THE POTENTIAL OF THE HUMAN

Reimagining the Notion of the Human with Frantz Fanon, Sylvia Wynter, Édouard Glissant, and Octavia E. Butler

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INTRODUCTION

In an interview with The New York Times in early 2015, Judith Butler responds to the protests that emerged after the killing of an unarmed black young man by a white US police officer in Ferguson the year before. In particular, she talks about "Black Lives Matter," which by then has become the defining slogan of the persistent protest campaigns against racial state violence. It is, Butler remarks, "a statement that should be obviously true, but apparently is not" ("What's Wrong" n.p.). She proposes to read it as an important reminder of the very fact that it is not true, as in the world of today some lives still matter more than others, and some lives do not even matter at all. "Black Lives Matter" is an expression of outrage and a demand for equality, that, at the same time, "links the history of slavery, of debt peonage, segregation, and a prison system geared toward the containment, neutralization and degradation of black lives, but also a police system that more and more easily and often can take away a black life in a flash all because some officer perceives a threat" (Butler, "What's Wrong" n.p.). People who, with the very best of intentions, join the protesting crowds with signs reading "All Lives Matter" – which, again, is a message that ought to be true – misunderstand the problem, according to Butler. "If we jump too quickly to the universal formulation, 'all lives matter,' then we miss the fact that black people have not yet been included in the idea of "all lives" (Butler, "What's Wrong" n.p.). The power of the slogan, Butler implies, thus lies in its marking of this specific racial exclusion from a supposedly universal category.

The cases of anti-black violence that the "Black Lives Matter" movement continues to demand serious attention for, show that indeed, as Katherine McKittrick observes, "our long history of racial violence continues to inform our lives and our anticolonial and decolonial struggles" ("Yours in the Intellectual Struggle" 3), and, furthermore, that race is, in Paul

Gilroy's words, "an urgent matter" (*After Empire* 12) that needs to be explicitly addressed. Contemporary studies of race tend to focus not so much on what race *is* – whether or not there is a biological basis to it –, but, rather, on what it *does* – its social reality. In *After Race*, Antonia Darder and Rodolfo D. Torres propose to approach race as an ideology, and racism as "a powerful, structuring, hegemonic force in the world of today" (2). In order to expose the very real consequences of this force in society, they aim to study the ongoing historical and social processes of racialization. Butler's analysis of the protest slogans seems to tie in well with such an approach to the notion of race; after all, she points out that "Black Lives Matter" foregrounds the issue of racialization and racism.

As the protesters revolt against the fact that the lives of black human beings are considered as invaluable or even disposable, they, however, ultimately call for the recognition of their humanity, that is, for the black human being to be recognized as human. Evidently, the matter of race is thus inevitably and inextricably bound to the question of what it means to be human. At the same time, the question of the human could be said to be more and more affected by issues of race, as they aim to bring in long histories of oppression, exclusion, dehumanization, et cetera – histories that are, in fact, closely connected to the ways in which the human has been explained in the Western world. It is precisely this all too often neglected link between dehumanization and traditional Western, or, to be more precise, Eurocentric humanism, that forms the starting point of this thesis. While it prides itself on its universalism, Eurocentric thought about the human has instead founded itself on the binarism of Self and Other,[1] which has marked a significant part of humanity as the human's Other. This thesis will examine a selection of interconnected theoretical and literary texts that critically respond to and break with the false universalism of humanism, yet, at the same

[1] I here prefer to use the more specific term "Eurocentric" instead of the more general "Western" in order to strongly emphasize the tendency of Western thinkers to explain the world from a supposedly superior European perspective. Furthermore, while "Eurocentric" and "Western" might seem to refer to the same, it is important to keep in mind that not all Western thought is necessarily Eurocentric.

time, propose to imagine the concept of the human in alternative ways. The authors of these texts, Frantz Fanon, Sylvia Wynter, Édouard Glissant and Octavia E. Butler, all share the interest to invest in the notion of the human. In the upcoming chapters, I will explore how they approach the question of the human and what answers they provide us with.

Before introducing the works and thoughts of the four key figures of this thesis, let me first further situate the question of the human in the academic debates of today. It is, after all, an issue that, Jane Hiddleston notes, "continues to preoccupy theorists of a whole range of traditions and schools into the twenty-first century" (363). Through its focus on the dehumanizing practices and discourses of the colonial system, postcolonial studies could be said to have transposed the question of the human from its predominantly Western context to the world of the colonies and, as for today, former colonies. Though a great number of postcolonial scholars and writers are concerned with the rehumanization of the colonized or postcolonial subject, to write him/her (back) into humanity so to speak, there is little consensus among them about the terms "humanism" and "the human" (Hiddleston 363). Nevertheless, quite some key postcolonial thinkers such as Fanon, but also for example Edward Said, seem to express a firm belief in the usefulness and value of the concept of the human. That appears to be quite different in the slightly more recent field of critical posthumanism, which calls into question the boundaries that define humanity and critique the exceptionalism of the human species. Much more than postcolonialism, the field of posthumanism sets out to deconstruct the humanist notion of individuality. Although it seems that posthumanism no longer wants to invest in the concept of the human, it is important to keep in mind that one of its central questions is, thus, precisely the question of the human.

Hiddleston furthermore argues that "current reinventions of the notion of the human" – whether these are postcolonial or posthumanist – "surely remain indebted to the radical rejection of colonial humanism […] by anti-colonial and postcolonial critics" (364). This

might come across as a somewhat biased claim, for it seems to ignore the fact that humanism and its perception of the human had, of course, been criticized in history before. The humanist belief in human rationality and autonomy obviously clashed with the perspective of Christianity, and also the dethroning of reason by Western intellectuals in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century constituted a great challenge to the then hegemonic conception of the human. Arguably most severe was the criticism after the two world wars of the twentieth century; quite some well-established European thinkers turned against humanism, as both wars happened right "in the heart of the culture that considered itself to be one of reason, progress and humanity" (Vanheste 1). It is, however, important to note that these various so-called anti-humanisms could be said to be biased themselves. As Gilroy points out, "neither humanism nor antihumanism have been comfortable or enthusiastic when asked to address the destructive impact of race thinking and racial hierarchy upon their own ways of understanding history and society" (*After Empire* 5-6). Since contemporary reinventions of the notion of the human tend to focus precisely on issues of difference, whether or not between human beings or between human beings and other living and non-living entities, Hiddleston might, then, just be right to designate anti-colonial and postcolonial thought as the most important source of inspiration for current debates on the human.

From the (former) colonies, quite a different story about humanism emerged: one that *does* focus on racial hierarchies. Humanism had presented itself as the quintessential model of civilization, an ideological belief that strongly informed and served as the legitimization of the European invasion of supposed non-civilized parts of the world. In fact, as David Scott brings forward in his interview with Wynter, the birth of what he labels as Renaissance humanism "is simultaneously the moment of initiation of Europe's colonial project" (5-6). Far from spreading freedom and human dignity, the "*mission civilisatrice*" (Hiddleston 363) led to the racialization, oppression and dehumanization of a large part of humanity. It is this

oppressiveness of the colonial regimes that Fanon writes against. In his powerful texts, he amplifies the connections between humanism, colonialism, and racism, yet at the same time, and this is in stark contrast to the European post-war anti-humanisms, he calls most persistently for the invention of a new human. It is, however, of great importance for Fanon that any attempt to rethink the notion of the human should be non-Western, that is, non-Eurocentric. This thesis adopts this particular perspective; all the texts that will be analyzed could be said to be explicitly, or at times somewhat more implicitly, grounded in non-Western worlds.[2]

In *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), but also in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961),[3] Fanon confronts his reader with a multiplicity of experiences of racism under the colonial regime. Despite, or perhaps precisely because of the very intense degradation, he proves himself to be combative, militant even, some would say. And although his life has clearly been very deeply affected by what he describes as "the fact of blackness" (*Black Skin, White Masks* 82), he does seem to also be grateful for it, as he concludes: "O my body, make of me always a man who questions!" (*BSWM* 181). His position as a black man presumably forces him to interrogate and to question the existing hegemonic systems and structures, and, furthermore, allows him to imagine an alternative, more inclusive type of humanism. That is not to say that he pleads for the inclusion of all the excluded, i.e. dehumanized human beings in the category of the human as formulated in Western humanism – to broaden the category, as it were. Rather, he wishes to transform the ways in which the concept of the human is perceived. An important contribution to the notion of the human is his concept of sociogeny, which Fanon introduces to foreground the significance of social conditions to the formation,

[2] It should be noted that I do not at all mean to hereby reproduce, or invest in, the constructed opposition of "the West and the rest." I am, in fact, very much aware that also in Europe, there is highly interesting philosophical and theoretical thought about the human that does not follow the Western humanist tradition, for example Jean Luc Nancy's work on *Being Singular Plural*. In this thesis, however, I would like to focus on various non-Western perspectives and their very particular engagement with both dehumanization and rehumanization.

[3] Throughout this thesis, Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* will be referred to with '*BSWM*;' *The Wretched of the Earth* will be referred to with '*Wretched.'*

or, as has been the case in the colonial situation, the determination of one's consciousness. It is a term that hints at the potential of the human, and although only explicitly mentioned once in these two specific texts by Fanon, the concept of sociogeny has been crucial to Wynter's project to reimagine the notion of the human.

Wynter writes about the *damnés* also of contemporary times.[4] She foregrounds that decolonization has never been fully realized, that the colonial regime has only been replaced by a very similar organizing principle, that is, neocolonialism. The Western notion of the human still presents itself as the only form of humanity – which Wynter aptly calls the overrepresentation of Man – and, as such, continues to control the ways in which human beings experience who and what they are. Here, Wynter seems to gain support from Gilroy, who observes a reappearance of racial sentiments "under the sign of progress and globalization" (*After Empire* 12). Fanon's term *damnés* has, thus, not at all lost its pertinence. Though it is his concept of sociogeny that takes center stage in Wynter's body of thought. It enables her to expose the currently overall accepted scientific "truth" of what makes up the human, namely, that human beings are biological beings who are merely driven by their genes, to be one of a series of human-made narratives – a particularly stubborn narrative, as its scientific character appears to simply rule out any alternative. It is, for Wynter, most important to also think of the human as a storyteller, a "*homo narrans*" ("Unparalleled" 25) who, throughout history, has had the ability to continuously reinvent the narrative by which he/she understands himself. With her take on Fanon's sociogeny, she highlights the human's potential to bring about change; after all, as Wynter stresses, the stories that aimed to explain the human have been rewritten by human beings before.

Her project to come to terms with the human thus leads Wynter to argue strongly – and quite convincingly – in favor of the imagination and, consequently, literature. It could be

[4] *Damnés* refers to Fanon's "wretched" – the original French title of *The Wretched of the Earth* is *Les Damnés de la Terre*.

argued that also Fanon identifies this as the forte of his concept of sociogeny, for in the final pages of *Black Skin, White Masks* he states that "the real *leap* consists in introducing *invention* into existence" (179, second emphasis added). Literature is the site of exploration, where the existing hegemonic story of the human and the concomitant humanist discourses of logic and reason can be countered and disproved, and, most importantly, where a new human, or a new humanism can be imagined.[5] The selection of novels that will be discussed in light of Fanon's and Wynter's theoretical lines of thought – Glissant's *The Fourth Century* (originally published as *Le Quatrième Siècle* in 1964) and *The Overseer's Cabin* (originally published as *Case du Commandeur* in 1981),[6] and Butler's *Xenogenesis* trilogy (1987, 1988, 1989)[7] – all contribute to such a reimagination of the human. As they critically respond to the fallacies of the Eurocentric version of the human, both Glissant and Butler depict, invent, and experiment with different ways of being human that foreground the relationality of human beings.

The Caribbean context that Glissant, like Fanon and Wynter, writes from and in which he also situates his narratives is very much defined by the dehumanizing practices of slavery, colonialism and, currently, neocolonialism – practices that, as I have pointed out before, are closely connected to Eurocentric humanism. Because of its unique history of rupture and displacement, the Caribbean has also become a region of plurality and diversity, and, therefore, it is often said to provide the ideal dynamics to come to think about how human beings relate to one another. Carine Mardorossian observes that the unique perspective of the Caribbean region "reflects a history of social struggles – divided among native-born whites,

[5] It is important to note that both Wynter and Fanon, even though Fanon expresses the wish for "the last [to] be the first and the first the last" (*Wretched* 28), aim not to turn the tables, but, instead, urge to think beyond the hegemonic narrative. This will, of course, be elaborately discussed in the next chapter.

[6] In what follows, Glissant's *The Fourth Century* will be referred to with '*FC*;' *The Overseer's Cabin* with '*OC*.'

[7] *Xenogenesis* has been retitled as *Lilith's Brood* in 2000. I will quote from a copy with the latter title, and thus the quotes will be accompanied by the letters *LB*. However, I prefer to use the title *Xenogenesis* in more general references to the work, as I believe it reflects my reading of the trilogy better.

foreign whites, free and enslaved blacks, free and enslaved mulattos – that has always resisted binaries" (15). As such, the Caribbean archipelago has increasingly been perceived as a "condensed 'workshop'" (Mardorossian 16) that can be said to function as an exemplar of the globalized world of today. As a result, Glissant's work has gained prominence also outside the Caribbean context in fields such as postcolonial studies. Glissant is mostly studied for his theoretical texts, perhaps most importantly *Soleil de la conscience, L'Intention poétique* and *Le discours antillais*.[8] Only too often, his fictional works are read as illustrations of his theories, or they are simply left out. As Celia Britton points out, the novels can, however, be very well read by themselves, for they "do not merely illustrate theoretical insights elaborated elsewhere (by Glissant or anyone else); they produce their own critique of the social situation in the island and their own representation of the defensive or subversive strategies that have evolved in response to it" (*Edouard Glissant* 6).

Over the course of four decades, Glissant has created a network of closely interrelated novels: his debut *La Lézarde* (1958), *Le Quatrième Siècle* (1964), *Malemort* (1975), *La Case du Commandeur* (1981), *Mahagony* (1987), and *Tout-Monde* (1993). As most characters reappear in these various novels, they could be said to constitute a fictional series, though Richard D.E. Burton is right to argue that, because of the lack of any chronological order, "it is, assuredly, a series of a highly non-serial and non-sequential kind" (303). In all novels, Glissant engages with experiences of slavery, colonialism and neocolonialism in Martinique and foregrounds the relationality of human beings. Instead of a sequence of steps towards an ultimate, perfect, or definite work, J. Michael Dash argues that it would be "far more accurate to visualize his [Glissant's] literary production as a series of probings which move back and forth in time, between landscapes and personae" (20).

[8] To define these theoretical texts as such, however, does not do justice to their poetics. Also, Glissant's novels are in their turn very philosophical and theorizing. It could be argued that, with his blended poetic and philosophical style of writing, Glissant undermines any straightforward classification.

In order to gain insight in the workings of this network and the way in which the novel can relate to one another, I will discuss both *The Fourth Century* and *The Overseer's Cabin*.[9] In *The Fourth Century*, Glissant installs a maroon as a narrator by profession,[10] who rejects the dominant registers of historical storytelling both with respect to content and form. Through this rather opaque figure of Papa Longoué, Glissant explores alternative modes of knowledge, and, therewith, alternative ways to think about the human subject. In *The Overseer's Cabin*, Papa Longoué is more or less sidelined; while he is still present, an unspecified we-narrator takes over the position of storyteller. Its curious identity strongly invites the reader to, with Glissant, think about the difficulties that arise when one attempts to articulate a more inclusive humanism.

It might seem to be a big leap from Glissant, as arguably the most prominent Caribbean thinker, to the African American science fiction writer Butler. The resonances between the works of the two have, however, been drawn out before by McKittrick and Valérie Loichot. Both reflect on Glissant's theoretical works in relation to Butler's "neoslave" (Loichot, "We are all related" 40) narrative *Kindred* (1979), which deals with an African American woman who finds herself travelling in time to the plantations of the early nineteenth century.[11] The link between Butler and Glissant that they establish, so it could be argued, is first and foremost based on the issue of slavery that is present both in Butler's novel and in the theories of Glissant that are brought into conversation with it. The readings of the seemingly more disparate fictional works of Glissant and Butler in this thesis, will,

[9] Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to read all of Glissant's interrelated novels and draw out their continuities and discontinuities. For interesting comparative readings of Glissant's novels, see Britton (in *Edouard Glissant and Postcolonial Theory: Strategies of Language and Resistance*) and Dash.

[10] A maroon is a slave who escaped from his/her captivity and most often settled in the mountains, or his/her descendant. In her essay "Beyond the Word of Man: Glissant and the New Discourse of the Antilles," Wynter points out that the word maroon is derived from the Spanish word *cimarrón*, "that is, the non-tamed, nondomesticated *animal*" (238, emphasis added). The fact that the word that refers to those slaves who escape to live in the wilderness is derived from a word that actually refers to an animal, is, of course, highly significant. Such tracing back of words and concepts is very typical for the work of Wynter.

[11] Loichot offers an analysis of Relation as kinship, whereas McKittrick focuses on the intersections of issues of geography, space and the body.

instead, reveal that their works also conceptually speak to one another; also Butler proves to be an advocate for more relational conception of the human.

While *Xenogenesis* can, to a certain extent, very well be read as a narrative that deals with slavery, as pointed out by Cathy Peppers, I propose to first of all approach it somewhat more literally, as a story about an encounter between the human and an alien species. The alien context into which Butler's human beings are transposed, serves well to study and highlight particular human traits and strengths, both for the alien species and for the reader. Like Wynter, Butler critically engages with the hegemonic narrative that considers the human as a mere genetically programmed biological being. She exposes this deterministic point of view as a dead-end street, as it inevitably deprives the human of his/her agency and autonomy, and, consequently of the very important possibility to realize change. At the same time, she uses the utterly different alien species to explore radically different ways to think about identity and about the human. Through the concept of symbiosis, Butler comes to a relational conception of the human that is quite similar to Glissant's.[12] In fact, and this also applies to Glissant, Butler points out that we already are relational beings; the trilogy thus only foregrounds what the human *is*, not what or who he/she should *become*. The only thing that the human should become, Butler argues, with Wynter, Glissant and Fanon, is less ignorant about her/his own reality.

In order to situate the theoretical and literary texts that will be examined in the upcoming chapters, Chapter 1 will first provide quite a concise profile of the hegemonic Eurocentric humanist notion of the human, followed by an overview of what has been argued against it. European theorists and philosophers seem to have dismissed the human from the center, or even denied the very existence of a center after the Second World War. At the same time, persistent protests against various sorts of social inequality aimed to expose the

[12] As both Glissant and Butler seem to decenter the human and challenge the notion of human individuality, their works are greatly interesting also from a posthumanist perspective. This said, I should stress that it is not my interest to label or categorize the texts and authors that are discussed in this thesis.

universalism of humanism to be false. It is the disparity between the theoretical schemas that are said to correspond to reality and the actual realities of the colonial system that Fanon is concerned with. His two works that will be extensively discussed, *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*, could be said to complement each other, as the former focuses on the psychological violence of the colonial system and the latter contains a much more future-oriented call for action. I will argue that it is exactly through the violent anti-colonial struggle that the black man can free himself from the social constructions, i.e. the categories that have trapped him, by means of which he will be enabled to retrieve his subjectivity. Chapter 1 closes with an in-depth analysis of various essays by and interviews with Wynter, in which she elaborates on Fanon's body of thought and develops the notion of the human as *homo narrans.* By thinking of the human as a storyteller, Wynter opens up the possibility of a new way of understanding human societal orders, and, most importantly, she thus reveals the opportunity to create a new narrative.

Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 offer close readings of respectively Glissant's *The Fourth Century* and *The Overseer's Cabin*, and Butler's trilogy *Xenogenesis*. The works of Wynter and Fanon will, of course, inform these readings, though I mainly aim to examine the novels for what they themselves bring forward. These will be quite voluminous chapters, as both Glissant and Butler do not at all present their reader with straight-forward answers to the question of the human. Glissant has, for example, set up a critical conversation with himself in and between both novels which makes him anything but unequivocal, and also Butler "invites at times seemingly contradictory interpretations" (Mezler 36). In both *The Fourth Century* and *The Overseer's Cabin*, Glissant explicitly counters the dominant mode of conventional reason, which, so he brings forward, has dehumanized the people of Martinique. Since particularly *The Fourth Century* evolves around the opposition between a slave and a maroon – and thus not between black and white – I will argue that the white man is dismissed

as the source of recognition for the black man. In both novels, Glissant furthermore confronts his reader with a new form of knowledge that argues for an investment in and acceptance of the opaque in the face of difference. This is, in fact, more or less enforced by the we-narrator of *The Overseer's Cabin*, whose mysterious continuous and discontinuous identity can only be explained as an ever-changing and expanding network of connections. In Chapter 3, I will show that in Butler's *Xenogenesis* this relationality is embodied by the alien Oankali species. Their symbiotic way of being might be frightening for most human beings – they perceive it as a threat to the self –, yet the narrative does present it as a source of inspiration. On the other hand, the Oankali set quite a bad example as they conceive of the human as a mere biological being. I will argue that Butler, by invoking this sociobiological narrative, which, as Wynter foregrounds, defines the ways in which the human is nowadays explained, forcefully exposes the inflexibility and unproductivity of current liberal humanist thought.

