72] Fanon, "A Democratic Revolution" [*El Moudjahid* 15 November 1957] in *Alienation and Freedom*, 571.

independence itself. Still more, however, "humanism" comes to signal an ideological program that goes beyond the horizon of independence itself, and especially beyond the racial ideology the colonized inherit from the colonial situation. Fanon's humanism is clearly a *continuous,* dialectical process of becoming, that unfolds not just through the national struggle, but through the efforts to build an egalitarian postcolonial society. If the specific content of Fanon's new humanism can prove somewhat vague, it is an important declaration of the universalizing ends of decolonization, and signals an appeal to novelty and invention, however indeterminate. In what follows I chart this movement towards a new humanism in *Wretched of the Earth*, devoting particular attention to questions of violence, political education, and Fanon's post-racial vision. I also consider how Fanon's humanism relates to other espousals of humanism, drawing attention to differences and similarities between Fanon and some of his contemporaries.

Dehumanization and violence

Colonialism, as Fanon describes it, is a practice of systematic *dehumanization*, defined by "a frenzied determination to deny the other any aspect of humanity."[73] In the stark opening pages of *Wretched*, Fanon notes the zoological, bestial metaphors colonizers use to describe the colonized subject: "In plain talk, he is reduced to the state of an animal."[74] The colonial world, in Fanon's description is a "Manichean" world, governed by a "purely Aristotelian logic," a world of apartheid and segregation, divided, to borrow from Jean-Paul Sartre's preface, between "men" and "natives."[75] In Fanon's infamous depiction of the initial phase of decolonization, there is no question of humanism, universalism, or "human dignity." This is, rather, a moment of uncompromising violence, in which the colonized adopt and reverse the "primitive Manicheanism of the colonizer."[76] This violent struggle is initially aimed at no higher value than *replacing* the colonizer, driving him to the sea and "taking his place." Decolonization, Fanon states, is simply "the substitution of one 'species' of mankind for another."[77] And yet Fanon also insists on a link between the violence of decolonization, which is "*always* a violent event" and "reeks of red-hot cannonballs and bloody knives," and profound transformations in human

[73] Fanon, *Wretched,* 182.
[74] Fanon, *Wretched,* 7.
[75] Fanon, *Wretched,* 4, Jean-Paul Sartre, "Preface," xliii
[76] Fanon, *Wretched,* 93.
[77] Fanon, *Wretched,* 1.

subjectivity: "Decolonization is truly the creation of new men … The 'thing' colonized becomes a man through the very process of liberation."[78]

Fanon, notoriously, credits the violence visited by the colonized upon their oppressors with a "cleansing," "enlightening," and, we might add, "humanizing" significance.[79] Not only does violence reveal the colonizer to be mortal and fallible, making way for a bloody, Hobbesian equality (all are equal insofar as all are equally capable, by force or guile, of killing each other), but Fanon argues that violence has a transformative psychological effect on the colonized, birthing a self-confident "new man." This teleological image of a new man redeemed through violence is no doubt among the most controversial moments in Fanon's work.[80] Scholars like Lewis Gordon and Sekyi-Otu have rightly underscored that this violence is a *response* to the far greater structural, indeed "atmospheric," violence of colonial rule, and that the turn to violence is in many ways a *tragic* choice forced on the colonized by the colonial situation.[81] Fanon's defenders have also rightly stressed that this is a passing moment in Fanon's narrative, in which the corrosive impact of violence on the colonized themselves (both psychological and political) is soon revealed. As it stands, this may be a moment in the *birth* of the *new man,* but only, in the end, insofar as it sunders the colonial world and inaugurates a struggle that will see the colonized not just reject their presumed inferiority, but come, eventually, to reject the insidious logic of race in its entirety and work towards a more universal "human" project.

One of the reasons why Fanon's analysis of violence has prompted such consternated misreadings is that Fanon himself often appears to conflate the *psychological* and *political* significance of violence.[82] This critique is well made in a 1963 review of *Wretched of the Earth* by the Vietnamese communist Nguyen Nghe, who argues that while Fanon is not *wrong* to consider the psychological impact of violence (which is discussed in far more sober terms in later chapters of *Wretched*), it is essential to parse out the psychological and political dimensions of violence.[83] Nghe is right that it is more useful to understand violence as a *political, strategic*

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[78] Fanon, *Wretched*, 1-3.

[79] Fanon, *Wretched*, 44, 51.

[80] See for instance Hannah Arendt's well-known critique in *On Violence* (Harcourt Brace, 1969). It has become practically cliché to observe (correctly) that Arendt's misreading of Fanon is heavily coloured by Sartre's Preface and neglects Fanon's following qualifications about violence.

[81] Lewis Gordon, *Fanon and the Crisis of European Man*, 67-84. Fanon, *Wretched,* 31.

[82] Nguyen Nghe, "Frantz Fanon and the Problems of Independence" [1963], trans. Jennifer Harvey and Patrick King. *Viewpoint Magazine* (2018): https://viewpointmag.com/2018/02/01/frantz-fanon-problems-problems-independence-1963/

[83] See the fifth chapter of *Wretched of the Earth*, "Colonial Wars and Mental Disorders," 181-234.

decision (often an entirely necessary and defensible one!) rather than as a psychological necessity. After all, many colonized countries, facing different circumstances than the Algerians, *were* able to achieve independence without violence. It would be absurd to claim that they emerged less fully "human" from this process than their Algerian counterparts.[84] Fanon himself knew this, and he talks about violence in much more pragmatic terms when soliciting support for the Algerian cause in Ghana, for instance.[85] And, of course, Fanon warns about the politically destructive effects of uncontained violence in later chapters, cautioning that "if this pure, total brutality is not immediately contained it will, without fail, bring down the movement within a few weeks."[86] As such, I find Fanon's assessment of violence ultimately rather close to Lenin and Roy's pragmatic expectations that *organized* violence would likely prove necessary for revolutionary independence struggles.

Fanon credits organized violence with unifying the people into a nation, and also suggests that the people who win their independence through violence will be less likely to invest their hopes in an individual leader, as "violence hoists *the people* up to the level of the leader."[87] What Fanon finds most significant about the turn to violence is that it represents a kind of will to *action*, a resolve to put an end to the passive acceptance of colonial rule and to take

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[84] Fanon himself does not make this claim, although it is in some sense the implication of his emphasis on the humanizing significance of violence which follows from his famous re-working of Hegel's dialectic of "lordship and bondage" in *Black Skin, White Masks*. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit* Hegel describes an abstract life-and-death struggle between master and servant in which self-consciousness as a free person can only be achieved by risking one's life: "The individual who has not risked his life may well be recognized as a *person* but he has not attained to the truth of this recognition as an independent self-consciousness." In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon suggests that the formally emancipated Black subject in the French Caribbean remains a slave—albeit a "slave" without a "master"—because they did not win their freedom through such a fight to the death. As he puts it: "the black man, steeped in the inessentiality of servitude, was set free by the master … [He] does not know the price of freedom because he has never fought for it." I have no desire to dispute Fanon's exhortations to action or political defence of violence, nor to deny that the experience of fighting for one's freedom yields profound transformations in self-consciousness. I do think, however, that this metaphysical line of thinking becomes rather difficult when taken at face value. The vast majority of the Algerian population were, after all, not members of the FLN—did they greet the dawn of independence with some kind of psychological deficiency, their "self-consciousness" or "humanity" less fully "realized" than those who were members? G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* [1807], translated by A.V. Miller (Oxford University Press, 1977), 114. Emphasis in original. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 194-195.

[85] See Fanon's 1960 speech at the Accra Positive Action Conference, in which Fanon frames the Algerian turn to violence in political terms, as "the unique solution that was left to [the Algerian people]," rather than as some kind of psychological imperative to "realize" the humanity of the colonized. In my view this speech—"Why we Use Violence"—should be much more widely discussed alongside the opening chapter to *Wretched of the Earth*, and I share the assessment of Jean Khalfa and Robert Young that it represents a "more nuanced and historicized justification of the use of violence in anticolonial struggle." See "Why we Use Violence" [1960] in *Alienation and Freedom,* 653-659.

[86] Fanon, *Wretched*, 95.

[87] Fanon, *Wretched*, 51. Emphasis mine.

responsibility for the postcolonial future. Fanon's heavy stress on human action and agency has an undeniable resonance with a "Marxist humanist" tradition that has places great emphasis on "agency" defined against an economic "determinism."[88] These concerns shape Fanon's thinking too—he knows that the nation, especially his inclusive ideal of the nation, has no natural or automatic existence, but depends on human will and effort. As he writes in *El Moudjahid*, "Africa will not be free through the mechanical development of material forces, but it is the hand of the African and his brain that will set into motion and implement the dialectics of the liberation of the continent."[89] Fanon's humanism thus has a profoundly *injunctive* quality and can be justly described, as Nigel Gibson puts it, as a "revolutionary-practical-critical humanism expressed through the individual's experience in building up a nation."[90] This experience may begin with violence but does not stop there.

It is clear for Fanon that this violence must become trained and organized, and its enactors educated in higher ideals than simply driving the colonizer to the sea. Fanon's humanism, like Roy's, is attached to a certain pedagogical ideal. However, as we have seen, Roy takes a decidedly elitist turn, advocating a transitional form of government that would see India steered by a small elite educated in "human values," who would seem to have nothing to learn from the benighted masses. Fanon certainly shares Roy's sense of the importance of education, writing that "to be responsible in an underdeveloped country is to know that everything finally rests on educating the masses."[91] At the same time, however, Fanon's sense of political education, unlike Roy's, retains an important lesson of the revolutionary tradition, which can be summarized by Marx's claim that "the educator himself must be educated."[92] Fanon's revolutionary intellectuals play a crucial role in educating the people, but they must equally be guided by them. It is perhaps above all the people's *impatience* for justice that must drive the intellectuals, who may otherwise deign to counsel compromise and deferral of urgent demands. Fanon retains a great confidence in the people's ability to grasp all that is required of them: "you can explain anything to the people provided you really want them to understand."[93]

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[88] The key influence here for Fanon is certainly Jean-Paul Sartre.

[89] Fanon, "Unity and Effective Solidarity Are the Conditions for African Liberation" [1960] in *Toward the African Revolution*, 173.

[90] Nigel Gibson, "Radical Mutations: Fanon's Untidy Dialectic of History," in *Rethinking Fanon,* ed. Gibson, 443.

[91] Fanon, *Wretched*, 138.

[92] Marx, "Theses on Feuerbach" [1845] in *MECW 5.*

[93] Fanon, *Wretched,* 131.

For Fanon, this continuous, dialogical process happens *within* the ambit of the national party. The national party is the crucial organ of struggle, which organizes the resistance to colonial rule and imbues it with a political and social consciousness. Fanon is highly alert to the possibility that the party may become an oppressive, technocratic body that acts *upon* the people rather than being directed by them. Fanon's concept of the party is firmly anchored in an ethos of mass leadership. He imparts a number of specific pieces of advice here: the party must avoid placing power in a single leader and resist the tendency to confine itself to urban centres. It must rather "decentralize to the utmost," maintaining constant, direct contact with the people who make up its mass base.[94] Indeed, Fanon counsels that practically *all* of the postcolonial nation's activities—agriculture, industry, military, even athletics—must be guided by the aim of instilling a sense of social and political responsibility among the people. As Fanon puts it, "to politicize the masses is not and cannot be to make a political speech. It means driving home to the masses that *everything depends on them*."[95] Fanon knows that this will be a "persistent battle," but it is precisely this ongoing fight to maintain the mass leadership of the independence movement and the postcolonial nation that is the engine of his humanism. The people, and not the "leader," *are* the nation. As he writes: "when the nation in its totality is set in motion, the *new man is not an a posteriori creation of this nation*, but coexists with it, matures with it, and triumphs with it."[96]

Fanon finds evidence of the emergence of this "new humanism" in practices through which the colonized shed their formerly defensive and recalcitrant posture. One finds a powerful testament to this process in the essay "Algeria Unveiled."[97] Here, as elsewhere, Fanon argues that colonialism forces the colonized into a kind of retreat, in which they cling to tradition as a kind of refusal or denial of the colonial presence. While the French deplore the veil and encourage Arab women to unveil themselves, the veiled Algerian woman refuses the colonial gaze: "this woman who sees without being seen frustrates the colonizer."[98] But with the outbreak of war, the meaning of the veil, like all traditions, undergoes "important modifications": Algerian

[94] Fanon, *Wretched,* 138.
[95] Fanon, *Wretched,* 138.
[96] Fanon, *Wretched*, 233. Emphasis mine.
[97] Fanon "Algeria Unveiled" in *A Dying Colonialism* [1959], trans. Hakoon Chevalier (Grove Press, 1965), 35-68. The other collected essays that make up *A Dying Colonialism* orbit around a similar theme. These include a number of studies of how Algerians overcame their (rightly held) suspicions of anything associated with the French—including technology such as the radio, modern medicine, and even the French language—as they appropriated them for themselves and put them in service of their own project.
[98] Fanon, "Algeria Unveiled," 44.

women now abandon the veil to walk unnoticed in the colonial sector, carrying guns, grenades, bombs, and messages. Where the Algerian woman once shrank in the colonial presence, she now walks upright: "she must overcome all timidity, all awkwardness."[99] Fanon was himself an ardent secularist and may be charged with reproducing certain French stereotypes in his analysis of the veil, but he does not make any abstract pronouncements supporting or opposing the practice.[100] His analysis, rather, foregrounds women's agency. If we set to the side Fanon's masculinist language of the "new man" (which he generally uses in the old-fashioned, "universal" sense to mean humanity as such), it is clear he believed that the Algerian struggle was also producing a "new woman," who was, through her participation in the movement for liberation, effecting her own self-emancipation. This is one instance among many that seems to substantiate Fanon's claim that: "this new humanism is written into the objectives and methods of the struggle."[101]

Humanism beyond race

Political education also proves crucial, Fanon argues, for transcending the Manichean logic of colonial rule. In its early stages, the aims and loyalties of the colonial struggle appear entirely clear-cut. This is, as we have seen, not a moment of any higher, human reconciliation. It is rather, a straightforward confrontation in which "truth is what protects the 'native' and undoes the foreigner … And good is quite simply what hurts *them* most." However, in the very same paragraph, indeed in the space of my own ellipses, the status of this truth is undermined, as Fanon writes: "in the colonial context there is no truthful behaviour." This truth, clung to by the colonized, is in fact a lie waiting to be revealed: "In answer to the lie of the colonial situation," Fanon writes, "the colonized subject *responds with a lie.*"[102]

As some point, either during the struggle for liberation, or upon the achievement of independence, the earlier image of a united, indivisible nation, defined by native belonging, is shattered. It becomes apparent that the bourgeois leadership has no interest in implementing a broader social project but are intent on plundering the nation for their own purposes. As Fanon

[99] Fanon, "Algeria Unveiled," 59.

[100] Quite revealingly, Fanon has been read as both *too sympathetic* and *too critical* of the veil. Macey, *Fanon*, 402-405.

[101] Fanon, *Wretched,* 178.

[102] Fanon, *Wretched,* 14. Emphasis mine.

puts it, this dawning awareness that "exploitation can assume a black or Arab face" proves "galling, painful, and sickening" for the people.[103] It is in this moment that the need for a *social* consciousness beyond a racial, national consciousness proves necessary: "they cry treason, but in fact the treason is not national but social, and they need to be taught to cry *thief*."[104] As Fanon argues, the Manichean solidarities that the colonized inherit from the colonial situation best serve the national bourgeoisie, who have their eye on the plush offices vacated by the colonial administration, and who attempt to deflect popular anger at their specious maneuvers by constantly inveighing against the foreigner. This racial nationalism proves profoundly destructive and fosters a belligerent nativism and "tribalism" among the subaltern classes, who direct their anger at the African "foreigners" in their midst.[105]

To respond to these challenges, Fanon insists that "the people must also learn to give up their simplistic perception of their oppressor."[106] Fanon's humanism signals an intervention *within* the nationalist movement and is consistently an intervention *against* racial nationalism, impressing upon the movement a more inclusive "humanist" character, even to the extent of embracing the former colonizer. As he puts it in the preface to *A Dying Colonialism*: "What we Algerians want is to discover the man behind the colonizer; this man who is both the organizer and the victim of a system that has choked him and reduced him to silence. As for us, we have long since rehabilitated the Algerian colonized man."[107] In this sense Fanon's "humanism" is clearly oriented towards the *destruction* of the identities of colonizer and colonized and a recognition of their mutual humanity—a task which in some sense reverses the nineteenth century genocidal directive: "*kill the colonizer, save the man*." As Fanon described the aims of the struggle at a 1960 Accra conference:

> We do not say to the settler "You are a stranger, go away." We do not say to him: "We will take over the leadership of the country and make you pay for your crimes and those of your ancestors." We do not tell him that "to the past hatred of the Black we will oppose the present and future hatred of the white man." We say to him: "*We are*

[103] Fanon, *Wretched,* 94.
[104] Fanon, *Wretched*, 94.
[105] Fanon, *Wretched,* 105.
[106] Fanon, *Wretched,* 94.
[107] Fanon, "Preface," *A Dying Colonialism,* 32. For good discussion of this passage see Robert Bernasconi's "Casting the Slough: Fanon's New Humanism for a New Humanity" in *Fanon: A Critical Reader*, eds. Lewis Gordon, T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, and Renée T. White (Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 113-121.

> *Algerians*, banish all racism from our land, all forms of oppression and let us work for man, for the flourishing of man and for the enrichment of humanity."[108]

As the above passage suggests, Fanon's conception of the nation is radically deracialized and grounded instead in an idea of political identification. Just as individual members of the bourgeoisie can, and should, "repudiate [their] status as bourgeois" and become militant revolutionaries attached to a more universal, popular conception of the nation (a claim which has a certain resonance with Cabral's concept of "class suicide"), so too might even the settler repudiate their privileges and prove themselves to be "closer, infinitely closer, to the nationalist struggle than certain native sons."[109] As Michael Neocosmos observes, Fanon posits the nation as a "purely political category" which "is not in any way to be equated with a social category of the native."[110] As Neocomos suggests, Fanon's concept of the nation can be usefully thought of in Alain Badiou's terms as a kind of "subjective becoming"—an act of creating a novel political identity *beyond* that which obtains in the world as it exists.[111] As I read him, Fanon's insistence on the "humanism" of the national project is, above all, an insistence on its universalist character, the measure of which is its ability to overcome the Manichean terms of the colonial relation.

Humanism and Socialism

Fanon's invocation of a "humanism" beyond race is also clearly aligned with a socialist project, a vision of postcolonial society that is free of all forms of exploitation. At this point it is worth situating Fanon in relation to other contemporaries who defended an "African Socialism." It is indeed striking that thinkers as varied as Leopold Senghor, Julius Nyerere, and Kwame Nkrumah all, after their own fashion, appealed to "humanism" as a way of articulating an inclusive national identity, in which postcolonial citizenship would not be defined by race or ethnicity. Unlike Fanon, however, the humanisms of these thinkers often tended to invoke an "African personality" that harkened back to a mythologized, cooperative village society as the basis for a non-conflictual social order. For thinkers like Nyerere and Senghor, "humanism"

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[108] Fanon, "Why We Use Violence," *Alienation and Freedom*, 657.

[109] Fanon, *Wretched,* 98-99, 95. Cabral, "The Weapon of Theory" [1966] https://www.marxists.org/subject/africa/cabral/1966/weapon-theory.htm

[110] Michael Neocosmos, *Thinking Freedom in Africa: Toward a Theory of Emancipatory Politics* (Wits University Press, 2016), 115.

