

Keynote Address

After the great white error . . . the great black mirage

Paul Gilroy

The Negro is not. Any more than the white man – Frantz Fanon'

The horrors of the 20th century brought 'races' to political life more vividly and naturalistically than imperial conquest had done. Post-colonial time reverberates with the catastrophes that resulted from their militarised agency and their unprecedented victimisation. Those events have been left behind but contemporary analysis of racisms and their morbidities still belongs emphatically to that unhappy period.

I want to begin by saying that critical analysis of racisms needs self-consciously and deliberately to be updated. Few new ways of thinking 'race', and its relationship to economics, politics and power, have emerged since the era of national liberation struggles to guide the continuing pursuit of a world free of racial hierarchies. If we are seeking means to revive that worthy aspiration, of making it sound less banal, more attractive and more political by showing where it touches and transforms modern dreams of substantive democracy and authentic justice, we will need to reconstruct the history of 'race' in modernity. We need to offer multiple genealogies of racial discourse that can explain how the brutal dualistic opposition between black and white became entrenched and has retained its grip on a world in which racial and ethnic identities have been anything but stable or fixed.

That worthy goal stages a conflict between the obligation to pay attention to local and conjunctural factors and the lingering desire for a totalising theory that can explain the attachment to 'race' and ethnicity under all conditions. The former is demanded by a subversive commitment to the relocalisation of a networked world, the latter is animated by the fantasy of controlling that world by reducing it to a set of elegant categories.

My attempt to reconcile the irreconcilable claims of abstraction and immediacy involves returning, in a systematic historical fashion, to the interpretations of racism and racial hierarchy that were produced during the cold war; which emerged from the critical theorists of national liberation struggles and that flowed from the confrontation with a variety of differing incarnations of fascism, not all of which appealed openly or consistently to the metaphysics of 'race'.²

Along this path we will be obliged to consider the fate of the libertarian and cosmopolitan left during the 20th century and to ask why there have been so few successor projects capable of articulating anti-racist hope in anything other than its negative moment: as a systematic conjuring with the possibility of better worlds rather than embattled criticism of this disenchanted one.

Though they were addressed to a very different context, Adorno's challenging words on the relationship between nationality, ethnicity and forms of intellectual freedom can be borrowed here. They communicate something of the specific problems that arise from dissenting contemplation of the mystified, alienated world in which racial truths and bio-cultural ontologies have supplied indices of realness as well as key markers of sensible social policy, mature political thought and good scholarly habits: 'The person who interprets, instead of accepting what is given and classifying it, is marked with the yellow star of one who squanders his intelligence in impotent speculation, reading things in where there is nothing to interpret'.³

Transposed in this way, his observation points to the way in which 'race' is invested with common sense. It might also suggest that the signs of 'race' do not speak for themselves and that the difficult work of interpreting the system of meaning they create is always likely to appear illegitimate, 'politically incorrect', sometimes treasonable and usually speculative in the most dismissive sense of that term. Adorno reminds us that while the political order of 'race' endures, the character of racial and ethnic groups is already at stake in attempts to transform a mode of exploitation and domination that is not merely comfortable with the phenomena of racialised differences but has amplified and projected them in order to remain intelligible, habitable and productive.

This opportunity to consider blackness and whiteness provides a chance to defend another orientation towards 'race' in the political field. It emphasises the currently unfashionable values of critical speculation and interpretative work and is therefore likely to offend black and white

proponents of 'identity politics' in equal measure. I know that opposing racism in practice does not always permit these varieties of reflection but I think anti-racism's practical political manoeuvrings are weaker and less convincing as a result of that shortcoming. The alternative stance I want to outline aims initially to consolidate the creativity and insight displayed by brave mid-20th century thinkers in whose work confrontations with Nazism, the possibility of armed anti-colonial resistance and commitments to civil and human rights struggles combined to produce a new analysis of 'race' and its political dimensions in several different places: not all of them obviously colonial in character. The imaginative scope of this political project typically spanned the over-developed and developing worlds. Today it is best conceptualised as a self-conscious successor to the trans-local interpretations of 'race', racism, culture, belonging and identity that were first laid out in the complex and forbidding work of Frantz Fanon, which has recently been so poorly served by his growing legion of academic fans.⁴

This pursuit of a history of the present can be guided by the irreverent spirit evident in his youthful flirtations with existentialism. In that frame of mind we have to be prepared to ask what anti-racism should become in the future? I suggest that it will have to be more than either a fading footnote to the injustices of colonial domination or a strategic manoeuvre designed to maintain elite control over divided and confused collectivities that fall back on the imaginary bonds of race' as a cheap, but nonetheless effective, surrogate for the political solidarity they think they need if they are to defend themselves.

The willingness to invent political cultures capable of ending racism now demands real creative and prophetic work from us. A decisive 'refusal to accept the present as definitive' is not as easy as Fanon made it sound in 1952 when the failures of western European civilisation were apparent to everyone and the destructive potency of race thinking was impossible to ignore.

The re-constructive labour signalled in these transgressions is most useful when it is directed not into the well-intentioned but utterly mistaken task of pumping up the phenomena of racial differences into a full-blown phenomenology, but when it turns against the political anthropology of 'race' that always precedes the identification of that order of difference.