In the concluding chapter, I will come back to Fanon's and Wynter's approach to the question of the human, and, together with the readings of the various novels, I will then attempt to map the network that the three chapters have weaved. All four authors, each in their own specific ways, undertake the challenge of conceptualizing a new universalism; a collectivity that does not exclude nor absorb human individuals, but instead is profoundly heterogeneous. I will stress that, most importantly, Fanon, Wynter, Glissant and Butler reveal not what the human should be, but what he/she already is in reality: an interconnected and interdependent being.

CHAPTER 1

Against (Anti)Humanism: In Search for a New Affirmative Adjective

1.1 Humanism on the Scaffold

Although humanism has appeared in different forms during its long and complex history and is, thus, most often found in the company of one of many adjectives – classical, Renaissance, Enlightenment, liberal, scientific, to name just a few –, there are some convictions that seem to lie at the heart of every type of humanism. Most importantly, humanism signifies an understanding of the human as a rational being. Through the gift of language and reason, the human has the potential to know the world that he lives in.[13] As such, humanism not only considers the human to be very *different* from animals, but it also elevates him to a position of *superiority*. All humanisms, as Kate Soper asserts, indeed show "a profound confidence in our powers to come to know and thereby *control* our environment and destiny" (14, emphasis added). The human is destined to achieve progress, that is to say, human progress. Humanism celebrates reason as the human's highest faculty, as it is believed that the use of it will "provide a path towards both the fulfillment of the individual life and progress of the society at large" (Vanheste 78).

In her critical reflections on humanism, Rosi Braidotti gives this rational human a face through Leonardo Da Vinci's Vitruvian Man. This renowned image, depicting a *male* figure with outstretched limbs inside a circle and a square, represents more than merely the ideal proportions of a male human body. Braidotti calls the Vitruvian Man "the emblem of Humanism" (13), since its geometric perfection – the breadth of the outstretched arms, for example, equals the length of the body – sets a universal model of perfection and perfectibility based on rational certainties. Furthermore, as the male figure is situated in the

[13] The use of the masculine pronoun, here, is deliberate, as humanism tends to think of the human as male.

center of both the circle and the square, the image reflects also humanism's anthropocentric outlook; this man clearly is, as the Greek philosopher Protagoras first formulated, "the measure of all things" (qtd. in Braidotti 13).

Throughout its past, humanism has been celebrated as "philosophical champion of human freedom and dignity" (Davies 4-5). The spirit of "unending progress and optimism" (Vanheste 336) that characterized much of nineteenth-century Europe was, however, soon to be crushed in the twentieth century.[14] The events of the First World War necessitated serious reflection on the humanist beliefs in reason and progress, yet this did not result in an overall break with the European humanist tradition. The atrocities of the Second World War caused much sharper criticism; Western intellectuals had to acknowledge that humanism had once more failed to prevent the barbarism of war. In fact, as Tony Davies explains, many realized that the systematic killing "was the result not of some inexplicable descent into irrational, atavistic barbarity but of a supremely modern rationality" (49). In *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947), Max Horkheimer and Theodore W. Adorno attempt to "explain why humanity, instead of entering a truly human state, is sinking into a new kind of barbarism" (xiv). The foundation of humanism – the presuppositions of rationality and human progress that trace back to the humanism of the ancient Greeks – was now under attack. Claude Lévi-Strauss, in an interview with *Le Monde*, expresses the central post-war stance quite straightforward, as he comments on the tragedies of colonialism, fascism and the concentration camps as follows: "all this has taken shape not in opposition to or in contradiction with so-called humanism in the form in which we have been practising it for several centuries, but I would say almost as its natural continuation" (qtd. in Malik 241).

[14] As has been pointed out in the Introduction to this thesis, humanism had been criticized before in history, for example from the perspective of Christianity. The context of the criticism of humanism after the two world wars seems, however, to be profoundly different, since now it simply had to acknowledge the failure of humanist thought.

This seemingly unanimous turn against humanism by Western intellectuals gave rise to various forms of anti-humanism that often only found common ground in their aim to undermine humanism's core convictions. In a 1946 lecture, provokingly entitled "Existentialism Is a Humanism," Jean-Paul Sartre calls for another meaning of the word "humanism." He rejects the humanist notion of human nature, as it presumes a certain universal essence that is to be found in each human being. Instead, as he expounds his existentialist perception of the human, "*existence* comes before *essence*" (Sartre, "Existentialism" 289), which implies that "[m]an is nothing else than what he makes of himself" (Sartre, "Existentialism" 291). This autonomy of the human subject, Sartre argues, is what should qualify his existentialism as a humanism. In that same year, Martin Heidegger writes his very significant "Letter on Humanism," in which he critically responds to Sartre's lecture as he also addresses the question of the human.[15] He elaborates on his complex philosophy of Being, that he already introduced in his book *Being and Time* (1927). According to Heidegger, man is not in control of his life, rather, he is called forth by "Being." Consequently, man has to accept that he is not at all self-determinant, as Sartre insists he is, and that, under the claim of "Being," "he will seldom have much to say" (Heidegger 223). Heidegger, thus, dismisses the subject from the center, which, as Jeroen Vanheste states, "implies a critique of the entire Western history of philosophical essentialism as it ran from Plato via the Christian Middle Ages up to our modern time" (344).

The idea that man is not a self-determinant subject was adopted by structuralists, such as Claude Lévi-Strauss, Roland Barthes, and Jacques Lacan, who argue that man is bound by social, linguistic, and psychological factors. The idea that the center is constituted not by

[15] The letter was, in fact, written in response to a number of interrelated questions on humanism posed by Heidegger's French colleague Jean Beaufret in 1946. Beaufret had asked Heidegger in a personal letter to reflect on Sartre's lecture and to further elaborate on his own philosophy of Being. As Heidegger was banned from teaching after the war because of his involvement with the Nazi regime, it could very well be said that Beaufret, by posing these questions on humanism at this particular moment in time, created the opportunity – "probably a welcome one," William J. Richardson notes (530) – for Heidegger to clarify his stance on humanism and to, thus, attempt to re-establish his reputation.

man, but the structures by which he is determined – or, as Louis Althusser puts it, interpellated (1356) –, is further developed by Michel Foucault, who could very well be considered the key figure of European anti-humanism. In his various archaeologies and genealogies dealing with, for example, the history of madness, medical treatment, and sexuality, Foucault reveals that man is the effect of discourse. The human subject is nothing less than an illusion, for he is shaped by hitherto hidden power structures. On the final page of *The Order of Things* (1970), Foucault famously announces the death of man, claiming that "one can certainly wager that man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea" (387). Also Jacques Derrida, in his influential 1968 lecture entitled "The Ends of Man," proposes a true rupture with traditional humanism. The death of man could be considered the quintessential slogan for the poststructuralist movement,[16] which rejects the existence of a center altogether and thus turns the human into a "decentered" being.

These "radical discourses" of the sixties and seventies did not just shake the foundations of humanism; rather, as Braidotti observes, "[t]he Vitruvian ideal of Man as the standard of both perfection and perfectibility […] was literally pulled down from his pedestal and deconstructed" (23). Humanism's supposedly universal man was revealed to be a norm; a specific mode of being human transposed into a generalized standard, "which acquire[d] transcendent value as *the* human (Braidotti 28). The concept of Man thus turned out to be only universal in theory. These insights were not only brought forward by the at times quite abstract structuralist and poststructuralist theories; rather, also the fierce protests against various concrete forms of social inequality, such as the anti-colonial struggles or the civil rights movement in the United States, contributed majorly to the exposure of the false universalism of humanism. One only had to – and still has to, as the "Black Lives Matter" protests demonstrate – look at everyday reality to see that far from all human beings are

[16] Foucault's work could be said to have evolved from structuralist analysis into poststructuralist criticism.

treated as human beings. Black people in the colonies, for example, did not measure up to the particular type of human that humanism installed as the norm and so they were not recognized as human, but rather as "less than" (Braidotti 28).

These hierarchical and exclusionary effects of the humanist conception of the human became the focus of various fields of study that emerged or revived in these turbulent times. Feminists argue against humanism's masculinist outlook and its patriarchal practices. The word "man" and "mankind" might etymologically refer to both "male" and "female" (Barzun 28), its continued use in reference to "human" and "humankind" is to be seen as both complicit with and reflective of the exclusion of non-male human beings. As Joanna Bourke argues, "man" means "human" "only to the extent that women, intergenders and transgenders conform to various traits that have been coded 'male'" (Bourke 2).

Furthermore, humanism's man is not just any male; he is a white European. Fanon was not the first, but he was, as Gilroy observes, perhaps the loudest to accuse humanism of the exclusion of non-European people ("Race" 158). Building on his critical work, which will be discussed hereafter, postcolonial scholars such as Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Homi K. Bhabha, have exposed how the presumed hierarchy of the European self over the non-European other is inherent in both colonialism and humanism. Pramod K. Nayar argues that the superiority of the white man has not only been used for the purpose of domination in Europe's colonial project, but it also formed crucial ground for the development of humanitarianism; "that since we (Europeans) are superior to other forms of human life, then it is our duty to improve their conditions, to look after them and be their protectors" (*Frantz Fanon* 119). As a civilizational model, humanism thus fueled and also legitimized the colonization of non-civilized parts of the world. Davies argues that, in fact, "[a]ll humanisms, until now, have been imperial" (141).

The notion of the human has furthermore been challenged by the closely related fields of animal studies and critical posthumanism, that both critique the exceptionalism of the human as a species. According to Dominick LaCapra, animal studies holds the most valid and pertinent dimension of the critique of humanism, as it points out humanism's anthropocentric perspective that "validates whatever serves human interests and, as a consequence, protectively situates other animals, or animality in general (including the animal in the human being), in the position of bare life, raw material, or scapegoated victim" (151). The human-animal distinction is, as Derrida reveals in his essay "The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)," an arbitrary construct created not by nature, but by man. It is the discriminating discourse of "speciesism" (qtd. in Weil 3), a term introduced into philosophical debate by Peter Singer in the 1970s, that a growing number of scholars, such as Giorgio Agamben, Kari Weil, and Cary Wolfe attempt to undo. Critical posthumanism seems to take the criticism that is brought forward by animal studies to the next level, as it also considers the human in relation to other life forms and even non-organic matter and technologies. Posthumanism of this gist argues that "the human is always already evolving with, constituted by and constitutive of multiple forms of life and machines" (Nayar, *Posthumanism* 2). As Braidotti demonstrates in *The Posthuman*, antihumanism – poststructuralist thought in particular – forms an important source for posthumanist thought.[17] In fact, she considers a complete rejection of the humanist assumptions about the human subject absolutely necessary if the intellectual tradition of humanism is to be overcome (Braidotti 30).

Judging by this short overview of the most prevalent twentieth and twenty-first-century antihumanisms, the end of humanism is inescapable, or even already accomplished.

[17] It should be noted that the field of posthumanism continues to evolve in various directions and that, therefore, not all forms of posthumanism are necessarily informed by antihumanism. Most basically, a distinction can be made between critical strands of posthumanism, such as Braidotti's, and transhumanism, a strand of posthumanism that celebrates the potential technological improvement of the human. Donna Haraway's classical "A Cyborg Manifesto" (1985) could be considered as a founding text of transhumanism. For an extensive overview of the genealogy of the various posthumanisms, see Wolfe's *What is Posthumanism?*

However, also antihumanism has not been devoid of criticism. To begin with, poststructuralism is often considered "overly negative and restrictive" (Howarth 78), as the removal of the human from the center appears to obstruct any possibility of change or resistance. In 1986, Soper already stressed that the abstract focus on the end of man risked to "encourage a passivity that may hasten the actual demise of humanity" (153). Soper here alludes to Foucault's claim that the human is not an autonomous being, but instead constituted by discursive structures. This denial of the autonomy of the subject consequently implies that any form of human resistance is impossible, or even futile; after all, it is not the human being, but the omnipresent power structures that are pulling the strings – also when it comes to resistance. In addition, it could very well be argued that if the human being is deprived of his/her autonomy, then also the possibility of human responsibility is undermined. A sense of indifference could, furthermore, emerge from the poststructuralist rejection of ideas of unity and the celebration of difference and fragmentation. Gilroy critically observes that, currently, in the face of difference the untranslatability of the other – which he calls "the strangeness of strangers" (*After Empire* 3) – is merely asserted, instead of engaged with.[18] According to Kenan Malik, who also claims that poststructuralist theories tend to accept "inequality as an inevitable fact of society" (8), the possibility of a future equal society is, thus, precluded.

Furthermore, various forms of antihumanism that target "the humanistic arrogance" (Braidotti 23) to place "man" in the center, have been criticized for having overlooked, or deemed unimportant, that this man is not just any human being. As both the feminist and postcolonial criticism mentioned above reveal, "[h]umanism installed only *some* humans at the centre of the universe" (Bourke 3); that is, white European males. The humanism that

[18] It is the following question that informs Gilroy's thinking: "[w]hy should the assertions of ethnocentricity and untranslatability that are pronounced in the face of difference have become an attractive and respectable alternative to the hard but scarcely mysterious work involved in translation, principled internationalism, and cosmopolitan conviviality?" (*After Empire* 9).

antihumanism dismisses could, thus, very well be seen as a Eurocentric *version* of humanism. While the rejection of the exclusion of non-white, non-European, and non-masculine human beings is absolutely necessary,[19] it does not, then, have to lead to an overall abandonment of humanism. Fanon came to this insight already in the 1950s, but, as Gilroy insightfully brings forward, humanism was not exactly a respectable topic after the Second World War.[20] The idea of a shared humanity, however, seems not to have lost its appeal throughout the past decades. On the contrary, for, as Hiddleston observes, there is in fact "a current resurgence of interest in the human" (363), that calls for a reinvention of the notion of the human.

This renewed interest in the notion of the human does not necessarily have to be considered in opposition to critical posthumanism. Also critical posthumanism is occupied with a reinvention, but, rather than reflecting on what we share as human beings, critical posthumanism considers the human as entangled with other life forms and non-living things. This type of posthumanism is highly critical – and rightfully so – of the hierarchization and classification that has served to elevate the human species to a position of superiority, but a question that should be asked is whether the focus on the relation of the human with animals and machines does not risk the passing over of the very real unresolved issues of hierarchization, like racism, among human beings. Gilroy, who has written extensively about the politics of racism, expresses such a concern in "Race and the Value of the Human" when he – unfortunately only briefly – refers to the work of the posthumanist scholar Donna Haraway. He critically observes that in *When Species Meet*, she displaces "the challenges of alterity and interdependency on to inter- rather than intra-species relations" (Gilroy, "Race" 146). Gilroy appears to be arguing that this is a move made too soon, that the human species as a category might not be ready to only be seen as a part of an all-encompassing network of

[19] Braidotti expands this list of cast-outs of the category of the human with "non-normal, non-young, non-healthy, disabled, malformed or enhanced peoples" (68).

[20] Gilroy states: "[i]f Nazism was, after all, not radical evil but rather a catastrophic trace of metaphysical humanism that reveals the problems with all forms of humanism, few brave souls will be prepared to subscribe to the grand folly of humanism's reconstruction" ("Race" 145).

intertwined relations. He criticizes Haraway for making humanism responsible for racism, while, as he argues, it is racism that has corrupted humanism. Therefore, what is needed according to Gilroy is a return to, instead of a move away from humanism.

The renewed interest in humanism seems to correlate with a renewed interest in the anti-colonial writings of Fanon. Hiddleston notes that the contemporary attempts to rethink the human are, to a certain extent "anticipated by the extraordinary dynamism with which the term was injected around decolonization and after" (363), a remark that clearly also refers to Fanon. Although his writings are very much grounded in his particular time, they strongly resonate with the contemporary world of today, as the imperial and colonial past continues to shape everyday life for many human beings. Fanon, who, of course, despises the Eurocentric humanism that was complicit to the colonial project, managed to write – well before decolonization – "[m]an is a *yes* that vibrates to cosmic harmonies" (*BSWM* 2). Any voice that will call for a rethinking of the human, that might even be prepared to contribute to the reconstruction of humanism, would, thus, be well advised to first turn to the intense anti-colonial writings of Fanon.

1.2 Frantz Fanon's Belief in Mankind

Fanon writes from what he himself calls "the middle of the whirlpool" (*Wretched* 60), that is, the so-called "Third World". He is born in 1925 in the French colony Martinique – which to this very day still is official French territory –, but spends a considerable part of his adult life abroad. He goes to France to be trained as a psychologist, after which he works as a psychiatrist in Algeria, another country under French rule, where he eventually devotes himself to the cause of Algerian independence.[21] In his various writings, Fanon seeks to raise the consciousness of his fellow colonized human beings, whom he addresses as his

[21] Fanon does not live to see Algeria gain independence in 1962; he dies of leukemia in December 1961.

"comrades" (*Wretched* 251).[22] As Sartre states in the preface to *The Wretched of the Earth*, "the Third world finds *itself* and speaks to *itself* through his voice" (9). That is, of course, not to say that Fanon's books and essays do not concern the Western world, on the very contrary,[23] yet Fanon clearly does not want Europe to take any part in the conversation, let alone become the center of it.

The two works of Fanon that will be discussed here both approach the question of the human through critical examinations of the reality of the colonial situation. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon offers an understanding of the psychological injuries that colonialism has inflicted on human beings all over the world. *The Wretched of the Earth* elaborates on this theme, while the call to action is intensified. Fanon exposes humanism as the accomplice of colonialism; he offers, Sartre notes, "a striptease of our humanism […] and it's not a pretty sight" ("Preface" 21).[24] However, unlike colonialism, which, of course, has to be overthrown at all costs, Fanon does not reject the idea of humanism. In fact, as Nayar states, "Fanon argues a case for colonialism as anti-humanist" (*Frantz Fanon* 10) while proposing a new, non-European humanism. Fanon clearly considers it the task of the "Third World" to start this "new history of Man" (*Wretched* 254). In the following pages, I will explore how Fanon arrives at his new humanism.

In *Black Skin, White Masks* Fanon states: "I propose nothing short of the liberation of the man of color from himself" (2). The very particular phrasing of this proposal requires some elaboration, for why does Fanon offer to free the man of color from *himself*, and not from the more obvious enemy, the colonizer? How is it that the man of color has become his

[22] The very fact that Fanon deliberately fails to address Europe, is, of course, one of his ways to undermine the position of superiority that Europe had ascribed to itself.

[23] In the preface to *The Wretched of the Earth*, Sartre formulates the relevance of Fanon's thinking to white European people as follows: "Fanon explains you to his brothers and shows them the mechanism by which we are estranged from ourselves; take advantage of this, and get to know yourselves seen in the light of truth, objectively" (12).

[24] Sartre continues: "[i]t was nothing but an ideology of lies, a perfect justification for pillage; its honeyed words, its affectation of sensibility were only alibis for our aggressions" ("Preface" 21).

own enemy? It is exactly this question that *Black Skin, White Masks*, but also *The Wretched of the Earth*, engages with. To come to an answer, Fanon draws from his own personal experience of alienation and from what he has seen in reality. He presents the colonial world as a Manichaean world that is "cut in two" and "inhabited by two different species" (*Wretched* 30). The dividing line of this world is one of race, and, as such, recalls W.E.B. Dubois' "color line" (qtd. in Leitch et al 867). On one side of the line is the white man who considers himself superior, on the other side the black man who, as Fanon reminds his reader on the first page of *Black Skin, White Masks*, "is not a man" (1). In the colonial context, Nayar notes, "subjectivity […] is the privilege and prerogative of the white man alone" (*Frantz Fanon* 44). For the black man, the only way that he can become a man is by becoming white. Fanon argues that the whiter the black man behaves, that is, for example, the better he masters the French language, the closer he will come "to being a real human being" (*BSWM* 8). The colonial situation, thus, creates the desire in the black man to put on a white mask, i.e. mimic the white man.[25] It allows him, at least so it seems, to be recognized by others and by himself.