[111] Neocosmos, *Thinking Freedom in Africa,* 114.

functions as a discursive attempt to avoid or pre-empt not only ethnic, racial, and religious conflicts, but *class conflict* as well. To a certain degree, this is understandable from the perspective of these post-independence leaders, who had inherited very fragile polities and were eager to avoid conflicts of all kinds while charting a peaceful road to "socialism."[112] While Fanon's humanism also points towards a harmonious future he is, however, much more attentive to the likelihood and necessity of class conflict in the post-independence nation, in part because he sees the national bourgeoisie as fundamentally incapable of delivering upon the emancipatory promise of the national struggle, and unable to transcend the Manichean racial order they had inherited.

Fanon is likewise considerably less invested than many of his contemporaries in the recovery of a "African personality" or "essence"; his humanism is far more a call to invention than an attempt to restore the colonized to some imagined prior harmony.[113] Fanon is also, as I have discussed to some extent already, quite wary of the turn to tradition or religion. In this sense, his humanism shares of the classical concerns of secularist post-Feuerbachian humanism, and its ambitions to found an ethical order which "has its root in man."[114] Fanon's exchange with Ali Shariati offers some clarification of his attitudes: Shariati, who was responsible for translating *Wretched of the Earth* into Persian, espoused a fascinating blend of Shia theology and Marxism and advocated a "return to the self" (which, as Fanon recognized, was not so different

[112] Nyerere, for instance, asserted that "the true African socialist does not look on one class of men as his brethren and another as his natural enemies." Nyerere [1962], "Ujamaa—the Basis of African Socialism" in *Ujamaa: Essays on Socialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 11. For an insightful analysis of Nyerere's attempts to downplay both class and ethnic conflict in post-independence Tanzania, see Mahmood Mamdani, "Beyond Settlers and Natives: The Theory and Practice of Decolonization" in *Define and Rule: Native as Political Identity* (Harvard University Press, 2012), 85-125.

[113] In a very interesting analysis Anthony Bogues denies this "restorative" impulse and argues that thinkers like Nyerere and Nkrumah are actually involved in the construction of a much more *novel* humanism. He distinguishes them here from Marx, arguing that "for Marx, the invention of the human was a constant process of restoration of a wholeness to man." I think the opposite is true: Nyerere and Nkrumah are *explicitly* restorationist, grounding their humanisms, at least partially, in an idealized notion of precolonial African village life, whereas it is Marx who treats as "ridiculous" any yearning for an "original fullness." This is not, however, to deny the novelty of Nyerere and Nkrumah's broader political projects, nor is it even to deny that their humanisms, despite their appeals to restoration, are actually inventions in their own right ("invented traditions" are, after all, still inventions!) Nonetheless, it is Fanon who stands out here in his eschewal of a restorative logic. See Anthony Bogues, *Black Heretics, Black Prophets: Radical Political Intellectuals* (Routledge, 2003), 119; Marx, *Grundrisse,* 162. For evidence of Nkrumah and Nyerere's respective restorationist ambitions, see Nyerere's essay, "Ujamaa—the Basis of African Socialism" (cited in preceding footnote), and Nkrumah [1964], *Consciencism: Philosophy and Ideology for De-Colonization,* (Monthly Review Press, 1970), 68.

[114] Fanon, "First Truths on the Colonial Problem," in *Toward the African Revolution*, 125.

from similar efforts among African intellectuals).[115] In a 1961 letter, mailed to Shariati (then living in Paris) from the *El Moudjahid* offices in Tunis, Fanon acknowledged the "immense cultural and social resources harboured in Muslim societies" but expressed his concern that "reviving sectarian and religious mindsets could impede this necessary unification – already difficult enough to attain – and divert that nation yet to come … from its ideal future by bringing it closer to its past."[116]

It is notable that while Fanon clarifies important points of disagreement with Shariati, he concludes his letter by acknowledging that while his own "path diverges from, and is even opposed to" Shariati's, he was nonetheless "persuaded that both paths will ultimately join up towards that destination where humanity lives well."[117] This speaks to a curious feature of Fanon's humanism, namely its pronounced ecumenism. Fanon himself links "humanism" to a socialist perspective. He rules out the capitalist path, asserting that "the capitalist way of life is incapable of allowing us to achieve our *national* and *universal* project."[118] On the contrary, he argues that socialism, based as it is "on the principle that man is the most precious asset" represents a far more salutary path for the independent nations, arguing that it "will allow us to progress faster in greater harmony, consequently ruling out the possibility of a caricature of society where a privileged few hold the reins of political and economic power without a thought for the nation as a whole."[119] Fanon nonetheless argues that the Third World must invent a socialism for itself. As he writes:

> The Third World must not be content to define itself in relation to values which preceded it. On the contrary, the underdeveloped countries must endeavor to focus on their very own values as well as methods and style specific to them. *The basic issue with which we are faced is not the unequivocal choice between socialism and capitalism such as they have been defined by men from different continents and different periods of time*.[120]

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[115] Despite Fanon's own professed reservations about Islamic revivalism, Shariati's editorial choices in his 1971 preface to and translation of *Wretched of the Earth* imparted a distinctly Islamic character to Fanon's text. See Farzaneh Farahzad, "Voice and Visibility: Fanon in the Persian Context," in *Translating Fanon Across Continents and Languages,* Kathryn Batchelor and Sue-Ann Harding eds., (Routledge, 2017), 129-150.

[116] Fanon, "Letter to Ali Shariati" [1961], in *Alienation and Freedom*, 668-669.

[117] Fanon, "Letter to Shariati," 669.

[118] Fanon, *Wretched*, 55. Emphasis mine.

[119] Fanon, *Wretched*, 56.

[120] Fanon, *Wretched,* 55. Emphasis mine.

Over the 1960's, however, other thinkers grew increasingly concerned that this idea of a "unique path" for the Third World, common to Fanon and others, lent itself to unacceptable departures from foundational socialist principles. To be sure, the efforts of Fanon and others to insist on a new path for the Third World was in part informed by a desire to avoid the entanglements of the Cold War. But one need not be an uncritical devotee of Soviet Marxism to see that the appeal to invention might effectively abandon the socialist path under the guise of reinventing it. Indeed, under the name of charting a unique course, many countries simply created the kind of neocolonial kleptocracies Fanon so feared. This was, for instance, the criticism that Kwame Nkrumah levelled at Senegalese President Leopold Senghor's efforts to create an African Socialism. As Nkrumah cautioned: "Socialist countries in Africa may differ in this or that detail of their policies, but such differences ought not to be arbitrary."[121] Nkrumah's essays, "African Socialism Revisited" and "The Myth of the Third World," are a valuable testament to the difficulties of this tightrope walk between creative appropriation and opportunism.[122]

Although Fanon was readily alert to the possibility that postcolonial leaders might abuse the rhetoric of "tradition" or "nationalism" in an opportunistic fashion, he seems to have been somewhat less alive to the possibility that *humanism* too might be appropriated by the national bourgeoisie. Fanon sees humanism as an ideological foundation for the post-independence nation-building project, insisting that "there must be a concept of man, a concept about the future of mankind."[123] But while Fanon insists that the content of this humanism will be substantiated through the struggle for freedom, he is relatively less attuned to the possibility that "humanism" itself might offer a rather thin or ambiguous political program. The risk I am pointing to here is the possibility that the postcolonial regime might propound "a concept of man" and employ the rhetoric of "humanism" but offer *little else*. This was the danger Louis Althusser later raised with respect to the uptake of "humanism" in the Soviet Union after Stalin's death. As Althusser

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[121] Kwame Nkrumah, "African Socialism Revisited" [1966] in *Revolutionary Path* (Panaf Books, 1973), 444. This essay is also to some an extent a self-criticism of Nkrumah's own earlier arguments about African socialism.

[122] The latter essay, "The Myth of the Third World" argues that Fanon's use of the concept "the Third World" lent itself to compromises that Fanon himself would surely have found unacceptable. In his review of *Wretched of the Earth,* Nghe makes a similar claim, and cites Nehru's leadership of India as an example, writing: "when Nehru refuses to give the word socialism a clear definition … he seeks simply to hide the fact that … the landowners continue to collect profits, annuities, and farm rents, while tasking the people with finding, amidst the fog and confusion, an "Indian road" to socialism." Nghe, "Fanon and the Problems of Independence." Nkrumah, "The Myth of the Third World" [1968], in *Revolutionary Path*, 435-438.

[123] Fanon, *Wretched*, 143.

observed, the turn to humanism in the USSR seemed a way of papering over a number of very real problems which, as Althusser saw it, were "basically problems that, far from calling for a 'philosophy of man', involve the preparation of new forms of *organization* for economic, political and ideological life."[124] Here, humanism served as a way of deflecting and deferring urgent questions to which it offered an inadequate answer. Indeed, humanism was on the lips of many African leaders, including figures such as Senghor, with whom Fanon, as I address below, had profound disagreements.

The ambiguous quality of humanism licenses comparisons, such as those which Gary Wilder has recently drawn between Fanon and Senghor. Senghor assumed the presidency of an independent Senegal somewhat reluctantly, as he was once among those reformers who preferred an enduring, albeit more racially inclusive, political union with France. As a leading poet of the Negritude movement, Senghor was also a vocal champion of a literary "humanism." Wilder points to a kind of missed connection between Fanon and Senghor, arguing that Fanon's uncompromising attitude on the question of independence left him "unable or unwilling to recognize real affinities between his and Senghor's radical humanist objectives."[125] The political and intellectual distance between Senghor and Fanon was great indeed—for instance, Senghor actively supported the French position in Algeria.[126] They also grounded their understandings of humanism rather differently; Senghor's more moderate humanism sought not only to recover an idealized African "essence" but was also dedicated to preserving cultural ties with France. Senghor's critics, however, recognized that his devotion to French culture masked a more troubling neocolonial relationship; behind Senghor's calls for "*un humanisme de la francophonie*" lurked *la Françafrique.*[127] Where Wilder takes Fanon and Senghor's shared

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[124] Althusser, "Marxism and Humanism" in *For Marx*, 239. Emphasis mine.

[125] Wilder, *Freedom Time,* 135.

[126] As Fanon notes in *Wretched of the Earth,* Senghor voted against recognizing Algerian independence at the United Nations. Wilder clarifies that his aim is not to evaluate Senghor's record in office. This is understandable—it is not a flattering one, not least of all where Algeria is concerned. While I am skeptical of Wilder's glowing assessment of Senghor and find that he passes over the anti-imperialist critique of Senghor too quickly, I think he is nonetheless right to suggest that renewed attention to the federalist aspirations of Senghor and Aimé Césaire might help us to denaturalize the nation-state and thus expand our political imaginations. For another analysis of Senghor, which echoes Wilder's positive assessment, see: Shiera S. el-Malik, "Reading Imaginative Futures across Historical Moments; Or Speaking Surreptitiously in Imperial Centres," *Contexto Internacional* 38, no. 3 (2016).

[127] Leopold Sedar Senghor, "Pour un humanisme de la francophonie" *La Nouvelle Revue des Deux Mondes* (1975), 276-284. Senghor faced massive student demonstrations in 1968, in which protestors accused him of being a "neo-colonial valet." For more on the 1968 protests in Senegal, see: Pascal Bianchini, "The 1968 Years: Revolutionary Politics in Senegal" *Review of African Political Economy* 46 no. 160 (2019), 184–203.

investment in "humanism" as evidence of the *power* of humanism as a unifying theme of anticolonial discourse, the comparison might equally be taken as evidence of the concept's deep ambiguities. But if Fanon was ever critical of Senghor's culturalist politics and did not share Senghor's enduring devotion (however cosmopolitan) to France, this does not mean that Fanon himself rejected everything associated with "Europe."

European Humanism and the European Working Class

Before I conclude this chapter, it is worth dwelling for a moment on Fanon's relationship to a hypocritical European "humanism." I will also consider a related issue, namely Fanon's relationship to Europeans themselves, especially the European working class. Fanon is clear-sighted about the racist self-delusion of Europe's humanism, noting that, "the bourgeois ideology that proclaims all men to be essentially equal, manages to remain consistent with itself by urging the subhuman to rise to the level of Western humanity that it embodies."[128] On this question Fanon clearly shares much with his former teacher, Aimé Césaire, whose *Discourse on Colonialism* inveighed against Europe's "sordidly racist" *pseudo*-humanism.[129] These concerns have set the tone for many readings of Fanon, which treat him primarily a critic of the falsities of a dominant, Western humanism.[130]

It is worth stressing, however, that Fanon does not see these racist hypocrisies as a *necessary* feature of "European thought" as such. Although it has become popular in certain tendencies of postcolonial and decolonial thought to criticize "Western thought," "humanism" or the "Enlightenment" as irrevocably tainted by association or complicity with empire, Fanon himself licenses no such maneuver. Rather, even as he calls on revolutionaries to "leave this Europe which never stops talking of man yet massacres him at every one of its street corners," he also insists, provocatively, that "*all the elements for a solution to the major problems of humanity existed at one time or another in European thought*."[131] This often neglected passage (inconvenient as it is to a certain strand of decolonial theorizing) is nonetheless no triumphant celebration of the "European," but is a rather pointed claim about political responsibility. After

[128] Fanon, *Wretched,* 110.
[129] Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 37.
[130] This tendency is critiqued in Getachew and Mantena, "Anticolonialism and the Decolonization of Political Theory."
[131] Fanon, *Wretched,* 235; 237. Emphasis mine.

all, if Europeans did *not* possess any elements for a "solution to the problems of humanity," and were simply enthralled to a category of the "human" irrevocably imprinted upon the European consciousness since 1492, how could they have known any better? How could anyone be held responsible for colonialism if alternatives were simply inconceivable? If for this reason alone (although there are others too) it is essential to reject any idea of "incommensurability" between the categories of European thought and the project of anticolonialism. Fanon's framing not only rejects the idea that colonialism was primarily an "epistemic" project, but also points to elements of a genuine universality in European thought and politics. The problem, as Fanon seems it, is that these emancipatory currents were subsumed by, or sacrificed for, a belief in "Europe" itself, displacing what was genuinely universal and human with a narcissistic racism.

Fanon makes a similar judgment of Europeans themselves. In *Wretched of the Earth* Fanon suggests that the European working classes *ought* to be natural allies of the anticolonial movements but argues they had been seduced by a racial narcissism that steered them away from a fight for universal emancipation. Fanon reminds the reader, however, that "there were Europeans… who urged the European workers to smash this narcissism and break with this denial of reality."[132] Fanon himself made such overtures the European left a number of times during his career, particularly while writing for *El Moudjahid*. In one memorable series of articles from 1957 Fanon sternly reminded the French left that the one of the "first duties" of left intellectuals in a colonialist country was to "unreservedly support the national aspirations of colonized peoples."[133] As Fanon would emphasize, this was no question of sympathy or pity, but a reminder of a common struggle.

In fact, Fanon's analysis suggests that this failure to recognize Algerian humanity had a destructive and baleful impact on French society itself. Although *bien pensant* French intellectuals recognized the damaging effects of the Algerian war on France itself, their racism prevented them from grasping the *solution* that lay before them—to unreservedly embrace the Algerian cause as their own (as Marx had once counselled English workers with respect to the Irish). The Algerian war had a shocking effect on French society, and many liberals were alarmed by reports of widespread torture perpetrated by the French in Algeria. However, as

[132] Fanon, *Wretched*, 237. Given Fanon's familiarity with the history of the early Communist International it does not take too great a leap of imagination to speculate that Fanon may have had Lenin's example in mind.

[133] Fanon, "French Intellectuals and Democrats and the Algerian Revolution" [El Moudjahid 1957], *Toward the African Revolution*, 76.

Fanon noted, the French "reckoning" with torture, such as there was one, seemed far more concerned with what torture meant for the "souls" of young French soldiers, said to be "learning fascism." As Fanon wryly observed: "one cannot fail to note that only the moral consequences of these crimes on the soul of the French are of concern to these humanists."[134] Fanon himself was well aware of the fascist danger and the fact that reactionary forces in Algeria exercised a rightward push on French political life. In May 1958, after a coup by military generals in Algeria returned General Charles De Gaulle to power in Paris, Fanon argued that the moment was one in which "a declining colonialism reveals its true face": that of fascism. Fanon hoped that the moment would prove a clarifying one:

> We are thus arriving at a turn where the relations between the Algerian revolution and the French left can be established on unambiguous foundations. Fascism and colonialism are intrinsically linked; Algerian revolution and French democracy ought to rediscover their natural ties. At the moment when freedoms are threatened in France, when fascism is at the doors of the Republic, the French's fight for peace in Algeria ought to be reasserted and a resolute commitment made to the revolutionary path.[135]

The May 58 putsch did not prove the galvanizing occasion for resistance that Fanon had hoped and over the following two years he grew increasingly disappointed and disinterested in the French left through the outlet provided by *El Moudjahid.* His contributions to the paper grew more infrequent as turned his attention to diplomatic work in Africa.[136] Fanon's writings, exceedingly difficult to publish in France as it was, were largely ignored by the French public.[137] But while Fanon lost patience and interest in addressing the French left, he never succumbed to

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[134] Fanon, "Algeria Face to Face with the French Torturers" [El Moudjahid 1957], *TAR*, 71.

[135] Fanon, "Ultracolonialism's Rationale" [*El Moudjahid* 1958] in *Alienation and Freedom,* 605. Fanon's analysis here clearly recalls Aimé Césaire's argument that fascism represented the application of colonialism to Europe itself. Fanon's intervention also brilliantly reverses an old PCF position: the PCF had long opposed Algerian nationalism, prioritizing a united struggle against "fascism" (both before *and* after WWII) over demands for national independence. Fanon reminds them that the *colonial project itself,* not the aspirations of the colonized, was the source of fascism.

[136] This pivot in Fanon's attitudes towards the French Left and renewed enthusiasm for diplomatic work are well discussed in Chapter Five, "Tunisia" in Christopher Lee's *Frantz Fanon: Towards a Revolutionary Humanism* (Ohio University Press, 2015).

[137] While Fanon's interventions did not bear fruit in Europe during the Algerian war, his work would be taken up with great enthusiasm by the European New Left in years after his death. This story is charted by Christoph Kalter in *The Discovery of the Third World: Decolonization and the Rise of the New Left in France, C. 1950-1976* (Cambridge University Press, 2016), especially chapter five.

the view that there was an incommensurability of interests between the European workers struggle and that of the Algerian revolution. As he reminded readers in *Wretched of the Earth*:

> This colossal task, which consists of reintroducing man into the world, man in his totality, will be achieved with the crucial help of the European masses who would do well to confess that they have often rallied behind the position of our common masters on colonial issues. In order to do this, the European masses must first of all decide to wake up, put on their thinking caps and stop playing the irresponsible game of Sleeping Beauty.[138]

And yet while the European working classes would prove, Fanon hoped, crucial allies, Fanon nonetheless saw a universalizing energy emanating principally from the struggles of the decolonizing world. As his concluding appeal in *Wretched of the Earth* goes: "For Europe, for ourselves, and for humanity, comrades, we must make a new start, develop a new way of thinking, and endeavor to create a new man."[139]

Fanon's new humanism is fundamentally a question of invention, imbued with the hope that the anticolonial struggles would usher in a new era of human emancipation. This vision of a new humanity to be realized through Third World liberation has struck some critics as politically vacuous. Nghe, for instance, argued that "the notion of a 'Third World,' invested with specific qualities and called by destiny to restore humanity by virtue of the unique fact of being the Third World, is devoid of content."[140] If this were accurate, Nghe's critique would be on the mark. But he misses something crucial—Fanon did not believe that the "unique fact of being the Third World" imbued it with a special "destiny." Rather, he hoped that the Third World's distinct *experience of political struggle* for national liberation would generate a new, universalizing and emancipatory project. *Wretched of the Earth* no doubt imparts many pieces of advice to anticolonial revolutionaries, but it is ultimately not so much a programmatic text as it is a call to invention, pointing to an emergent, and insurgent, universality.