The youthful Fanon trumpets his decisionistic escape from the constraints of inherited circumstance but was still operating in a conceptual framework

informed by substantial elements of historical materialism. Anti-colonial solidarity made him essentially sympathetic to arguments by Sartre, who had emphasised that it was the anti-semitic who created the Jew, and those of de Beauvoir who argued under the same constellation that woman was made rather than born. In this distinctive 'constructionist' problematic, which grows in importance as we grasp its ethically grounded refusals of scholastic protocol, Fanon stripped not only the Negro but 'race' itself of the ontological claims which removed it from history and delivered it instead to the unnatural realm of what he called 'timeless truths' and 'ultimate radiances'.⁵

This radical approach refers us to the processes he identified as 'sociogeny', a valuable but oddly neglected concept which opens a difficult angle of vision on racialised politics and promotes the disturbing conviction that racial divisions have no given, necessary or automatic effects and can therefore be made to serve various ends.

Fanon's combative stance is readily compatible with an approach to raciology that identifies 'race' as a precarious discursive construction rather than the achievement of primordial or bio-cultural emanations. He encompasses but also moves beyond a radical historicising of racism that encourages alertness to its changing forms and functions. He allows for the possibility that 'time lags' or 'differences of rhythm' can arise in the systematic flow of racialised mentalities and identifications. Symbolic constructs, imaginary representations and political meanings that derive from discrete phases in the history of 'races' can co-exist, interact and combine. For example, the brutal bio-political force of the colonial order was supplemented but never completely erased by the culturalist, anthropologically-minded race-thinking of the 1950s when, in the bloody penumbra of the Third Reich, innocent culture took over from raw natural hierarchy as the favoured medium through which racial differences would become apparent. Today we must note that both are still latent within more recent genomic innovations adding their weight to the density of multiply-accented racial signs which serve the interests of corporate multiculturalism. We must also entertain the possibility that the simplifying and solidarising effects of racial discourse may thrive and be enhanced in situations where the fundamental or ultimate meanings of 'race' are muddled or deferred. Anyone who opposes racism(s) must be no less careful than Fanon was not to confuse these strands of discourse. Their conspicuous perlocutionary power means that success in opposing racism(s) may depend upon not

mistaking one for the other.

The emergence of genomic theories of 'race' has left the older constructions in a residual condition but, like abandoned munitions under an old battlefield, though they may be obsolete they are nonetheless powerful. Indeed, the passage of time may have added to their volatility even as the rigid hierarchy they created has lost many of its attractions. It offers no plausible therapy capable of salving the visceral anxieties and largely pre-political concerns which now speak to the currency of 'race' and absolute ethnicity, not only in the lives of subordinate groups, gilding their traditional badges of inferiority, but in the increasing fears of those who feel themselves to be superior but find that the post-colonial world withholds automatic assent to that historic *a priori*.

In these circumstances, to approach the problem of racialised political cultures via the system of ideas that gives us blackness and whiteness may already be to have conceded too much ground to raciality's accumulated common sense. The Manichean opposition of those colour-coded aggregates is a fatal one. It erases earlier patterns of intermixture and combination through a simplifying mechanism that is the very instantiation of the colonial order. All its original violence is concentrated there in a condensed, and suspended but nonetheless traumatic, form. Today it tells us that relation – complex, tangled, profane, inconvenient inter-dependency – must supply the starting point for inquiries into the making and projection of racialised bodies.

Before we can deal with the historical specificities that shaped localised racial identities and made them trans-local, bringing those pure and irreconcilable entities into being and then baptising them repeatedly in warm blood, we must address the principles of solidarity and collectivity that produced black-ness and white-ness as totalities governed by distinctive arrangements that are inseparable from the political rules and ontological foundations of national states. This requires a lengthy detour through the political philosophies of modernity, which can then be reconsidered in the light of their colonial and imperial provenance. It is not just that theories and concepts, notions of history and culture, government and statecraft are found to have been implicated in the workings of European domination that they subsequently rationalise and legitimate. Without lapsing into an idealist approach to the history of raciological ideas, we can recognise the discourses of 'race' and nation as having had a larger, world-historic significance than most historians of imperial power have so far been

willing to grant.

Once the rational irrationalities of raciology are factored in as a driving element central to the development of modern political theory, this line of inquiry can be used to dispute conventional conceptions of the relationship between metropolitan state and colonial outpost, between core and periphery. It takes us instead toward a view of the colony as rather more than an extractive commercial operation. No longer merely a settlement, an adventure, an opportunity, a place for self-creation and a space of death, it becomes a laboratory, a location for experiment and innovation that transformed the exercise of governmental powers at home and configured the institutionalisation of imperial knowledge: judicial, medical, anthropological.

These are enormous topics that have been the subject of substantial absorbing volumes.⁶ Here I want to concentrate briefly on the problem of what we use to identify the distinctive political and juridical dynamics of colonial power? This involves asking how those relations may have been shaped by the articulation of racial discourse and the belief in racial difference and how the pattern of political relations that lay at the heart of the old imperial systems was transformed as a result of a sometimes murderous enthusiasm for the racial ordering of the world. This shift was completed long before Europe's colonies began to export living labour as well as commodities and raw materials, thereby beginning a new kind of link to imperial power through having to manage and contain colonial enclaves at home. From this unorthodox angle, the colony can be recognised as a special kind of place. Its necessary reliance on divisions within humankind, for example, demanded and institutionalised the abolition of all conceptions of citizenship as universal entitlement. This might also represent the end or limit of politics as it had been previously understood. The racial ordering of the colony inaugurated novel patterns of statecraft, the consequences of which are still to be understood.