In the mind of the colonized arises a conflict that is the result of a disparity between his perception of himself, and the way in which he is viewed by the colonizer.[26] Fanon describes how the French educational system teaches the Antillean that the white world is "the only honorable one" (*BSWM* 86), and that the Negro, who most often represents the symbol of evil in the Western-made stories, is to be disliked, or rather, not even to be

[25] This is where the "striptease" of humanism begins. Fanon brings to the forefront that in reality, the humanist claim of "essential equality between men" comes down to black men having to conform to the Western prototype of humanity (*Wretched* 131). This domination is considered justified, as the sub-men are invited to become human. However, as I will discuss hereafter, the white world will never allow the black man to fully participate, i.e. to become fully human.

[26] It should be noted that Fanon wrote *Black Skin, White Masks* before he moved to Algeria in 1953, and the personal experiences that he describes in this book are thus restricted to Martinique and France. But although his analyses are very much grounded in a particular location, Fanon stresses that "there is every reason to think that the situation is the same in the other colonies" (*BSWM* 113).

considered human. The Antillean adopts the lessons that he is taught, and indeed starts to look down on the Negro. The paradox, Fanon sets out, is this:

> the Antillean does not think of himself as a black man; he thinks of himself as an Antillean. The Negro lives in Africa. Subjectively, intellectually, the Antillean conducts himself like a white man. But he is a Negro. That he will learn once he goes to Europe; and when he hears Negroes mentioned he will recognize that the word includes himself as well as the Senegalese. (*BSWM* 114)

So it is only when he meets "the white man's eyes" (*BSWM* 83) that the black man becomes aware of the fact that he has no agency or subjectivity whatsoever, and that he, instead, is a mere object. To explain this moment of objectification, Fanon takes recourse to his own personal case. He recalls an encounter with a young white boy and his mother. The boy shouts "Look, a Negro!" (*BSWM* 84) and tells his mother that the black man – that is Fanon – frightens him. With poetic force, Fanon describes how he is nauseated when he considers himself from the perspective of the white boy.[27] "I took myself far off from my own presence, far indeed, and made myself an object" (*BSWM* 85). He describes this moment of alienation as an amputation, for this is the moment that he loses his sense of self. His subjectivity is replaced with a single term, Negro, that comes with a chain of stereotypes; "[t]he Negro is an animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is mean, the Negro is ugly" (*BSWM* 86). This is how he is "*fixed*" by the white boy, objectified, and, Fanon reveals, this is also how he now starts seeing himself: "[a]ll this whiteness that burns me . . . I sit down at the fire and I become aware of my uniform.[28] I had not seen it. It is indeed ugly" (*BSWM* 86). It is at

[27] Pal Ahluwalia offers an elaborate and insightful analysis of the nausea that is caused by this encounter in his article "Fanon's Nausea: The Hegemony of the White Nation."

[28] The fact that Fanon uses the word "uniform" in reference to his own body – in particular to his skin – is highly significant. First of all, hereby he emphasizes that the skin is a site of ranking, just like military uniforms

this point of the internalization of inferiority, that the black man's enemy is no longer to colonizer alone, but also the colonized himself.

An important cause for Fanon's nausea is his recognition that he does not have any control over the way in which he is perceived. A white mask, as this famous encounter painfully exemplifies, will never be enough for the black man to be considered fully human. No matter how French he acts or how well-educated he is, the black man is denied his humanity merely because of the color of his skin.[29] His skin proves to be an inescapable trap. In comparison with the stereotyping and discrimination of the Jew that Sartre discusses in *Anti-Semite and Jew*, Fanon states: "I am given no chance. I am overdetermined from without. I am the slave not of the "idea" that others have of me but of my own appearance" (*BSWM* 87). Because the black skin is the token of inferiority, Fanon proposes to speak not of the internalization, but of the "epidermalization" of inferiority (*BSWM* 4).

Fanon's work, which is full of references to real life situations, offers a profound reality check for Western readers. It is concerned not with abstract models and theoretical schemas, but with the lived experience of black human beings during colonialism.[30] By foregrounding the concrete social conditions that lead to the emergence of the inferiority complex of the black man, Fanon explicitly counters the hegemonic theory of the French psychoanalyst Octave Mannoni, who presupposes that the, what he calls "dependency complex" of the black man to the white man's leadership, is innate. With his "sociodiagnosis," Fanon aims to expose the Negro rather as an invention of the white man, and his supposed inferiority as "a solidly established myth" (*BSWM* 116) that functions as the

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are. Furthermore, the word once more draws attention to the fact that, in the colonial context, all black people are considered to be one and the same.

[29] There is, as Nayar notes, "no attempt to engage with anything deeper than the colour of the skin" (*Frantz Fanon* 71).

[30] Fanon states that the abstract thinking of philosophy "has never saved anyone" (*BSWM* 17), which makes it unfit for his project of liberation. He also proves the European framework of psychoanalysis to be insufficient to come to terms with the lived experience of the black man. Fanon says he is "struck by the disparity between the corresponding schemas and the reality that the Negro presents" (*BSWM* 116). So he picks and chooses from psychoanalysis and from philosophy – most notably Marx, Hegel, and Sartre – only that which is of use to his particular cause.

justification of the colonizer's treatment of the natives. "As long as the black man is among his own," Fanon explains, "he will have no occasion, except in minor internal conflicts, to experience his being through others" (*BSWM* 82). It is only when the white man arrives that the black man is forced to be black, that is, "black in relation to the white man" (*BSWM* 82-3). Therefore, Fanon reasons, ontology will not be able to provide any answers about the being of the black man, and so he claims that "[b]esides phylogeny and ontogeny stands sociogeny" (*BSWM* 4).[31]

It is crucial for the black man to recognize that he is trapped not because of any natural innate condition, but as the result of a set of social constructions that are imposed on him. In order to break out of this "crushing objecthood" (*BSWM* 82), the black man has to drop his white mask and acknowledge his equality with the white man *as a black man.* For Fanon, this recognition forms the initiation of the process of decolonization.

> Thus, the native discovers that his life, his breath, his beating heart are the same as those of the settler. He finds out that the settler's skin is not of any more value than a native's skin; and it must be said that this discovery shakes the world in a very necessary manner. *All the new, revolutionary assurance of the native stems from it*. For if, in fact, my life is worth as much as the settler's, his glance no longer shrivels me up nor freezes me, and his voice no longer turns me into stone. I am no longer on tenterhooks in his presence; in fact, I don't give a damn for him. Not only does his presence no longer trouble me, but I am already preparing such *efficient ambushes* for him that soon there will be no way out but that of flight. (*Wretched* 35, emphases added)

[31] It is this particular sentence that, as will be further discussed in the next section, is used by Wynter to develop her theory of the human as *homo narrans.*

Once the black man realizes that his inferiority is constructed by the white man, a transition to violence appears to be inevitable. The threatening language that Fanon here uses to describe the emergence of his revolutionary spirit, is exemplary for *The Wretched of the Earth.* In fact, the reference to "efficient ambushes" in this specific passage is rather mild in comparison to phrases such as "life can only spring up again of the rotting corpse of the settler" (*Wretched* 73).

In light of such statements, it is hardly surprising that Fanon has been seen as an "apostle of violence" (Pithouse 108), though this is, I agree with Edward Said, a "caricatural reduction more suited to the Cold War than to what Fanon actually says and to how he says it" (qtd. in Pithouse 109). According to Fanon, violence is the only possible way through which the black man will be able to assert his agency and thus to liberate himself, and, therefore, the anti-colonial violence that Fanon calls for, should be considered to be intimately connected to the rethinking of the human. Samir Dayal rightfully stresses that the black man's recourse to violence should not be ascribed to his supposed incapability of rationality, "for that would be only a covert racialism" (229). Rather, it is the violent reality that requires the use of violence.[32] Fanon formulates it as follows: "colonialism is not a thinking machine, nor a body endowed with reasoning faculties. It is violence in its natural state, and it will only yield when confronted with greater violence" (*Wretched* 48). A very insightful analysis of the place of violence in Fanon's thought is offered by Pal Ahluwalia, who very convincingly proposes to read Fanon's work as a medical examination. In both *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon looks for symptoms in order to formulate a diagnosis, and, as any doctor would, he subsequently attempts to come up with a cure. This "medical metaphor" allows for an understanding of violence beyond brute

[32] There is, so it seems, a remarkable inconsistency when it comes to Fanon's violence and the violence of colonialism. Richard Pithouse bitterly comments that "Fanon is routinely reduced to an 'apostle of violence' on the basis of a few pages written in support of armed resistance to the extraordinarily violent French suppression of the Algerian independence movements" (108-109).

barbarism. “Violence is like surgery,” Ahluwalia suggests, “quick and brief so that in its aftermath a process of healing can begin” (348).

It is, however, crucial to understand that for Fanon, it is not *after* the surgical violence that the healing of the black people begins, but *in* and *through* the anti-colonial struggle itself. He claims that “violence is a cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect” (*Wretched* 74). When Fanon calls for armed struggle against the colonizer, he simultaneously invites the black man to retrieve his subjectivity. As Nayar aptly observes, “Fanon sees violence as both an assertion of agency as well as a means to recover it. Violence here is to be seen as praxis, an acting out, or a performance in which the Self is rediscovered” (*Frantz Fanon* 88). In the colonial context, the rethinking of the human is, thus, necessarily and inextricably linked to the violent anti-colonial struggle. It is, therefore, sadly ironic that Fanon’s endorsement of violence has, as Richard Pithouse points out, rendered Fanon’s claim to humanism “unacceptable” in academia (108).

As Fanon declares that “decolonization is the veritable creation of new men” (*Wretched* 28), it follows that the physical elimination of the colonizer is just a part of the decolonization process. I would like to argue that the violent statement quoted above – “life can only spring up again of the rotting corpse of the settler” (*Wretched* 73) – does not only refer to literal human corpses, but also to the abolition of the *concept* of the settler, and, subsequently, the *concept* of the Negro. Also the mind of the black man needs to be decolonized, as it needs to be freed from “all untruths implanted in his being by oppression” (*Wretched* 250). The European ideas and way of thinking are to be abandoned, Fanon repeatedly insists.

> Humanity is waiting for something other from us than such an imitation, which would be almost an obscene caricature. If we want to turn Africa into a new Europe, and America into a new Europe, then let us leave the destiny of our countries to Europeans. They will know how to do it better than the most gifted among us. But if we want humanity to advance a step farther, if we want to bring it up to a different level than that which Europe has shown it, then we must invent and we must make discoveries. (*Wretched* 253)

The fight for freedom is, thus, one of both brains and muscles, and although on the opening page of *The Wretched of the Earth* he states that "decolonization is *quite simply* the replacing of a certain 'species' of men by another 'species' of men" (*Wretched* 27, emphasis added), Fanon is well aware that the deeply rooted inferiority complex – and also the delusional idea of superiority – will not leave the brain just like that. In fact, according to Gilroy, who writes more than fifty years after Fanon and thirty years after the publication of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Decolonising the Mind*, "the decolonization process is still incomplete" ("Race" 149).

By proposing the replacement of one species of men for another, it might seem that Fanon intends a reversal of roles; for the black man to seize the position of superiority and to then degrade the white man to objecthood. It should be stressed, however, that even though Fanon literally describes decolonization with the phrase "[t]he last shall be the first and the first last" (*Wretched* 28), he does not at all envision the future of humanity along the separatist color line of the colonial system. Rather, the anti-colonial struggle "aims at a fundamentally different set of relations between men" (*Wretched* 198). In the chapter "The Pitfalls of National Consciousness" he therefore sharply criticizes the approach of the so-called native intellectual; the black man who, during colonialism, has adopted Western

manners and whose resistance relies heavily on Western techniques. The native intellectual attempts to counteract colonialism's negation of the black man's culture by demonstrating that there actually *is* a glorious precolonial Negro culture; the Négritude movement being just one example of it. So now the category of the Negro – which is really an invention by the colonizer – is affirmed, proudly even, by the people who are condemned to that category.

Fanon acknowledges that the passionate search for a shared African culture is "a necessity in any coherent programme" (*Wretched* 170) that fights colonialism. This, what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak identifies as strategic essentialism (205), provides the black man, who is robbed not only of his individuality but also of his culture, with roots and a sense of belonging and as such, it creates a preliminary collective consciousness that is very urgent for the anti-colonial struggle. There are, however, some very important logical errors that underlie this celebration of the concept of the Negro. Fanon stresses that the native intellectual "fails to realize that he is utilizing techniques and language which are borrowed from the stranger in his country" (*Wretched* 180). As a result, the cultural work that he produces is, according to Fanon, "strangely reminiscent of exoticism" (*Wretched* 180). He continuously stresses that it does not make sense to uphold the idea of a black culture, for the concept of the Negro will disappear with decolonization. "To believe that it is possible to create a black culture is to forget that niggers are disappearing, just as those people who brought them into being are seeing the break-up of their economic and cultural supremacy" (*Wretched* 188).

Perhaps most problematic is the fact that the idea of a black culture that is shared by all black individuals throughout the African continent, or even throughout the world, echoes the dangerous ideology of essentialism used by the colonizer to dismiss and degrade a large part of humanity. Just like the colonizer, the native intellectual seems to overlook the fact that "there is not merely *one* Negro, there are *Negroes*" (*BSWM* 104). By presenting the black

people as a homogeneous group, he could be charged for using the very same strategy as the colonizer, which Fanon describes as "putting all Negroes in the same bag" (*Wretched* 173). For Fanon, this strategic racialization of thought can only be acceptable when considered as a starting point for the black man to stand up against the colonizer, to retrieve a sense of self through the sense of belonging, to unify in the struggle against colonialism; in short, as a means, not as an end. He considers nationalism in a somewhat similar way: it is necessary to bring people together under the concept of the nation, but nationalism can in itself be exclusionary and, Fanon argues, has the dangerous potential to turn into racism (*Wretched* 125). So also nationalism can only be a tool to achieve a national consciousness – "which is not nationalism" (*Wretched* 199) – that allows for connection with other peoples.

The new human 'species' that Fanon has in mind, thus, evolves in stages. The obliteration of the colonial system is a very important first step towards this potential new human. For Fanon, this is the moment that the black man has the opportunity to truly break out of the trap that he is held in, by affirming his own humanity *as a black man* through his actions. Drucilla Cornell notes that "this assertion of a black 'I' refuses to recognize the white other as a source of recognition" (122). The white man is no longer allowed to have any control over the black man, physically and mentally, nor over what it means to be human. He is sidelined in the "huge task" (*Wretched* 84) of the rehabilitation of mankind, because the European version of humanism has proved to be destructive for humanity. Fanon addresses only the colonized people: "[l]et *us* try to create the whole man, whom Europe has been incapable of bringing to triumphant birth" (*Wretched* 252, emphasis added).[33]

[33] All the same, Fanon does articulate a need for European participation as well. However, the only Europeans that are fit to join his mission to rethink the human, are those who open their eyes to reality. "[R]eintroducing mankind into the world […] will be carried out with the indispensable help of the European peoples, who themselves must realize that in the past they have often joined the ranks of our common masters where colonial questions were concerned. To achieve this, the European peoples must first decide to wake up and shake themselves, use their brains, and stop playing the stupid game of the Sleeping Beauty" (*Wretched* 84).

That is not to say that the white man will be excluded from the new species of men. On the contrary, the phrase "whole man" should not be mistaken for a pseudo-universalism, like the European claim for the equality of all human beings. Rather, I propose to read Fanon's call "to make man victorious everywhere, once and for all" (*Wretched* 84) as a sincere attempt to include all human beings in the new category of the human. Although Fanon clearly instructs his reader to literally fight the colonizer and to always be cautious of Europeans, he seems to interpret colonialism as a system that also captures the white man. Therefore, Fanon's new humanism, as Nayar also stresses, should be understood in terms of "*mutual* recognition" (*Frantz Fanon* 120, emphasis added). That means that the black man should be recognized as human being instead of as object, but also that the white man should be recognized as human being, and not as oppressor or master. Both have to be freed from the categories of blackness and whiteness in which the colonial situation has "sealed" them (*BSWM* 3). Fanon states: "I have only one solution: to rise above this absurd drama that others have staged round me, to reject the two terms that are equally unacceptable, and, through one human being, to reach for the universal" (*BSWM* 153).[34] In this respect, Anthony C. Alessandrini is more than right to translate "*il faut faire peau neuve*" as "we must grow a new skin" (438), instead of "we must turn over a new leaf" (*Wretched* 255).[35]

Fanon's new humanism enables, or, as Wynter would have it, *requires* all human beings to be self-creating and self-determinant. While the rediscovery of the self could be considered the most important stake in the anti-colonial struggle, at the same time, Fanon's humanism could be considered as a model for collectivity, that looks beyond the individual at all times. It does not centralize *a* man who then functions as a norm; rather, it argues for "decentralization in the extreme" (*Wretched* 153). It is the mass that everything depends

[34] For me, this line of argument demonstrates once more that essentially Fanon despises the European system of colonialism, and not every single inhabitant of the Western world.
[35] This phrase is part of the final sentence of *The Wretched of the Earth.* The original translation is by Constance Farrington.

upon, and therefore one could argue that Fanon places the collectivity of all human beings in the center.[36] It is an ambitious move, for, as the analysis of Glissant's *The Overseer's Cabin* in the next chapter will foreground, the notion of a "we" is not at all free from difficulties. Nevertheless, Fanon foresees that in the struggle against colonialism it will quickly become clear that "the interest of one will be the interest of all" (*Wretched* 37), and he seems to suggest that this should serve as a motto for post-colonial times as well.

> What we want to do is to go forward all the time, night and day, in the company of Man, in the company of all men. The caravan should not be stretched out, for in that case each line will hardly see those who precede it; and men who no longer recognize each other meet less and less together, and talk to each other less and less. (*Wretched* 254)

For Fanon, it is of the utmost importance that human beings, whether or not they share the same background, genuinely connect with one another.[37] In his writings, Fanon succeeds in connecting different people with each other by foregrounding the translatability of the very particular realities that he describes. His writings may be mostly grounded in the realities particular to Martinique and Algeria, but at the same time they function as a framework for other colonial situations. Following Albert Memmi's reading of Fanon, Nayar calls Fanon's model of humanism *centrifugal*; "moving outward from the individual to community to

[36] Although it does seem that Fanon elevates all human beings above other life forms, it should, however, not be overlooked that Fanon pursues "a relation of coexistence" (*BSWM* 97) with the world, and not one of enslavement. Unfortunately, he does not elaborate much on this particular relation between the human being and other life forms. Perhaps, his humanism could, like nationalism and Négritude, be considered a necessary step towards an even more inclusive way of life.

[37] It is the task of the people to make these connections and to also understand their value. Fanon's description of the building of a bridge could be read as an illustration for this challenge. "If the building of a bridge does not enrich the awareness of those who work on it, then that bridge ought not to be built and the citizens can go on swimming across the river or going by boat. The bridge should not be 'parachuted down' from above; it should not be imposed by a *deus ex machine* upon the social scene; on the contrary it should come from the muscles and the brains of the citizens" (*Wretched* 162).

ethnic group to nation to the race and then, finally, the world" (*Frantz Fanon* 128). Because of its outward and international perspective, Alessandrini aptly coins Fanon's humanism as a "transnational humanism" (438).

Fanon's humanism has furthermore been labeled as anti-racist (Gilroy, "Race" 143) and inclusive (Pithouse 112). As I have stressed above, it is absolutely vital to keep in mind that Fanon indeed fights for a humanism that includes all human beings, rather than, as some have argued, only those who have suffered colonial oppression.[38] In fact, Fanon wants to break with the structures of the past; a truly new and affirmative humanism, he implies, could never be grounded in the past. He, thus, explicitly instructs people to be "actional" (*BSWM* 173), instead of merely reactional, because "there is always resentment in a *reaction*" (*BSWM* 173). Both the Negro and the white man, Fanon states towards the end of *Black Skin White Masks,* "must turn their backs on the inhuman voices which were those of their respective ancestors in order that authentic communication be possible" (180). For Fanon, it is, thus, of the utmost important to look forward towards what he calls "the new day which is already at hand" (*Wretched* 251).