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[138] Fanon, *Wretched,* 62.
[139] Fanon, *Wretched*, 239.
[140] Nghe, "Fanon and the Problems of Independence."

CONCLUSION

Fanon's appeal to a "new humanism" is above all a revolutionary exhortation. In Chapter 1 we saw that Marx and Engels feared that the language of humanism risked diluting the commitment to class struggle and gestured instead towards an ideal of class harmony. Fanon, however, develops a far-reaching critique of the national bourgeoisie grounded, in part, in what he identified as their *inability* to offer an inclusive humanistic vision for postcolonial society. Where Roy's humanism takes an elitist turn, Fanon's humanism remains anchored in the enthusiasm and aspirations of the most oppressed and excluded constituencies of the colonized society. Although Fanon clearly sought to *surpass* a narrow-minded racial nationalism in the name of "humanism," he also treats the *nation* as the necessary basis and form for these humanistic aspirations. In this sense Fanon can easily be read as both *apologist* and *critic* of nationalism; the key to understanding this contradiction is to recognize that Fanon recommended *overcoming* nationalism by first whole-heartedly embracing it and fighting *for* the nation. As we saw in the previous chapter, Roy rightly became rather skeptical of this dialectical view which imagined nationalism could be overcome by deepening and intensifying it. Unlike Roy, however, Fanon's brief life never afforded an opportunity to reflect with on the independence movements at a distance—we are left, instead, with those works written in the heat of the struggle itself.

Fanon died in 1961, a year before Algeria finally won its independence. Through his participation in the FLN Fanon had come to see Algeria as a vanguard nation of global revolution and he fantasized of "carrying Algeria to the four corners of Africa."[141] Algeria, to Fanon, signified not just insurrection, but a spirit of anticolonial solidarity and a determination to radically remake the world. Fanon's sense of Algerian nationhood was always profoundly internationalist; Algeria would be a nation *defined,* he imagined, by the very depth of its commitment to the collective emancipation of humanity. For a time, independent Algeria seemed to embody this Fanonian spirit. In the 1960's and early 1970's, liberated Algiers became, as Amilcar Cabral called it, "the Mecca of Revolution," a city to which rebels from Soweto to Palestine to California flocked and conspired together.[142] However, the FLN's vocal internationalism and support for global revolution sometimes masked more troubling domestic

[141] Fanon, "This Africa to Come," 180.
[142] Byrne, *Mecca of Revolution*, 3.

realities. As the heady optimism of the 1960's faded, it seemed clear that many of Fanon's darkest preconditions had come true in Algeria and in the wider Third World: postcolonial polities were wracked by ethnic and religious conflicts and governed by corrupt national parties and military dictatorships that still served, as Fanon feared, the interests of the former colonial powers. In the end, *Wretched of the Earth* has the distinct quality of capturing both the most optimistic, utopian aspirations of the national liberation movements, while also predicting their postcolonial troubles with disheartening accuracy.

Due to the glaring "incompleteness" of the Fanonian project, and perhaps due as well to the malleability of Fanon's "humanist" vision, a great deal of the Fanon literature, especially since the 1990's, can justly be described as revivalist (if not hagiographical), arguing for a contemporary resurrection of "Fanonism." While I have a profound sympathy with these efforts, I also believe we would do well to reflect on our distance from Fanon's political moment. I think, for instance, Fanon's vision of a postnational future than can only be realized by *deepening* an "authentic" nationalism is not so worth reviving today. This is not to say that it was never a defensible vision. But it is to recognize that after the heroic achievement of national independence, the tools of the independence struggle and its strategies of criticism may no longer have quite the same emancipatory purchase they once did. Considering these questions is hardly at odds with the spirit of Fanon's work, who wrote that "each generation must discover its mission, fulfill it or betray it, in relative opacity."[143]

In the following chapter I begin with the work of David Scott, who has insisted on this kind of contextual distance from the Fanonian national liberation project. I will have more to say about Scott's insightful critique in the following chapter, but I generally share his sense that the conceptual political vocabulary of the 1960's needs some rethinking today. For now, however, let me conclude by addressing one point I think Scott gets wrong. Scott argues that Fanon, like many of his generation, works within what he calls an "alienation-realization" paradigm. This paradigm, Scott argues, depends on a kind of metaphysical idea of an "authentic" humanity that exists *prior* to colonial repression, the overthrowing of which represents the "realization" or "restoration" of the humanity of the colonized. Scott also claims that this "Fanonian story licenses too unreflexive idea of an essential native subject," an idea that has acquired more

[143] Fanon, *Wretched*, 145.

reactionary connotations in the decades since independence.[144] Scott makes some perceptive criticisms here, and I think he is right to draw attention to the potentially conservative implications of this "restorative" tendency. But while this may be true of other thinkers (and may even be true of Fanon at certain moments), I think Scott misreads the overall thrust of Fanon's intervention.

Fanon's call to a "new humanism" is one of *invention* not *restoration*. The concluding exhortation of *Wretched of the Earth* is, after all, "let us endeavor to *invent* a man in full."[145] Likewise, Fanon's concept of the nation, which he thought would pave the road to this new humanism, was one which he sought to imbue with a fundamentally novel and universal character. While the "nation" may no longer be able to fulfill the role Fanon once assigned it, his confidence in the possibility of human transformation and his resolute commitment to seeing humanity through to a new egalitarian horizon is one to which we should maintain a fidelity. It is indeed precisely to the extent that a "new humanism" names Fanon's commitment to an emancipatory universalism that it must be adamantly affirmed and defended in the present. In an era where we seem resigned to much more modest political horizons, these Promethean ambitions to create a world free of racist colonial hierarchies and the depredations of capital are worth recalling today.

[144] David Scott, *Refashioning Futures*, 205.
[145] Fanon, *Wretched*, 236. Emphasis mine.

Chapter Four: Humanism After National Liberation

There is no drama like the drama of history.

—C.L.R. James

Many participants in the anticolonial movements of the twentieth century imagined an egalitarian future for humanity, not just a world without colonial powers. The twentieth century is marked at once by great victories over colonial domination, but also by the defeat of these far-reaching emancipatory ambitions. Renewed attention is being paid today to these movements and their "worldmaking" ambitions—ambitions fought for in guerilla wars, on the floor of the United Nations General Assembly, and expounded at international conferences such as the 1955 Bandung Conference in Indonesia and the 1966 Tricontinental Conference in Cuba. The defeat of these ambitions was both a product of the inveterate hostility of the former colonial powers and the new American superpower, and of the internal contradictions of these projects (contradictions which cannot be understood without reference to the aforementioned colonial hostility). The governments which took power after independence defended the principle of human equality on the global stage and fought to defend their hard-won sovereignty. The irony was that even as these states defended an international egalitarianism of states, the fragile domestic reality was often quite repressive.[1]

As Adom Getachew, Salar Mohandesi, and others have documented, the rise of "human rights" and "humanitarianism" in the 1980s *displaced* the radical, anti-imperialist projects which preceded it, including both the Third Worldist Bandung and Marxist-Leninist Tricontinental visions.[2] The new humanitarianism, which arose in response to genuine postcolonial crises, appealed to "human rights" beyond state borders, subverting the claim to national sovereignty so adamantly defended by postcolonial governments. The emergent discourse of human rights and

[1] This irony is not wholly unfamiliar—Doris Garraway refers us back to the "constitutive" and "paradoxical" universalism of the Haitian Revolution, which combined a militant egalitarianism on the global stage with a domestic authoritarianism which demanded the obedient submission of its newly emancipated citizens. As Garraway points out, this Haitian experience is one which foreshadows later national liberation struggles. Doris L. Garraway, "Empire of Freedom, Kingdom of Civilization: Henry Christophe, the Baron de Vastey, and the Paradoxes of Universalism in Postrevolutionary Haiti," *small axe* 39 (2012): 1-21.

[2] Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking After Empire*; Salar Mohandesi, *Red Internationalism*. See also Samuel Moyn's influential account of the rise of human rights in: *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Harvard University Press, 2010).

humanitarianism, which promoted direct intervention to alleviate human suffering, had a depoliticizing impetus, elevating moral imperatives and charity over political demands, and fostered a view of postcolonial humanity as helpless, suffering victims in need of Western protection from their own governments. The humanitarian ethos, championed by many disillusioned radicals previously engaged in anti-imperialist solidarity, also proved appealing to former colonial governments as yet another means of undermining anti-imperialism.[3] By the turn of the century, humanitarian intervention had become the rallying cry of twenty-first century empire.

In the absence of any global emancipatory project, this liberal-imperialist vision of human rights still sets the limit on our horizon of possibility. Humanitarian sentimentalism sees especially the poor and oppressed segments of humanity as victims and objects of pity rather than as potential political subjects. We have little faith today in our collective capacities, in the earth-shattering and world-making movements which once gripped millions in both the global South and North. To the extent that this humanitarian vision is receding today (discredited as it has been by the West's obscene hypocrisy), it is not being displaced by a solidaristic ethos, but by naked, reactionary cynicism that denigrates compassion and upholds instead the violent, neo-Darwinian conviction that might makes right. Writing in South Africa's *Mail & Guardian,* Achille Mbembe points to, among other things, the global rise of the far-right, militarized borders and xenophobia, reckless extractivism and deepening austerity, as evidence that "the age of humanism is ending."[4]

In light of these trends, it makes sense that there has been a renewed interest in the anticolonial tradition, including particularly those humanist thinkers who resisted the nationalist enclosure of these projects. Dipesh Chakrabarty, for instance, has suggested that the unfolding climate catastrophe, which threatens human life on earth, represents one such reason for returning to this tradition. As Chakrabarty rightly suggests (and as also noted in the Introduction), "anti-colonial, utopian humanism remains valuable as an archive precisely because this humanism turns around certain axes—the universal versus the particular, the ideal versus the pragmatic, the past as a resource … versus the need to overcome the past—that often act as

[3] The story of former radicals turning to human rights is well documented in Mohandesi's *Red Internationalism*.

[4] Achille Mbembe, "The Age of Humanism is Ending" 22 December 2016, *The Mail & Guardian* https://mg.co.za/article/2016-12-22-00-the-age-of-humanism-is-ending/

organizing themes for contemporary debates as well."[5] I share Chakrabarty's assessment of the contemporary relevance of this tradition; indeed, such a sense has informed this project from its outset.

Chakrabarty's intervention also raises important questions about how we should approach these projects from our own historical moment, and what inspiration we might hope to find in them today. These are the questions I consider in this chapter. However, my own conclusions differ from Chakrabarty's. Like others before him, Chakrabarty finds in Fanon's humanism a disturbingly violent utopianism. While appreciative of the "poetic appeal" of Fanon's humanism, and cognizant that such idealism played an important role in the revolutionary struggles of the time, Chakrabarty nonetheless concludes that Fanon's universalism is one not worth reviving.[6] As he puts it, Fanon's vision, grounded in the "violent action of the will" is one which "has never been realized in the world and cannot be, for its extreme and deliberate inattention to history."[7] Against this explosive but apparently doomed humanism, Chakrabarty instead turns to a different legacy, that of Aimé Césaire and Leopold Senghor. In the humanism of the Négritude poet-statesmen, Chakrabarty finds a cosmopolitan sensibility that resists Eurocentrism, eschews cultural "authenticity," and yet remains more attuned to historical particularity than Fanon's aspirations for novelty and rupture.[8] Although Chakrabarty defends the idealism of Négritude humanism in face of the seemingly more "humble," "pragmatic," and "practical" tasks of the present, he finds this more modest humanism better suited to the current conjuncture than Fanon's futile exhortations.[9]

Chakrabarty's valorization of the humble and pragmatic over the grand ambition to effect a genuine novelty that might break with history speaks to a contemporary malaise recognizable in various tendencies in critical theory, including posthumanism and different strands of post-colonial theory. Having lost confidence in the progressive course of history, and uneasy about radical acts of will, some thinkers have distanced themselves from the more assertive and prescriptive political projects of, say, a Fanon, on the grounds that they risk

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[5] Dipesh Chakrabarty "Humanism in a Global World," in *Humanism in Intercultural Perspective: Experiences and Expectations*, Jörn Rüsen and Henner Laas, ed. (Transaction Publishers, 2009), 27.

[6] Chakrabarty, "Humanism in a Global World," 35 n. 5.

[7] Chakrabarty, "Humanism in a Global World," 35.

[8] Chakrabarty acknowledges, but does not endorse, Fanon's critique of the Négritude movement for its tendency to romanticize and essentialize African history and identity.

[9] Chakrabarty, "Humanism in a Global World," 28.

reproducing the practice of "mastery" associated with colonial domination and ecological catastrophe.[10] Alberto Toscano is right, I think, to see in this contemporary "anti-Prometheanism" the lingering influence of a neoliberalism that dismissed any possibility of a different future for humanity and has now left disillusioned radicals with the resigned conviction that "the price of our principles is prohibitive."[11] There are many today who would seem to make a virtue of caution rather than enthusiasm and accede, however reluctantly, to the limits of the present and turn to the past with the lens of melancholia and tragedy.

These are, I argue, the wrong lessons to take from this history of intellectual and political struggle. That said, not everything in the humanist problematic necessarily remains worth recuperating today. In part one of this final chapter I first consider at length the work of David Scott, who has for many years been developing a poignant critique of the humanist assumptions that defined an earlier period of political struggle. I affirm many of Scott's critical points but take my distance from his political conclusions which seem, in my view, too resigned to the eclipse of these earlier horizons. Scott is right, however, to warn against the temptations of nostalgia and to suggest that we should take some critical distance from the revolutionary projects of the past, lest we imagine we can simply step into their shoes and take up their historically specific projects as our own.

After discussing Scott's work, along other thinkers who share overlapping concerns, in part two of this chapter I offer a different diagnosis of the conclusion of this revolutionary sequence. Beginning with Michael Neocosmos's insightful reading of Fanon as a practitioner of a specific "mode of politics," I argue that Fanon belonged to a particular revolutionary sequence in which the *nation* emerged as the central animating category of political contestation and national independence as the overriding goal (although the sequence also produced stringent critics of nationalism, Roy among them). Building from Neocosmos as well as Salar Mohandesi and Nandita Sharma, I argue that it is more productive to approach this history as the conclusion of a particular revolutionary sequence and its animating assumptions, rather than the end of revolutionary possibility and the prospect of radical human transformation as such, which seems

[10] See for instance Julietta Singh, *Unthinking Mastery: Dehumanism and Decolonial Entanglements* (Duke University Press, 2018). Similar reservations about Fanon's prescriptivism animate Chakrabarty and Scott (with less emphasis on post-humanist ecological concerns in Scott's case).

[11] Alberto Toscano, "Prometheanism" in *Terms of Disorder: Keywords for an Interregnum* (Seagull Books, 2023), 98.

to be the implication of Scott's argument. The terminus of this sequence is one Roy can be said to have recognized: namely, the impossibility of the "Fanonian" or "Leninist" aspiration to overcome nationalism by *deepening* it. Part three offers a concluding discussion of the concept of the "new man"—an idea which in some respects might seem to represent the most hubristic and unhelpful legacies of the twentieth century. Engaging Alain Badiou's critical reflections on the "new man" I defend the idea of a "new humanity" advanced by Fanon—one premised on political invention, not restoration. Fanon's affirmation that a new humanity can be invented through creative political struggle offers an antidote to a reigning cynicism about transformative possibility.

PART ONE: TRAGEDY CONTRA HUMANISM

Scott's animating concern across the trilogy of works which include *Refashioning Futures* (1999), *Conscripts of Modernity* (2004), and *Omens of Adversity* (2014), is to insist upon our contemporary distance from the theorists and participants of the twentieth century revolutions.[12] Drawing on intellectual historians including Quentin Skinner, Scott argues that the anticolonial political thought of the twentieth century should be understood as a response to a set of problems that are, by this point, rather distant from our own. Anticolonial thinkers like Fanon and C.L.R. James lived in a radically different world: they faced different problems, possessed different political models, held different understandings of history, and nurtured different hopes for the future. Theirs was an era defined by struggles for national self-determination and decolonization, of guerilla wars, of ideological polarity, and of postcolonial state building. Scott's project is a deeply melancholic one, self-consciously writing in the wake of the defeat of radical Third Worldism, the fall of state socialism, and the neoliberal "End of History." Over the course of these volumes Scott has grown increasingly insistent that the hopes of a previous

[12] I adopt Scott's "we" and "our" advisedly. At times, Scott's "referent-we" (to use Sylvia Wynter's term) is a specifically Caribbean "we." But it is also, often, a much broader "we," defined by a temporal distance between those who lived a period of global revolutionary possibility (in the "South" as well as the "North"), and those who live after the eclipse of these horizons. Indeed, a crucial and admirable feature of Scott's project is to treat the postcolonial experience, and the Caribbean postcolonial experience especially, as a source of universal lessons for modern political life. Sylvia Wynter, "Unparalled Catastrophe for Our Species?: Or, to Give Humanness a Different Future: Conversations." Interview by Katherine McKittrick in *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*, ed. Katherine McKittrick (Duke University Press, 2015), 24.

generation—hopes for a future which did not come to pass—have little purchase on the present. As such, we can no longer work with the same intellectual assumptions they once did and cannot hope to reinvigorate a revolutionary humanism which was, after all, an answer to a set of problems that are no longer relevant. Scott's rejection of this humanism is central, I believe, to the theoretical project that ties this trilogy together.

The closing chapter of Scott's *Refashioning Futures* addresses directly the exhaustion of what he calls "Bandung Humanism."[13] Taking its name from the famous Bandung Conference, held in Indonesia in 1955, Scott uses the term "Bandung Humanism" to refer to the broader constellation of ideas that informed how the national liberation project was understood and narrated by its leaders and theorists. Anticolonial liberation was narrated by these thinkers as a story of alienation and realization; that is, colonial power was depicted by thinkers like Fanon as an oppressive and dominating force which exercises power *over* a colonized population, alienating them from their essential "humanity." The struggle for national independence, then, was one of overcoming, which *restores* the "authentic" humanity of the colonized and clears the way for their (re)entry into the progressive course of history. Scott does not deny that this narrative once served a radical and important purpose in the struggle for independence and the years of postcolonial reconstruction, but he does suggest that as the horizon of possibility imagined by revolutionary Third Worldism has receded, battered by the neoliberal offensive, "humanitarian interventions," "structural adjustments" and much else, this humanism appears an increasingly spent force.