Though many able and committed scholars have followed in the path-breaking footsteps of Fanon, Foucault and Elias, the story of how modern political cultures linked the body, the state and violence is not usually told on a scale that encompasses imperial dynamics. This academic resistance is significant in itself and cannot be explained away by issues of historical probity or disciplinary duty that have made empire, when it is considered at all, principally into a matter of history and economics rather than culture and politics.

The nature of connections between colonial and metropolitan life became central to the political and moral agenda set by national liberation movements of the 20th century. Their core questions included asking whether the Nazi genocide had colonial precedents, whether Europe's continuing colonial empires reproduced or converged with the racism that had lent its logic to the Third Reich's crimes, whether Europe could recover and whether capitalism could be divested of its historic attachment to racial divisions. This provocative inventory is still unresolved. It will remain so while the impact of governmental techniques and technologies that derived from colonial imperatives is considered unworthy of scholarly investigation, even in the most obvious fields: planning, medicine, policing, killing, propaganda, communications technology and population control. Important links have certainly been identified between the development of modern social policy and the life of imperial systems. But outside of interesting material drawn from the analysis of sexuality and consumer cultures, they remain significantly under-explored.

As far as the history of European statecraft is concerned, problems like the disappearance of public torture are often understood to identify a significant stage in the development of a new type of power: capillary, bio-political and primarily directed towards the management of population. This is only one institutional element in the larger history of modern government that would have to be explained quite differently if colonial conflicts and their distinctive legal ordering were fully taken into account.

The history of colonial power overflows with evidence which suggests a particular relation to military power and martial law that must have changed the workings of institutional complexes like the army and medical practice, as well as the professional thinking of administrators, planners, managers and rulers alike.

Focusing on basic institutional components of state power – sovereignty, territory, population and government itself – raises numerous issues that complicate and can even overturn orthodox accounts of how modern political authority was secured and transmitted. This worthwhile corrective exercise does not only yield an amended account of the institution of bio-politics, which is seen differently when it is approached from imperial angles. A fuller appreciation of the specifically colonial input into national statecraft promises an altogether different sense of where bio-political procedures and anthropological hierarchies fit into the history of modernity. Understanding of the telling balance between normal and the exceptional

deployments of legitimate violence is transformed by accounts that can operate on this scale. Finally, modernity itself becomes a different type of geo-political project when the colonial extensions and outposts that remain peripheral within narrowly Europe-centred accounts, are shown to have been intimately and complexly associated with its core domestic activities in ways that move beyond their valuable role as a stimulus for the development of critical comment and oppositional consciousness.

The significance of this conceptual adjustment can only increase if colonial modernity can be shown to rely upon its various investments in the idea of racial hierarchy, both at home and abroad. However, as I have said, most commentators on these dynamic threads of planetary history have failed to mention 'race' specifically or to entertain the possibility that histories of racism and of raciology might be productively associated with the genealogies of political anatomy and bio-power which culminated in the ideal of the apartheid state. They also furnished western modernity with the important governmental laboratory in which the political technologies of separate development could be refined. After all, under the sign of 'race' that is the only form of development available.

The de-sacralisation of the body has rightly become a major issue in accounting for the transition towards modern political authority. It provides an important way to explore the new range of analytical possibilities that emerges from this change of focus. The role of race thinking in rendering the bodies of natives, slaves and other infra-humans expendable is a pivotal issue in specifying how the racialisation of governmental practice impacted upon the exercise of power. Though he is clearly uninterested in the analysis of colonial relations, there is something profound to learn from Giorgio Agamben's⁶ recent attempts to reconcile the complicated legacies of Arendt and Foucault. He has made a dense but invigorating study of sovereign power, centred on the politically ambivalent and juridically marginal figure of the person who can be killed with impunity, and their reduction to the infra-human condition of 'bare life' that sanctions their death. Though it is limited by a frustrating Europe-centredness, this important work raises the hope that integrating genealogies of governmentality with histories of race thinking will eventually be an especially stimulating and productive combination. Colonial power contributed to the manifestation of bare life in historically unprecedented quantities and circumstances under the supervision of administrative and managerial systems that operated by the rules of raciology.

It is not only that rationally-applied terror routinely became colonial administration but also that the critical figure of the person who could be killed with impunity moved out of the liminal position to which it had been allocated by the unruffled workings of the national state and merged with those of the infra-human natives and the racial slaves. At that fateful but very familiar point the colonial project manifests a new kind of political space and fills it with a new cast of characters. This development can contribute directly to our understanding of how the state of emergency associated with the spatial and juridical institution of colonial power has contributed to the normal functioning of post-industrial and post-colonial societies where inequality is increasing, mass incarceration has become systematic and other forms of confinement delimit the lives of racialised minorities.

The lowly life forms that populate this zone or quarter exhibit the full shocking depth of their infra-human character only when their bare lives are contrasted with the healthier modes of being enjoyed by the settler population. These different types were products of a colonial enterprise that mandated the reduction of the native to the status of an animal in order to operate properly. The native, always closer to the condition of scarcity, stood at the epicentre of governmental action, placed there by the imperatives of exploitation and kept there by progressively more elaborate racial anthropologies which, however potent they appeared to be, could never, according to Fanon anyway, completely 'mask the human realities' involved.⁷ This verdict seems to be endorsed not only by his conviction that colonialism triggered mental illness but by the fact that Hendrik Verwoerd's doctoral thesis in psychology was entitled *The Blunting of The Emotions*.