1.3 Sylvia Wynter's *Homo Narrans*

Fanon's writings are filled both with anger about the present and hope for the future. The humanism that he proposes is a humanism to come; the 'new species of men' that he envisions will have to take shape in the reality of the uprisings against Western domination from the 1950s and 1960s onwards. In the years that follow Fanon's writings, the "old species of men" come under assault not only by anti-colonial movements; also the civil rights movement, gay and lesbian movements, and feminism get involved in the struggle. Crucial though these various social and intellectual challenges are, the Jamaican writer and critic

[38] It is, thus, somewhat surprising that Nayar, while acknowledging that Fanon calls for mutual recognition, claims that the new humanism that Fanon seeks is "[b]uilding solidarities on the basis of a shared history of suffering" (*Frantz Fanon* 128).

Sylvia Wynter considers them to form only the first phase in a still ongoing struggle against the pseudo-universalism of the European concept of the human, or what she calls "the overrepresentation of Man as if it were the human [itself]" ("Unsettling" 267).

In an elaborate and highly insightful interview with Scott in 2000, Wynter notes that she always tends to find herself on the side of the marginal ("Re-Enchantment" 149). She is born in 1928 in Cuba to Jamaican parents, and grows up in Jamaica that is then under British rule. When she moves to London to study modern languages, she experiences the displacement that Fanon describes in *Black Skin, White Masks,* as she continuously runs into the European stereotyped view of herself. This alienation – and Fanon's take on it – come to form a guiding thread in her extensive oeuvre. The various plays that she writes, her only novel *The Hills of Hebron* (1962), but most explicitly her voluminous critical essays and articles all engage with the question of the human from a "liminal frame of reference" (Wynter, "Ceremony" 39). According to Wynter, such an outer view allows her to perceive "the grammars and regularities of boundary and structure-maintaining discourses" ("Ceremony" 39).

At the same time, her texts are filled with references to a wide range of writers and scholars from various fields of study, ranging from anthropology, literary studies, and social studies, to biology and even neurology.[39] McKittrick aptly describes Wynter's work as "a *creative-intellectual project* of reimagining what it means to be human and thus rearticulating who/what we are" ("Yours in the Intellectual Struggle" 2, emphasis added). As Wynter's texts are in conversation with each other as well, they are best to be considered as an ever-expanding network that, Walter D. Mignolo helpfully assures, can be entered through any single article or essay (111). In order to come to grips with her approach to the question of

[39] Wynter's engagement with these systems of knowledge should be considered twofold. First of all, in a fashion similar to Fanon, she uses bits and pieces from various fields of study to build her own interdisciplinary argument. Secondly, as will be discussed later in this section, she studies these systems of knowledge in order to reveal and think through their limits.

the human, I will primarily engage with the essay "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom. Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation – An Argument" (2003), and two in-depth interviews: Scott's "The Re-Enchantment of Humanism: An Interview with Sylvia Wynter" (2000) and McKittrick's "Unparalleled Catastrophe for Our Species? Or, to Give Humanness a Different Future: Conversations" (2015), in which Wynter reflects and elaborates on her ideas and writings.

It could be said that Wynter takes off where Fanon stopped, as she lives to see the process of decolonization unfold in an increasingly globalized world. Fanon's premonitions of the pitfalls for the newly independent nation states turn out to be not at all far off. In conversation with McKittrick, Wynter recalls:

> we who, after our respective anticolonial uprisings, were almost all now subjects of postcolonial nations, nevertheless fell into the mimetic trap […] – because the West is now going to *reincorporate* us neocolonially, and thereby mimetically, by telling us that the problem with us *wasn't* that we'd been imperially subordinated, *wasn't* that we'd been both socioculturally dominated and economically exploited, but that we were *underdeveloped*". ("Unparalleled" 20)

The only way for the newly postcolonial subjects to become "*un-underdeveloped*" (Unparalleled" 20), Wynter reflects, was by once again assimilating to the Western order of knowledge and its concomitant global economic schema.

In this way, despite the political independence of the formerly colonized countries, the West has continued to keep a firm grip on the ways in which people all around the world experience who and what they are. The Western "genre" of the human, as Wynter calls it, still wrongfully presents itself as the only form of humanity, thereby excluding those human

beings who do not meet the criteria of Man. Wynter suggests that every contemporary struggle, whether it relates to race, gender, or even the issue of global warming, is ultimately part of the ostensibly never-ending "Man vs. Human struggle" ("Unsettling" 261). She foresees that

> the struggle of our new millennium will be one between the ongoing imperative of securing the well-being of our present ethnoclass (i.e. Western bourgeois) conception of the human, Man, which overrepresents itself as if it were the human itself, and that of securing the well-being, and therefore the full cognitive and behavioral autonomy of the human species itself/ourselves. (Wynter "Unsettling" 260)

She first and foremost intends to fight this struggle by coming to an understanding of how this "misequation" of Man and the human could have become so persistent and why it is that thinking about the human outside of the Western perspective is so very difficult (Wynter "1492" 43). Wynter suggests that the answers are to be found in the globally hegemonic biocentric version of humanness itself. She foregrounds that "our present system of knowledge is based on the premise that the human is, like all purely biological species, a natural organism" (Wynter, "Unparalleled" 16-7).[40] Following from Darwin's theory of evolution, the human is considered to be first a biological being – that is either naturally selected or dysselected – that then creates culture, and as such, the human is reduced "to being a 'mere mechanism' driven in its behavior by its genetic program" (Wynter "Unsettling" 330). This biocentric origin narrative presents itself as "a purely scientific one"

[40] Note how Wynter here claims that the system of knowledge is based on the conception of the human, and not the other way around. She seeks to position herself in opposition to Foucault, as she strategically refers to his statement in *The Order of Things* that the appearance of man "was the effect of a change in the fundamental arrangements of knowledge" (qtd. in Wynter, "Unsettling" 257). While this particular quote does not necessarily encapsulate Foucault's stance on causality, it does enable Wynter to argue that in order to change the system of knowledge, first the human has to be conceived of differently.

(Ferreira da Silva 95), which is, Wynter recognizes, an important reason why it is "extremely difficult" to think outside of it ("Unparalleled" 35).[41]

Ironically, Wynter uses biological research in order "to denaturalize biocentricity" (McKittrick, "Axis" 147); that is, to break with the supposedly natural given that the human is a purely biological being.[42] She draws on the work of the Chilean biologists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela, who propose that biological organisms are, in fact, autonomously functioning systems. This concept of autopoiesis, Mignolo explains, holds that "what is seen with the eyes does not represent the world outside the living organism; rather, it is the living organism that fabricates an image of the world through the internal/neurological processing of information" (107). Wynter transposes this primarily biological concept to human social systems, as she suggests that the human is likewise produced within an autopoietic, i.e. self-generating and self-maintaining, system. In its social configuration, the concept of autopoiesis echoes Fanon's notion of sociogeny that he articulates in *Black Skin, White Masks* and that Wynter "amplifies" (Eudell 229) as the sociogenic principle. Fanon's statement that "[b]esides phylogeny and ontogeny stands sociogeny" (*BSWM* 4), as also discussed above, foregrounds the importance of concrete social conditions for the formation and determination of human consciousness and experience. If human beings are the expression of the developmental process of phylogeny, ontogeny *and* sociogeny, Wynter subsequently reasons, "they cannot preexist, as they are imagined to do within our present order of knowledge, the symbolic representational modes of socialization specific to each culture's 'form of life,' and conception of being ("1492" 50). Rather, Wynter argues, the human being is created at least partly by codes and narratives that are, in fact, human-made. Consequently, she claims that the human is not a mere biological being, but a hybrid being

[41] This idea functions as what Wynter calls a "lawlike order of knowledge" (qtd. in Joyce E. King 361), indicating that it this conception of the human functions as a law that is very much fixed and not up for debate.
[42] Since Wynter, thus, counters the hegemonic system of knowledge, Mignolo describes her approach as "epistemic disobedience" (106).

that is simultaneously biological – *bios* – and cultural – *mythoi* (Wynter, "Unparalleled" 17).[43] This hybrid human is, thus, as McKittrick notes, "*at once* physiologically organic, cognitively responsive, and creatively inventive and, *in this simultaneity*, provides the origin stories through which we make sense of our flesh-and-blood and neurological and cultural claims to humanness" ("Axis" 144).

It is, however, crucial to note that the origin stories that have explained who and what we are have hitherto not been ascribed to the human, but to extrahuman entities or agencies that, Wynter reveals, "have […] *mandated* what the structuring societal order of our genre-specific, eusocial or cultural *present* would have to be" ("Unparalleled" 36). God is arguably the most obvious example of such an extrahuman entity that has been considered the author of the human, yet it should not be overlooked that in the current biocentric model of being human, evolution holds that exact same position. Wynter argues that thinking of the human in terms of evolution and natural selection has wrongfully led us to believe that we are controlled by nature and its immutable, objective laws.

> The paradox is this: that for the 'descriptive statement'[44] that defines the human as purely biological being on the model of a natural organism (thereby projecting it as preexisting the narratively inscribed 'descriptive statement' in whose terms it inscripts itself and is reciprocally inscripted, as if it were a purely biological being, ontogeny that preexists culture, sociogeny), it must ensure the functioning of strategic mechanisms that can repress all knowledge of the fact that its biocentric descriptive statement is a descriptive statement. (Wynter "Unsettling" 325-6)

[43] Wynter's notion the hybrid is, thus, fundamentally different from Homi K. Bhabha's conception of hybridity. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha introduces hybridity as that which is "new, *neither the one nor the other*" (37) – a concept that first and foremost refers to the mixed-ness of cultures and identities.

[44] Wynter borrows the phrase "descriptive statement" from the British anthropologist Gregory Bateson. She uses it to refer to hegemonic epistemologies that prescribe a particular genre of the human.

Wynter here stresses that it is inherent to the humanly created origin narratives that any recognition of the collective production and reproduction of the particular narrative is repressed.[45] She refers to the French cultural anthropologist Maurice Godelier, who makes clear that human beings are enabled to systematically keep the reality of their own agency opaque to themselves through the invention of extrahuman entities (Wynter, "Unparalleled" 36). In *The Enigma of the Gift* Godelier argues that society needs this opacity in order to produce and reproduce itself: "[i]t is as if human *society* could not exist unless it obliterated from the conscious mind the *active presence* of man *at his own origin*" (172). As long as the human is understood through these rules of knowing – or not knowing –, the human is, as Mignolo rightfully points out, "trapped" in that same system of knowledge (107). In order to counter the "systematic repression ensuring that we oversee (thereby failing to recognize) the culture and class-specific relativity of our present mode of being human" ("Unsettling" 282), Wynter aims to shift the focus to the storytelling faculties of the human, which is why she comes up with a new term for the human: "*homo narrans*" ("Unparalleled" 25).

A major implication of seeing the human being as this "hybrid-auto-instituting-languaging-storytelling species" ("Unparalleled" 25), Wynter states, is that, "*humanness* is no longer a *noun. Being human is a praxis*" ("Unparalleled" 23). She suggests that the descriptive statement of the genre of the human is not only prescribed, but also has to be *enacted* by human beings. Here, Wynter explicitly refers to Judith Butler and her notion of gender performativity. According to Butler, gender should not be considered as something human beings are by nature, but as an act that all human beings perform. It is crucial to understand that gender is an activity that is "incessantly taking place" ("Variations" 507) in all human beings; it is a continuous and infinite process of becoming. That is not to say that gender is a performance that a subject prior to this performance deliberately elects to enact.

[45] As will be discussed in Chapter 3, according to the alien species of Butler's *Xenogenesis*, the human has to thank its intelligence for this oblivious ignorance.

Rather, "gender is *performative* in the sense that it constitutes as an effect the very subject it appears to express" (Butler "Imitation," 24). Butler, thus, redefines gender as a praxis, rather than a noun, which for Wynter, "set off bells ringing everywhere!" ("Unparalleled" 33). She proposes to stretch Butler's notion of performativity to all human enactment, for she wonders,

> [w]hy not, then, the performative enactment of *all our roles*, of all our *role allocations* as, in our contemporary Western / Westernized case, in terms of, inter alia, gender, race, class / underclass, and, across them all, sexual orientation? All as praxes, therefore, rather than *nouns*. So here you have the idea that with being human *everything is praxis*. (Wynter, "Unparalleled" 33-4)

By considering the human as hybrid, and subsequently, being human as praxis, Wynter opens up the possibility of a new way of understanding human societal orders. Although her work is very much grounded in contemporary reality, as her reflections on climate change, the market of skin-whitening products, and even Jennifer Lopez demonstrate,[46] these insights incite her first of all to reconceptualize the past. As Scott also remarks in his interview with Wynter, her concern is "to track the 'codes' and 'genres' in terms of which the understanding (including self-understanding) [of the human] is constituted" (121). It is important to note that Wynter does not turn to the past to foreground the age-old systematic racism by the West and the cruelties of slavery. Rather, her "rehistorization of the human" (Mignolo 118) should be considered as a call for a move beyond resentment,

[46] Wynter talks about "the 'J-lo'syndrome" in an interview with Greg Thomas in 2006 (n.p.).

> beyond a feeling of anger at the thought of how much the population to which you belong has been made to pay for their rise to world dominance, and instead you ask: How did they do it? Because, if *they* did it, how can *we*, the non-West, the always native Other to the true human of their Man, set out to transform, in our turn, a world in which we must all remain always somewhat Other to the 'true' human in their terms. (Wynter "Re-Enchantment" 175)[47]

It could, thus, very well be argued that Wynter studies the past in order to gain inspiration for the struggle against the present hegemonic genre of the human which has been dominant since the nineteenth century. Therefore, she examines in great detail the different ways in which the West has conceived of the human and how these particular narratives have affected the ways in which the world is perceived.[48]

Most importantly, Wynter distinguishes two phases, or rather two successive inventions in the history of Man, which she labels Man1 and Man2.[49] Before Man1, the human is described in theocentric terms; the religious order of being is supernaturally mandated by the absolute God and organized by the master code of spirit/flesh.[50] This Judeo-Christian notion of the human as fallen is undermined by "a newly invented Renaissance humanist counterpoetics" (Wynter, "Unparalleled" 15), that conceives of the human rather as a rational being capable to gain knowledge about God's creation. Wynter presents this

[47] Interestingly, in order to move beyond resentment Fanon precisely suggests not to look at the past, whereas for Wynter, resentment is evaded exactly by the exploration of the past. But, of course, the study of the structures and codes of the past that Wynter undertakes is quite different from what Fanon had in mind.

[48] Wynter's intellectual project is reminiscent of the archeological work of Foucault. She takes from Foucault the understanding of history "as the organization and reorganization of epistemes" ("Re-enchantment" 199). However, as will later be discussed, Wynter explicitly shows also the continuities between the different orders of being and systems of knowledge, whereas Foucault argues that an epistemological break necessarily entails pure discontinuity ("Re-Enchantment" 199).

[49] In "Sex/Sexuality & Sylvia Wynter's 'Beyond': Anti-Colonial Ideas in 'Black Radical Tradition,'" Thomas offers a very informative schematic overview in which he draws attention to the many facets – such as human others, symbolic ills, and emergent fields of study – that are connected to each particular conception of the human.

[50] Each genre of the human has its own particular "master code," which should be considered as a value distinction by which the world is divided. Wynter generally refers to this organizing principle as the "master code of symbolic life/death" ("Unsettling" 263).

invention of Man1 as a redescription; for the framework of the Judeo-Christian explanation of the human is reoccupied, instead of disposed of. The idea of the "True Christian Self" is replaced by the "Rational Self," the master code of spirit/flesh by rationality/irrationality, Reason moves into the place of the extrahuman authoritative figure and the matrix slot of Otherness is now occupied by the enslaved people of Africa and the inhabitants of the New World territories.

The Negro and the Indian are, thus, made into the physical referents to the notion of irrationality. This "ill," Wynter stresses, "is still that of a negative degree of rationality, not yet that of a negative degree of being human" ("Re-Enchantment" 182). She argues that it is only with the shift in the nineteenth century – the shift towards our current genre of the human that is the biocentric Man2 – that one becomes able to think about humans as "not *quite* human" (Wynter "Re-Enchantment" 182). The invention of Man2 is informed by the Darwinian theory of evolution and understands the human to be a purely biological species that is, like any other natural organism, driven by its genetic program. Evolution functions as mandate for the organization of the world by the new master code of selected/dysselected. Wynter stresses that, within the logic of the Darwinian paradigm, the supposedly extrahuman phenomenon of race comes to be used as the answer to the question of who or what we are. People of black African descent are constructed as "the ostensible embodiment of the non-evolved, backward Others" (Wynter "Unsettling" 266), who barely evolved from the status of the ape (Wynter "Unsettling" 319). White bourgeois Europeans, on the other hand, are presented as the naturally selected species. Whether or not one is successful in life, the story goes, is to be understood as merely the result of extra-humanly ordained natural selection or dysselection. This "enormous fallacy [and] dangerous absurdity of our present form of ethno-class humanism" ("Re-Enchantment" 205), Wynter argues, only serves to legitimate the hegemony of the Western bourgeoisie as a ruling group.

Since Wynter studies these genres of the human and their corresponding origin narratives from the perspective of the human as hybrid – as *homo narrans* – she is able to expose the European concept of Man for what it is: relative, multiple and human-made. Each genre of the human gives rise to and functions according to its own episteme, a concept that Wynter rephrases as "adaptive truth-for." She, thus, draws attention to the fact that although the order of knowledge is presented as truth-in-general, it is, instead, always genre-specific. So presently, one might think that the biocentric conception of the human and its respective order of knowledge is the only true one – especially since it is built on scientific grounds –, but, Wynter underscores, this should also be considered as an "adaptive truth-for." "[A]s the condition of the continued production and reproduction of [the] genre of being human and of its order" ("Unsettling" 269), Wynter argues, the way in which we nowadays know Self, Other, and social World, is no less adaptively true than the Latin-Christian theocentric outlook was in medieval times.

Wynter's sociohistorical research furthermore elucidates that narratives, even though they are perceived as holding the one and only truth, can shift. In order to create a new narrative, and, thus, as Demetrius L. Eudell adds, generate the possibility for social change (243), the hegemonic genre of the human and its order of knowledge have to be questioned from outside of the adaptive truth-for. Wynter clearly is very much inspired by the breakthroughs that characterize the development of European humanism.[51] In her essay "1492: A New World View," she admiringly refers to Columbus' "root expansion of thought" (19);[52] his discovery of the New World was only possible because he managed to break through the limits of the hegemonic order of knowledge of his time. In this respect, she equates the infamous explorer with Fanon. With his statement that "[b]esides phylogeny and

[51] In the interview with Scott, Wynter stresses that "we have to recognize the dimensions of the breakthroughs that these first humanisms made possible at the level of human cognition, and therefore of the possibility of our eventual emancipation, of our eventual full autonomy, as humans" ("Re-Enchantment" 195).

[52] This is a quite remarkable move, for, as Wynter herself acknowledges, Columbus and his travels to the Americas are very much condemned by non-Western people ("1492" 5).

ontogeny stands *sociogeny*" (*BSWM* 4, emphasis added), he too, Wynter once more underlines, moved beyond our current adaptive truth-for.

Wynter's redefinition of the human as hybrid should be considered as another "root expansion of thought." It does not only discard our current order of knowledge; it also rejects the framework by which the human has been explained for many centuries. Wynter does not want the new imagination of the human to continue to be hierarchically organized by the oppositional principle of symbolic life/death. Rather, she states, "the task before us will be to bring into being a new poetics of the *propter nos*" (Wynter, "1492" 47); that is, a humanist narrative that, instead of being partial – because ethnoclass –, encompasses all humans as a species. Wynter envisions that, then, we will be able to,

> for the first time, *experience* ourselves, not only as we do now, as this or that *genre* of the human, but also *as* human. A new mode of experiencing ourselves in which every mode of being human, every form of life that has ever been enacted, is a part of us. We, a part of them. ("Re-Enchantment" 197)

Wynter, thus, proposes a new universalism, that calls for the acknowledgement that as human beings, and even as "every form of life that has ever been enacted" ("Re-Enchantment" 197), we are all connected.[53] In this respect, Scott calls Wynter's humanism "planetary" (121); Joan Anim-Addo opts for the also very fitting adjective of "post-Western" (251).

As she calls for the writing of a new poetics of the human, Wynter very importantly expresses her faith in the transformative power of language and the storytelling faculties of the human. In the interview with McKittrick, she first and foremost draws attention to the

[53] Nandita Sharma adds in a footnote that Wynter fails to include nonhuman life in her "we-ness" (181). Wynter might indeed not explicitly do so, but her concern with the natural environment is so very present in her work, that I do think it is safe to say that she envisions the human as very much connected to and to some extent responsible for the environment.

complicity of discursive structures to the dominant mode of being human, as she states: "[o]nce you redefine being human in hybrid *mythoi* and *bios* terms […], all of a sudden what you begin to recognize is the central role that our discursive *formations*, aesthetic fields, and systems of knowledge must play in the performative enactment of all such genres of being hybridly human" (Wynter, "Unparalleled" 31). It is precisely through these discursive structures, including, of course, also literature, that the human social order can become a successfully operating autopoietic system. The role of these narratives, Wynter argues, is to elaborate genre-specific orders of truth and to simultaneously motivate the enactment of this genre ("Unparalleled" 32).