This exhaustion is evidenced, Scott tells us in 1999, by a moral panic then unfolding in Jamaica. The occasion of anxiety was the growth of new musical forms such as dancehall and the subjectivities which accompanied its rise. Dancehall, Scott suggests, appears radically at odds with the "Bandung humanist" sensibilities of an earlier generation, who were raised under a political project which championed Third World solidarity and self-determination on the world stage and was sustained at home by "an ethos of egalitarianism and social justice, a social democratic welfarism, a sense of service, and a faith in its own basic reasonableness and decency."[14] The celebratory hedonism of dancehall, Scott argues, appears stubbornly resistant to the social consciousness of the reggae artists who preceded them, and was widely understood by

[13] Scott, *Refashioning Futures*, 190-220.
[14] Scott, *Refashioning Futures*, 191.

the Jamaican middle class as evidence of social and moral decline. As Scott observes, the Jamaican "*ruud bwai"* (rude boy) was once legible as an "emblematic Fanonian figure," a subaltern rebel whose struggles were depicted against a social context of poverty and exploitation and could easily be enfolded into a progressive narrative of overcoming oppression and moral progress.[15] The contemporary "rude boy," Scott suggests, is a figure who resists such assimilation.

In essence, what Scott artfully describes is the transformation of an ideology of rebellion into an ideology of governance. What he captures is the transformation of a once radical and oppositional discourse into a staid posture of middle-class respectability, and the concurrent rise of new, subaltern subjectivities which appear immune to a political radicalism which is, in any case, no longer on offer. Although Scott argues for dispensing with the "revolutionary" and "universalist" ambitions of the Bandung generation, there is still in Scott's project in *Refashioning Futures* a search for oppositional, rebellious subjectivities that have fallen through the cracks of a tattered humanism. These remain, however, rebels "without a cause" and Scott himself has none to recommend to them. He concludes instead with an appreciative nod towards their "self-fashioning practices" and recommends a somewhat vague value pluralism.[16]

Scott's melancholic conviction in our distance from the revolutionary possibilities of the mid-twentieth century only deepens over the course of his next two books. *Conscripts of Modernity* introduces the idea that the anticolonial past should be reconstructed as a *tragic* narrative.[17] Borrowing from Hayden White's analysis of narrative forms of writing history, Scott suggests that anticolonial struggle was largely narrated by its contemporaries (like Fanon), as a *romance*, i.e., as a story of heroic overcoming, of human triumph against all odds and worldly limits. As White argues, tragedy resists the heroic overcoming associated with romance, or the festive reconciliations associated with the comic emplotment. In tragic narratives, "there are no festive occasions, except for false or illusory ones," and human strivings initiate sad consequences and reveal only deeper, intractable conflicts.[18] Tragedy nonetheless has its

[15] Scott, *Refashioning Futures*, 209.
[16] Scott, *Refashioning Futures,* 214.
[17] David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity*.
[18] Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe* (John Hopkins University Press, 1973), 9.

melancholic lessons to impart, if not for its protagonists, then at least for its spectators. As White puts it:

> The reconciliations that occur at the end of Tragedy are . . . *in nature of resignations of men to the conditions under which they must labor in the world*. These conditions, in turn, are asserted to be inalterable and eternal, and the implication is that man cannot change them but must work within them. *They set the limits on what may be aspired to and what may be legitimately aimed at in the quest for security and sanity in the world*.[19]

Such are the lessons, Scott believes, we should take from the history of anticolonial struggle; they are ones that should serve to temper the optimistic, romantic humanism of previous generations.

Scott makes his case in *Conscripts* through an original and attentive reading of CLR James's *The Black Jacobins*.[20] *Black Jacobins* is, in many respects, an epic anticolonial romance, but what makes it such an enduringly fecund text, Scott suggests, is James's attention to the tragic outcomes of the Haitian Revolution, which subtly undercuts the text's romantic humanism.[21] The romantic *and* tragic elements of James's text both turn on the figure of Toussaint L'Ouverture, the former slave turned general who led an army of self-emancipated Haitians through the twists and turns of revolutionary war. The Toussaint of James's narrative is at once every inch a world-historical romantic hero, and a quintessentially tragic figure in that it was precisely those qualities that precipitated his rise—his exceptional education, individual genius, and commitment to the ideals of the French Revolution—which led to his fall in a later phase of the revolution. With reactionary forces carrying the day in France, the high-minded Toussaint was left without Jacobin allies, isolated from his lieutenants, and unable to see the revolution through to its bloody culmination: the massacre of the island's white population (with the highly notable exception of Polish and German deserters from Napoleon's army) and the

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[19] White, *Metahistory,* 9. Emphasis mine.

[20] C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins* [1938] (Vintage Books, 1989).

[21] Scott makes much of the addition of several paragraphs reflecting on the tragic quality of Toussaint's fate in the revised 1963 edition of Black Jacobins, which were absent in the 1938 version. Scott attributes this new emphasis on tragedy to the shifting political conjuncture to which James is responding; in 1938 African independence seemed still a long way off, whereas by 1963 the process of decolonization was well underway, and James was more attuned to looming postcolonial dangers. Scott's analysis is convincing on the whole, but he somewhat overstates the novelty of these reflections; I share Jeremy Glick's view that a "tragic" sensibility is already present in the 1938 edition of *Black Jacobins*, even prior to the 1963 revisions. Glick. *The Black Radical Tragic: Performance, Aesthetics, and the Unfinished Haitian Revolution* (New York University Press, 2016).

declaration of Haiti's independence, both ordered by his former lieutenant, Jean-Jacques Dessalines. The tragedy, as both James and Scott underscore, was not just Toussaint's, but Haiti's. Despite winning their independence on the battlefield, Haitians were nonetheless later forced into devastating debt regime. Facing economic ruin, successive Haitian leaders would, as did Toussaint, send the emancipated population back to the plantations. As Scott puts it, the situation faced by Toussaint was one in which "there [were] only tragic alternatives."[22]

For Scott, tragedy is a reminder of what political action proves unable to overcome and he argues that to read *Black Jacobins* as a tragedy is "to read it as honoring the simple but often obscured fact that as human beings we never begin in conditions of our own choosing."[23] As Scott sees it, a humanistic confidence in our capacity for self-mastery and invention, or in the progressive march of history, are assumptions which threaten to elide or obscure this crucial insight. Scott emphasizes that political action does not necessarily lead to total triumph but runs up against conditions that can never be wholly transcended, and that lead to unexpected defeats and sorrows. Tragedy, then, is a reminder of constraints that cannot simply be shrugged off or willed away, and which still, in some sense, inform even those efforts to dramatically change the world. As he reminds us:

> The alternative modernity being made by Toussaint Louverture and his colleagues was not a prior choice they made as preconstituted subjects waking up in the middle of a world they found objectionable and in need of change; it was a choice partly constituted by that modern world and, therefore, a choice partly constructed through its conceptual and ideological apparatuses.[24]

This is, for Scott, indicative of the tragic contours of the (post)colonial relationship to the Enlightenment, as such—any oppositional politics must be articulated on an intellectual and political terrain already determined in advance. Or in other words, already colonized, with certain routes already closed off.

Scott's emphasis on the tragic outcomes of anticolonial liberation movements only deepens in 2014, with *Omens of Adversity*, which takes as its subject the Grenada Revolution of 1979, an event which, for Scott, represents the end of revolutionary socialism, as such. In a

[22] Scott, *Conscripts,* 164.
[23] Scott, *Conscripts,* 164-165.
[24] Scott, *Conscripts,* 115.

fascinating gloss of the intra-party disputes which ultimately led to the 1983 murder of Maurice Bishop and the subsequent American invasion, Scott underscores that this is not a story of malice or ill-intent, but one of earnest, devoted revolutionaries colliding with and misunderstanding each other. Scott attributes these outcomes to a failure to appreciate the fragile and contingent, that is to say *tragic,* dimensions of political action. This is a failure which he argues is deeply embedded in the practice of collective, revolutionary politics. Scott argues such movements are predisposed to ignore the possibility of misunderstanding that political action invariably opens up. As he puts it:

> Modern revolutionary movements have often sought to insulate themselves from the inherent unreliability of human action in one or both of two ways: they have sought to bind action to abstract and invariant principles or to bind action to a single personality—which is only to say, to degrade or defeat or preclude political action, properly speaking. They are, in this sense, *antipolitical.*[25]

But if militant, collective striving to realize principles is deemed "antipolitical," what then is the stuff of politics? Scott has few convincing answers here, but points towards certain virtues which, as he sees it, honour the contingency and fragility of political life and action: modesty and responsibility.[26]

Scott asserts that his is not a fatalistic or defeatist argument, but rather one which impresses upon us the gravity and risks of political action, to recognize, in other words, that "to use one's freedom [to act] is inevitably an *invitation* to tragedy."[27] However, despite his protests to the contrary, Scott's argument *does* end up in rather a fatalistic position and he is curiously resistant to the idea of drawing any political lessons from the Grenada Revolution. For instance, he dismisses Brian Meeks's suggestion that greater democratic openness might have saved the revolution as yet another attempt to assimilate revolutionary failure into a "consoling," "progressivist" philosophy of history.[28] For a thinker who makes so much of historical

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[25] Scott, *Omens of Adversity*, 64.

[26] Scott's conception of politics is articulated in deep dialogue with Hannah Arendt, who emerges as an interlocutor at the end of *Conscripts of Modernity* and is a consistent presence in *Omens of Adversity*.

[27] Scott, *Omens*, 62.

[28] Scott, *Omens*, 44. Scott's history of the Grenada Revolution is largely drawn from Brian Meeks's *Caribbean Revolutions and Revolutionary Theory: An Assessment of Cuba, Nicaragua and Grenada* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2001 [1993]). See Meeks's response to Scott: "After Tragedy, Searching for Liberation" in *Cultural Critique* 93 (Spring 2016): 212-220.

contingency, Scott appears peculiarly closed off to the idea that events might have taken a different course. As Robert Nichols observes, "it is as though for Scott, by adopting a romantic revolutionary political form, such movements ensured their collapse *in advance.*"[29] Indeed Scott winds up in a teleological position, veering (albeit with great sophistication) towards a traditionally conservative position which sees revolution as invariably doomed to tragic defeat.

Scott's sense of revolutionary tragedy was not James's, and it need not be ours.[30] For all his awareness of the Haitian Revolution's tragic outcomes, James does not see these ends as inevitable, and they do not prevent him from pointing to moments where the course of events might have gone differently. These are moments, too, from which James draws lessons for his present—a practice which Scott is largely reluctant to endorse.[31] What James refuses to do is to let a sensitivity to tragedy become a source of pessimism or melancholia. It is something of this spirit which we need to maintain in order to see in the past not so many dead ends and closed doors, but to recover instead a sense of insurgent possibility in the present. And where Scott attaches the insight that "we never begin in conditions of our own choosing" to a sense of tragedy, it bears remembering that such insights are hardly alien to the revolutionary tradition Scott proposes to abandon. One need merely recall, as does James in the Preface to *Black Jacobins,* Marx's insight that "men make history, but they do not make it as they please."[32]

If, as Scott argues, the romantic humanism of mid-twentieth thinkers can be understood as an appropriate answer to *their context*—a moment of global upheaval and fierce ideological contestation in which radical alternatives appeared not just *possible* but genuinely *achievable*—what then does Scott think is the answer to our context? Scott has proven rather reticent to present any affirmative response to our current problems. This is understandable insofar as his work is more concerned with drawing attention to the fact that we do *not* have any easy answers at hand. However, the very *hubris* implied in even imagining any radical alternative to the present seems to fly in the face of Scott's project. His recommendation is that we embrace a

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[29] Robert Nichols, Book Review of *Omens of Adversity*, *Political Theory* 45, no. 3 (2017), 429.

[30] See Alberto Toscano's "Politics in a Tragic Key" *Radical Philosophy* 180 (2013) for an insightful commentary on Scott's understanding of tragedy.

[31] For James, these lessons hinged on the all-important question of the relationship between the leader and the masses, and which he related directly to the Bolshevik experience. James was a consistent critic of the concept of the "vanguard party," and James implies that had Toussaint been more willing to listen to his subordinates, and more attuned to the demands of the people, the Haitian revolution could have taken a different course.

[32] James reformulates the quote to reflect his attention to Toussaint: "Great men make history, but only such history as is possible for them to make." James, *Black Jacobins*, x.

tragic sensibility and abandon fantasies of "total revolution," undergirded by a romantic vision of human possibility and agency. For all his insightful criticism of neoliberalism's closures, and for all his efforts to expose the limits on our present imagination, Scott all but endorses resignation to these reduced horizons and makes a virtue of tempered expectations. The greatest danger, it seems to Scott, is not the crises of the present, but to persist in imagining we might radically change the world. He urges the cultivation of modest virtues "to stay the inclination to hubristic confidence in our boundless capacity for mastery and self-mastery."[33] This is a troubling recommendation. It is a sense of our collective capacity that we most need today—modesty, pragmatism, and resignation to shrunken horizons are in ample supply.

"Agency" and the problems of anticolonial humanism

Scott has undeniably advanced a brilliant, if ultimately despondent, critique of some of the theoretical assumptions undergirding anticolonial humanism in the twentieth century, and while I depart from his political conclusions, his work contains many insights which remain well worth endorsing. For one, Scott is an insightful critic of the understanding of *power* with which anticolonial thinkers operated. The "alienation/realization" paradigm of anticolonial critique, he argues, was one that understood and critiqued colonialism as a *repressive* force that acted downwards on the colonized and denied their humanity. Scott's point is certainly not that colonialism *was not* repressive, but he does contest the idea of an authentic self that was lying dormant underneath a suffocating blanket of colonial domination, waiting to be unearthed. Drawing on the insights of Michel Foucault, Scott emphasizes that power is not simply exercised *over* pre-constituted subjects, but constitutes them *as* subjects, shaping their selves and desires—even their oppositional desires.[34] Scott is also right to observe that this discourse of "authenticity" could, and did, acquire a much more conservative valence *after* independence.

Scott's reservations about anticolonialism humanism have a certain resonance with the critique of humanism elaborated in Saidiya Hartman's brilliant 1997 *Scenes of Subjection*, which attends to what Hartman calls the "nonevent" of emancipation in the United States.[35] Like Scott, Hartman is sensitive to *why* the enslaved have often claimed the language of humanism and

[33] Scott, *Omens*, 65.

[34] This line of argument runs through *Refashioning Futures* and *Conscripts of Modernity* especially.

[35] Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America* (Oxford University Press, 1997).

described their struggles as one of overcoming a systematic dehumanization and claiming their entitlements as *human beings*. But Hartman troubles the discourse of humanism in a profound way, arguing that these structures of oppression were *not* so much premised on an *absolute denial* of the humanity of the enslaved, but rather by a "*selective recognition*" of their humanity.[36] The enslaved and formerly enslaved subject was, after all, still "human" enough to be held responsible for their "transgressions", to be deemed guilty, to be blamed and punished (all of which are very "human" categories), but *not* human enough to merit equal treatment with whites. The humanity of the enslaved and formerly enslaved was not disavowed entirely, but "circumscribed," "subordinated," "truncated," "constricted," "encumbered," and "limited."[37] The "recognition" of enslaved humanity was then, in many ways, a new burden, one which positioned formerly enslaved humanity as blameworthy and indebted subjects. Hartman does not consider in this text different efforts to articulate a *radical humanism*, but this work is one that exposes, in quite a stark way, the perils of a liberal humanistic discourse, and the limits of a kind of politics that seeks the *recognition* of the humanity of the Black subject.

Scott and Hartman are, in their own fashion, both critics of a mode of historiography focussed on *agency,* located in practices of resistance or cultural memory/survivals. This approach to writing history, often called "history from below," has some of its roots in the work of thinkers like James and Fanon, and broader trends in the anti-Stalinist Marxism of the 1950's and 1960's. Thinkers like James rejected what they saw as the economic determinism of Stalinism, a mode of understanding history that saw the development of the productive forces as the "motor" of historical progress. Reacting against this tendency, these thinkers instead championed "human agency." Although these thinkers rejected an economic determinism, they imputed a similar historical teleology to *agency* itself; agency was understood as a nearly autonomous, metaphysical substance with a transhistorical "will to freedom" as its *telos*. This understanding of agency came to deeply inform a historiographic tradition that was motivated by an almost obsessive search for "agency," always assigned a rebellious, transgressive significance.[38]

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[36] Hartman, *Scenes*, 15.

[37] Hartman, *Scenes*, 5-6; 93; 117.

[38] The term "history from below" was coined by English historian E.P. Thompson. Prominent examples of this tendency include Thompson, *The Making of The English Working Class* (Vintage Books, 1963); James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), or the

As Hartman argues to great effect, agency is a particularly fraught concept in the case of slavery—the agency of the enslaved was constantly negated, burdened and constrained, and only recognized as a *criminal* agency. Hartman is likewise critical of a mode of scholarship that emphasizes "Africanity," in which the activity of the enslaved (such as "stealing away") are read as enactments of African cultural practices. Resisting the "metaphysical" and "mystical" assumptions of this tendency, Hartman instead suggests that attention should be directed towards the *historicity* of these practices, and the specific context of enslavement and its brutal exercises of power.[39] In *Conscripts of Modernity* Scott suggests that the debate over "cultural survivals" in the literature on New World slavery—a debate in which one side claimed that the cultural practices of the enslaved were linked to memories of Africa, and another claimed that these were novel inventions—shared a common goal in pointing to the cultural autonomy and agency of Black subjects as a way of *demonstrating* their humanity. Scott suggests that this search for sources of resistance and cultural-political agency was articulated in response to a certain set of problems or questions, i.e., "were enslaved Africans too brutalized by slavery to respond to it with some degree of cultural autonomy?" that may no longer have the same purchase it once did.[40]

As Scott observes, this search for "agency" is also an "answer" to a question posed in such a way that frames domination, particularly colonial domination, as a purely *negative* mode of power that acts only in a repressive fashion. Scott's point, as already noted, is not to deny that colonialism *was* and *is* repressive, and he registers his sympathy with the historian's "desire to affirm the humanity of the subaltern."[41] His claim, rather, is that this mode of posing the question obscures or occludes *other* questions, particularly ones that attend to the *productive* or *constructive* dimensions of colonial power—how were resistance movements and their visions of an emancipated future shaped and constrained, even produced, by what they sought to overcome? It is not difficult to see here the connection to Scott's emphasis on *tragedy*—his attention is directed to how systems of power structured even those attempts to overcome it. He

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early work of the Sublatern Studies Collective, such as Ranajit Guha's *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Oxford University Press, 1983).

[39] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 74-75.

[40] Scott, *Conscripts*, 109. Scott is referring here to Sidney W. Mintz and Richard Price, *The Birth of African-American Culture: An Anthropological Perspective* (Boston: Beacon, 1992[1976]) and Joel Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge University Press, 1998).

[41] Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity*, 114.

points to a more complex understanding of how relations of power do not merely stunt or repress, but also define the conditions in which agency is exercised and shape the terrain that freedom movements must navigate.

Saba Mahmood's 2004 *Politics of Piety* addresses some other problems with what we might call the "agency paradigm." Mahmood is also concerned with critiquing the way much "New Left" scholarship invests "agency" with a particular normative horizon—assuming that agency is always oriented towards rebellion or resistance and trained in the direction of achieving individual or collective freedom and autonomy. Mahmood proposes to "detach the notion of agency from the goals of progressive politics," arguing convincingly that reading agency only in terms of "resistance" and "subordination" imposes a binary that threatens to obscure a whole range of desires and actions that may animated instead by a rather different set of values.[42] Mahmood's book is principally an ethnographic study of Egyptian women's participation in the "women's mosque movement" in Cairo in the 1990's, a movement in which women were joining Quran study groups at mosques—an activity traditionally reserved for men—but still promoting an perspective that upheld, among other things, values of devotion, piety, modesty, and willing subordination to male authority. Mahmood argues that feminist scholarship devoting serious attention to women's agency should recognize that Muslim Egyptian women were *active* participants in a movement that did not take a Marxist or liberal ideal of freedom as its goal, but neither could their activities simply be read as capitulation to oppression. Mahmood's aim is not to endorse or condemn the politics of this movement but to recommend a kind of epistemic humility—one that does not presume to know in advance what (subaltern) subjects might desire, and how they might act.