Fanon describes the process through which colonial subjects are rendered vulnerable to the forms of rationality, violence and legality that can routinely be visited upon the paradoxical conditions of social death and exclusionary inclusion that Agamben identifies with bare life. He contrasts the practical morality which guides native resistance against this downward pressure with the overly abstract forms of universalism that are more likely be found at the other end of the imperial chain. The key to grasping this important difference in ethical outlooks lies in the natives' pursuit of a concrete and immediate dignity. This reaction is a response to the dehumanisation involved in the institution of race hierarchy. Humanity can only be recovered, he continues, through a new relation to the land which

'will bring them bread and, above all dignity'. Territory thus supplies an 'essential value' in the economy of colonial reparations, which inevitably also includes the counter-violence and resentment of the natives, the slaves and the unfree.

These geo-political and spatial aspects of power are intrinsic to Fanon's analysis of the colonial order of 'race', its *nomos*. As is well known, he presents apartheid as the paradigm case of this arrangement and reveals how the reduction of the native, unfree worker or slave to infra-humanity becomes inseparable from the foundational opposition between blackness and whiteness. Those terms of racialised identity are values but they are also places and cultures in the older sense of the term, preserved by the English words agriculture and horticulture. The warring totalities to which they refer promote and identify ecologies of belonging saturated with the mythologies and metaphysics of race-thinking which are always close at hand.

We should remember that for Fanon this arrangement was not a matter of politics. Instead, the emergence of colour-coded, Manicheistic duality marked the suspension of political relations and fostered their replacement by a rather different set of technologies and procedures. They have helped to make a special brutality – seemingly anachronistic by mid-20th century European standards – into the engine of a colonial power so chronically absurd and so total in its infiltration of everyday life that it has parcelled up the earth itself along racial lines. Needless to say, this was done in ways that explicitly confounded Marxian distinctions between base and superstructure and posed difficult questions to movements that looked only to economic progress as the means to deliver a raceless world.

Though it is fed by a sacred belief in racial hierarchy, the violence that inaugurated the motionless world, in which blackness and whiteness confronted each other, is not only a symptom of the fact that racial code has been engaged as both governmental terror and technique. For Fanon, colonial power is Manichean in its nature. The same ruthless, simplifying logic places blackness and whiteness in mutually antagonistic relation. They are separated spatially, geo-politically but conceptually their common reliance upon racialisation ensures that they are bound to each other so tightly that each is unthinkable without the proximity and hostility of the other. This distinctive geometry of colonial power pushes cultural questions to the fore, but we should also pause to identify other related issues that can be highlighted through an acknowledgement of Carl Schmitt's deeply

problematic theory of politics as the practical expression of elemental distinctions between friend and enemy.⁶

This popular and influential approach can be interpreted as an attempt to incorporate a damaging Manichean code into a universal theory of the political and to re-write the tradition of modern political reflection according to the ultra-nationalist and race-friendly rules which make all political relations conform to the deadly exigencies of imperial foreign affairs. Few commentators on his work have thought that it might be worth asking whether this might have been related either to his sense of Germany as an imperial power in need of 'raum' or to the racialised opposition between itinerant Jews and rooted Christians.

Fanon shared this geo-political and philosophical interest in the living room that colonial power won for the settler and denied to the native. He saw whiteness and blackness as among the first and most durable products of territorial expropriation. Their coupling and separation was central to his account of the political arrangements that characterised colonial rule. There, as we have seen, he placed a heavy emphasis on the spatial configuration of these two great camps –totalities that could synthesise unity and plurality into the distinctive patterns associated with the lives of 'races'. Colour-coded duality specifies the transmutation of sameness and plurality into racial identities. Those great 'encampments' were permeated with neurosis and a 'dual narcissism'. Their opposition draws us towards the primal problem of difference if not to the essential features of monotheistic systems and their genocidal successors. This, perversely, was also his route to universality and perhaps, eventually, to the evasive new humanism that he wrote so much about.

The Sartrean emphasis that Fanon placed upon Manicheism shows how the relationship between blackness and whiteness denies any possibility of a comforting dialectical resolution. The omnipresent violence of colonial administration creates the colony as a frozen, immobile world of statues, which is not in teleological or progressive motion towards freer, healthier or more comfortable arrangements. The split character of that militarised colonial world allows it to be inhabited, in effect, by different species, each of which nourishes itself inadequately with the fantasy of its unanimity. Fanon underlines that the break up of the colonial world 'does not mean that ... lines of communication will be established between the two zones. The destruction of the colonial world is no more and no less than the abolition of one zone, its burial in the depths of the earth or expulsion from

the country'.⁹ Though many of his interpreters overlook it, this is not the end of Fanon's colonial tale. The issue of blackness and whiteness as both political values and cultural cues recurs in his critique of bourgeois nationalism and unsettling account of the post-revolutionary transition. By this time the original Manicheism of the settler, which, as we have seen, culminated in the transformation of the native into either an animal or the quintessence of evil, has been destroyed. However, more damage is done by an inverted and essentially similar mentality that has taken root in the other encampment: among the natives. In his optimistic scheme, this second, transitional formation yields finally to a wider consciousness that can break with the alienated logic of epidermalisation and open oppositional and, for the first time, fully human consciousness to a wider range of ethical and political sensibilities.