In other words, as hybrid human beings, we imagine and experience ourselves through these narratives, by which we, at the same time, replicate the human order. Wynter, however, seems to be convinced that, since we *are* storytelling beings, it is possible – and very necessary – to create a new narrative. She urges her readers to take up pens in order to "collectively undertake a rewriting of knowledge as we know it" (Wynter, "Unparalleled" 18).[54] Inspired by Aimé Césaire's science of the Word that he put forward in the 1940s, Wynter proposes that "the study of the Word (the *mythoi*) will condition the study of nature (the *bios*)" ("Unparalleled" 18). While Scott is absolutely right to also refer to Wynter's humanism as an "embattled humanism" ("Re-Enchantment" 153), her fight is, seemingly in contrast to the violent struggle of Fanon, thus one that is to be fought with words.

[54] Here, Wynter seems to address writers and academia from both the marginal and the dominant perspective.

CHAPTER 2

Unity in Diversity in the Fiction of Édouard Glissant

In *Soleil de la Conscience* (1956) theorist, poet, dramatist, essayist and novelist Édouard Glissant rhetorically asks: "[w]ho has not dreamt of the poem that explains everything, of the philosophy whose last word clarifies the universe, of the novel that organizes all truths, all passions, and orients and deciphers them?" (qtd. in Dash 25). Supposedly, an ultimate explanation that brings together all particularities in order to then offer a transparent absolute, is a dream of many. Curiously, throughout history, most attempts to grasp the totality of the world seem to have placed the human in the center of it all. However, so far, as discussed in the former chapter, they offer severely biased and simplified versions of the experience of being human, that have consequently led to intolerance, inequality, and exclusion.

Glissant, who interestingly appears to position himself among the dreamers, does not need to be lectured on these very dangerous pitfalls. Born in Martinique in 1928 – only three years after Fanon – Glissant has become an iconic figure in the field of Caribbean studies. In his often quite challenging works, he responds to the unique experience of slavery in the Caribbean region, to colonial and neocolonial relations and to practices of racism that together continue to define the French West Indies. His oeuvre could first of all be read as an effort to assert the specificity of the French West Indies', or rather, the Martinican experience. As Britton points out, Glissant counters "the West's imposition of its pseudo-universalist values on the rest of the world with an insistence on diversity and an antiessentialist, relational conception of human existence" ("Globalization" 2). While Glissant's thinking is clearly grounded in the Caribbean region, he also aims to expand this vision on relationality to the rest of the world, most explicitly in his later works. According to Dash, "[t]he world, for Glissant, is increasingly made up of archipelagos of culture. The

Caribbean has become exemplary in this creative global 'chaos' which proliferates everywhere" (23).

Glissant's various theoretical and literary works – if such a clear-cut distinction can even be made – all seem to be driven by the desire to come to an understanding of what "we" share as human beings. He has constructed an extensive network of interconnected novels, essays, plays, et cetera, in which the question of who "we" are as humans is explored. Each work creates and recreates new connections, and as such, Glissant's texts could be said to also formally enact the relationality that, as will be elaborately discussed in this chapter, according to him produces the human. The multiplicity and diversity with which he approaches the question of the human furthermore also exposes the naivety – and/or the arrogance – of the idea that one single human-made poem, philosophy, or novel could explain it all. That is not to say that the dream should not be dreamt, one only needs to be aware that it can only function as an incitement; as a means, not as an end. As Glissant later explains in *Poetics of Relation*, "one who is errant[55] (who is no longer traveler, discoverer, or conqueror) strives to know the totality of the world yet already knows he will never accomplish this – and knows that is precisely where the threatened beauty of the world resides" (20).

Written by arguably the most prominent advocate for errantry, Glissant's novels will thus not offer their reader any straightforward or definite resolutions. Rather, they self-consciously produce, try out, and reflect on different approaches to the notion of the human. This chapter will revolve around two of Glissant's literary works: *The Fourth Century* and *The Overseer's Cabin*.[56] I will examine the ways in which Glissant explores new registers to think about the human and to also include to this category those who have not been

[55] Glissant's concept of errantry is to be understood as a form of wandering that is not idle roaming, nor aiming straight for a particular goal. One who is errant does not know where he/she goes, but is always aware of his/her relation to the other. Britton rightfully characterizes Glissant's way of thinking as "*pensée de la trace*" ("Tribute" 111), which she translates as wandering thought.

[56] As said in the introduction, these two novels could be considered as part of a larger rather unconventional series that reimagines the history of Martinique. Other works that this series include are *La Lézarde* (1958), *Malemort* (1975), *Mahagony* (1987), and *Tout-Monde* (1993).

recognized as human before. Since, as both Fanon and Wynter emphasize, the ways in which people experience and enact who and what they are, are prescribed by the dominant discursive structures that are laid out in, for example, history books, Glissant's project to rethink the human is very much also an attempt to reimagine the history of Martinique. Therefore, it is important to examine how Glissant reimagines this very particular history. What strategies does he perform on the formal level of the text to write the people of Martinique into humanity? And, subsequently, how do the novels reflect on their own representations and discursive structures? In the next section, I will first of all examine how these novels target the dominant mode of conventional reason that, throughout the ages, has been imposed on the people of Martinique, degrading them to less than human. Then, I will explore the alternative modes of knowledge that Glissant confronts the discourse of logic with. The concept of opacity, which is omnipresent in Glissant's body of thought, proves to be essential to come to grips with characters such as Papa Longoué, a seer who descends from the first maroon on the island, and Marie Celat, a woman who has come to despise that everything is translated into words. The final part of this chapter will reflect on the quite unusual first person plural narrator of *The Overseer's Cabin*. Could this "we" be read as an expression of a more inclusive humanism, as also proposed by Fanon? Or is there perhaps more to it?

2.1 Unofficial Histories

The Overseer's Cabin opens with an excerpt of a newspaper article from the *Quotidien des Antilles* of September 4 1978, which relates two eyewitness accounts that describe a supposedly mad woman who is frightening her neighbors. One of the witnesses vaguely refers to difficulties that this woman has had in the past, yet the editors feel free to insinuate – though only in a footnote – that this is "a question of plain and simple madness that strikes

blindly" (*OC* 2). Under the ironic cover that "it is not for us […] to comment upon," they avoid going more deeply into the "repugnant ideas" that this woman is said to be spreading (*OC* 2), and quickly conclude that "[n]o more needs to be said" (*OC* 2). The woman, to whom the editors apparently have not spoken at all, is dismissed in the article as a mere discomfort for her environment.

The main narrative of the novel, which follows directly after this rather biased newspaper article, advocates the exact opposite; that there is much more that can, and thus needs to be said about the mental condition of this particular woman, who goes by the name of Marie Celat or Mycéa. Before bringing up any of her contemporary personal tragedies, the narrative first traces back Mycéa's family history, generation by generation; from her father Pythagore Celat, who is known for shouting mumbo jumbo in the street, all the way back to the day when a slave boat brings the two presumably African Odono brothers to Martinique in the early eighteenth century, one of whom – nobody knows which Odono – is believed to be the ancestor of the Celat's. Mycéa appears to have become the heir to the bitter experiences of slavery and colonial oppression of all of these ancestors. "Unlike those around her," Dash rightfully observes, "she cannot shut out the past" (129). I would like to add that she considers it to be of great importance not to; it is not for nothing that she decides to name one of her sons Odono. Together with her lover Mathieu Béluse, Mycéa has come to the conclusion that the population of Martinique has been "weakening itself by forgetting" (*OC* 162); a strategic amnesia that, Glissant aims to demonstrate, is produced and incited by official accounts such as newspaper articles that oversimplify and, thus, misrepresent Martinican reality. According to Britton, Mycéa's mental breakdown might not so much be caused by the horrendous memories of her family history, but rather by the collective repression of it. She convincingly states that "madness is a state […] of unbearable awareness: people go mad when their vision of society and of themselves becomes too clear

and conflicts too sharply with other people's acceptance of the status quo – whether this is slavery or the consumerist ideology of the 1970s and 1980s" (Britton, "Tribute" 110, emphasis added).[57] The newspaper's classification of Mycéa's mental condition as "madness that strikes blindly" is, then, at the very least ignorant of the complexities of the island's past and present.[58]

The incompetence, or the unwillingness, of the newspaper to come to grips with the Martinican reality, is once more exposed at the end of the novel, when the excerpt of another newspaper article that touches upon the subject of madness is enclosed. It claims that "[t]he problems that emerge [in Martinique] are neither more nor less than the ones encountered in the Metropole. Mental illness […] strikes everywhere and in the same manner" (*OC* 211). Moreover, the editors proudly announce that "our psychiatric hospital is the envy of the entire Caribbean" (*OC* 212). When read in juxtaposition with the main narrative, which foregrounds the inadequacy of the mental health care to be of any help to Mycéa, these statements are, to borrow Dash's words, "loaded with irony" (128).

The Fourth Century targets another form of official discourse, namely History as it is taught in the schools of Martinique. Its narrative revolves around various encounters between Mathieu Béluse, who is then still a schoolboy, and the elderly Papa Longoué. Significantly, they first meet in the year of the Tricentennial – the marking and celebration of three centuries of French rule over Martinique. "1635, the jurisdiction of France established; 1935 Tricentennial of French jurisdiction" (*FC* 259); in school, these dates are drummed into

[57] It should be noted that, towards the end of *The Overseer's Cabin*, an implicit parallel is drawn between slavery and the consumerist society of modern Martinique. The image of the slave boat that appears earlier in this, and also in other works by Glissant, now serves to describe contemporary times too: "[a]s if this country was a new boat at anchor, where they crouched in the holds and between the decks without ever climbing into the masts on the hills. And on the contrary they sank deeper and deeper, every day crammed even more tightly into their ignorance" (*FC* 214).

[58] Perhaps one could even consider this diagnosis insane. For, as Dash quite convincingly brings forward in his reading of *The Overseer's Cabin*, to be sane would be to adjust to the absurdities of the French institutions. Therefore, it would indeed make sense to consider "sanity as defined in contemporary Martinique [as] a kind of madness" (Dash 128).

Mathieu's mind as a litany. He has a little green book of only sixteen pages long that is said to contain the entire history of Martinique. Its rather schematic and obviously biased version of history goes as follows: "The Discovery, The Pioneers, The French Jurisdiction, The War with the English, The Natural Goodness of the Natives, The Mother – or Great – Country" (*FC* 259). Presuming that these are the chapters of the book, each of these topics will be discussed in an average of only 2.5 pages. Apparently, in school not much needs to be said about the history of Martinique.

As a quimboiseur (a seer, sorcerer, or storyteller), Papa Longoué is known to have a different kind of knowledge of the past and Mathieu, who is said not to get any satisfaction or peace from his little history book, is keen to discover this alternative version. Reflecting on the one-sidedness of the official historical accounts of slavery, Mathieu pleads:

> it seems to me that the light all over the world would lack light if we did not have an account of the bargain, for us, for us, not the account of the seller content with his day […] but the account of the merchandise itself on display watching the crowd go by. (*FC* 52)

It is indeed the story of "the merchandise" that Papa Longoué begins with. His incoherent, yet more or less chronological history lesson starts in the late eighteenth century with the arrival of a slave boat that brings the two men who will later become known as Longoué and Béluse to the island of Martinique. As the ancestors of both himself and Mathieu, these particular men form the starting points of the two family histories that Papa Longoué is about to share. Their paths diverge already on this first day in Martinique; while the first Béluse is to be taken to the Senglis plantation, the first Longoué runs off into the hills of the island just

after he has been sold.[59] With this twofold origin, Glissant does not only counter the very limited content of the schoolbooks, but also the idea that history can be "reduce[d] to a single truth" (*FC* 259). As Loichot observes, the choice for a double origin instead "creates a conception of history that is simultaneous and competitive" (*Orphan Narratives* 45).

There is, in fact, actual rivalry between the first Longoué and the first Béluse. Right before they are sold as slaves to competing planters, and before Longoué escapes to become the island's first maroon, the two have a violent fight on the deck of the slave boat. Once their chains are temporarily removed, they furiously start beating one another up without exchanging even a single word.[60] Papa Longoué suggests to Mathieu that this "unleashing of forces" (*FC* 18) is to be regarded as the culmination of a tension, of a hatred, that had been there long before, under the deck of the ship during the crossing of the Atlantic, or even before that. He claims that "they had brought it with them. It came with them all the way across the sea" (*FC* 25). The fierce tension that is present between these two men has, as Papa Longoué's stories will show, been passed down to both their future generations. He tells Mathieu that "fighting was inevitable" (*FC* 143) between the sons of the first Longoué and the first Béluse, which eventually leads to the killing of Liberté Longoué by Anne Béluse. The hostility between the two families is, albeit in a less violent manner, also very much present between Papa Longoué and Mathieu; as will be discussed shortly hereafter, the ways in which they prefer to approach the histories of the two families are very different, to the extent that at one point, Mathieu runs off, thinking "I don't care who won the *fight*" (*FC* 193, emphasis added).

[59] These different paths are reflected in the names of the two men. Béluse is named after the "good use" (*FC* 95) that the planter's wife expects to make of him as a "stallion" (*FC* 94), i.e. a procreator of slaves. With the name Longoué, which the first Longoué more or less accidentally adopts after a mispronunciation of the Creole word *dongré*, Glissant seems to allude to the English "long away" – even though he, of course, writes in French.

[60] For the captain of the ship, this sudden outburst of violence confirms that "he was truly trafficking in animals – wild beasts, not docile animals that could be domesticated" (*FC* 26).

Interestingly, the counterhistory – or, more precisely, manifold counterhistories – that Glissant offers in *The Fourth Century*, is not constructed around the opposition between slave and master or black and white, but around the opposition between escaped and enslaved, or, black and black. Of course white people do appear in the narrative, but they are more or less sidelined. The two white planters to whom the first Longoué and the first Béluse are sold – La Roche and Senglis – embody the oppressive and exploitative system of slavery, yet it could be argued that both of them do not really have a hold over the ways in which their "properties" experience themselves. In the communities that Papa Longoué describes, it is all about being either a Béluse, or a Longoué; the white man is no longer required as the supposed measure of all things. By foregrounding "internal" struggles, black people, who have been only too often considered as a homogeneous group by official colonial discourse, but also by the Négritude movement, are now represented as essentially heterogeneous.

Moreover, I would like to suggest that the opposition between the Longoués and the Béluses is even not as dichotomous as it seems. The two family histories clearly are, after all, as both the chronology at the end of *The Fourth Century* and the family trees on the final pages of *The Overseer's Cabin* exemplify,[61] interlinked by love and marriage. Stéphanise Béluse, daughter of Anne Béluse, is the first to choose a Longoué as her man, a marriage that, in fact, Papa Longoué is the product of.[62] But also the future relationship between Mathieu and Mycéa turns out to be a Béluse-Longoué bond, as Mycéa's great-grandfather is the son of Liberté Longoué, the daughter of Melchior Longoué, brother of the killed Liberté Longoué.

[61] The latter is significantly announced as "An Attempt to Classify the Relations between the Families Béluse, Targin, Longoué, Celat (*OC* 213).

[62] Despite his mixed origin, Papa Longoué obviously considers himself as a Longoué, and not as a Béluse. This is, I would like to stress, not only the result of the persistent fight between the two families. Rather, it indicates that, for Papa Longoué, the paternal family line is definitive for one's identity. This also explains why his stories focus merely on the Longoué and Béluse sons. For an elaborate analysis of the "family grammar" in Glissant's novels, see Loichot's *Orphan Narratives: The Postplantation Literature of Faulkner, Glissant, Morrison, and Saint-John Perse*, in which she proposes "not mistake the father's omnipresence for his omnipotence" (38).

The addition of a third point of origin in *The Overseer's Cabin*, that of the Odono brothers, who are said to have arrived on the island of Martinique well over half a century before the first Longoué and the first Béluse, furthermore functions as a challenge to binary thought. Herewith, Glissant once more reveals binary oppositions to be mere human-made constructs that are imposed on human beings, which should, thus, not at all be seen as true reflections of reality. Nonetheless, precisely because this discrepancy has not been sufficiently acknowledged in the past, the ways in which people have experienced who and what they are have been strongly determined by these constructed categories. As turns out to be the case for many characters in Glissant's novels, eventually "everyone ended up resembling his own name" (*FC* 170). With this remark in *The Fourth Century*, Glissant might refer to proper names – for example of the maroon Liberté Longoué –, but the aptness of it also for categories, such as black and white, is not to be overlooked. In the novels of Glissant, the Martinicans are educated to think of the white world as superior, and the black as inferior, and it is this racialized societal order that prescribes that the black man is, as has been pointed out by Fanon, not human.

Besides countering *what* is told in the supposedly official historical records, *The Fourth Century* thus clearly aims to also interrogate *how* it is told. Mathieu needs the alternative version of the past to be an orderly and linear chronicle; this is, after all, how school has taught him to think about history. The "talks" with quimboiseur Papa Longoué, however, turn out to be profoundly different. At first, Mathieu mostly finds himself sitting in shared silence with the old man in or around his hut, which is built supposedly on the exact same clearing in the forest as where the first Longoué fled to. Since Papa Longoué is the last in the Longoué family line, he is determined to share the history of both their ancestors with Mathieu, who is the closest he has to a descendant. Papa Longoué thus has chosen Mathieu to become his heir, his "young sapling to sink [his] roots into the ground of the future" (*FC* 8).

While he hopes to be able to convey his stories without the use of words, in a way that could best be considered as a hypnosis-like sharing of experiences, he does need to make at least some concessions. Eventually, Mathieu achieves the task to make the quimboiseur speak (*FC* 6). That is, in his own language.

While he knows that Papa Longoué, a man who rarely uses words, "would be put off by logic and clarity" (*FC* 7), Mathieu repeatedly urges the man to provide his stories with some structure. At one point, Mathieu becomes so frustrated that he concludes for himself that in Papa Longoué stories "there will never be a *because*" (*FC* 121). He clearly blames Papa Longoué's disorienting style of narrating for this lack of causality; it does not seem to occur to him that history does not exactly happen in the way as it is conventionally told, which is, linearly and focused on unambiguous (be)causes and effects. Upon Mathieu's outburst, some of the next chapters start with the word "because," as if these are all explanations for the Martinican reality of the present and the past. It is, however, important to note that these "becauses" are followed by what do not seem to be crucial points. For example, Chapter 9 opens with "Because Apostrophe, Melchior's second child, was born immediately after Stéfanise, Anne Béluse's daughter" (*FC* 160). The "becauses" might, then, be read as advocates for the importance of details for the understanding of the past.

Yet, I also like to think that it is a way for Papa Longoué to ridicule Mathieu's beloved logic and causality, for the "becauses" do not really make sense, not in the way that Mathieu needs them to. Papa Longoué even seems to reprimand the schoolboy for his support to conventional reason, when he confronts him with all the details that are left out from the official history records; "the smell for example, the night crew, and the ups and downs on the Senglis plantation, everywhere the terrain changing, the trained dogs" (*FC* 118). He argues that these are the things that tell what really happened, not the dates or the logic that Mathieu is after. In fact, the school books that are to provide Mathieu with knowledge, Papa Longoué

suggests, could only have been made at the expense of what, or who, is not in there. He assures that "you will never know the price paid for every one of the books you spell out from *a* to *z*" (*FC* 119). Although he might propose a totally different approach to the past, as will be elaborated upon in the next section, it should also be remarked that Papa Longoué does at the same time also tune his story to Mathieu's wishes. He seems to be unaware of the fact that "the young man was forcing him to follow the 'most logical' path, and here he was arguing *that* and *therefore* and *after* and *before*, with *why* in knots inside his head, drowned in a storm of *because*" (*FC* 40). The images of knots and storms here seem to illustrate that this path is, for Papa Longoué, not exactly most clarifying.