In a critical but sympathetic reading of *The Politics of Piety*, William Clare Roberts endorses Mahmood's insight that agency cannot be straightforwardly identified with a "will to freedom."[43] Although he is concerned with reclaiming the language of freedom and emancipation, he argues that struggles for "freedom" should be concerned with overthrowing relations of domination, and not proceed from the assumption that all human beings will wish to exercise their freedom from domination in the same way. In this sense he affirms many of

[42] Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton University Press, 2005), 14.

[43] William Clare Roberts, "The Idea of Emancipation after Postcolonial Theory," *Interventions* (2017).

Mahmood's cautions about imposing a particular normative horizon on subaltern subjects. His critique of "agency," however, goes further than Mahmood's. As Roberts observes, more acutely, agency can indeed often be oriented towards *support* for systems of domination; actions that *uphold,* rather than *challenge*, structures of domination are no less *active* for that fact. The individual who collaborates with the authorities, sells out their fellows, curries favour with the oppressor, crosses a picket line, or enlists in the colonial police force is, after all, no less an "agent" than those engaged in active resistance.

Contrary to much received wisdom, Roberts argues that structures of domination are not upheld by an *absolute suppression* of agency, but actually *depend* on the agency of the oppressed and exploit their activity in various ways. Domination does not extinguish the very possibility of "acting" but, instead, shapes, burdens, and constrains the context in which actions take place. Oppressors reward or incentivize *certain* kinds of actions, and punish others, often with overwhelming violence. For these reasons, Roberts observes, "complicity is an overwhelming historical fact, and for good reason."[44] Roberts's point here is not to cast a moral judgment, blaming the oppressed for their oppression, but to draw attention to the fact that the oppressed often have *very good* reasons to *not* resist. To act in ways that threaten the oppressor is, after all, to risk one's own life and livelihood, and to invite reprisals against those that one cares about. It is quite understandable, then, that most people, most of the time, are more concerned with getting along, making the best of things, and acting in their own self-interest, rather than risking punishment, impoverishment, or death by standing in solidarity with others. To forge a collective project that can surmount or mitigate these dangers, that can encourage and inspire solidaristic activity in face of risk; *this* is the incredibly demanding task of emancipatory politics. As Roberts observes, the mere fact of "agency" is undeniable, and certainly indispensable for the pursuit of such aims, but it is also "too meagre to count as an achievement" in its own right.[45]

Although I have ventured somewhat far from Scott in the preceding discussion, these distinct critiques have, I think, clear resonances with many of Scott's reservations about mid-twentieth century radical humanism and serve to underline his general point that the strategies of criticism adopted by an earlier generation of thinkers may be worth stepping back from. If, as Gayatri Spivak puts it, "Humanism names man (at best the human being) as the master of an

[44] Roberts, "The Idea of Emancipation," 7.
[45] Roberts, "The Idea of Emancipation," 3.

unexamined subjective agency,"[46] then *interrogating* what has gone unexamined is hardly to evaporate the possibility of collective action (as some self-styled defenders of "humanism" seem to believe). Indeed, many of Scott's insights, as well as those of Hartman, Roberts, and Mahmood, are worth retaining. These include a critical view of a liberal recognition paradigm that sees salvation in the "recognition of the humanity" of the oppressed, a wariness of identifying agency, as such, with a "will to freedom," a recognition that "selves" and "desires" are not prior to social context, and a corresponding appreciation for the fact that emancipatory movements are invariably shaped by that which they are contesting. Such insights need not lead us to the same pessimistic conclusions at which Scott's other lines of thinking arrive, nor do they necessarily undermine any project that is oriented towards the radical transformation of human life and society. In fact, they can and should well serve such efforts!

While I do not share Scott's melancholic political conclusions, I do believe he is right to draw attention to the distance between our contemporary moment and the revolutionary possibilities of the past, and to insist that we reckon seriously with what distinguishes *our* moment from *theirs.* In this sense I share his reservations about a certain romantic, nostalgic impulse "to read Fanon as though we were about to join him in the trenches."[47] I also share his appreciation for the *universal* significance of these projects. Embedded in Scott's argument across these three works is a claim that the end of revolutionary Third Worldism—deeply connected, as he understands it, to the Marxist project—marks the eclipse of a certain horizon of radical possibility for humanity as a whole. Revolutions in Algeria, Vietnam, Grenada and elsewhere were not merely local events, but were part of a global revolutionary sequence that had the potential to herald much broader transformations in human life, and were recognized as such both by distant observers and those who acted in solidarity with such movements.

However, those who *do* still wish to intervene in this world to overthrow the reigning status quo, and who wish to *re-open* rather than abjure horizons of radical possibility, will need something more than modesty and a tragic disposition to sustain them. Scott's project comes quite close to disavowing the possibility of revolutionary transformation as such. In the following section I will offer a different diagnosis of the closure of this particular horizon of

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[46] Gayatri Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Harvard University Press, 1999), 322 n. 15. Emphasis mine.

[47] Scott, *Refashioning Futures,* 204.

revolutionary possibility (which Scott does nonetheless correctly identify as a closure). I will focus not so much here on the "humanism" that animated Fanon and many of his contemporaries, but the *project* to which he and others attached these humanistic ambitions: national independence. In the following discussion I suggest that we should approach the end of radical Third Worldism not as *the end of revolutionary possibility*, but as the conclusion of a *particular revolutionary sequence* which took "the nation" as its central animating category. In this sense, this can be framed as a long conclusion to a political problematic that emerged from the Roy-Lenin debate at the beginning of the twentieth century. If we understand historical sequence in these somewhat more politically precise terms, I think we can find our way back to a recover a sense of the insurgent, partisan, transformative vision for a "new humanity" defended by Fanon and others.

PART TWO: THE EXHAUSTION OF THE NATIONAL LIBERATION SEQUENCE

In his *Thinking Freedom in Africa*, Michael Neocosmos offers a reading of Fanon which, like Scott's, is animated by a desire both to situate Fanon in his historical context and to assess our contemporary distance from this moment.[48] Neocosmos describes Fanon as a militant theorist and practitioner of what he brands the "National Liberation Struggle Mode of Politics" (NLS) a particular sequence of political action dated from roughly 1945-75.[49] For Neocosmos, Fanon offers a singular insight into the political logic and assumptions of this "mode of politics"; indeed, the Martinican revolutionary is "the most accurate observer and theorist of this sequence on the African continent from within its own subjectivity."[50] In treating Fanon as a thinker writing from "within the subjectivity" of a particular "mode of politics" Neocosmos is drawing heavily on the work of Sylvain Lazarus, who has long argued that politics (by which he generally

[48] Michael Neocosmos, *Thinking Freedom in Africa: Toward a Theory of Emancipatory Politics* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2016). I am drawing principally here from Chapter Four: "The National Liberation Struggle Mode of Politics in Africa, 1945-1975," 112-133.

[49] The beginning of the sequence is marked, in Neocosmos's exposition, by the Pan-African Conference held in Manchester in 1945. There is no great closing event here, although Neocosmos points to Peter Hallward's periodizing claim that the 1973 assassinations of Amilcar Cabral in Guinea and Salvador Allende in Chile "mark the end of the last truly transformative sequence in world politics, the sequence of national liberation associated with the victories of Mao Tse-tung, Mohandas Gandhi, and Fidel Castro." Peter Hallward, "The Politics of Prescription," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 104, no. 4, 769. Neocosmos, *Thinking Freedom in Africa*, 112.

[50] Neocosmos, *Thinking Freedom*, 114. The only thinker who might rival Fanon's insight into this Mode of Politics, Neocosmos suggests, is Amilcar Cabral.

means *emancipatory politics*) occurs in rare, discontinuous sequences that are marked by their own original conceptual vocabulary and novel ideas about political change and organization. Such movements, however, invariably hit a point of "exhaustion" or "saturation," where the political terrain changes in such a way that this "mode of politics" can no longer be practiced as before; its categories become "depoliticized" and cannot guide emancipatory struggles in the way they once did.[51]

The NLS, as Neocosmos describes it, was a sequence in which a "particular subjectivity developed through which national liberation and freedom were jointly thought in Africa in a specific manner."[52] The NLS encompassed a diversity of tactics, including armed struggle, but shared a consistent political goal: the end of colonial rule and the achievement of national independence. The emphasis on the overwhelming priority of national independence is evidenced in Kwame Nkrumah's famous, aphoristic advice imparted to a generation of Africans: "Seek ye first the political kingdom and all things shall be added unto you."[53] In this sense the *national cause* came to embody much broader hopes for social and political transformation. The NLS mode had a somewhat contradictory or ambivalent relationship to the state; on the one hand, Neocosmos suggests, the NLS was animated by a generalized desire to tear down the colonial state and replace it with a totally new political order, and was driven by popular currents whose aspirations, if not explicitly "anti-statist," could not wholly be reduced to questions of state management. And yet the dominant orientation of the NLS mode could aptly be described as "statist"; the aim of the national parties was to *seize* the colonial state, occupy its organs of power, and build both a strong, sovereign state and developed economy to meet the problems of poverty and maintain a political and economic independence from the West.

The internal contradictions of the NLS, Neocosmos suggests, can productively be illustrated by Fanon's treatment of the "nation" and the "national party." As Neocosmos suggests, the "nation" in Fanon's work is principally a *political* category, and Fanon is distinct among his contemporaries in defining the nation in these decidedly open-ended, political terms.

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[51] See particularly Lazarus's "Can Politics be Thought in Interiority?" trans. Tyler Harper, *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy* 12 no. 1 (2016) and *Anthropology of the Name*, trans. Gila Walker (Seagull Books, 2015). Lazarus's political thought is deeply engaging, original, and idiosyncratic. Rather than engaging in a lengthy digression on Lazarus's political thought in this chapter, I will focus on Neocosmos's engagement with Lazarus's ideas.

[52] Neocosmos, *Thinking Freedom*, 112.

[53] Kwame Nkrumah, *Ghana: The Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah* (Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1957), 164.

As we will recall from the previous chapter—and Neocosmos lays heavy stress on this point—Fanon articulated an idea of the nation that was not premised on ethnic, racial, or religious identity, but was defined, rather, in terms of political commitment to national emancipation. This ideal of political commitment could encompass all minorities, migrants, foreigners, and even some members of the settler population. As Fanon put it, "We do not say to the settler 'You are a stranger, go away.' … We say to him: "*We are Algerians*, banish all racism from our land, all forms of oppression and let us work for man, for the flourishing of man and for the enrichment of humanity."[54] Fanon's national ideal is ultimately based, as Neocomos suggests, in the "political universality of the human."[55] Fanon's constant insistence on a "popular conception of the nation" is one that captures the broader hopes for far-reaching transformation cherished by many of those who fought in mass movements for liberation across the African continent and beyond.[56] The "nation" on this reading is an "excessive" category—one that exceeds the boundaries of the nation as defined in territorial or ethnic terms and captures a novel ideal of national belonging that transcended the Manichean divisions of the colonized society.

However, if the nation could be defined in open-ended, inclusive terms (as in the case particularly of Fanon's work), this understanding was not shared, Neocosmos argues, by the leading organizations and protagonists of the NLS mode—the "national parties." National parties claimed, across different contexts, an exclusive right to "represent" the people and fought hard to be recognized as the *sole* legitimate representatives of the colonized population by both the colonial state and by the colonized themselves. The national party took responsibility for managing, organizing, and dictating the struggle for freedom, and negotiated the terms of independence on behalf of the colonized population. It was, ultimately, to these organizations that independence would be handed with the end of colonial rule. If the vision of the "nation" advocated by Fanon was an "excessive" category, the national parties hewed to a narrower understanding of national belonging. They positioned themselves as *representing* a more closed, "native population" defined in terms of ethnic, racial, or religious belonging to a particular bounded territory.

[54] Fanon, "Why We Use Violence," in *Alienation and Freedom*, 657. Emphasis added.
[55] Neocosmos, *Thinking Freedom,* 117.
[56] Neocosmos, *Thinking Freedom*, 114.

Fanon was, in many respects, a critic of the national party. He recognized, for instance, that the national party could be captured by particular elite interests that were not aligned with the popular aspirations of the people. Having witnessed the corruption, isolation, and authoritarian tendencies of the national party in those countries where independence had already been achieved, he argued that the national party should be organized to prevent this kind of degeneration. He argues at various points in *Wretched of the Earth* that the national party should maintain close links and connections with neglected regions and peoples, resist narrow-minded nationalism, nativism, and xenophobia, not allow itself to be taken over by the postcolonial bourgeoisie and take its direction instead from the masses. In short, the national party should represent the demands of the people *accurately*. However, as Neocosmos quite astutely points out, although Fanon condemned in many instances the *abuses* of the party, he never calls into question the representative logic of the party form itself; he never doubted that *there must be a national party*, which could and should act as the legitimate representative of the people's interests.

Neocosmos is clear that this is not some unique failure Fanon's part—it means simply that he was acting *within* the subjectivity of a particular mode of politics, and "his difficulty is no more than that of the politics of the NLS mode."[57] It is clear, in retrospect, that the national party's overwhelming orientation towards seizing and holding state power clashed with ongoing popular mobilization and autonomous political organizing. Once in control of the state, national parties in Africa and elsewhere sought to stifle popular expression, banned independent political organizations and labour unions. The people were no longer conceived of as active political subjects but as an ethnically and territorially defined population to be managed and "developed." As Ernest Wamba-Dia-Wamba concludes in an essay that also extends Lazarus's thinking about "modes of politics" to the African context: "ultimately, national independence was won on the basis of the abandonment of emancipatory politics rooted in the large masses of the people and their needs and aspirations."[58] In many respects, Wamba-Dia-Wamba and Neocosmos's diagnosis of the closure of the national liberation sequence—a story of popular aspirations betrayed by postcolonial elites—is a familiar one, and will certainly be recognizable to any

[57] Neocosmos, *Thinking Freedom in Africa,* 120.

[58] Ernest Wamba-Dia-Wamba, "Africa in Search of a New Mode of Politics," in *African Perspectives on Development: Controversies, Dilemmas & Openings*, eds. Ulf Himmselstrand, Kaburi Kinyanjui & Edward Mburugu (James Currey, 1994), 251.

reader of Fanon. What particularly commends their analysis, however, is their focus on political organization; as Neocosmos argues, it was principally the contradictions of the national party, a now exhausted form of organization, that led to this unfortunate conclusion. Endorsing Lazarus's insight that "the party has the effect of fusing popular consciousness with that of the state," Neocosmos argues that the national parties' preoccupation with state power fostered a technocratic understanding of politics, one which upheld a narrow, nativist ideal of postcolonial identity, and ultimately rejected a "universal notion of national emancipation concerning all of humanity" in favour of a "notion of the nation founded on indigeneity, according to state political criteria."[59]

Neocosmos's account of this sequence, its conclusion, and consequences resonates deeply with other projects. Nandita Sharma's 2020 *Home Rule,* for instance, offers an unsparing critique of what she calls the "Postcolonial New World Order."[60] The global order of independent nation-states, Sharma argues, was the United States's preferred outcome for the end of European empires; American leaders assumed (rightly) that this way of organizing global politics would make a favourable terrain for American capital. Even those nation states that were not formally aligned with the United States pursued developmentalist, modernization programs that swelled the ranks of the global proletariat and ultimately served well the interests of capital. Like Neocosmos and Wamba-Dia-Wamba, Sharma suggests that national self-determination anchored in the state represented the containment, domestication, and depoliticization of a broader revolutionary program. Sharma is concerned with the way nationalisms and the nation-state invariably re-produce a specious division between *nationals*, those who belong to a particular territory and enjoy certain "rights" by virtue of that fact, and *migrants,* a hyperexploitable and expendable perpetual foreign other whose welcome is only ever provisional. Charged with policing borders and citizenship, the postcolonial state system is one that manages global population flows on behalf of capital and continues to divide collective struggles against capitalism and colonialism.

Sharma and Neocosmos may both be said to elide the creative efforts at re-ordering the postcolonial world by the independence leaders of postcolonial states. Adom Getachew's

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[59] Neocosmos, *Thinking Freedom in Africa*, 122; 113. Sylvain Lazarus, *Les Trois Régimes du siècle: le parti-état dans the le parlementarisme, le stalinisme, le nazisme* (Les Conférences du Rouge Gorge, 2001).

[60] Nandita Sharma, *Home Rule: National Sovereignty and the Separation of Natives and Migrants* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020).

Worldmaking After Empire, for instance, elucidates how politicians from across the "Black Atlantic," such as Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, and Eric Williams, re-imagined self-determination and attempted to use the state as a tool to advance a more egalitarian global order. This project ran up against insurmountable global challenges—particularly the weaponization of debt—but also suffered from their own internal contradictions, which Getachew attends to judiciously. It is clear from her analysis that these efforts to reconstruct a more egalitarian world system were profoundly invested in the *state*; theirs was an internationalism of independent states, not mass movements, and these leaders were primarily concerned with narrowing the economic gap between the newly independent states they ruled and the wealthier states of the Global North, with relatively less concern for making their own societies more egalitarian. This does not imply, in the first instance, a retreat from anticolonialism; although Fanon expected that the postcolonial bourgeoisie would prove a comprador class and make easy peace with the former colonial powers, in other cases the postcolonial elite continued to oppose neo-colonialism without, however, embarking on the socialist reconstruction Fanon hoped for.[61] Rather than simply capitulating to empire, it is clear from Getachew's account that anticolonial nationalists sought to *displace* class struggle from the domestic to the international arena.[62] While the vision of state-sovereignty defended by postcolonial leaders was an understandable reaction against imperial interventions, it does not take too much cynicism to read the "right to self-determination" defended by postcolonial leaders as, by the end, a self-interested right to wield unchecked sovereign power in their respective countries. Although Getachew is a fair sight more sympathetic to these projects than Sharma and Neocosmos, their analysis converges in some essential respects, and Getachew's analysis offers a useful historical accounting of the pitfalls of these statist projects.[63]

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[61] Sara Salem has argued that Fanon's critique of the national bourgeoisie as a weak class incapable of achieving postcolonial hegemony does not explain more durable postcolonial regimes such as Nasser's government in Egypt. See Salem, *Anticolonial Afterlives in Egypt: The Politics of Hegemony* (Cambridge University Press, 2020).

[62] Getachew, *Worldmaking After Empire,* 168.

[63] Torsten Menge likewise suggests that despite significant differences in their projects, Getachew and Sharma "converge in some of their central insights, which include diagnosing the mistake of thinking about imperialism and colonialism primarily in terms of foreign rule and recognizing the difficulties of independent post-colonial nation-states to overcome international structures of domination and exploitation." See Menge, "Colonial Genealogies of Immigration Controls, Self-Determination, and the Nation-State," *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 27, no. 5 (2024), 868.