But this happy outcome which is not the third term in a dialectical movement is also flecked with blood. It provides a reminder that the association of blackness and whiteness is not just a site of ontological obstacles to the emergence of dis-alienated human consciousness among blacks (which is Fanon's primary concern). Blackness and whiteness identify the depths of alienation itself. Their symptomatic pairing is especially unhelpful when it can be misread as precipitating a system of ethnic or racial equivalences that would produce whiteness as a straightforward effect of the racialisation of humankind, pure and simple. On the other hand, it becomes useful when it helps to question the ridiculous notion that 'race' is somehow the innate or particular property of its black subjects, something that is assigned to them alone.

Fanon recognises that whiteness can carry its own wounds even if they are still veiled in post-colonial melancholy and colonial privilege. He is again instructive in viewing this as an amputation. But abstract whiteness is never a parallel or complementary 'white' version of the culture, history and consciousness that previously produced abject blackness as the object of anthropological knowledge, colonial exploitation and racialised power. The precious post-revolutionary stage, which marks the end of 'race', may also prove to be the starting point for a new class analysis prompted by post-colonial varieties of exploitation and authority. This insight arises amid a moment of the gravest danger, in which the revolutionary project can be hijacked and people are offered back their racial and ethnic difference in exchange for their human freedom. His disturbing point is clear even from Markmann's poor translation. I would like to quote it at length:

The people must be taught to cry "stop thief!" ... the people must give up their too-simple conception of their overlords. The species is breaking under before their very eyes ... The barriers of blood and race prejudice are broken down on both sides. In the same way, not every Negro or Muslim is issued with a hallmark of genuineness; and the gun or the knife is not inevitably reached for when a settler makes his appearance. Consciousness slowly dawns upon truths that are only partial, limited and unstable. As we may surmise, all this is very difficult. (Fanon:xxx)

If we follow Fanon's inspiring example and work towards creative possibilities that are too easily dismissed as utopian, our moral and political compass might profitably be reset by acts of imagination and invention that are adequate to the depth of our post-colonial predicament. This commitment is part of an approach that has several additional virtues. It can be readily linked to that diminishing and invaluable commodity hope. And, it can be connected to a vibrant political and ethical enterprise that carries anti-racist dissidence into a deeper confrontation with the history and philosophy of modernity – understood here, following the eloquent and compelling arguments developed by Enrique Dussel¹⁰ as the process in which Europe ruthlessly instituted itself as the centre of planetary development.

The innovative emphasis Fanon placed on the sociogenesis of racial mentalities originally licensed his humanist and existential ventures and marked his departure from the psychologism of his own training. It seems to have been shaped by his growing conviction that 'Marxist analysis should always be slightly stretched every time we have to do with the colonial problem' and still offends attractively against all economically-deterministic accounts of 'race' and racism. Today, his scurrilous speculations also underline the benefits of turning away from the list of dull priorities established by purely scholastic reflection on the rational irrationalities of 'race' and racism. The limits of that polite labour were reached long ago. Its fruits should certainly be disseminated, but contemporary political strategies must involve more than simply chanting them indefinitely in the optimistic expectation that one day they will be heard by power.

The more negative and reflexive orientation I favour is part of restoring moral credibility to anti-racist critique and exploring the rehabilitation of a humanist voice. In drawing energy from Fanon's determination to make 'race' historical and, above all, social, it assigns racism(s) to the past and can therefore help to make anti-racism more than just a jumbled collection

of political instruments and techniques. The necessary element of negation endows today's project of liberation from 'race' with an ethical character. Even though this has gone out of fashion recently, it has long been apparent and constitutes a noble if muted presence in the buried, disreputable lineage of anti-racist action and commentary that has shadowed modern race thinking since its inception. Without the crude injustices of racial slavery and colonial conquest to orient us, we are now obliged to know, even more comprehensively than in the past, precisely what we are against and why. But, as far as the order of racialised differences is concerned, our political imaginations are inclined to falter or become blocked at the point of maximum defensive solidarity. That is where we are certain of what we are against but cannot say what we are for with the same degrees of clarity and conviction. The debate in contemporary South Africa over how to evaluate the historic, insurrectionary commitment to non-racialism in the face of racialised governance, would seem to bear this out.

This hesitancy is associated with the inability to explain how people become intimidated by, and resigned to, the mystifications of raciality and its narcissism of minor differences; how they try to make the refusal to see beyond reified racial categories into a measure of their political virtue; and how, while usually according racial difference a routine and empty measure of recognition as a social and historical construction, they are only too happy to lose the capacity to imagine its unmaking, its deconstruction, its transcendence or even the possibility of its eventual descent into irrelevance. These problems have been compounded by a vogueish reluctance to trespass upon the imagined communities of oppressed groups who may have seized the discursive categories through which their subordination has been transacted or imposed, and then lodged them in the centres of their 'wounded' solidarity and the carnival of identities that it supports. This compensatory commitment to unanimity cannot succeed for long. The inevitable appearance of differences within the favoured collective creates grave disappointment with the group's lack of spontaneous fellow feeling and mutual regard. Here the idea of 'race' damages us by feeding expectations of being together that are impossibly high. As Cornelius Castoriadis¹¹ controversially pointed out, there is also a degree of self-hatred to be reckoned with.

I am not suggesting that the utopian-sounding procedures involved in seeing, thinking and acting beyond race hierarchy can be divorced from practical confrontations with the immediate manifestations of racism(s).