2.2 How to Not Understand

For the most part, Papa Longoué's stories remain, in spite of the slight adjustments to Mathieu's need for logic, quite obscure. He speaks – and thinks – often in quite long sentences in which he makes connections with seemingly different worlds. Mathieu is dizzied by the flowing stream of words and experiences that is to make him feel the past in all his complexities, through which Papa Longoué attempts to teach him "how to feel the ancient madness quivering" (*FC* 40). No books or registers are required, for, as Papa Longoué explains in an indeed dizzying style,

> the only thing I am able to read is the sun blowing down on my head like a big wind. And the first days, they are up there, a single cloud, almost blue, marking time, you try to climb into the throbbing but those are days heavier and deeper than the underside of the earth, they are hardly moving in the midst of the sky's brilliance, you can hardly see them start off in your direction, then bit by bit it turns into rain, it all gushes down, the day before yesterday is a sigh, yesterday is a flash of lightning,

> today is so bright in your eyes that you do not see it. Because the past is up there all tightly clustered about itself and so far away; but provoke it and it takes off like a herd of bulls, soon it is falling on your head faster than a *cayali* hit by a slingshot.[63] (*FC* 216)

Dash aptly describes Papa Longoué's vision of the past as "a symbolic forest, an inextricable tangle of lives and events where the unexplained and the explainable intersect" (78-9). At points, Papa Longoué appears to be rambling, though, incoherent as his stories might come across, he does always seem to be aware of how everything connects and relates to one another. I propose to think of his stories as an expression of, or an exercise in, errantry; wandering thought in opposition to systematic thought. Papa Longoué clearly is not after certainties, for, as he explains to Mathieu, "the past is not in things you know with certainty, it is also in everything passing like the wind and impossible for anyone to stop in his closed hands" (*FC* 145).

The image of the wind, which recurs remarkably often in *The Fourth Century* in association with the past, seems to also reflect some of the qualities of errant thought. Breezes are said to carry thoughts and sounds and storms blow up into hurricanes when turbulent times are described. The wind is not at all static or fixed, nor can it be captured in categories or numbers. Instead it is elusive, mobile, and has to be experienced with the senses.[64] The first Longoué is said to feel the wind reading its wounds: "[h]e felt the wind: not around him or vaguely over his whole body, but running like a river through the furrows made by the whip on his back" (*FC* 37). Papa Longoué stresses that it is most valuable when the wind can blow freely. That is, if thoughts can wander in any direction, like after the

[63] The cayali is a bird that is also known as the green heron and lives in Martinique.
[64] The importance of the senses is furthermore emphasized by Papa Longoué's curious ability to smell the past; his mother has taught him to remember "[t]he odor of vomit, blood, and death" of the slave boat that brought the first Longoué and the first Béluse to the island of Martinique.

abolition of slavery, when barriers were broken down and, he remarks, "the wind could blow right through from field to field" (*FC* 98). An observation that might have been too hopeful, for Mathieu observes that "today there is no running-wind over the farms, no, it's still prison still death" (*FC* 118).

The elusiveness of Papa Loungoué's stories confuses and also annoys Mathieu. The regular outbursts in which he expresses his frustration with the quimboiseur's mode of storytelling – such as "can't you announce the dates one after the other and quit spinning around back and forth?" (*FC* 215) – seem also to anticipate the reader's response to the narrative. Most likely, when reading *The Fourth Century*, one will experience a sense of confusion that is similar to Mathieu's; presumably, also the reader has been taught to think of the past in an ordered way. In addition to the at times puzzling monologues by Papa Longoué, the reader is, however, furthermore confronted with a narrator whose depictions of the meetings between Papa Longoué and Mathieu are far from transparent either. Moreover, it is not always entirely clear who is speaking and if there is, in fact, anybody speaking at all; both Mathieu and Papa Longoué do not always seem to put their thoughts, memories, observations, et cetera into words. It could very well be argued that, to a certain extent, Mathieu voices the reader's discomfort with the experience of not being able to fully understand what is going on. At the same time, both Mathieu and the reader are, as Britton also states, "being invited to understand in a different way: that the unintelligibility can itself be meaningful" (*Edouard Glissant* 156).

It should be stressed that, as both *The Fourth Century* and *The Overseer's Cabin* think about alternative ways to understand the past and to, thus, offer a reimagination of the history of Martinique, they inevitably also explore how human beings can be understood. Remarkably often, characters in both novels do not understand one another. In *The Overseer's Cabin*, what or who cannot easily be understood, is met with great distrust, or will

simply be avoided. In the early twentieth century, Ozonzo Celat (Mycéa's grandfather) is said to be "tormented" (*OC* 48) by the fact that he does not know the origins of Cinna Chimène (Mycéa's mother), a girl he found under a tree when she was little. Together with the "so many other things he didn't know" (*OC* 48), it is a burden that is not at all easy to bear. But in particular in Martinican modern society, quite a number of people seem to "get out of the road when they see obscure words coming" (*OC* 17). Only Mycéa and Mathieu seem to be able to accept and even enjoy obscurity: "the gulf and lack of understanding brought them together in the same intense pleasure in being misunderstood" (*OC* 179), a mindset that they might have inherited from the encounters with Papa Longoué. It should, however, not be overlooked that they also quarrel about the use of words, which is very much reminiscent of the "fights" between Mathieu and Papa Longoué.

> Mycéa never used words to be in command of things; she felt words would be the school principal still doing the talking in her body. She held it against Mathieu that he did. Because she had come to understand things on her own, things she wouldn't accept having him translate into words.[65] (*OC* 163)

In *The Fourth Century*, uncertainties and vagueness seem to be much more appreciated. Arguably most salient is the moment when Longoué and his former master La Roche encounter each other in the forest. They both have knowledge of the local Creole, however, La Roche decides to speak French. It astonishes La Roche that Longoué does not force himself "to exert any comprehension" and furthermore, that Longoué replies in his own African language. What follows is most peculiar:

[65] Nevertheless, Mathieu is said to be "sensitive enough to feel something going on with Marie Celat that was more than simply the reserve of a young woman unsure of her future" (*OC* 161), an observation that is followed by the remark that "[h]is perceptiveness was reinforced by long sessions at Papa Longoué's" (*OC* 161).

> [a]fter a few quick retorts they contented themselves with the dialogue that was not a dialogue: each one closed in upon his own injury, mutually inaccessible, as if instinctively they were veiling the immodesty of confidence or as if, forced as they were to confide in each other, they were trying nonetheless to preserve their free will or, in more human terms, their self-regard. (*FC* 102)

Although they do not understand a single word of what the other says, they take turns and talk to each other. It should not be mistaken for a moment of synthesis or conciliation; rather, the two are "extremely respectful of this mutual incomprehension in which they found themselves once again interdependent" (*FC* 108). It is a situation in which they each safeguard their own, and the other's difference, their opacity, that is, the quality of the other that is primarily characterized by a substantial degree of impenetrability and incomprehension.

Passages such as this one clearly offer critique on the insistence on transparency in Western thought. When it comes to an encounter with the other, the general urge for transparency will necessarily lead to a reduction of the other to the self, since the other can only be known in the terms of the self.[66] The other is then appropriated, or, as Glissant brings forward in *Poetics of Relation*, "grasped." When Mathieu is said to be "annoyed that he was unable to *grasp* the all-quivering shades and tones of the chaotic, passionate words around him" (*FC* 269, emphasis added), the use of the verb "to grasp" is, thus, of great importance. In *Poetics of Relation*, Glissant notes that, in the context of understanding cultures, "[t]he verb *to understand* in the sense of 'to grasp' [*comprendre*] has a fearsome repressive

[66] In *The Fourth Century*, the former slaves are literally known in terms of their former masters. They show up as a "pounding tide of humanity" (*FC* 177), yet the majority receives their new names from two agents behind a desk. Besides the names of the local plantations, they use the ancient history, natural phenomena, musical terminology, and geography that they are familiar with as inspiration for these names. In the next chapter, I will point out how also the non-human other, that is, the alien species that the human beings are confronted with in Butler's trilogy *Xenogenesis*, can only ever be described in human terms.

meaning" (26). Not without reason, the translator Betsy Wing includes the French word "comprendre" in this statement. In the introduction to *The Poetics of Relation,* she explains that "[t]he French word for understanding, *comprendre,* like its English cognate, is formed of the Latin word *comprehendere*, 'to seize,' which is formed from the roots: *con-* (with) and *prendere* (to take)" (Wing xiv). There is, thus, a sense of appropriation to the word that is, Wing claims, "almost rapacious" (xiv).

For Glissant, it is of great importance that the opacity of the other is registered, accepted and subsequently even appreciated.[67] He explicitly emphasizes that "the opaque is not the obscure" (*PR* 191), a remark that could be read as a criticism to the Martinican people in *The Overseer's Cabin* who get out of the road when they are confronted with what they consider to be obscure and, thus, so it seems, prefer to be ignorant. It is a lesson that Papa Longoué attempts to bring across to Mathieu. He repeatedly stresses that one can never know everything, and that it is not at all to be taken as a failure, a lack, or a weakness when something or someone is unexplainable.[68] Like, for example, the woman in *The Overseer's Cabin* whose name and origin is not known by the people surrounding her. The narrator reassures that "the absence of a name (absent for us) did not plunge her into some impersonal void, but, on the contrary, filled her (in our eyes) with a density full of darkness" (*OC* 71).[69] For Papa Longoué, "what was ignorant was the refusal not to know, which is already like a great knowledge" (*FC* 136).

[67] Glissant's conception of opacity clearly is of a different order than the opacity that is criticized by Wynter and also by Butler. Glissant values and also celebrates opacity, while Wynter and Butler – each in their own way – argue that that which is opaque needs to be illuminated. It is, however, of great importance to note that Glissant discusses the concept of opacity mostly in relation to human encounters, whereas Wynter and Butler criticize the human skill to keep reality opaque to themselves. The next chapter will further elaborate on Butler's take on the human ability to close one's eyes for reality.

[68] He drums into Mathieu's and Mycéa's minds that "[w]hat you don't know is bigger than you" (*FC* 24, *OC* 149). I believe that in both instances, Papa Longoué uses the verb "to know" in the sense of conventional reason.

[69] Note that the narrator is careful to point out that the fact that they do not know the woman's name does not mean that she does not have one; "the absence of a name" is only an interpretation from a specific point of view. The same goes for the "density full of darkness" that they ascribe to her.

The name of the ancestor of the Celat's, Odono, seems to function as a reminder of this. Odono is a mysterious and continuous presence in the narrative, whom nobody really knows anything about with certainty. All that is known is that there once were two brothers who both called themselves Odono. One of the Odono's is said to have sold his brother, but eventually, he found himself in the hold of the ship towards Martinique too. The Celat's do not know whether they descend from Odono the betrayer or Odono the betrayed. In fact, as Beverly Ormerod brings forward, "the identity of the two is forever inextricably fused" ("Discourse and Dispossession" 10). As it is impossible to detach the two histories from one another, it could very well be argued that Odono functions as a marker of inclusiveness. As such, it very much echoes Wynter's new universalism, which calls for an acknowledgement of the interconnectedness of the human.

But, perhaps more profoundly, Odono signifies the inability to know. The word Odono, as Priska Degras draws out, "represents the impossible memory" (617) of the land before, and, as such, it could be said to be an expression of that which is not only beyond knowledge, but also beyond language. Pythagore is tortured by this void, as the lack of knowledge only seems to fuel his need for it. The narrator of *The Overseer's Cabin* observes that "[w]hat remained of Pythagore's torment became concentrated in his stubbornly stammered word […] *Odono Odono* that we all laughed at, never suspecting that the same lightning sometimes flashed through us" (*OC* 30). Odono, although it is of course read as a word, is, as the narrator stresses, "hardly even a word: a sound" (*OC* 7) – a sound that designates the opacity that connects not only the Odono descendants, but all the people of Martinique, or even the entire Caribbean region. Although *The Overseer's Cabin* is, of course, written in French, I agree with Loichot, who notes that "[i]t is likely that Glissant […] is playing with the phonetic resemblance between Odono and the English 'I don't know' or its colloquial form 'Idunno'" (*Orphan Narratives* 46).

It is only with respect to its opacity that Mathieu – and the reader of *The Fourth Century* – will be able to experience Papa Longoué's stories. He is not going straight from a to z like the schoolbooks that Mathieu is so familiar with, but instead he wanders and his stories are, furthermore, full of detours. He could be said to be weaving the stories, like the "nameless" woman, who "wove together the maximum possible words" (*OC* 71). The remark of the narrator that follows, seems to also very well apply to Papa Longoué.

> Perhaps she was teaching us something true about us all: that we had no propensity for scholarly discussions – the béké's daughter would have called them dialogues – but, rather, rushed through a single speech in one extended outburst whose beauty consisted in sometimes breaking up the fabric, carding words that we liked onto this weave – broken ones in saffron yellow, indigo blue, or popping fresh roucou red. (*OC* 71-2)

It is, Glissant adds in *Poetics of Relation*, "the texture of the weave" that one must truly focus on, "and not […] the nature of its components" (190). He seems to suggest, not only with this particular remark but most of all with both novels, that what matters most is the collectivity, a multiplicity that consists not of individual entities, but of relations and connections.

2.3 Struggle with "We"

For Glissant, the Martinican reality of the past and the present can only be imagined in the plural; in multiple interconnected novels and through the multiplicity of characters that populate them. His novels are structured, as Barbara J. Webb also points out, "to accommodate the multiple voices and dispersed elements of historical experience" (49). In *The Fourth Century*, these manifold histories come together in the dense character of Papa

Longoué. In his explicit role of storyteller, he is, perhaps, the epitomization of Wynter's *homo narrans*; he is a storytelling human being whose focus on specificities and diversities could be read as an attempt to create a new narrative that opposes any ideology that intends to grasp human beings in a single definition. Papa Longoué's single voice is, as Dash nicely puts it, "the vehicle for a polyphony of other voices" (79-80).

When Papa Longoué reflects on eighteenth-century gossip about Marie-Nathalie, the wife of the planter Senglis, he curiously shifts to the first person plural. He tells Mathieu that "[a]ll of this was what the slaves knew. Even *we* knew it" and that "[t]hen she had met La Roche. *We* knew this" (*FC* 58). Papa Longoué does not clarify whom he here speaks for and seems to just skip over it, which for the reader is impossible to do because the italicization draws the attention exactly to this particular pronoun. A resolution to the mystery, which Mathieu remarkably does not ask for, is, however, not provided in the novel. This curious case seems to be followed-up nearly twenty years later in *The Overseer's Cabin*, whose main narrative is almost entirely written in the quite unusual first person plural.[70] This "we," Webb notes, "serves as commentator, interrogator and guide through the spiral labyrinth of stories and story fragments" (123), and could, as such, very well be considered to be the protagonist of the novel. He/she/they seem to take over the role of storyteller from Papa Longoué,[71] who, despite his efforts to share a variety of perspectives, could still be said to hold a position of authority – even though his authority and expertise is continuously challenged by the young Mathieu. With the shift to the plural perspective, Glissant appears to intensify his engagement with the issue of collective identity, and therefore, *The Overseer's Cabin* might be said to

[70] It should be noted that, according to Dawn Fulton, "[t]he first person plural certainly has a culturally specific importance in French Caribbean literature, particularly in texts that are heavily influenced by the Creole oral tradition" (1105).

[71] Since the identity of the *The Overseer's Cabin*'s we-narrator is unknown and ambiguous, as will be reflected on further in this chapter, I will use he/she/they to refer to him/her/them. Although grammatically incorrect, for the sake of clarity, this chain of pronouns will always be followed by the plural form of the verb.

explore not only a different approach to the Martinican reality, but perhaps even an improved one.

In his theoretical work *Caribbean Discourse*, which is published in the same year as *The Overseer's Cabin*, Glissant defines what he refers to as the "roman de nous" as follows: "the novel of the involvement of the I and the We, the I and the Other, the We and the We" (qtd. in Ormerod "Realism Redefined" 441). He then adds: "[t]hey tell me that the novel of the We is impossible to write, that one will always have to include the embodiment of individual destinies. It's a fine risk to run" (qtd. in Ormerod, "Realism Redefined" 441). There are, indeed, quite some challenges that come with writing – and also reading – in the first person plural. At first sight, the we-perspective seems to be the quintessential mode for expressing a sense of collectivity, for it has the capacity, as Dawn Fulton points out, to create and affirm intimacy, solidarity, and unity (1105-1106). More than the third person plural – which could, of course, also be used to foreground plurality and to counter Western tendencies "to isolate the individual from the community" (Webb 123) – the first person plural can, as Uri Margolin stresses, describe a community most effectively and convincingly, for it can "let its possessors speak for themselves, 'from within'" (129). The we-narrator of *The Overseer's Cabin* indeed seems to be able to offer an inside perspective, as he/she/they are always more or less part of the diverse experiences throughout history that he/she/they relate. The "we" listen to Pythagore's mumbling in the local bar, he/she/they are present when Cinna Chimène is spoiled as a child, and he/she/they also know first-hand about the story fragments that Anatolie Celat intrigues his fellow slaves with. It is even said that "[w]e […] were in Augustus's eye" (*OC* 67).

Margolin furthermore explains that it is of great importance to keep in mind that the "we" is much more than a simple multiplication of "I's." He argues that it is, in fact, "the most flexible, heterogeneous and ambiguous of all personal pronouns" (Margolin 119). "We"

can be uttered by a single speaker or by multiple speakers, it can include all, only a part of, or even none of the hearers, and it may or may not be actually empowered to speak on behalf of the group. It is exactly this ambiguous nature of the "we" that *The Overseer's Cabin* engages with. The first sentence of the main narrative sets the scene straight away: "Pythagore Celat went around loudly trumpeting 'we' though there was not one soul who could guess what he meant by it" (*OC* 5). Yet, this remark is followed by a series of guesses; first of all, the "we" is imagined to be "this unique body that would make it possible for *us* to begin entering into our spread of earth or the violet sea around it […] or into the protracted repercussions weaving the faroffness of the world for *us*" (*OC* 5, emphasis added), and later, it is referred to as "the countless us that *we* imagine but can't imagine" (*OC* 18, emphasis added). The fact that the narrator claims not to know what Pythagore is rambling about, is not so much a "problem of not understanding words" (*Edouard Glissant* 144), as Britton seems to suggest, but it is a problem of conceptualizing a collectivity, which entails much more than simply using "we" instead of "I". Pythagore's "we," the narrator muses, might be "[a] 'we' that perhaps, when all was said and done, *we* would never ever form" (*OC* 5, emphasis added). The notion of a "we" has, it should not be overlooked, a fraught history; while colonial humanism has claimed to be universal, to include every single human being, in reality, this supposed "we" turned out to be an instrument of exclusion, of "us versus them."

It is quite ironic that these reflections about the unimaginable "we" are uttered by the we-narrator; he/she/they could, thus, very well be read as the putting into practice of Pythagore's vague and opaque vision of collectivity; as a way for Glissant to "write the 'we' into existence" (Dash 4).[72] It is a dual task that is aptly described by Fulton as "the conceptualization of a culturally heterogeneous group that can define itself collectively and yet avoid repeating the stifling prescription of uniformity inherited from its colonial past"

[72] Margolin explains that generally, the use of the first person plural is an acknowledgment of the existence of a sense of "us" or a "we-ness" (128). In *The Overseer's Cabin* this feeling of collectivity is, of course, only just in the making.

(1104).[73] This tension between heterogeneity and homogeneity, or, put differently, the struggle between diversity and collectivity, finds its resonance in the ambiguous pronoun "we," and, thus, in the narrator. Since his/her/their identity is not once uncovered, the question of who "we" is/are is extremely present in *The Overseer's Cabin*. The we-narrator is everywhere; he/she/they seem to be befriended with Mathieu and Mycéa, but are also present at various events way back in the past. It is often foregrounded that "the unspecified 'we'" has a shifting identity; as Ormerod suggests, it is "now Pythagore's drinking companions, now Ozonzo's children and their playmates, now the group of slaves gathering before the driver's hut to gaze at the official announcement of abolition" ("Discourse and Dispossession" 9). This is a valid observation of course, for clearly, the "we" who states that "we called Mathieu Béluse 'Mathieu Celat' – to tease him about what we considered his weakness for Mycéa" (*OC* 161), can, logically, not be the same as the "we" who remembers drinking "extravagant amount of tafia" (*OC* 95) to celebrate the pregnancy of one of the many admirers of Anatolie, who is Mycéa's great-great-grandfather. Then again, this issue of uncertainty might not be one that should necessarily be grasped with logic.