Like Sharma, Neocosmos is particularly attentive to migrant struggles, eager to see the renewal of anti-statist politics, and a great critic of nativism, and xenophobia. And yet where Sharma rejects the "nation" and "nationalism" entirely, Neocosmos is surprisingly sanguine on the possibility for a renewed emancipatory nationalism. As he writes, "in Africa and in the countries of the Global South there is no path to emancipation that does not confront the power of empire in its neo-colonial form, which is only another way of saying that nationalism is not an obsolete emancipatory conception – far from it."[64] He likewise insists that to suggest "nationalism in Africa has failed … is simply to make it *impossible* to think … new forms of emancipatory politics on the continent."[65] To be sure, Neocosmos's idea of the nation is one informed by a Fanonian sensibility, and his enduring hope in "the nation" might be understood as a kind of fidelity to those who once deployed the "nation" to name broader hopes and aspirations for the marginalized and oppressed. Sharma's project, at times, seems to downplay the genuine attraction of "national emancipation," and often casts nationalism as a kind of manipulation tactic by the powerful, neglecting the extent to which communists and others (like Fanon) were invested in national emancipation in the hopes of eventually overcoming nationalism.[66]

However, in light of the history that Neocosmos himself charts, I am not convinced that his insistence on the enduring relevance of an emancipatory nationalism can be sustained. I think Sharma is correct to argue (drawing on Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*) that that "nations" are communities always imagined in such a way that draws some kind of boundary between the *national* and the non-national *outsider*.[67] If Neocosmos's idea of the nation is truly so detached from ideas of ethnic belonging, history, the nation-state (in other words, from everything we have come to associate with the nation), then it is not at all clear why the "nation" must remain a privileged political vocabulary. Indeed, given all that has become attached to the "nation," it strikes me as a rather *saturated* category in its own right, too freighted with all the

[64] Neocosmos, *Thinking Freedom*, 113. Sharma offers a penetrating critique of the "neocolonialism" concept, a term coined by Kwame Nkrumah. As Sharma argues, while "neocolonialism" did some productive work to expose the ongoing exploitation of the Third World by global capital, it also offered a convenient alibi for postcolonial elites (like Nkrumah). Implicit in the conceptual framework of "neocolonialism," she argues, is a claim that these problems can be overcome by *greater* state sovereignty, rather than rejecting the logic of the nation-state system. Sharma, *Home Rule,* 154.

[65] Neocosmos, *Thinking Freedom*, 113.

[66] One might note, for instance, that Woodrow Wilson's idea of "national self-determination" is referenced at various points in Sharma's text, whereas Lenin's competing vision is not.

[67] Sharma, *Home Rule,* 3. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso, 1991).

baggage Neocosmos would have it shed. Neocosmos's insistence that the *nation* must remain central to an emancipatory politics today, even (especially?) in countries where "national independence" has been achieved, seems to suggest that he too might be working with the exhausted categories of an earlier sequence. I think this requires a closer look at the "national and colonial question," and we can turn to Salar Mohandesi's largely complementary account of the exhaustion of the "Leninist" project through the Vietnamese liberation struggle.

Returning to the "national question"

Mohandesi's *Red Internationalism* is an investigation into the "Leninist" anti-imperialist politics of the twentieth century, particularly through the Vietnamese struggle against the United States in the 1960's. The Vietnam case is, to a considerable degree, unique among national liberation movements: unlike other national parties which were made up of broader tents (while often encompassing significant Marxist currents), the Vietnamese Communist Party had, through good fortune and sophisticated political maneuvering, managed to position itself as the *leader* of the national struggle for independence—first against the French, and later against the United States. In this sense, they are direct heirs to the problematics of the Roy-Lenin debate at the Second World Congress of the Communist International. While the Vietnamese example is in some sense exceptional, theirs is also an instructive case insofar as Vietnamese revolutionaries were *particularly* adamant that their struggle for national independence was attached to much loftier aspirations, namely the struggle for global communism. Similar assumptions can be seen in many other radical visions of national liberation, Fanon's included, which sought to downplay antagonism between national ambitions and radical social transformation and treated the "nation" as the crucial category through which a much broader program of social justice could be achieved.

As we have seen, the "Leninist" position on the national and colonial question was one that maintained that national struggles for self-determination were integral to the global fight against capitalism. As Mohandesi stresses in his opening account of the "Leninist problematic", Lenin's intellectual and political engagements with the national question were deeply informed by strategic considerations.[68] Lenin, as I discussed in Chapter 2, was reluctant to defend nationalism in positive terms and defended the principle of national self-determination as a

[68] Mohandesi, "Overture: Lenin's Shadow," in *Red Internationalism*, 18-48.

negative right to be free of national oppression. "Leninism"—as invented and formalized by Stalin—largely worked to minimize tensions between nationalism and communism seemed to jettison Lenin's wariness about "positively" endorsing nationalism. And yet, it was not as if Leninism had *no* relationship to its namesake. Although Lenin was wary of nationalism, he had also advocated "concessions" to nationalism as a means of overcoming the hostility of oppressed peoples might harbour towards working-class members of "oppressor nations." Moreover, as Mohandesi observes, both "Lenin and Stalin aimed to ultimately transcend the nation, but they wagered that the way to do that was to use the state to promote nation-building."[69] This was a widely and deeply held assumption among the Comintern: even Roy, who offered a trenchant critique of Indian nationalism in the 1920's, still assumed that the Indian struggle must take the form of a national movement for self-determination.

Although Leninism became a more blunt and less nuanced doctrine than Lenin's own writings would suggest, the Leninist approach to anti-imperialism also enjoyed a very real global success and came to inform, in a profound way, anticolonial struggles around the world, especially the Vietnamese struggle (which in influenced other movements, like the FLN). As Mohandesi summarizes the reasons for the success of the Leninist approach to anti-imperialism:

> [Leninism] named an enemy, validated a real desire for freedom, popularized a language of political change, presented a plan for winning liberation from imperial domination, promoted the agency of oppressed peoples in their own emancipation, provided a convincing way to build internationalism, offered an interpretation of history that could explain current events, and projected an electrifying vision of the future.[70]

Working within a Leninist problematic, Vietnamese communists could coherently interpret and portray their revolution as *simultaneously* a patriotic, nationalist struggle, as well as a movement for international communism. For many years this proved galvanizing and effective, and Vietnamese communists were largely able to downplay tensions between their internationalist and nationalist commitments.

However, as Mohandesi argues, the tensions between the *national* and *communist* projects became particularly acute with victory against the United States and the subsequent unification of Vietnam. The struggle for communism demanded the dissolution of borders and

[69] Mohandesi, *Red Internationalism,* 35.
[70] Mohandesi, *Red Internationalism*, 40.

the nation-state, the abolition of work, and a non-hierarchical organization of human life. The tasks of nation-building, however, demanded the building of a strong national state, protecting and policing borders, suppressing dissent, and boosting economic productivity.[71] In the end, the imperatives of nation-building won out over the building of global communism. The post-unification Vietnamese state became increasingly authoritarian, invaded its neighbours, and oppressed national minorities—long treated as junior partners of the dominant Kinh majority.[72] Mohandesi links these problems, like Neocosmos, to the party form and the focus on the nation-state. He goes further, however, in interrogating *how* the relationship between the "national" and "communist" struggles were conceptualized in the Leninist problematic.

As Mohandesi argues, there "lay a profound contradiction at the very heart of the problematic": Vietnamese Leninists—like Leninists elsewhere—sought to *overcome* the nation by *deepening* the national project.[73] As we have seen, this was among the critiques raised by M.N. Roy in the years after his expulsion from the Comintern. Vietnamese communists, like Fanon, believed that the nation, and nationalism, could only be transcended by going *through* the nation. As Mohandesi observes, "the goal was to abolish nations, but the way to do that was to hypostatize nations, win national independence, and build strong nation-states."[74] While, for a time, the Leninist problematic seemed to effectively mitigate tensions between nationalist and internationalist commitments, in the end, rather than making communists out of nationalists, this strategy had made nationalists out of communists. In seeking to *overcome* nationalism, the Leninist approach actually did much to propagate the vocabulary of "national self-determination" and encouraged colonized peoples around the world to think of themselves as *national* communities and to think anti-imperialism in *national* terms. Just as the "national party" is not a pre-ordained form of emancipatory struggle, neither is the *nation* the "natural" way of understanding resistance or oppression. One lesson we might draw from Mohandesi is a

[71] Mohandesi, *Red Internationalism*, 46.
[72] Mohandesi, *Red Internationalism,* 45.
[73] Mohandesi, *Red Internationalism,* 39.
[74] As Mohandesi details, this is a problem of other categories in the Leninist program as well: categories like *class, state, work, and party* were all equally supposed to be transcended. But again, this could only be accomplished, it was believed, by intensifying these same categories. As Mohandesi puts it: "The goal was to abolish the state, but the way to do that was to erect a special governing body that took over state functions. The goal was to abolish work, but the way to do that was to encourage everyone to work harder. The goal was to abolish party politics, but the way to do that was to merge the vanguard party into the state. The goal was to abolish classes, but the way to do that was to think in class terms, lionize the working class, and evaluate all political change according to class criteria." *Red Internationalism*, 39.

recognition that a "Leninist" or "Fanonian" dialectical approach which hopes to *overcome* nationalism by *deepening* it is no longer sustainable in light of historical experience.

The Upshot of the "Sequence"

One advantage of thinking in terms of political sequences, as Neocosmos rightly suggests, is that it gets one away from an unproductive binary of "success" or "failure."[75] It recognizes that even "victories" produce new contradictions, might change the situation in such a way that the categories that informed that initial period of struggle can no longer be able to serve the same purpose once that victory has been achieved. This is, to my mind, a rather useful way of approaching both the history of national liberation movements and twentieth century socialism. In the case of the NLS mode it was only the undeniable *victory* and tremendous achievement of national independence that brought latent tensions and contradictions into the light of day. It helps us see that this is not necessarily the end of revolutionary possibility *as such*, but rather the end of a *particular* revolutionary sequence.

This approach also helps us avoid an unfortunate tendency to scold or chastise past revolutionaries and thinkers for not adequately addressing problems that only became clearer in retrospect.[76] It is worth being attentive to *why* certain thinkers made the arguments they did: Fanon, for instance, was a staunch advocate of the nation-form in part because the alternatives on offer did not necessarily seem viable or attractive. Although thinkers like Césaire and Senghor advocated a re-imagined federalism in which former colonies would have equal status as France itself, it is hardly surprising in retrospect that Martinique remained part of France while Senegal did not—France clearly had no intention of enfranchising millions of Senegalese, Algerian, and Vietnamese colonial subjects, but could more readily tolerate equal voting rights in its much smaller Caribbean colonies. As Fanon recognized, the French empire would rather "decolonize" itself than accept equal rights for colonized subjects or accept decolonization on the terms defended by the colonized themselves: "In answer to the strategy of a Dien Bien Phu defined by the colonized, the colonizer replies with the strategy of containment—respecting the sovereignty of nations."[77] National sovereignty, as Fanon's claim suggests, could be both a *radical* demand

[75] Neocosmos, *Thinking Freedom*, 158.

[76] A similar impulse counts among the many salutary features of Scott's work, especially in *Refashioning Futures*.

[77] Fanon, *Wretched*, 31.

as well as a domestication strategy, an effort to mould the national independence movements into a form more amenable to colonial powers. Some recent revisionist scholarship has, as Michael Goebel critically observes, depicted the "proliferation of new nation-states after 1945 as a highly contingent, almost accidental event."[78] It is important to remember that there were strong pressures for the nation to emerge as the central category it did without succumbing, either to a view that sees it as natural and uncontested. We can and should remember those critics like Fanon who, convinced of nationalism's political necessity, nonetheless sought to articulate an inclusive and emancipatory vision of nationalism that would be linked to international solidarities, as well as those like Roy, who offered an entirely perceptive critique of an internationalism that assumed the existence of national states, and who was also right to look for solutions that could not " be found within the boundaries of National States."[79] We should also recognize, however, that he had great difficulty illuminating a convincing path to a post-national future.

To think in terms of political sequences is, ultimately, an argument for invention and against imitation; later thinkers and militants committed to emancipation should affirm the emancipatory significance of past sequences. However, those seeking to initiate a new revolutionary sequence must necessarily discover and invent *new* categories, develop new forms of organization appropriate to their moment, and not assume that they can so easily step into the shoes of previous thinkers and activists. We must not, in Scott and Skinner's terms, assume that we can pose the *same* answer to *old questions*. This is particularly relevant when it comes to the "national question" as posed by anticolonial nationalists and communists in the early twentieth century. As Sharma points out, it has proven tempting to imagine that *national sovereignty* remains an answer to the enduring problems of capitalism. As she puts it, reflecting on what Paul Gilroy has diagnosed as a condition of "postcolonial melancholia": "many people who became *a People* grossly misidentified their feelings of loss. Rather than question the rhetoric of nationhood or national sovereignty, people in both the former colonies and former metropoles assumed that their nations did not have *enough* sovereignty."[80] Sharma is right to pose the

[78] Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis*, 277. Goebel seems to have in mind particularly Gary Wilder and Frederick Cooper.

[79] Roy, *Beyond Communism*, 135.

[80] Nandita Sharma, *Home Rule,* 19. Emphasis in original. Paul Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia* (Columbia University Press, 2005).

problem in this way, and her insights clearly apply as much to the Global North as to the Global South. I do not entirely share her cynicism about early anticolonial nationalists, and I do not necessarily see the achievement of national independence as *only* being the containment of a more radical program (although it surely is that): the conclusion of this sequence can be understood as, simultaneously, victory and defeat. There was and is no easy or clear road to a post-national, egalitarian future for humanity, but such insights can hopefully serve well the ongoing struggle to realize what Sharma calls a "global commons," and what others have called, simply, *communism*.

PART THREE: THE "NEW HUMAN" AFTER NATIONAL LIBERATION

This account of the conclusion of the national liberation political sequence allows us to adopt a nuanced position on the eclipse of revolutionary possibility which, as Scott correctly observes, characterizes our present period. We live, as Scott suggests, in a *post*-revolutionary time, in which the political horizons that sustained "radical nationalisms, Marxisms, Fanonian liberationisms, [and] indigenous socialisms" alike have all collapsed.[81] To be sure, Scott laments this closure, which he argues has been accompanied by an "acute paralysis of will and sheer vacancy of imagination."[82]Although Scott has not specifically identified *nationalism* as a problem for the emancipatory political movements of the twentieth century, he has clearly recognized the gap between the period of national liberation struggles and the postcolonial period. As he argues in *Refashioning Futures*: "In the Fanonian problematic … nation-state sovereignty constitutes the privileged political space of freedom, that space in which the ex-colonized are restored to their own history, and their humanity."[83] Recognizing that the nation thus constitutes a "threshold" in Fanon's work, Scott writes that "our questions cannot continue to be those of *realizing* that threshold. A Fanonian politics of national liberation is only intelligible when the currency of nation-state sovereignty has value as an unattained aspiration."[84] Scott raises an important challenge here: we cannot affirmatively engage Fanon's work without recognizing our distance from his central animating problem.

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[81] Scott, *Conscripts*, 1.
[82] Scott, *Conscripts*, 2.
[83] Scott, *Refashioning Futures,* 203.
[84] Scott, *Refashioning Futures*, 204.

I do think we should take very seriously Scott's reservations about uncritically reviving the radical humanisms of past thinkers. Scott's fear, in essence, is that by adopting their humanisms as our own, we will remain trapped not only by their assumptions, but stuck in an unproductive romantic nostalgia, yearning for a future that did not come to pass without taking adequate stock of our moment. In this sense we can say that Scott has, with Skinner, thoroughly absorbed the idea that "we shall do better to learn to do our own thinking for ourselves."[85] The difficulty, however, as I noted in the Introduction, is that this is an approach to intellectual history that seeks to *contain* the radical past. Absent a revolutionary horizon today, we can still turn to the intellectual and political history of the radical past to discover more than closed opportunities and tragic defeats; such histories can remind us of the contingency of our present and offer lessons worth learning from—not just for the sake of bitter rumination—but to re-invigorate and re-awaken our political imaginations in moments, like ours, when it has waned.

And waned it has: the conclusion of the national liberation sequence was marked by the rise of a new, profoundly depoliticized understanding of human subjectivity. Despite some significant differences in their account of the conclusion of this sequence both Getachew and Mohandesi argue that the language of "humanitarianism" and "human rights" *displaced* extant idioms of internationalism. The new humanitarianism emerged in response to genuine postcolonial crises, including, most notably, the Biafran war of the late 1960's, and the exodus of the Vietnamese "boat people" in the late 1970's. If anticolonial and communist internationalisms had largely deteriorated into an internationalism of states, the new humanitarianism sought to surpass states and reach out directly to suffering victims across borders. In the process, however, human rights discourse came increasingly to depict the peoples of the Third World as victims in need of saving from their own governments, not as political subjects and agents of their own emancipation, or as potential allies in a united political struggle across borders. The new humanitarianism, which abandoned concern with class struggle and revolutionary transformation, proved quite amenable to European powers and the United States, and human rights rhetoric was deployed with great enthusiasm and devastating effect after the end of the Cold War. As Alain Badiou puts it in somewhat polemical but evocative terms: "what

[85] Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding," 52.

contemporary 'democracies' wish to impose upon the planet is an animal humanism. In it man only exists as worthy of pity. Man is a *pitiable animal*."[86]

In the final pages of this chapter, I would like to consider and defend an idea that represents, in some respects, the most utopian, hubristic (and perhaps dangerous) impulse of modern revolutionary movements: the ambition to invent a "new humanity." In *Refashioning Futures* Scott offers an insightful critique of Fanon's "New Man," identifying in it a desire for redemption and restoration to a harmonious existence. Scott is particularly attentive to the potentially conservative implications of Fanon's narrative, arguing that it "licenses too unreflexive an idea of an essential native subject" and is too insensitive to questions of difference within postcolonial society.[87] I find Scott's awareness that this narrative could acquire a more conservative valence in the postcolonial period particularly compelling. In his later work, however, he increasingly critiques earlier anticolonial thinkers for their radicalism—or, more accurately, he comes to see their radicalism as always destined for defeat. Scott does not directly return to the "New Man" problematic in his later works, but I suspect he would identify in it a misplaced, romantic "longing for total revolution." He seems to share with liberal political theorist Bernard Yack (from whom he borrows this phrase), a sense that the desire for a total transformation of human life is an "inherently self-defeating" impulse, its hopes too extreme to be politically achievable.[88] While we should not imagine that radical politics can eliminate all sources of human dissatisfaction or even suffering (this would indeed be self-defeating)—I do think, as I conclude this chapter, that it is worth affirming that the radical transformation of human life remains both possible and necessary. As I argue here, it is particularly Fanon's vision of a "new humanity" to be *invented*—not *restored*—through political struggle, that is worth defending today, even if the "nation" itself may no longer be able to serve the role Fanon assigned it.

Calls for the invention of a "new humanity" are, understandably, met with considerable wariness today. As we saw in the opening to this chapter, Chakrabarty is rather skeptical of Fanon's ambitious call for a "new humanism," attributing to it a violent disregard for context and

[86] Badiou, *The Century*, trans. Alberto Toscano (Polity Press, 2007), 175.
[87] Scott, *Refashioning Futures,* 205.
[88] Bernard Yack, *The Longing for Total Revolution: Philosophic Sources of Social Discontent from Rousseau to Marx and Nietzsche* (Princeton University Press, 1986), 369. Scott uses the phrase "longing for total revolution" throughout *Conscripts of Modernity*. For discussion of Yack see particularly *Conscripts*, 5-6; 89-91.

historicity. For Chakrabarty, as for Scott, Fanon's longing for a reinvented humanity, to be achieved through political action, not only represents a lapsed horizon, but one that was always destined for failure and frustration. In this sense both Scott and Chakrabarty echo a longstanding conservative critique of revolutionary, utopian invocations of a new humanity to come. For conservative thinkers like the philosopher John Gray, and Edmund Burke before him, the idea of creating a "new humanity" from scratch represents the very height of revolutionary folly; its ambitions show a reckless disregard for established habits, accumulated wisdoms, customs, and patterns of life. As Gray argues, "the use of inhumane methods to achieve impossible ends is the essence of revolutionary utopianism."[89] At best, they believe, such hubristic efforts at fundamental human transformation are idle fantasies, dreams of "total revolution" destined to culminate in disappointment; at worst, disappointment will only settle in after much blood has been spilled. Before I conclude with a defence of Fanon's vision for a "new humanity" or "new humanism," it is worth dwelling for a moment on the difficulties such invocations of a "new humanity" present.