Indeed, I would argue that the precious ability to imagine political, economic and social systems in which 'race' makes no sense is an essential, though woefully underdeveloped, part of articulating a credible anti-racism as well as an invaluable transitional exercise. However, that useful capacity has fallen into disrepute. In this area, the long-idealised unity of theory and practice has given way to the dominance of practice in ways that are a convenient measure of the defeats, weakness and marginality of anti-racist critique. At best, we have no time to think critically because we are always on the move from one funeral, detention centre or police station to the next. At worst, cheap if heartfelt assertions of absolute ethnicity and unbridgeable racial difference can provide a convenient means to postpone any confrontation with racism. The narcissism of minor differences takes over and engulfs any critical aspirations or creative impulses.

The inability to deal with this situation has been compounded by the retreat of Marxian anti-capitalism. That strand of analysis promoted not only a distinctive critique of ideology that could explain racism away as mirage and mystification, but an attachment to labour as a race-transcending abstraction. It was inevitably tied to the existence of an alternative developmental project that fed western dissidence and anti-colonial movements in numerous ways. However dreadful the fate of racialised and ethnic minority populations inside the communist systems, their outward-looking governments were alert to the fact that the moral authority of capitalist states would be compromised where capitalism was seen to be too cheerfully compatible with racism. Combined with new communicative technologies, this development brought assessments of racial antagonism into the field of cold-war politics and was an essential feature of the planetary discourse of human rights in its mid-20th-century form. The moralisation of remote spectatorship became part of the techno-cultural complex through which some asymmetrical invitations into anti-racist solidarity were extended. People became present to one another in new and significant ways, even at the risk of an aestheticised response to remote suffering. The immortal celebrity of figures like Malcolm X, Muhammad Ali and Nelson Mandela is one obvious illustration of that stage in the unfolding of global or rather trans-local connections. In reply to their sometimes rash but always exciting promises of revolution, a pallid, official anti-racism emerged close to the memory of the Third Reich and as a result of anti-colonial and African-American freedom struggles. It was a minor but inescapable part of the liberal democratic project of cold-war

governance.

We've seen that today's continuing difficulties in the face of racism reveal a discrepancy between where we are and the tools that are available to us to make sense of our post-colonial predicaments. At worst, in order to make sense of a political and moral topography around 'race' that is completely different from the Darwinian landscape in which the natural imperatives of culture, nation and empire were first braided into the political ontologies of European domination and imperial rule, we drift back into scholastic 18th-century concepts and outmoded 19th-century bio-logical imaginings.

Under the spell of Marxism for too long, critical thinking about 'race' consoled itself with the wish that racialised attachments and collectivities could be disposed of by being shown to be unreal, insubstantial, invented and ideological in character. We must all be familiar with arguments of that type which can be far more sophisticated than I've let them sound. They invite us to wave the magic wand of rationality towards forces that cannot possibly acknowledge its power.

Against that vain attempt stands another popular option. It says that however they may motivate, bite, corrode and inspire, racial identities are a misplaced and re-articulated form of something else. This something may be economic relations, gender attachments, class solidarities, religious, regional or primordial aesthetic distaste, but the question of why they require the particular language and symbols of racialised difference as a cloak cannot be considered. Now, I agree that we need to see the virtual realities of 'race' in their complex and profane patterns and that we must be able to possess, analyse and criticise them in relation to other dynamics of power and dimensions of hierarchy, including those of gender and class.

This is a nice and neat formula that has energised some interesting and important work but it offers little when tactical choices have to be made and contributes even less when the question of double standards gets raised and would-be anti-racists are required to say how the invocation of absolute 'race' or ethnicity by the exploited and the oppressed and their more fortunate descendants differs from the ways it has been solicited and traded by their oppressors. Faced with that uncomfortable situation it is easier to respond by recycling the interpretative habits with which earlier political generations had struggled to make sense of 'race'.

The other safe options are easily identifiable. We can defer to ethnic absolutism and ignore its fascist poetics. We can overlook the self-

interested antics of the group Fanon dismissed as the native petite bourgeoisie. Where racial difference boils down to lifestyle, consumer choice, management theory or new-age bio-occultism, the resuscitation of a vulgar Marxism that subordinates 'race' absolutely to class does not seem quite so bad. In this scenario, anti-racism is finally silenced by resurgent corporate trading in 'race'; by the manipulation of absolute ethnicity by those who have been its victims and cannot now be measured by the same moral standards as everybody else; and lastly by the exercise of racialised power in patterns that do not conform to the binary logic of 'Manicheism *delerium*'.

I would like us to ask if our hesitations and inhibitions in the face of these developments are connected to the dominance of anti-humanism in what is left of 'left thinking'? This pattern of responses needs to be interpreted as a reaction against the articulation of liberalism and humanism in cold-war discourse as well as a symptom of the scientific pretensions that accompanied the retreat of Marxism and its accompanying scholastic turn. The hesitation that characteristically freezes us in our encounters with 'race', and the increasingly assertive voice of corporate multi-culturalism, might also result from the Trojan horse represented by the malign influence of figures like Schmitt and Heidegger¹² in framing political ontologies and, more recently, in moving oppositional commentaries beyond the limits of Marx's Europe-centred anti-racism, a cosmopolitan history, and endowing it with a philosophical skeleton that is not reducible to recent, vaguely Marxist or feminist commitments, helps not only to undermine Heidegger's growing authority over these matters but to answer the apprehensions of those who do not want to accept that it is racism which has made 'race' into a burden - on individuals, on polities and on democracy itself.