It might be more interesting to observe that, although the we-narrator is surrounded by ambiguity, his/her/their omnipresence in the novel does evoke a sense of continuity in time. It is always the "we" who witnesses events, who knows people, who sings songs about them or comes up with nicknames. Here, the shared voice of the "we" seems to retroactively create a community, as it appears to be capable of "restoring continuity, or, in a sense, providing the illusion that this continuity was never lost" (Fulton 1106). I do not believe that *The Overseer's Cabin* aims to create any illusion of a past wholeness, yet it must be said that both novels seem to want to root the "we" in the network of connections that are made throughout time. Not insignificantly, towards the end of *The Fourth Century*, after Papa Longoué has

[73] In her essay "Beyond the Word of Man: Glissant and the New Discourse of the Antilles," Wynter describes this as the "anti-Universal," which she claims is one of the central "counterthemes" in Glissant's work (639).

passed away, it is said that "[t]he Longoués who had run dry were buried in everyone" (*FC* 293).

Glissant invites his reader, thus, to think of the "we" as an ever-changing and ever-growing rhizomatic network of connections; a totality that, because it consists of relations only, is by no means totalitarian. It should enable the "crazily scattered" and the "separate selves" to "adjust and settle into this belt of islands" (*OC* 5). While skeptical, the narrator is also full of hope:

> we felt there was some hugeness about to burst overflowing from this us, that a boundless energy would polish it into shape, that the selves would knot together like strings, tied just as badly as the ones binding the last canes at the end of the day when the sun sinks into the body's exhaustion, but just as stiff and stubborn as wormgrass when it's gotten inside your mouth. (*OC* 5-6)

The knot that he/she/they here refer to, seems to be an equivalent of the weave I mentioned above. The narrator uses this image of entanglement for a time to come, though, as both *The Fourth Century* and *The Overseer's Cabin* seem to imply, it is a very fitting image to represent the complex Martinican reality of past and present times. Herewith, Glissant furthermore reveals that the binarism of Self and Other, which has strongly informed and shaped Eurocentric humanism, has absolutely nothing to do with reality. It is, in fact, a very biased discursive structure that, throughout time, has led to the exclusion and, thus, the dehumanization of a large part of humanity. Glissant's rehistorization of Martinique, and also his emphasis on the collective and the multiplicity, function to undermine those hegemonic categories and hierarchies, and to prevent these structures to shape reality any longer.

CHAPTER 3

Awakening from Ignorance with Octavia E. Butler's *Xenogenesis*

In *The Fourth Century*, Papa Longoué justifies his interest in the past to Mathieu by pointing out that "today is the son of yesterday" (*FC* 240). It is a principle that the African American science fiction writer Octavia E. Butler seems to endorse too, though her formulation of it suggests a shift in temporal focus. In the essay "A Few Rules for Predicting the Future," she states that "our tomorrow is the child of our today" (Butler, 264).[74] In most of her fictional works, Butler does not so much look back at what has been in the past, but she imagines what may be born out of the present. Accurately predicting the future is, Butler notes, a rather difficult, if not impossible task, as there will always be surprises, unintended consequences and "often less-than-logical" human reactions to them that will cause unexpected detours ("A Few Rules," 264). What we are able to see is furthermore determined – and thus also limited – by where we stand. So why bother with the future? Butler offers the following threefold answer to this question: "[b]ecause making predictions is one way to give warning when we see ourselves drifting in dangerous directions. Because prediction is a useful way of pointing out safer, wiser courses. Because, most of all, our tomorrow is the child of our today" ("A Few Rules," 264).

Butler's works of science fiction are, thus, not merely concerned with the future, or as she herself states in an interview with Stephen W. Potts, with "exploring new ideas and possibilities" (332). Rather, despite the deliberately created distance in time and often also in space to the present human world, her novels are indeed deeply rooted in the realities of the present. In fact, as Teri Ann Doerksen brings forward, "Butler's forte is in creating metaphorical situations that reveal contemporary social and political issues" (22). The trilogy

[74] Note that, in contrast with Glissant's choice for the masculine word "son," Butler here uses the much more neutral word "child."

Xenogenesis, which consists of the novels *Dawn* (1987), *Adulthood Rites* (1988), and *Imago* (1989), makes a fine example of this modus, as it elaborately reflects upon the deeply rooted and very much entangled notions of hierarchy, difference and sameness. The narrative starts around 250 years after humanity has nearly destroyed itself and the earth by a nuclear war – a scenario which does not seem to be far-fetched at all towards the end of the eighties. The few human beings who survived this "humanicide" (*LB* 8) have been rescued and captured by an alien species, the Oankali, who are "gene traders" and have selected the human species to become their new trading partner. For the human survivors, the Oankali are so very different in appearance and in mode of existence, that initially even being in the same room with them is hardly bearable – a response that, interestingly, does not seem to be mutual. The xenophobia with which these alien others are met, echoes all too familiar treatments of racialized others in the real world. "Though the players have changed," Loichot rightfully observes, "the rules of the game remain the same" ("We are all Related" 50).

Together, the three novels portray the encounter between, and eventually the merging of, the two different species. As a new origin story, *Xenogenesis* is in constant conversation with various familiar origin stories that have, as also discussed by Wynter, provided human beings in the Western world with ways to make sense of their humanness. Peppers points out that Butler simultaneously invokes the biblical origin story of Adam and Eve, the sociobiological narrative that claims that social behavior can be reduced to genes, and the tale of human evolution in order to tell an altogether different story. *Xenogenesis*, the title says it, is to be read as the origin of that which is strange or different. Literally, xenogenesis means "production of offspring permanently unlike the parent" (*OED*).[75] As I will further discuss in the upcoming pages, the novel indeed foregrounds reproduction of, or rather with difference.

[75] "xeno-, comb. form." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, December 2015. Web. 30 January 2016.

This chapter will first of all examine how the figure of the human is portrayed in the *Xenogenesis* trilogy. As it turns out, the way in which human beings prefer to think of themselves diverges from the outcome of the Oankali research of the human. The Oankali present themselves as experts on the topic of "humanness," as they have meticulously studied the human species – mostly biologically, but also culturally and linguistically – before waking up Lilith Iyapo, the protagonist of *Dawn*, after many decades of so-called suspended animation. I will explore both the human and the Oankali insights and the ways in which the narrative critically engages with them. Which "dangerous directions" does the trilogy suppose humanity to be drifting towards? As human beings have become, by their own doing, "an endangered species – almost extinct" (*LB* 140), notions of authenticity or even purity still seem to thrive among a large number of them. The blurring of the boundaries that define the human, which, it could be argued, is one of the central motifs of the novels, is by many perceived as a threat that has to be resisted at all costs.

The final part of the chapter will focus on the Oankali. Are their inclinations towards adaptation and change, and their craving for difference to be read as the "safer" and "wiser" course? They surely do offer an alternative form of subjectivity that might inspire humanity, though the Oankali themselves do not cherish any hope that the human species will be able to change on their own. Butler in her turn, is not as pessimistic as the alien species she has created, as she states that "the one thing that I and my main characters never do when contemplating the future is give up hope. In fact, the very act of trying to look ahead to discern possibilities and offer warnings is in itself an act of hope" (Butler, "A Few Rules" 165).

3.1 We Stay Human

Dawn, the first book of the trilogy, opens with the awakening of Lilith, an African American woman in her twenties who has survived the humanicide on Earth. It is not the first time that she suddenly finds herself awake in a doorless, windowless cubicle that offers her no way of escape. So far, most of her awakenings have been more or less similar; she has already become used to the interrogations by her captors, who never show themselves to her nor inform her about their identity or their intentions.

This time is different though, for after a while a creature appears in the room. It is an Oankali male called Jdahya, who says to have come to take her out. At first sight he appears to be very hairy, though Lilith quickly learns that what she assumed to be wavy long hairs are in reality tentacles that function as "sensory organs" (*LB* 14). While she is utterly frightened by the alienness that she is confronted with, Jdahya calmly explains to her in perfect English that she is one of a number of human beings who have been saved from Earth right after the so-called humanicide. She has thus been with them on their space ship for about 250 years now, though they have kept her mostly in suspended animation, a hibernation-like state of being that has kept her young and healthy. While Lilith was "asleep" for many decades, the Oankali studied her, cured some of her ills, and began to make Earth inhabitable again. The Oankali have planned to eventually send some of the human survivors back to Earth. Now Lilith is told that, whether she likes it or not – and she does not –, she will be in charge of the awakening and the training of at least forty human beings, with whom she is to form the first group of "returning colonists" (*LB* 139). Interestingly, most of these survivors were found outside of the Western world, as the destruction of the earth had been most severe in the

Northern Hemisphere. Yet Jdahya assures Lilith that the people she can choose from "will all be from what you would call civilized societies" (*LB* 32).[76]

Jdahya stresses that Lilith will have to teach the other human beings "to *deal* with us" (*LB* 32, emphasis added). This first of all means that she has to prepare them to bear the alienness of the Oankali physique and to understand a thing or two about their existence. But more importantly, as Lilith will later learn, she has to persuade her group of human beings to deal with the Oankali also in the business sense of the word; they are, after all, a trading species. The Oankali specifically value the human's "talent for cancer" (*LB* 22), as they believe that the human body's ability to produce a cancer could, in fact, be turned into a tool of regeneration. The deal, or trade, that they have in mind is most radical: an exchange of genes, i.e. a human-Oankali merger. Jdahya may present it as a new beginning for humanity, yet Lilith understands very well that this gene trade will mean extinction for the human species. Not accepting the trade would nonetheless lead to the same result, since the Oankali have rendered all human beings infertile.[77] Either way, the human species face extinction once again.

As expected by Lilith, the people whom she awakens refuse, just like herself, to reconcile to this fate. Initially, Lilith is determined to follow and preach the strategy that she calls "Learn and Run" (*LB* 118), as this seems to be the only form of escape from Oankali tampering with their so highly valued humanity. It is, then, all the more striking that even before a single Oankali has even shown him/her/itself,[78] let alone laid a tentacle on any of the

[76] Jdahya furthermore guarantees that all of these people will speak the English language, so that Lilith will be able to communicate with them. It would, therefore, be rather assumptive to read this "new beginning" as a chance for the non-Western world to rebuild humanity. But it is, of course, very significant that the humanicide is said to have originated in, and destroyed most of, the Western world. Herewith, Butler marks the West as the center not of civilization, but of destruction, and she thus most powerfully overthrows the West's self-proclaimed reputation of superiority.

[77] For reasons that will be discussed in the next section, the Oankali consider it dangerous for the human species to be allowed to reproduce by themselves.

[78] The Oankali have not two, but three sexes: male, female, and ooloi. The latter is neither male, nor female, and is, thus, referred to by the neuter pronoun "it." Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of this chapter to examine what effects the arrival of this third sex could be said to have on human gender categories. In his article "'The

human beings, safeguarding the humanity of the group has already become a full-time job for Lilith. At one point, Lilith is only just in time to save a woman who is being dragged away by two men. In an admonishing tone she speaks to the group: "[t]here'll be no rape here. […] Nobody here is property. Nobody here has the right to the use of anybody else's body. There'll be no back-to-the-Stone-Age, caveman bullshit! […] We stay *human.* We treat each other like people, and we get through this like people" (*LB* 178, emphasis added). There is no need for Lilith to elaborate; presumably, her listeners recognize and perhaps even share the deeply rooted belief in the human as a civilized being that clearly underlies her words. Whether consciously or not, she overlooks the fact that one does not need to go back as far as the Stone Age to find that human beings abuse each other. In fact, the present realities of the narratives of *Dawn*, *Adulthood Rites*, and also *Imago* (as will be discussed shortly after) do increasingly undermine and subsequently even ridicule Lilith's supposed equation of "human" with "civilized."

Lilith's call to "stay human" becomes a catchphrase for the people who most strongly oppose to the gene trade with the Oankali and, for seemingly good reasons, choose to run away to live a life of resistance once they have arrived on Earth. They can only perceive the rather radical interspecies merger that the Oankali propose, or rather impose, as a violation of their self-determination and a serious threat to the survival of the human species. This resistance to the Oankali seems, at least to a certain extent, to presume the existence of some sort of fixed or even "essential" human identity. This is, of course, an essentialism that is different from the racist and dehumanizing type of essentialism that Fanon, Wynter, and also Glissant explicitly engage with and oppose.[79] In *Xenogenesis*, the human focus on humanness

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Human Contradiction': Identity and/as Essence in Octavia E. Butler's *Xenogenesis* Trilogy," Jeffrey A. Tucker offers an interesting discussion of the question whether or not the ooloi means a move beyond gender.

[79] It should be added here that this does, of course, depend on the way in which the trilogy is read. As I have pointed out before, Butler's fiction can very well be read metaphorically. The speciesism directed at the Oankali could then be said to function as a parallel for racism in the contemporary present world. Consequently, it is safe

operates on the level of species; it would, perhaps, thus be best considered as species essentialism, more commonly known as speciesism. Yet the logic of this species essentialism appears to be one of segregation as well; in order to remain human, it is most important that the boundaries that define the human species are preserved and, if necessary, protected. And thus Lilith, who is perhaps most receptive to the Oankali, also objects to the genetic changes that the Oankali make to her, "even when," Naomi Jacobs notes, "the changes are to her advantage" (97). Lilith is given increased physical strength, enhanced memory, the ability to control the plants that hold the human beings in suspended animation, and to open, close and even grow walls on the organic Oankali ship.

Her objection appears to be two-fold: first, she does not want the Oankali to tamper with her humanness, and second she is afraid her humanity will become suspect because of these alterations. And indeed, immediately after using her unusual physical strength to rescue the woman from rape, Lilith is asked by that same woman: "[a]re you really human?" (*LB* 180). Even though the question obviously annoys her, Lilith must at the same time understand the origin of the question. For later, when she finds out that the Oankali have made her pregnant without her consent and she realizes that this child and all others that might follow will be only half human, she protests: "[b]ut they won't be human. […] That's what matters. You can't understand, but that *is* what matters" (*LB* 248). Again and again, human beings fail to offer a substantial explanation for why the preservation of their humanity is so very important. It is as if the very notion of humanness self-evidently implies value, and perhaps even also superiority. This self-centeredness of the human is also illustrated by the fact that most human beings at first believe that they see human sensory organs and wavy long hair on the head of the Oankali, while in reality there are no eyes, ears, noses or hair, but only tentacles.

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to say that the trilogy *does* also invoke and comment on the type of essentialism that excludes large parts of humanity from the category of the human based on biased and unquestioned norms, albeit in the background.

The Oankali tentacles, their most distinguishably alien feature, remain a knotty issue for most human beings, the resisters in particular. On Earth, the frustration and despair with human infertility has generated a trade in human-born construct children,[80] as they, at least in their younger years, more or less look like human children. One day, two construct sisters arrive in the resister village of Phoenix. It is said that "Humans valued them, fed them, sheltered them, but they did not like the girls' tentacles" (*LB* 374). One of the villagers, Neci Roybal, expresses the wish to remove the tentacles to enable the girls to "see the world as we do and be more like us" (*LB* 375). Clearly without having any idea what she is talking about, she claims that "[t]hey'll learn to do without the ugly little things if we take them off while they're so young" and assures that "[t]hey won't feel much now" and that "[t]hey'll learn to use their Human senses" (*LB* 375). Akin, Lilith's first son and the protagonist of *Adulthood Rites*, exposes all these assumptions as rather dangerous falsehoods. Cutting of the tentacles would not only hurt the girls, as he explains to a more sensible human being – "maybe the way it would hurt you to have your eyes cut out" (*LB* 381) – but it would cripple their senses too. Neci's accumulation of fallacies in regards to the Oankali features of the children, whether deliberate or not, first of all exposes the focus on humanness to be blind and irrational, and, furthermore, reveals the human's struggle, or perhaps even incapability to tolerate difference. Apparently, that which is different should either be appropriated, or expelled.

Lilith describes the human's complex relation to difference as follows to Akin: "[h]umans persecute their different ones, yet they need them to give themselves definition and status" (*LB* 329). Human beings in the resister villages create frightening narratives in which they portray Lilith as being "possessed of the devil" (*LB* 298) and the Oankali as actual devils in order to claim their own superiority. Patricia Mezler correctly argues that "Butler

[80] The human-Oankali offspring are called constructs, as they are genetically constructed by the Oankali.

posits that it is not differences themselves that are foundational, but *categories*. She destabilizes the naturalization process that defines difference as a given and instead points out that how we *deal* with difference is what creates the binary of self and other" (75). Although *Xenogenesis*, of course, focuses on the encounter between human beings and the truly other Oankali, it should not be overlooked that human beings continue to ascertain their superiority at the expense also of their *human* others. Towards the end of the trilogy a resister mountain village is described where accidently, so it seems, humans have retained their fertility, yet inbreeding has deformed all of their offspring. Every single villager deviates from the human norm, yet some are considered more different than others. Even deviancy is categorized, as the man living in a cave outside of the village exemplifies; it is said that "[h]e did not veer from the Human norm in the same way as other people in the village" (*LB* 710).[81]

Let me turn to Phoenix once more, for this is the place where the idea of superiority that the human has credited him/herself with is not only most present, as the incident with the human-Oankali construct sisters illustrates, but also most clearly an illusory story. When Tino, a man from Phoenix, arrives at the trading village of Lo where Lilith resides, he looks around "with disapproval" (*LB* 280). "It's primitive! You live like savages!" he exclaims (*LB* 280). He boasts that in Phoenix they have real houses, that they have built a proper town. Without even examining the structures of Lo, which are actually part of an ecologically extremely advanced entity, he says: "[y]ou should see what we have!" (*LB* 280).

Indeed, when the young Akin gets to see Phoenix for the first time, the village comes across larger and more beautiful than the other resister villagers that he knows. When he returns quite some years later, however, the town truly has become a mess. There is trash in

[81] I believe Walter Benn Michaels is, thus, jumping to conclusions when he claims that "the contrast with the alien makes the differences between humans look absolutely trivial" (654). Surely, as Tucker also observes, the narrative maps racist thinking on to another group, "at a higher, species-oriented, taxonomic level" (171). Yet, Tucker rightfully points out, "the diminution of race and racism at the human level goes only so far in *Xenogenesis*. The resisters divide themselves into villages that are organized around language, religion, ethnicity, and/or nationality" (171). It would, thus, be safe to say that actually "the resisters represent the persistence of race" (Tucker 171).

the street, some of the houses are empty and torn down, people are openly drunk or hiding indoors with guns; fights all too often end in killings. "Phoenix was dying" (*LB* 483), Akin aptly concludes even before he is confronted with the increased hostility towards strangers. It is rather ironic that the people of Phoenix fight and even kill in the name of keeping human superiority intact. As Jacobs also observes, "[t]hroughout the trilogy, those human beings who hold most tightly to their human identities are also the ones who exhibit the worst elements of humanity" (98). As a result, "[t]he 'human' world that we might expect to be posited as the hopeful alternative, the locus of value, here promises little more than a return to barbarism" (Jacobs 101).

The discrepancy between the human's high opinion of him/herself and his/her actions in reality is very significant, as it foregrounds the arrogance and also the irrationality of the line of reasoning of the people of Phoenix and, writ large, of humanity. Eventually, the group of Phoenix' people who aim to destroy what they consider a danger for humanity, which in this case is Akin, accidentally set fire to the entire town of Phoenix. As it is burned to ashes, the name Phoenix suddenly starts raising alarms. This is no randomly chosen name, nor an allusion to Phoenix, Arizona; rather, it is a straightforward reference to the mythical phoenix, the bird that is able to burn itself and to then rise from its own ashes. Butler seems to evoke this image of rebirth first of all to indicate that the destruction of Phoenix is not the end of it; the ideas of the superiority of the human species will rise again. The image of the phoenix seems furthermore to suggest that Phoenix is a rebirth of humanity too, that is, the one that came after its destruction in the pre-Oankali war. Although the phoenix is often seen as a symbol of transformation, here, as also will be discussed in the upcoming section, it should clearly be considered as a symbol of blunt repetition, of the perpetual continuation of human (self-)destruction. One is, thus, urged to reconsider whether it is a good idea to encourage the phoenix to rise again, that is, for the human to stay human. I strongly agree with Jacobs that

Butler "is casting into doubt the legitimacy and even wisdom of the quest for human survival" (97).

3.2 Human Contradiction

For the Oankali, the events in Phoenix cannot be much of a surprise. They have taken their time to study various human beings and have come to the conclusion that the human species is bound to self-destruction. This is caused by what Jdahya refers to as "a mismatched pair of genetic characteristics" (*LB* 38). He explains to Lilith that the first and most recently evolved characteristic is intelligence; human beings are highly intelligent creatures, in fact, the space-roaming Oankali view them as "potentially one of the most intelligent species we've found" (*LB* 39). But the human's intelligence is dominated by the second and eldest characteristic, which is hierarchy. According to the Oankali, the combination of these two is "lethal" (*LB* 38), for instead of guiding the hierarchical characteristic, intelligence has been serving it. This is, as Akin later explains, simply inevitable, because "hierarchical behavior selects for hierarchical behavior, whether it should, or not" (*LB* 501). The human's constant quest for dominance, over each other, but also over any other living or non-living entity, will eventually lead to the self-destruction of the human species. It is a rather serious genetic flaw that the Oankali coin the "Human Contradiction," or just "Contradiction" (*LB* 442).