Although the "New Man" was once a rather common idea in radical discourse, it is rarely discussed today, perhaps assumed to be an embarrassing, best-forgotten piece of Stalinist propaganda. However, appeals to create a "New Man," "New Woman," and "New Humanity" had a wide appeal in the twentieth century. They were common to twentieth century communist societies, including in Russia, China, and Cuba, and in the discourse of twentieth century anticolonialism; alongside Fanon we might cite Amilcar Cabral, Samora Machel, among others.[90] These were injunctive, emancipatory visions of a new humanity, understood as a genuine act of creation springing up from the "destruction of historical antagonisms."[91] The image of the "new man" was not, however, only the preserve of the political left, but had fascist

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[89] John Gray, *Black Mass: Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia* (Farrar Strauss & Groux, 2007), 18.

[90] For a good overview of the "new man" concept in post-revolutionary Russia, Cuba, and China, see Yinghong Cheng, *Creating the 'New Man': From Enlightenment Ideals to Socialist Realities* (University of Hawaii Press, 2009). For some representative historical references see the following: Alexandra Kollontai, "The New Woman" [1920] in Kollontai, *The Autobiography of a Sexually Emancipated Communist Woman*, ed. Iring Fetscher (Herder & Herder, 1971), 49-104; Che Guevara, "Socialism and Man in Cuba" [1965], https://www.marxists.org/archive/guevara/1965/03/man-socialism.htm; Amilcar Cabral, "Connecting the Struggles: an informal talk with Black Americans" [1972] in *Return to the Source,* 78; Samora Machel, "Leadership is Collective, Responsibility is Collective" in Machel, *Mozambique, Sowing the Seeds of Revolution* (Committee for Freedom in Mozambique, 1975), 16.

[91] Badiou, *The Century*, 65.

and Nazi variants as well. The fascistic "new man" was not premised on the invention of universal human equality, but on the restoration of a long "authentic" past, grounded in a mythos of racial purity, and would not be arrived at through universal equality, but through the purification of a "decadent" present. Despite their radically different coordinates, the two images both conjure up in the liberal and conservative imagination alike "totalitarian" images of re-education camps, social engineering, and the wanton sacrifice of existing human life for the sake of a new humanity to come.

It does bear acknowledging that the skepticism that the idea of the "new human" elicits today is well earned, and the list of crimes committed in the name of this idea has been long indeed. In *The Century,* Alain Badiou acknowledges that the attempt to create a "new man" was an "extreme passion" often accompanied by an equally "extreme violence."[92] As Badiou argues, twentieth century militants (it is worth noting here that Badiou has in mind particularly the communist movements) were gripped by what he calls "the passion of the real"—they did not defer the construction of the new humanity to a distant utopia, but treated it as an urgent, feverish, and bloody task to be accomplished immediately. Many accepted that this project could only be accomplished at a high human cost—the death of many "old men" seemed a tolerable price for the birth of the new. As Badiou puts it, they laboured under the mistaken assumption that "novelty will only take place in the element of a fully accomplished destruction."[93] The passion for the *real* was deeply suspicious of any falsity in the representation of the new. This proved a vicious cycle. As Badiou observes, "the real … is never real enough not to be suspected of semblance."[94] It is this fervent impulse to destroy the old and to uproot the false to which, Badiou suggests, can be attributed the seemingly unbreakable spirals of potentially limitless revolutionary violence: purges, show trials, mass arrests, executions, and massacres.

Badiou also observes that past efforts to create a "new man" were often premised on a feverish urge to uproot sources of particularity.[95] Those who attempted to mould a "new man" posited a certain model of what humanity should be and believed that this could only be achieved through destruction of difference, out of which, it was expected, a *sameness* would arise. Bearing in mind my previous discussion, we should also not forget how often these images of the "new

[92] Badiou, *The Century*, 63.
[93] Badiou, *The Century*, 45.
[94] Badiou, *The Century*, 52.
[95] Badiou, *The Century*, 66.

man" were attached also to a *national* identity and linked to authoritarian development programs (e.g., the "New Soviet Man," the "New Cuban Man," etc.).[96] This aspiration towards uniformity and the stifling of difference is, certainly, doomed to frustration. This is, in part, what Chakrabarty seems to sense in Fanon's work. Although I do not share his reading of Fanon, Chakrabarty is surely right to caution, reflecting on the unfolding climate crisis, that our present challenges "[call] for a global approach to politics without the myth of a global identity, for, unlike a Hegelian universal, it cannot subsume particularities."[97] But while a principled respect for difference is undoubtedly essential for any contemporary emancipatory project, an emancipatory universalism cannot be, either, merely a universalism *of* differences. Taking his distance from the proponents of a "new man" who sought homogeneity out of destruction, Badiou, for his part, has argued for an approach to "universalism" grounded in fidelity to egalitarian political commitments *in excess* of the world as it is with all its sources of difference and particularity without aspiring, either, to destroy them—I share Neocosmos's view that we see an example of such an "excessive" universalism in Fanon's politicized understanding of the nation.

It is clear, I believe, that the conjoined crises of capitalism and the climate do necessitate a new, universal project for humanity; *universal* because extant structures of exploitation, domination, and dispossession are global and must ultimately be toppled at that scale if human beings are no longer to confront each other as exploited and exploiter; and *new* because humanity has not yet found the adequate means of overthrowing these forces. This orientation towards the "new" is not to make a fetish of novelty, and it is certainly not to gainsay the possibility that local traditions and histories can be creatively transformed to create new "insurgent universalities" (as Marx detected in the Russian commune, or Fanon saw in the transformation of Algerian village institutions). [98] It is, however, to recognize that the organizations and institutions that humanity needs to finally put an end to the social relations that

[96] Here I depart somewhat from Badiou, who argues that the "new man is envisioned in opposition to … all predicates, in particular against family, property and the nation-state" (66). I am not so convinced by the latter point. The issue may stem from Badiou's approach, which operates at a high level of generality and abstraction. In *The Century* Badiou considers the "new man" through the work of visual artists, philosophers, writers, and revolutionary activists alike. Particularly as concerns the communist states, however, it is inaccurate to say that the "new man" is envisioned in opposition to the nation-state.

[97] Dipesh Chakrabarty, *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age* (University of Chicago Press, 2021), 45.

[98] Massimiliano Tomba, *Insurgent Universality: An Alternative Legacy of Modernity* (Oxford University Press, 2019).

oppress and degrade so many human beings have yet to be formed. If Chakrabarty is right to warn against the "myth of a global identity" that would threaten to "subsume particulars," we should also be wary of embracing a universalism premised simply on the inescapable fact of human difference, or which seeks to embrace every member of the human species from the outset—a solidarity so loose as to extend from the most wealthy and powerful to the most vulnerable and dominated. As Ayça Çubukçu argues, reflecting on the potential for politicizing the category of "humanity," the universalism demanded of our moment is one that might be said to entail "an invitation to a 'we' that is open yet selective; to a 'we' that remains to be imagined; to a 'we' that is *not all*."[99] Or, in Ato Sekyi-Otu's phrase, this ought to be a *partisan* universalism, one animated, in part, by Fanon's call for a "new humanism" premised neither on premature reconciliation or the suppression of difference, but, above all, in collective commitment to overturning relations of exploitation and domination and opening up new horizons of human possibility through political struggle.[100]

We certainly want for such ambitions today. Although Badiou finds many faults in past efforts to create a "New Man," this was, as he argues, *at least a project*. In its most emancipatory iterations, it held out the possibility of new forms of human life, political organization, and sociality. In this sense it compares rather favourably, as Badiou suggests, to our reigning "project-less humanism."[101] The dominant (liberal-imperialist) conception of humanity, Badiou claims, takes humanity as a *victim*, an object of pity—this humanism might attempt to avert the worst but stops short of affirming a vision of a better future for humanity.[102] Badiou's critique has some resonance with that of Bonnie Honig, who has insightfully identified in contemporary political culture and critical theory the contours of a "mortalist humanism," one which embraces a negative universalism of tragedy, grief, shared vulnerability, and capacity for suffering. This mortalist humanism, Honig suggests, is one of lamentation rather than affirmation, and aspires to a post-conflictual politics by appealing to the common human experience of suffering, urging that we "dwell longer in grief or forge in grief new solidarities."[103] Deeply connected to a tragic sensibility, she identifies this mortalist humanism with the politics of, for instance, truth and

[99] Ayça Cubukçu, "On Left Internationalism" *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 123, no. 3 (2024), 570.
[100] Ato Sekyi-Otu, *Left Universalism, Africacentric Essays*.
[101] Badiou, *The Century,* 175.
[102] See also Badiou, *Ethics*: *An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* (Verso, 2001).
[103] Honig, *Antigone*, 26.

reconciliation commissions, which orient themselves to confession and forgiveness, the acknowledgement of suffering and loss, rather than justice and revolutionary social transformation. This mortalist humanism positions humanity, she suggests "in a sentimental ontology of fragility," downplaying our capacity for radical change.[104] It thus represents, she concludes, a "limited and limiting politics" or even an "anti-politics."[105]

It is worth returning once more to Scott, as his position here is a curious one. He offers an entirely perspicacious and acute diagnosis of the consequences of the closures on our political imagination, and his account has clear affinities with that of Honig. As he writes: "In our liberal and liberalizing time, *emancipation has given way to accommodation*, and *reconciliation has displaced revolution* as the language of social and political change where the future has been reduced to a mirror image of the present."[106] Scott identifies a clear temporal disjuncture between our present moment and that of previous revolutionary thinkers: they believed that the past and present could be overcome and a better future could be achieved. With the collapse of these horizons, we are left "stranded the present" and can no longer sustain the belief that "we are in fact going somewhere—somewhere other and maybe *better* than we currently are."[107] All it seems we are left with is the task of reckoning with the past, sifting through the wreckage, and reconciling with the trauma of this closure. In this sense, while he likewise offers a critical account of it, Scott might be said to endorse, rather than reject, a "mortalist humanism," emphasizing modesty and caution over the prospect of renewed political transformation. Scott is surely right to recognize that we do not at present inhabit a revolutionary moment, and to insist this demands sober thought and reflection. However, as Gary Wilder observes, Scott seems to present us with a false binary between "faith in a linear temporality (the certainty, as he puts it, that we are going somewhere) and resignation to a perpetual present (the certainty that we are not)."[108] If Scott sees the rhetoric of a "new humanism" as too complicit with a unilinear, redemptive understanding of history, I think we can still defend the *possibility* of creating a new humanity without attaching this aspiration to any confidence in historical progress.

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[104] Honig, *Antigone,* 31.
[105] Honig, *Antigone*, 25.
[106] Scott, *Omens of Adversity,* 131. Emphasis mine.
[107] Scott, *Omens of Adversity*, 6.
[108] Gary Wilder, *Concrete Utopianism*, 93.

Badiou offers some valuable insight here. As we have seen through his analysis of the "New Man," Badiou is clear-sighted in his recognition of the failures of twentieth century Marxism. Interestingly, Badiou himself eschews the language of humanism on grounds that chime somewhat with Scott's. To be sure, he deplores the "project-less" or "mortalist" humanism of the present. But he also rejects a "radical humanism" that grounds itself either in a progressive philosophy of history, which sees the movement of history as a continuous, linear, dialectical realization of our essential humanity, or an anthropology, which sees human emancipation as the activation of an innate human nature or essence.[109] In short, he rejects humanism not so much for its "radicalism," but for what he sees as its (potential) conservatism: the comforts of history or anthropology risk pulls us back to what humanity *is* and *has been*, rather than what it has the potential to *become* and *create*. The project of human emancipation from all sources of domination and exploitation (what Badiou defends as the "communist hypothesis") cannot count on any teleology but must constantly be invented anew and affirmed. But while Badiou, for these reasons, favours a "radical antihumanism" over a "radical humanism," he also concedes that the distance between these positions narrows considerably in a revolutionary situation, cohering around a sense of humanity "as opening, possibility, programme of thought."[110] The recognition that we may not inhabit such a revolutionary situation now need not lead us to forswear the possibility that we might again.

Fanon's vision for a "new humanity" offers useful inspiration in light of Badiou's critical reflections on the "New Man."[111] In his discussion of the "New Man" Badiou seems to focus particularly on the communist experience in the Soviet Union and China, where proponents of the "new man" were intent on a ruthless modernization of the pre-revolutionary society, uprooting tradition and destroying what they saw as the remnants of "feudalism." It is difficult to find the same hostility to difference and tradition among many the anticolonial proponents of a "new humanism" (a term which has a slightly different valence than the "new man"), who were often more concerned with *defending* and *rescuing* tradition from colonial denigration and were likewise animated with ensuring a harmonious postcolonial future. Fanon's "new humanism" is

[109] See particularly Chapter 13 "The joint disappearances of Man and God" in *The Century*, 165-178.
[110] Badiou, *The Century*, 171.
[111] Fanon is strikingly absent in Badiou's *The Century*, but it is not surprising that Alberto Toscano turns to Fanon's call to "invent a new man" in his postscript to Badiou's work. See Toscano, "'European nihilism and beyond: commentary" in *The Century*, 200-201.

generally less "restorationist" than that of many of his contemporaries—his humanism is an injunction to novelty and is not informed by a romantic understanding of precolonial society as essentially harmonious and pure of class antagonism. As Christoph Kalter observes, Fanon's "new humanism" is also distinct from the Stalinist "new Soviet man" in that its wellspring is creative, liberatory praxis rather than "planning, disciplining, or machine-like uniformity."[112] Fanon is decidedly not seeking to obliterate all sources of difference or uproot all traditions under the banner of his "new humanism." His aim is to defend a political project that could *unite* many different communities, who might not share culture, language, or religion, into a common political project. To the extent that Fanon might be said to premise this novelty on "a fully accomplished destruction" (one of the criticisms Badiou levels at twentieth century proponents of the "new man"), the target of this destruction is narrow and clearly defined: the apartheid reality of the colonial state. Fanon thus demands the destruction of the specious identities of "colonized" and "colonizer," but does not imply that all other attachments or identities need be abandoned.

Fanon's new humanism is a reminder that subjective human transformation lies downstream from creative political action. It was the Algerian revolution and global anticolonial upsurge that licensed his call to "start over a new history of man."[113] For Fanon, as I have stressed, this is an impulse towards genuine creation and novelty, not restoration. As Ato Sekyi-Otu puts it, Fanon "credits the imagination of postcolonial humanity with … the capacity to cleanse itself of the detritus of history and to write for itself a fresh destiny."[114] Fanon, as we have seen, attaches this political novelty to the *nation*, which he sought to imbue with a fundamentally inclusive and open-ended character. While the political construction of the nation may no longer be able to serve his far-reaching hopes, we can still defend the ambitious utopianism of his appeal. It is worth recalling that Fanon's assertation that a "new human" was being born in the anticolonial struggles was not only a *future-oriented aspiration*, but an *observation* of what he was witnessing in Algeria. Fanon's writings remain a powerful testament to a long-oppressed and degraded people acting with a renewed confidence in themselves, asserting their collective dignity as human beings, acting on new solidarities, fighting for control

[112] Kalter, *Discovery of the Third World,* 237.
[113] Fanon, *Wretched,* 238.
[114] Sekyi-Otu, *Fanon's Dialectic of Experience*, 238.

of their own destiny, and nurturing new aspirations for the future. As Ernst Bloch reminds us: "there are no innate rights; they are all either acquired or must be acquired in battle. The upright path is inclined to be something that must be won."[115] Fanon's work is in part a tribute to those who walked the upright path and who stood tall against oppression. With Bloch, Fanon's is also a utopian gesture towards the *not yet*, paths yet to be walked, victories yet to be won. As Achille Mbembe poignantly reflects on Fanon's legacy:

> I myself have been attracted to Fanon's name and voice because both have the brightness of metal. His is a metamorphic thought, animated by an indestructible will to live. What gives this metallic thinking its force and power is the air of indestructibility and, its corollary, the *injunction to stand up*. It is the inexhaustible silo of humanity that it houses and which, yesterday, gave the colonised strength and which, today, allows us to look forward to the future.[116]

This is an apt way to remember Fanon's vision of a "new humanity." It is at once a testament to past triumphs in the face of oppression, and an "injunction to stand up" in our present, to press onward for a better humanity to come.

CONCLUSION

It is impossible to deny our present distance from the revolutionary expectations of those who, like Fanon, believed they were witnessing the global birth of a new humanity before their eyes. This confidence in human progress, improvement, and reinvention was sustained by an international wave of revolutionary projects that have concluded and whose co-ordinates are to a large extent eroded and irrecoverable. Although I have been critical of Scott throughout this chapter, I must underscore that I find his willingness to face up to the temporal gulf that divides us from the revolutionary expectations of the twentieth century both challenging and compelling. My hope, however, is that if we recognize the lapse of these horizons as marking the end of a *particular* emancipatory sequence, we can avoid naïve appropriation or imitation of the past without, however, discarding all the aspirations of those who came before us and who fought for a better world. The very idea of revolution itself is inseparable from a confidence in humanity's

[115] Ernst Bloch, *Natural Law and Human Dignity,* trans. Dennis J. Schmidt (MIT Press, 1987), 186.
[116] Achille Mbembe, "Metamorphic Thought: The Works of Frantz Fanon" *African Studies* 71, no. 1 (2012), 26.

ability to reinvent itself and I do believe we must retain some sense of humanity's malleability and capacity for reinvention lest we resign ourselves to the belief that our present condition is natural and inevitable.

We should remember that human subjectivity has been transformed in far-reaching ways before, although not always for the better. The colonial ordering of the world encouraged human beings to understand themselves as members of "races," and gave many the pernicious idea that they belonged to a higher rank of humanity; nationalism has fostered a widely held belief among human beings that they naturally belong to discrete, bounded national communities; the capitalist mode of production has cultivated in human beings a sense of themselves as self-possessed individuals, who confront each other and understand themselves as economic competitors. These processes have always been uneven and never total. There are, of course, countless ways that human beings understand themselves, some of which have been springboards for admirable solidarities and offer invaluable insight into different ways of organizing human life. A world without exploitation and domination would certainly be one with room for many different visions of the good life to flourish. And yet I do not think we should so quickly abandon the idea of "new human being" or close ourselves off to the possibility of large-scale subjective transformation achievable through political struggle. Overthrowing structures of domination could never inoculate us from tragedy or eliminate all sources of disagreement, sadness, or suffering. It would not turn human beings into angels. But it might well be a world in which solidarity becomes a new common sense, in which human beings understand themselves and their obligations to each other in new ways. In short, it might well be world of *new human beings*.

CONCLUSION

I pondered all these things, and how men fight and lose the battle, and the thing that they fought for comes about in spite of their defeat, and when it comes turns out not to be what they meant, and other men have to fight for what they meant under another name.