Everybody knows that conceptual innovations cannot bring racism to an end. But they can highlight how sharply scholastic theories diverge from the common-sense world through which we walk to find our way home from sessions like the one that produced this publication. There, the life-threatening jeopardy provoked by being racialised as different is undiminished, and may even have increased now that 'race' and its certainties claim to heal or at least calm the anxieties over identity that have been precipitated by globalisation and the multiple insecurities and yawning inequalities of what is sniggeringly referred to as 'turbo capitalism'. The academic tribunes of globalisation do not usually include the end of formal empires or the wars of decolonisation in their contentious genealogies of

our planet's commercial and political integration. They are mostly a complacent bunch more content with pondering the enigmas of weightless economic development than the violence that seems to be proliferating in the borderlands around it.

In Britain anyway, they are disinclined to acknowledge the fact that they live in an environment that has been shaped over a long period of time by colonial relationships and by what I've come to identify as melancholic responses to the loss of imperial privilege and position. Even after the debacle of the Stephen Lawrence¹³ episode, they are unlikely to see action against racism as something that can shape the life of their own polity for the better, enriching popular understanding of justice, fairness and rights or assisting in the reform of legal procedures that can impact upon the lives of all citizens.

This unhealthy situation has re-directed attention to the uncomfortably flimsy boundaries placed around racial and ethnic identity by fading national states and their desperate political leaders, who will try anything to locate the populist pulse of the ailing body politic. Once the post-colonial subjects move in close by, the colonial hierarchy which previously specified the proper relation of blackness to whiteness breaks down and yields to a different – usually commercial and resolutely anti-political – understanding of what 'races' are and how they may differ from themselves and each other. The previously separated worlds of blackness and whiteness can then be made to leak, to bleed risk, pleasure and excitement into one another as part of selling things and accumulating capital. The magic of these freshly racialised markets means that it is important to recognise and affirm that blackness and whiteness – those interdependent homogeneous magnitudes bequeathed to us by metaphysical dualism – are nothing but transient symptoms of an alienated and dying order. In the meantime, that insight brings little comfort. It does not help us to know what anti-racism should be for.

If there is still a good side to today's unwitting and anachronistic borrowings from the racial theory of the 18th and 19th centuries, it is that they underline the extent to which enlightenment agendas and problems remain pending in our trans-local, worlded modernity. We can also see that those approaches are outmoded for a number of urgent economic, political and cultural reasons. They are incapable of addressing the political and moral shifts provoked by the revolution in bio-technology, bio-colonialism and informatics which completes the privatisation of nature begun in the

17th century. These changes are, of course, bound to a larger process of technological and economic acceleration, which is having a profound impact on our relations with ourselves, our bodies and our natures. If the nature within is under assault, the nature outside our bodies is also being assailed by an environmental catastrophe that exceeds the power of national states to resolve. This crisis of the biosphere is a global problem but it is experienced locally and with a radical unevenness that can only feed the righteous hunger for re-localisation.

It bears repetition that all this necessitates producing a better history not only of our own planetary movement but of the political dimensions of racial discourses that were not peripheral or decorative ideological motifs appended to colonial adventures. They shaped the intimate, essential workings of imperial power in ways that confound any over-simple split between material embodiment on the one hand, and culture, ideology and discourse on the other. The history of political struggle that we construct through them does not conform to a neat sociological dichotomy between recognition and redistribution.

We need to see where and how the experiences of slave descendants, conquered and post-colonial peoples worldwide have fitted into the wider historical processes that we understand via the political, philosophical and sociological notions of democracy and modernity. We need to understand, and be able to intervene, in contemporary debates over globalisation and trans-local justice, to find some new ways to orient ourselves in the fields that those debates are struggling to identify via conceptions of humankind that have not as yet fully registered the necessary break with humanity's liberal and cold-war specifications.

At this point, colonial and post-colonial folks acquire a distinctive mission: our special modern history as the descendants of people who were themselves commodified for sale on an international market or deemed expendable within the larger racial logic of Europe-centred historical processes, gives us ready access to a fund of knowledge that we can make useful in a number of areas. These insights are not ours alone but will belong to anybody who is prepared to make use of them. This history is not intellectual property and we are not defenders of cultural and experiential copyright.

The first task is to animate a post-Marxist critique of market relations that is tied to the memory of human commodification. A second immediate project relates to the fraught issue of what, if anything, distinguishes

human beings, and therefore what any irreverent new humanism must include. We need to try to take any lessons that can be found in the histories of suffering and resistance that have shaped us and make them into resources for the future of this planet. Those lessons do not, of course, aim to redeem past suffering or make it worthwhile. Their very failure to be productive in this way helps to specify that they should be available to anybody who dares, in good faith, to try to set them to work in pursuit of justice. Lastly, it seems imperative to try to revive and sustain those elements in earlier phases of black political culture that are tolerant, humane, pluralistic and cosmopolitan in outlook. Those elements are still present in diminishing quantities but they are somewhat muted these days. They have had to take a back seat behind other simpler, noisier and, for many, more attractive options which are in step if not always in tune with the mainstream sentiments of consumer capitalism, and have the additional virtue of echoing a seductive nationalist agenda set elsewhere.

Nationalism is no longer the correct name to be given to our pursuit of solidarity and hope for a future in which we work to synchronise our trans-local agency and act in concert. It retains the aspiration towards sovereignty and propriety just as we are being moved into a very different era in which the definition of private property in terms of personal ownership has been superseded. New issues of privatisation, access and entitlement which are central to the ambitions of governmental and corporate power are reconceptualising the relationship between peoples and resources. We cannot be content with the casual proposition that authoritarianism, coercion and militaristic hierarchy have privileged claims upon that world of blackness. We are also entitled to ask why our movement has so often been content to build its alternative conceptions of the world from simple inversions of the powers that confront us rather than altogether different conceptions guided by another political morality?