—William Morris

In this dissertation, "Between Communist Internationalism and a 'New Humanism': Episodes in the Intellectual History of Twentieth Century Anticolonialism," I turned to the anticolonial histories of the twentieth century. As I emphasized in the Introduction and throughout the project, these movements were not narrow campaigns for national independence but were also animated by far more expansive visions of human emancipation. For many, the project of national liberation bound up with deep egalitarian commitments, informed by a strong desire not to substitute foreign for native oppressors, and animated by an aspiration to fundamentally remake the world order. These aspirations were often explicitly socialist or communist in character, shaped in part by the radical political networks fostered by the Communist International in the 1920s and 1930s, and later supported by newly independent socialist states. The project of communist internationalism, however, underwent a subtle transformation over the course of the century. Initially, it signalled a commitment to proletarian class struggle across national boundaries. The Bolsheviks attempted to facilitate this internationalism by propounding a "national right to self-determination"—a project that left a lasting imprint on the history of twentieth century anticolonialism. Over time, however, this internationalism became increasingly an internationalism of national liberation movements, and then an internationalism of radical nationalist governments and independent nation states. Although this shift was likely not obvious to those living through it, some, like M.N. Roy, recognized and criticized the implicit nationalism that had come to undergird communist internationalism. While Roy adopted the language of a "new humanism" to express a staunchly anti-nationalist position, humanism was also later used by thinkers like Fanon as a gesture to a universalistic political horizon *beyond* nationalism, but which remained nonetheless deeply attached to the nation.

Formal decolonization and the achievement of national independence by so many former colonies in the twentieth century represented a momentous victory. The various internationalisms that emerged out of these experiences of struggle (including the Non-Aligned Movement, Pan-Africanism, Pan-Arabism, Marxism-Leninism, Third-Worldism, and others) sustained radical imaginations for many decades but found themselves under heavy strain by the 1980's. The erosion and defeat of these "worldmaking" projects was the result both of unabated imperial hostility as well as internal contradictions and political closures effected around the nation-state. As these radical horizons receded, they were supplanted by a form of humanitarian internationalism that positioned the peoples of the Third World as victims of their own states and proved entirely compatible with a renewed liberal imperialism. Today, however, even this humanitarian framework appears to be in decline, displaced by a harsh, revanchist nationalism around the world.

It is within these dark horizons that many thinkers have been returning to the radical movements and intellectual traditions of the past, not to idealize them, but to recover unrealized alternatives and to rediscover visions of internationalism, cosmopolitanism, and humanism, that might again help animate horizons of political possibility beyond capitalism, empire, and nationalism. Sharing in these aspirations, in this project I looked particularly at how various thinkers engaged the language of "humanism." I cautioned against an uncritical embrace of the concept and urged instead that political theorists should attend closely to how humanism was used, deployed, or rejected in different contexts.

As I stressed in the Introduction to this project, "humanism" is an extremely mutable, capacious concept—appeals to humanism are invariably accompanied by some other set of explicit or implicit commitments and the term seems always to require some adjective (radical, Marxist, liberal, secular, anticolonial, etc.) to clarify exactly what *kind* of humanism it is we are talking about. The inescapable ambiguity of humanism is well captured in Samuel Moyn's pithy observation that: "if you say you are a humanist, you still haven't told me what you are for."[1] This ambiguity is why I chose to devote my attention to reconstructing the contexts and varied political commitments of the thinkers in question, investigating how they used, embraced, or rejected the language of humanism as they worked out strategies to overturn colonialist and

[1] Samuel Moyn, "Hatred and humanism" (16 June 2010) *The Immanent Frame.* https://tif.ssrc.org/2010/06/16/hatred-and-humanism/

capitalist forms of domination. I will summarize once more the arguments of these chapters and conclude with some final reflections on "internationalism" and "humanism" with the aim of highlighting some lessons to be retained from Marx, Roy, and Fanon.

In Chapter 1 of this dissertation, I showed how Marx and Engels came to eschew the language of humanism then dominant in their political and intellectual milieu. This humanism skirted class struggle and hoped instead that religious criticism could bring about universal human reconciliation. Marx and Engels rejected this depoliticizing humanism in favour of a more militant conception of the class struggle, which they believed should necessarily be waged across national boundaries. This was, as they saw it, principally a European internationalism, based in the industrial working class. Marx has often been criticized for his (qualified) support for colonial rule, particularly in India. Cautioning against an uncritical approach to Marx's humanism, I argued that some of Marx's more problematic claims about colonialism can be linked to a lingering "theoretical humanism" and the influence of the Young Hegelian criticism of religion. Engaging particularly Edward Said's famous critique of Marx, I argued that it is important to understand Marx's *humanism* and his *historicism* together, rather than as separate problems. I argued that Marx abandoned his confidence in capitalism's "humanizing" or "civilizing" significance in his later years and became more open to revolutionary possibility beyond the European industrial heartland, including Russia and Ireland. This did not, however, entail any reconciliation with the political humanism he had abandoned in the 1840's.

Chapter 2 turned to M.N. Roy, who began his political life as a committed nationalist and became an inveterate critic of nationalism. In this chapter I focussed particularly on Roy's communist and humanist periods. I argued that Roy developed an enduringly insightful criticism of the Indian nationalist movement over the course of his career in the Communist International, particularly during his 1920 debate with Lenin and his 1922 *India in Transition*. Offering a nuanced analysis of colonial capitalism in India, Roy advanced a vision for national revolution that rejected the spiritualist rhetoric of Ghandian nationalism and embraced instead a social revolution grounded in the aspirations of the proletariat and peasantry. I argued that Roy's later rejection of communism can be attributed to several factors, including his disappointment upon returning to India that the country's social and political conditions did not live up to his expectations, his frustration with the Soviet Union's retreat from internationalism, and, perhaps most significantly, his alarm at the rise of fascism and its echoes in Indian nationalism. As Roy

came to understand fascism in India as principally a problem of religion, tradition, and superstition he also came to abandon his earlier confidence in the Indian working classes. He ultimately shed his revolutionary aspirations in favour of a liberal reformism that, like the Young Hegelians before him, held that secular enlightenment was the key to political transformation. In this respect, Roy might be read as a cautionary tale, one which confirms Marx's earlier fears about the depoliticizing potential of appeals to "humanism." Roy's late humanist period nonetheless contains important insights including, most notably, a vigorous opposition to fascism and nationalism, as well as a discerning critique of how communist internationalism supported and relied on nationalism.

Chapter 3 engaged the interventions of Frantz Fanon, written amidst the Algerian war of independence. In this chapter I read Fanon as a partisan of the nation-form, who defended the priority of national independence against other competing political projects and aspirations. I argued that Fanon's investment in an anticolonial nationalism grounded in the aspirations of the labouring classes and oriented towards a solidaristic internationalism can be productively situated in a lineage of political debate that runs through Marx, Lenin, and Roy. I drew particular attention in this chapter to Fanon's proximity to the 1920 Roy-Lenin debate and argued that Fanon, despite his strong reservations about nationalism, was more willing to defend a "positive" vision of national culture and national consciousness than either Lenin or Roy. I argued that although Fanon's "new humanism" represents a move *beyond* nationalism, his humanism also remains embedded *in* the nation: national independence and the cultivation of an "authentic" nationalism is the condition of possibility for his new humanism to flourish. I charted how Fanon saw the emergence of this "new humanism," considering the issues of violence, political education, and its relationship to the hypocrisies of European humanism. I argue that while Fanon's humanism retains significant political ambiguity, it remains an important universalizing gesture towards invention. Where Roy troubles Fanon's ambition to transcend nationalism by going *through* it, Fanon's humanism nonetheless remains much more firmly wedded to novelty and revolutionary political struggle than Roy's.

In Chapter 4 I considered the contemporary legacy of twentieth century anticolonial humanism. I began with a lengthy engagement with the work of David Scott, who has articulated a long-running critique of what he sees as the "romantic" humanism of an earlier generation. Scott has advanced profound reservations about uncritically reviving the theoretical and political

coordinates of earlier thinkers and political movements, and I affirmed many of his critical points. At the same time, however, Scott comes close to disavowing the possibility of future radical transformation altogether. Thus, in this chapter I offered an alternative account of the "national liberation sequence," drawing on thinkers like Michael Neocosmos, Nandita Sharma, and Salar Mohandesi. Here I suggested that this historical trajectory should be understood not as the end of revolutionary possibility, but as the conclusion of a particular sequence of revolutionary politics, one in which the project of socialism and communism became attached to the cause of nationalism. I concluded this chapter with a qualified defence of the utopian aspiration to invent a "new humanity." I considered some of the dangers that have accompanied the "new man" (drawing here especially on the work of Alain Badiou) and argued that Fanon's appeal to *invent* a "new humanity" avoids some of these pitfalls and can still offer valuable inspiration in the present. We may, as Scott suggests, be living in post-revolutionary times, but those committed to the radical transformation of human life cannot disavow the possibility that humanity can be changed and transformed in far-reaching, liberatory ways.

In brief, I argued in these chapters that Marx rejected the language of humanism for what he saw as its depoliticizing potential but retained until a late period a confidence in capitalism's "humanizing" significance; Roy embraced a "new humanism" to propound a critique of Indian nationalism while simultaneously retreating from the problematic of class struggle; while Fanon attached his "new humanism" to an inclusive, emancipatory understanding of the national struggle but nonetheless sought to overcome nationalism by going *through* it. There are several lessons we can take from these thinkers: from Marx, an emphasis on class struggle and a wariness of humanism's depoliticizing potential; from Roy, a strident critique of nationalism; from Fanon, a commitment to realizing a genuinely "new" humanism through political action and invention. I will conclude this dissertation by saying a few more words about the overlapping themes of this dissertation: humanism and internationalism.

Marx recognized that capitalism, which came into the world "dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt," created an interconnected, global web of exploitation that could only be overcome by a concerted international effort.[2] Although there are certainly many aspects of Marx and Engel's vision that do not have the same purchase they once did, their insistence that socialism must necessarily be an *international* achievement remains as relevant as

[2] Marx, *Capital*, 926.

ever. We appear to be entering a period in which the neoliberal free market orthodoxy of the 1980's and 1990's stands largely discredited, and for good reason: the neoliberal offensive fuelled global inequality, decimated organized labour, and was a wrecking ball to the developmentalist ambitions of the Third World.[3] But the neoliberal creed is not necessarily being replaced by any salutary program, still less an anti-capitalist one. Instead, we see in many countries, and not only in the West, a kind of nationalist retrenchment. The populist, authoritarian right claims, speciously, to protect the national working class, and directs its ire at "cosmopolitan elites" and demonizes migrants and refugees. We do not have to choose between an ugly, racist nativism and neoliberal dystopia. This requires, however, the renewal of an emancipatory, anticapitalist, internationalist vision.

One consistent thread we can see running through these thinkers is an insistence that internationalists should, in the first instance, be critics of their own nation, and build solidarity with others by fighting their own local battles. Marx, for instance, counselled English workers to not express "pious wishes" for the liberation of Poland but direct their fight against their *own* enemy—the English bourgeoisie. Likewise, he urged them to make common cause with the Irish anticolonial struggle, not simply out of sympathy for Ireland, but to recognize that an Irish victory would be *theirs* as well. Roy, for his part, consistently fought against colonial attitudes within the Comintern and tried to build bridges between European and Indian communists while articulating his own long-running, principled critique of the Indian national movement's own chauvinism. Echoing the terms of the Roy-Lenin debate some decades earlier, Fanon reminded French leftists that "one of the first duties of intellectuals and democratic elements in colonialist countries is unreservedly to support the national aspirations of colonized peoples." Fanon and the FLN urged the French left "to encourage every strike undertaken by the French people" and to connect France's problems—the rising cost of living, the rise of the far-right, and restrictions on democratic freedoms—to the Algerian war.[4] Fanon also developed his own internal critique of the Algerian national movement and warned his generation of revolutionaries against the debilitating power of nationalism.

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[3] Neoliberalism is a contested term and when used loosely can often obscure as much as it clarifies. I use it here to name a specific historical period in the history of capitalism, namely the ruling class offensive against the compromises of the post-WWII welfare state that began in the 1970's and accelerated in the 1980's.

[4] Fanon, "French Intellectuals and Democrats and the Algerian Revolution" [1957], in *Toward the African Revolution* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 76, 90.

Those simply seeking to revive past traditions of internationalism will find that their coordinates have been scrambled. The old anti-imperialist vision has been complicated not least of all by the fact that, to borrow Lenin's terminology, many of yesterday's "oppressed nations" have become "oppressor nations" with respect to their own national minorities and neighbours. Writing on the verge of India's independence, Roy recognized that one of the limitations of the Comintern project was that it had fostered an *internationalism of nationalisms*. Roy was ever invested in transcending the separatist logic of nationalism, and his turn to "cosmopolitanism" shares much with Paul Gilroy's admirable call for "the cultivation of cosmopolitan disloyalty" and "active hostility toward national solidarity, national culture, and their privileging over other, more open affiliations."[5] Roy's late work contains some significant gestures towards a world government and the prospect of a universal political order not divided by national states. This remains as distant a possibility in our day as it did Roy's, but as Ayça Çubukçu reminds us: "the current absence of a blueprint that outlines the institutional shape left internationalism can take … does not foreclose the possibility of its emergence in the future."[6]

Those seeking to give new shape to a left internationalism will, however, need to retain what Roy abandoned, that is, a confidence in the political capacities of the international labouring classes. Like the Young Hegelians before him, Roy grew increasingly confident that secularism was the key to undoing humanity's social and political antagonisms. I do not wish to deny the radical significance that secular criticism might possess in contexts where political and religious authority are closely entwined, but I think Marx was right to see in the atheistic humanism of the Young Hegelians a rather myopic and limiting politics.[7] It is clear today that global capitalism does not *depend* on religion in any fundamental way. We should also retain Marx's wariness of the desire for reconciliation that animates many expressions of humanism; where Roy and the Young Hegelians were animated by a positive "love of humanity," we have

[5] Paul Gilroy, *Postcolonial Melancholia,* 81, 68. Gilroy locates this attitude in the work of Sigmund Freud and other "fugitives and refugees from Nazism." Although Roy left Europe before the rise of Nazism, he knew many such fugitives himself (including his Jewish communist wife, Ellen Gottschalk Roy) and can well be said to count in their company.

[6] Ayça Cubukçu, "On Left Internationalism," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 123, no 3 (2024), 580.

[7] The vaguely naturalistic atheistic humanism propounded today by organizations like "Humanists International" has barely moved an inch beyond Feuerbach. This humanism does not attach itself to any political project but shares Roy and Feuerbach's sense that the erosion of religious belief is some kind of master key to social progress. We should not forget—as the example of the "New Atheists" attests to—that secularists and self-styled atheist humanists can prove enthusiastic drumbeaters for empire, while the devout have often proven courageous militants of emancipatory movements.

seen the proliferation of "mortalist" humanisms grounded instead in negative themes like suffering, grief, and fragility but which equally aspire to transcend social and political conflict. Chakrabarty, for instance, has called for a renewed "humanism" grounded specifically in humanity's shared vulnerability in the face of climate change. I share here Ajay Singh Chaudhary's deep reservations and grim assessment of this urge for reconciliation in the face of climate vulnerability.[8] Although there is much in Marx's project that cannot be revived for our time, the general answer to the climate crisis remains: class struggle on a global scale.

What most clearly distinguishes revolutionary humanists like Fanon from these humanists, is that the revolutionary humanist knows this future reconciliation will be an *achievement* that can only be won *through* conflict and social and political transformation. We should remember and defend the memory of those who fought for such a world. Commenting on Fanon's legacy, Paul Gilroy hails Fanon's "preparedness to speak in humanity's name."[9] We should, with Gilroy after Fanon, continue to "speak in humanity's name" and defend a vision of a better possible life for humanity. If there is a radical future for the term humanism I think it lies in what Gilroy has called a "planetary humanism," one that is not grounded in any fictious idea of a "human essence … somehow lodged in every individual subject" or in any assurances of history, but one that is defined by an uncompromisingly universalistic antiracism and a commitment to human equality that transcends all borders.[10] We ought to affirm the idea that the radical transformation of human life and society remains possible, no matter how closed our present horizons might seem. Indeed, many of the ideas expounded under the banner of humanism, including a confidence in humanity's capacity for creative self-transformation, a commitment to free thought and inquiry, and an aspiration for a *genuinely* postcolonial, postnational, and postracial future for humanity in which all can flourish, remain well worth defending today.

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[8] Chakrabarty frames the danger of climate change as a truly universal threat, for "unlike in the crises of capitalism, there are no lifeboats here for the rich and the privileged." Chaudhary rejects this vision of global apocalypse for humanity as a whole, stressing that the rich *do* possess ample lifeboats and much more besides. Chakrabarty, *The Climate of History*, 45; Chaudhary, *The Exhausted of the Earth: Politics in a Burning World* (Penguin, 2024).

[9] Paul Gilroy, "Race and the Value of the Human" in *The Meanings of Rights: The Philosophy of Social Theory and Human Rights*, eds. Costas Douzinas and Conor Gearty (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 137.

[10] Gilroy, "Race and the Value of the Human," 143.

Those seeking to re-invigorate "humanism" in the present moment should also be alive, however, to its contemporary connotations. Outside of academic circles, humanism, especially in the English-speaking world, is typically associated with an atheistic, secular worldview. It is also often associated with a vague humanitarian impulse, describing a sympathetic attitude towards human suffering. It is occasionally, but less commonly, invoked to defend the tradition of the liberal arts and humanities. While it possesses no clear political connotations, for some who wish to revive humanism as a term of politics and critique today, this ambiguity may appear more a strength than a weakness; Kieran Durkin, for instance, suggests that this commends the reinvigoration of humanism, arguing that: "The mutability of the term merely serves to underline its enduring serviceability and appeal."[11] I am rather less convinced. Although many left defenders of humanism tend to lament the use of the term on the political right as a kind of illegitimate appropriation, humanism, given its fundamental ambiguity, has always lent itself to such deployments and there is nothing new about a depoliticizing humanism that imagines, fantastically, that human connection can simply overcome social and political antagonism.[12]

Given humanism offers so little political clarity in its own right, my modest suggestion is that we should work on clarifying, sharpening, and defending those *other* attendant commitments that are necessarily attached to any invocation of humanism, with perhaps less concern for mounting a defence of the term in and of itself. What we fight for is, after all, more consequential than what we call it. My agnosticism regarding the term "humanism" should not be mistaken for a *political* agnosticism, and my argument does not imply that we should renounce humanity's capacity for thought, for subjective transformation, for creative political action, or potential to build alternative political orders that are free of domination. We have ample examples from throughout human history to affirm that these things are possible; radical new horizons have been opened up before and can be again. It is possible that new movements and organizations may yet take up the language of "humanism" again and imbue it with new purpose and meaning—it is not possible to predict such things in advance. While there are tendencies that vitiate against this kind of popular reinvigoration we can still, however, affirm

[11] Kieran Durkin, "Adventures in the Anti-Humanist Dialectic: Towards the Reappropriation of Humanism," *European Journal of Social Theory* (2021), 16.

[12] Gilroy, for instance, argues that humanism has been "hijacked" by studiously Eurocentric, Islamophobic secularists like the scientist Richard Dawkins. I share Gilroy's antipathy towards the likes of Dawkins but am less convinced this is a hijacking. Gilroy, "Race and the Value of the Human," 146.

much of what has gone under the name “humanism” before and continue to defend the basic, implicit universalism that is present in every revolt, uprising, protest, and collective movement for liberation: the claim that nobody should be oppressed.

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