The guiding terms of this Fanonian project: humanism, justice, cosmopolitanism are all contested. We should be wary of them because they resonate most strongly in the traditions of liberal political thought that have descended from European enlightenment writings. Those attempts to see the lives of individuals and nations in broader contexts supplied by a subversively shifting sense of scale, above all by a sense of the earth as but one small and insignificant location in an infinite and only partially knowable space, are by no means the only forms of cosmopolitan thinking in circulation. The black thinkers of the western hemisphere have sometimes

been alive to the destiny involved in understanding their own distinct positions relative to the fate of Africa from which their distant ancestors were kidnapped and sold. The anti-racism that drew its energies from pan-Africanism and lent them to worldwide anti-colonial movements did not descend to the present through the temperate landscape of liberal pieties. It comes to us via disreputable abolitionism and histories of anti-imperial activism that was allied with the insurrectionary practice of those who, though legally held in bondage, were subject to the larger immoralities of a race-friendly system of domination and brutality.

Du Bois, James, Fanon, Senghor and company have already shown that there is a whole counter-history of modern government to be written from the genealogy of these neglected political formations. They contributed vitality and hope to dissident democratic formations that derived their moral confidence and many of their political dreams from confrontations with the evil and immorality they discovered in the operations of colonial domination. This opposition confronted and undermined the codes of western liberalism at several significant points. Its principal value is that it can still embarrass and contest the overly innocent versions of liberal thinking that are still in circulation. It highlights their failures in the face of raciology and their refusals to admit the humanity of the racial Other.

If we are going to interrupt the romance of blackness and whiteness at last, we will need to find an explanation for how that telling blockage has damaged the planetary movement we should probably no longer refer to minimally and apologetically as anti-racism. In recognition of the need for more assertive and wholeheartedly political moods and tactics, we should become prepared to acknowledge the extreme difficulty of moral and political enterprises which require the systematic de-naturing of 'race' as part of their confrontations with the alienated modern sociality that drowns out the cries of those who suffer. Here perhaps South Africa can furnish the planet with another laboratory, this time for the development of a more dynamic and credible anti-racist politics.

Notes

1. F Fanon *Black Skin, White Masks* (1970:165), Paladin, translated Charles Lam Markmann.
2. Some breadth of the literature involved in this last part of the task is provided by Roger Griffin's (1995) indispensable reader *Fascism*. Oxford University Press.
3. TW Adorno (1991) 'The essay as form' in *Notes To Literature* 11:4, translated

Sherry Weber Nicholson. Columbia University Press.

4. The delicate and insightful interpretation offered by Ato Sekyi-Out (1996) in *Frantz Fanon's Dialectic of Experience*, Harvard University Press, stands out from the crop of recent commentators on Fanon's writing. See also Robert JC Young's introduction to Jean Paul Sartre's *Colonialism and Neocolonialism* (2001), translated Azzedine Haddour et al, Routledge: vii-xxiv.
5. F Fanon *Black Skin, White Masks* (1970:110), Paladin, translated Charles Lam Markmann: 'Ontology—once it is finally admitted as leaving existence by the wayside—does not permit us to understand the being of the black man. For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man. Some critics will take it on themselves to remind us that this proposition has a converse. I say this is false. The black man has no ontological resistance in the eyes of the white man'.
6. See Susan Buck Mors (2000:821-865) 'Hegel and Haiti', *Critical Inquiry* 26(4); Richard Drayton (2000) *Nature's Government: science, imperial Britain and the 'improvement' of the world*. Yale University Press; James R Ryan (1997) *Picturing Empire*. Reaktion; Nancy Leys Stepan (2001) *Picturing Tropical Nature*. Cornell University Press; Megan Vaughan (1991) *Curing Their Ills*. Polity Press. The work of Edward Said is, of course, an honourable exception to this disabling tendency. Another dazzling exception to this pattern but in regard to the 18th century is Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker's (2000) *The Many-headed Hydra*. Beacon Press.
7. Giorgio Agamben (1998) *Homo Sacer: sovereign power and bare life*. Stanford University Press, translated Daniel Heller-Roazen.
8. Fanon, op cit.
9. See Carl Schmitt (1996) *The Concept of Political Universality*. University of Chicago Press; and (1997) *Land and Sea*. Plutarch Press; and (2001) *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of the Jus Publicum*. Telos Press.
10. Frantz Fanon (1968:41) *The Wretched of the Earth*. Grove Press.
11. Enrique Dussel (1998) *The Underside of Modernity: Apel, Ricouer, Rorty, Taylor and the philosophy of liberation*. Humanities Press.
12. Cornelius Castoriadis (1993) 'Reflections on racism', *Thesis* 11(32):1-12.
13. The racial dimensions of Heidegger's philosophical project are a scary and intimidating topic that has been skirted by most appropriators of his work. Valuable exceptions to this from both sides of the political spectrum are Julian Young's (1997) *Heidegger's Philosophy: Nazism*. Cambridge University Press; and Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg (1996) *Martin Heidegger and the Holocaust*. Humanities Press.
14. Brian Cathcart (1999) *The Case of Stephen Lawrence*. Viking.