With the humanicide still fresh in her memory, Lilith reluctantly realizes that "Jdahya sounded . . . almost plausible" (*LB* 39). At this early stage in the narrative, Lilith does not even know yet that she, and also her offspring, will be confronted with a wide range of human beings who all seem to bear out the Human Contradiction. From the first group of human beings she awakens on the Oankali ship and the deformed people in the mountains, to, of course, the inhabitants of the supposedly quintessential human settlement of Phoenix – they all add to Jdahya's plausibility. Clearly, some exhibit the Contradiction a little more than

others, yet, as the Oankali continuously stress, every single human being is held by it since it is a genetic issue. This appears to be most difficult for Lilith to process; though she recognizes that human beings tend to be hierarchical, she states: "I don't think that most of us thought of it as a genetic problem" (*LB* 39). She is not the only one who struggles with this particular element, who believes that the direction in which humanity is going can be adjusted. But, as Akin tells to a doctor in Phoenix, for the Oankali it is crystal clear: "Human purpose isn't what you say it is or what I say it is. It's what your biology says it is – what your genes say it is" (*LB* 501).

The Oankali's biological explanation of the human may well strike Lilith and her fellow human beings to be unusual, it is, however, far from new. In fact, ever since Darwin's theory of evolution the human is increasingly thought of as a biocentric being that is more or less genetically driven – a concept of the human that Wynter distinguishes as Man2. She points out that, from the nineteenth century onwards, human beings have been told to understand what and who they are through the master code of selected and dysselected. The narrative of the survival of the fittest, that is, of the selected, informs the field of sociobiology that is defined by Edward O. Wilson as "the systematic study of the biological basis of all social behavior" (qtd. in Johns 382), and with which Butler's trilogy is often said to be in close conversation. In his article "Becoming Medusa: Octavia Butler's 'Lilith's Brood' and Sociobiology," J. Adam Johns brings forward that, in their conclusions about the human, the Oankali exactly follow the logic of sociobiology. While Johns, in his attempt to clarify what he observes to be the "continual disagreement" (383) about the ways in which Butler uses sociobiology, does present an informed comparative reading of the Oankali view and Wilson's key texts on sociobiology, he wrongly concludes that "Butler is fundamentally a biological essentialist" (383). Here, Johns knowingly supports what I consider to be a rather alarming misreading of the trilogy by Hoda M. Zaki, who most fiercely criticizes Butler for

"her vision of human nature as a biologically-determined entity" (Zaki 242). As Jim Miller correctly points out, Zaki "confuses Butler's position with that of the biologistic Oankali" (342),[82] when, in fact, Butler does not at all adopt the Oankali's view indiscriminately.

As Butler represents it, the biological explanation of the human is a dead-end street. Throughout *Xenogenesis*, the Oankali repeatedly assure human beings that they "can't grow out of it" (*LB* 501), and that they will destruct themselves "as certainly as the pull of gravity will keep their new world in orbit around its sun" (*LB* 475). Evidently, the Oankali rule out any possibility of change through human action. I believe it to be far more likely that Butler imagines human beings to be *genetically* hierarchical and intelligent in order to expose the inflexibility and unproductivity of this deterministic sociobiological view, than that she endorses it. In this respect it is important to keep in mind that, as Wynter also foregrounds, sociobiological thinking is fundamental to the ways in which the human is nowadays understood, that is, as a mere mechanism that is only driven by its genetic program. Rachel Greenwald Smith is thus right to claim that "what the Oankali tend to invoke as biologically human characteristics could just as easily (and perhaps more accurately) be described as the values of liberal humanism" (556). The liberal humanist notion of the human is, however, exposed to be rather contradictory, as on the one hand it considers the human subject to be autonomous and self-determinant, while on the other hand he/she is apparently driven by his/her genes. The sociobiological narrative, thus, deprives the human subject of his/her autonomy and as such undermines also the possibility of human responsibility.

Xenogenesis could be said to offer a demonstration of the extent to which this supposedly purely scientific explanation of the human can be suffocating and even paralyzing. I would thus like to suggest that Butler, instead of accepting the Oankali view that the human being is genetically programmed for self-destruction, is instead revealing that it is

[82] Johns reading, however, could not exactly be dismissed as confusion, since he actually refers to Miller's criticism of Zaki's reading. He, thus, consciously decides to read the Oankali explanation of the human as Butler's.

precisely this way of thinking that is destructive. This is not to say that Butler rejects the idea that human behavior is controlled by the biological. But, as she states in an interview with Larry McCaffery, "[i]t's less a matter of being programmed for self-destruction than it is that self-destruction occurs because we're not willing to go beyond that principle of who's got the biggest or the best or the most" (63). Although the hope for change that is cherished by most human beings in *Xenogenesis* is dismissed by the Oankali as extremely naïve and irrational, Butler also seems to depict exactly this particular capacity as a rather valuable quality.

Arguably most salient is the instance towards the end of *Adulthood Rites* when Akin, who, one should keep in mind, is half human half Oankali and, thus, often functions as a mediator between the two species, declares that he thinks that there can be actual change in the future. "Chance exists. Mutation. Unexpected effects of the new environment. Things no one has thought of. The Oankali can make mistakes" (*LB* 501-2). It is important to note that after having mentioned the possibility of mutation, Akin moves beyond the biological argumentation that the Oankali confine themselves to. He suggests that ecology can contribute to change too and, perhaps most significantly, that also the imagination has an important role to play in the future of humanity, namely, to imagine a way out of the supposed dead-end street. In order to give the human species this chance, Akin pleads with the Oankali to allow them to colonize Mars, where they would be able to live a human life without Oankali interference. His plea is successful, but remarkably the reader never learns whether or not those human beings who accept the offer to start anew on Mars will manage to prove the Oankali's sociobiological explanation of the human wrong. The third novel, *Imago*, continues to focus on the interspecies project on Earth and we hear no more of the experiment on Mars. The title of this last volume is significant; as Jacobs brings forward, "[i]n insect development, the 'imago' is the perfected type" (106). The fact that the trilogy culminates with the evolvement of a new species and not with an image of the colonists' life on Mars,

presumably indicates that the former "provides the more compelling image of hope" (Jacobs 92).

In the interview with Potts, Butler furthermore suggests that if only we come to an understanding of our biological programming, we might be able to work around it (333), to beat the supposed system, as it were. However, as *Xenogenesis* suggests, the human precisely lacks self-knowledge. According to Jdahya, human intelligence not only failed to acknowledge the human's hierarchical drive as a problem, "but took pride in it or did not notice it at all" (*LB* 39). In order to make Lilith truly aware of the danger that lies in this ignorance, he compares it to not recognizing cancer. "But your denial doesn't matter," he states. "A cancer growing in someone's body will go on growing in spite of denial" (*LB* 39), and it will, he seems to imply, eventually lead to death. Jdahya thus seems to suggest that the human's tendency to be ignorant – of his/her own genetic structure, but also of the reality that he/she lives in – is his/her most dangerous flaw.

This ignorance is supposedly made possible by intelligence, for, as Jdahya explains to Lilith, "intelligence does enable you to deny facts you dislike" (*LB* 39). In contrast to the Oankali, who cannot *not* perceive, human beings are literally and figuratively able to close their eyes. Jodahs, Lilith's first ooloi child and the protagonist of *Imago*, contemplates that "[t]here were times when I envied Humans their ability to shut off their sight by closing their eyes, shut off their understanding by some conscious act of denial that was beyond me" (*LB* 547-8).[83] It is suggested that because of this particular quality not to have to face reality, human beings can continue to believe in their superiority, even when reality dictates otherwise. As a result, this allows for, as Greenwald Smith observes, "precise repetition of previous stages of human development with no evidence of learning from past mistakes" (*LB* 556).

[83] Although the outcome of the genetic mixing is never fully assured, the fact that Jodahs has not inherited the human ability to close his/her eyes to reality seems to indicate that this is indeed a malignant quality that the Oankali felt necessary to eliminate in their mixing of genes.

In light of the Oankali criticism of human ignorance, the term "Awakening," which is used in reference to the waking up of human beings from suspended animation, acquires additional meaning. Awakening, not insignificantly written with a capital A, turns out to stand for much more than merely waking up from sleep; it is also to be read as waking up from ignorance, as the opening of one's eyes in order to become fully conscious.[84] The Oankali appear to have selected Lilith as the leader of the first group of "returning colonists" (*LB* 139) not only because she dislikes being a leader, which could be explained as a low hierarchical drive, but, perhaps more importantly, because she might be the least ignorant of the survivors. Before the so-called humanicide Lilith majored in anthropology because, as she herself explains, "[i]t seemed to me that my culture – ours – was running headlong over a cliff" (*LB* 132).[85] She had wanted to study "[p]eople who didn't do things the way we did them" (*LB* 87) in the attempt to discover "saner ways of life" (*LB* 132). Lilith's critical view of humanity and her interest in other ways of life presumably make her highly receptive to the Awakening that the Oankali offer.

On the formal level of *Xenogenesis*, the reader is encouraged to experience the Awakening with Lilith. From *Adulthood Rites* onwards, a remarkable and significant change can be observed in the writing of the word "human". In the first novel of the trilogy, "human" is still written with a lowercase "h," whereas in the two following novels the word is suddenly capitalized. It looks odd in the middle of the sentence; "Human babies" (*LB* 258), "the Human species" (*LB* 475), or "Human beings" (*LB* 645). But has the same not been done to the word Oankali? While it is unusual to capitalize names of species, from the moment Jdahya tells Lilith "[w]e are Oankali" (*LB* 23), the name of this alien species is written with an uppercase letter. By changing human into Human after *Dawn*, Butler first of all reveals the

[84] The title of the first book, *Dawn*, similarly indicates the beginning of the end of human ignorance.
[85] Interestingly, the image of the cliff is also used by Jodahs to describe a man who is about to go to Mars. "It was as though he were about to walk off a cliff simply because he could not see it – or because he, or rather his descendants, would not hit the rocks below for a long time" (*LB* 531).

inequality of the treatment of the two species and, secondly, aims to equate the Human with the Oankali. It is significant that she levels out this difference by capitalizing Human and not, as would perhaps have been the most logical option, to change Oankali into oankali. It is, after all, much more striking for the Human reader to be confronted with an unusual writing of the name of their own species, than with an unusual writing of an unfamiliar species. It is, then, a very strongly present reminder of the fact that the Human is yet another species and not, as quite a few Human beings persistently believe, a superior species.[86]

The Human could thus be said to be levelled with the Oankali, though much earlier in the narrative of *Xenogenesis* the Oankali are levelled with the human. Once Lilith has gotten over the first shock of meeting her alien captors, she remarkably soon starts referring to the Oankali as people. Even when she is still locked in the doorless and windowless cubicle with Jdahya, she asks him: "[w]hat did your *people* do to me?" (*LB* 21, emphasis added), after having discovered a scar across her abdomen. When she is allowed to leave the room for the first time, she observes that "[t]here were *people* moving around in the distance" (*LB* 30, emphasis added). Lilith is surprised herself of "how quickly the Oankali had become people to her" (*LB* 58). Through the regular use of the word "people," which one normally uses only in reference to Human beings, the Oankali are granted the same standing as Human beings. Thus, as Theodora Goss and John Paul Riquelme note, "they have achieved ontological equality" (447) with Human beings. It is, however, also important to remark here that the use of the very familiar word "people" for an image that is unfamiliar – the Oankali – could at the same time be said to exemplify the limitedness of the human language, or perhaps even the human imagination. This is furthermore illustrated by the various human terms that, the Oankali repeatedly stress, can only inadequately describe Oankali features and concepts, such as sensory arms, gene trade, or space ship. In fact, as Glissant's criticism of the word and

[86] As I find Butler's capitalization a rather clever way of foregrounding the fact that the human is one of many species, I will follow her example (for the sake of clarity in this chapter only, and except for quotes).

concept *comprendre* underlines, capturing the unfamiliar in familiar terms runs the risk of appropriation.

Nonetheless, since Lilith and also the narrator of *Dawn* and *Adulthood Rites* continue to use the word "people," the reader is invited to accept the Oankali as people too. The change in perspective of the three novels obviously contributes to this acceptance. The narrative of *Dawn* is focalized through Lilith, *Adulthood Rites* follows the growing up of Lilith's construct son Akin, who is Human-born but of both Human and Oankali descent, and *Imago* shifts to first-person voice of Jodahs, Lilith's first ooloi child. Jacobs rightfully observes that "each volume's central consciousness [is] increasingly distanced from the human" (91), which trains the reader not only to accept the Oankali and the new Human-Oankali species, but also to identify with the unfamiliar.[87] It is of great importance that this "I" is not mistaken for a marking of individuality. Being an ooloi Oankali, Jodahs can only exist in connection with others, and as such he can be read as the embodiment of the "involvement of the I and the We" (Glissant qtd. in Ormerod "Realism Redefined" 441).

3.3 The Oankali Way

To the Oankali, the hierarchical drive that controls Human behavior does not just seem unwise, it is, as Jdahya says, truly alien. Unlike the Human, whose genetic structure has engendered a "natural fear of difference" (*LB* 191), the Oankali actually crave difference in a fundamentally non-hierarchical way. As gene traders, they roam the universe in search for new trading partners in order to merge with them and to consequently be transformed by them. The ooloi play an important role in this acquisition of difference; it studies the other species' DNA, genes and cell structures in great detail, after which it is in charge of the

[87] Goss and Riquelme observe that also the name Akin functions as a means of familiarization. They claim that "[h]is name, introduced without guidance about pronunciation, suggests kinship, if we pronounce it 'a kin,' as speakers of English are likely to do. For us he is a kin, one of us, akin, not an alien, not a stranger" (451). Even though the narrative eventually does disclose information about the pronunciation, which is Ah-keen (*LB* 348), they argue that "we are unlikely to be able to suppress entirely" the old pronunciation (Goss and Riquelme 451).

making of "a good viable gene mix" (*LB* 40) of the two species. Considering their long history of blending with other species, the Oankali could very well be described as "agents of change" (Mezler 71).[88] It is important to note, though, that the Oankali craving for difference is much more than just a strong affinity with difference; they are, in fact, genetically programmed to collect and to combine with other life forms. As Jodahs also explains, the Oankali are "as curious about other life and as acquisitive of it as Humans were hierarchical" (*LB* 531).

Even though it is because of this biological curiosity for difference that the Human species will ultimately go extinct,[89] Lilith will come to appreciate it. She is quite shocked by her first reaction to Jdahya, which she aptly recognizes to be "[a] true xenophobia" (*LB* 23), and also the behavior of the Human beings who she attempts to Awaken does the Human approach to difference no good. Since Lilith realizes that Akin, as a Human-Oankali construct, will most likely be able to experience both the Human fear of, and the Oankali hunger for difference, she explicitly instructs him to express his Oankali characteristics. "When you feel a conflict," she urges him, "try to go the Oankali way. Embrace difference" (*LB* 329).

As the trilogy unfolds, the non-hierarchical way of life of the Oankali that so sharply contrasts with the way in which Human beings tend to organize their existence, indeed seems to become much more sensible and attractive. The absence of hierarchy makes that the Oankali do not know any type of categorization or classification that could lead to the degradation of others; in contrast, they live in symbiotic relation with each other and also with their surroundings. The ship where they keep Lilith and the other Human survivors

[88] Therefore, it might be somewhat imprecise to speak of *the* Oankali; clearly, the Oankali are no fixed species, and so it could very well be argued that *the* Oankali do not exactly exist.

[89] In this respect, it would not be unfair to see the Oankali as oppressors. They have, after all, taken full control over the future of the survivors of the Humanicide. It would, however, be wrong to merely read them in this way, if only because the Oankali are said to be genetically incapable of oppression, as they are purely non-hierarchical beings. As I hope this final part of the chapter will confirm, a more critical examination of the Oankali can actually bring forward interesting alternative approaches to subjectivity.

before sending them back to Earth is, so it seems, the quintessential example of such a relationship. It turns out to be an enormous living and still growing entity which, as Jdahya explains to Lilith, "can be chemically induced to perform more functions than you would have the patience to listen to" (*LB* 35). It provides the Oankali with food and oxygen, it can grow walls and other structures, and it can pass on messages, to name a few. The Oankali in their turn take care of the ship. It is a symbiotic relationship that is presented by Jdahya as rather straightforward: "[w]e serve the ship's needs and it serves ours" (*LB* 35).[90]

A similarly intense bond can be distinguished among the Oankali themselves, which seems to be made possible by their specific sensory abilities. As Lilith notes, the Oankali speak very little aloud, yet there is "much touching of tentacles to flesh or tentacles to other tentacles" (*LB* 57). They use their tentacles to establish direct connections with each other's neurological system so that they are able to directly share their thoughts, feelings, and experiences with each other. It appears to be a truly honest and also intensely powerful form of communication, since the lack of mediation renders the Oankali incapable of deceit or misinterpretation, which could be said to indicate that whatever is shared, will be inevitably transmitted without any distortion. For the Oankali, communication is, thus, always an intimate affair. As Akin nicely phrases it, the Oankali spend a lot of time "living inside one another's skin" (*LB* 637).

This direct and non-verbal form of communication appears to be a uniquely Oankali trait that can by no means be acquired by Human beings, if only because of physical restrictions. This is sufficient reason for Zaki to dismiss the Oankali way of communication

[90] Triggered by this apparent communitarian way of life and by two instances in which Lilith refers to the U.S.S.R. and America, Miller offers a highly interesting Cold War reading of the trilogy. He reads *Xenogenesis* "as the story of the conflict between the humans' endorsement of a competitive individualism, much like the hegemonic ideology of the capitalist democracy of the United States, and the Oankali's endorsement of collective thinking, much like the hegemonic ideology of the former Soviet Union" (Miller 346). Miller concludes – perhaps a little too lightly – that Butler rejects what he calls "the false either/or choice of the Cold War era between Stalinist Communism and Capitalist Individualism" (347), and instead proposes to adopt a more or less middle course.

as a problematic element in Butler's narrative, for, as she states, "[t]his is, after all, a human impossibility, given the nature of our language and how we use it" (243). However, there does seem to be a Human version of the Oankali way of communication, one that has even existed for many centuries and does not require tentacles: fiction. Akin notices this analogy while watching one of his caretakers, the former actor Gabriel Rinaldi, perform Shakespeare's *King Lear*. Even though he does not understand much of what is said, Akin is sure that "he felt what Gabe seemed to want him to feel" (*LB* 408). After the performance, he remarks:

> It's like what we do – constructs and Oankali. It's like when we touch each other and talk with feelings and pressures. Sometimes you have to remember a feeling you haven't had for a long time and bring it back so you can transmit it to someone else or use a feeling you have about one thing to help someone understand something else. (*LB* 409)

Fiction, as Akin here seems to suggest, could thus be an extremely powerful means for Human beings to come to an understanding of that which is unfamiliar to them, and to connect with those who are presumed to be different. Butler even seems to insinuate that fiction could be considered as a cure for the Human's persistent fear of difference, as she makes Akin ask Gabriel the question whether he does also perform for his people in Phoenix – the answer is, not at all unsurprisingly, "no" (*LB* 409).

Another cure would be to accept the merger with the Oankali. While at first Jdahya tells Lilith that it will make the future Human beings "only different" (*LB* 34), clearly the idea is that the gene trade will result in progress for both species, or, to be more precise, for the new Human-Oankali species. As Jdahya's ooloi child Nikanj says to Lilith:"[o]ur children

will be better than either of us (*LB* 247). However, these fine promises of a better future will, as the Oankali must know, fall on deaf ears, for as mentioned earlier, Human beings are genetically programmed to fear difference. For them, the prospect of a merger with the Oankali means only one thing: a threat to the one thing they value most, which is, of course, their Human self. This fear of losing the self is particularly evident in the Human reactions to "the seductiveness of the ooloi, the 'third sex' of the Oankali, who mediate all mating and reproduction" (99). Unlike the male and female Oankali, the ooloi have sensory arms which enable them to directly plug into the Human central nervous system. As Lilith remarks, they can make a person feel most intensely "by pushing the right electrochemical buttons" (*LB* 169). They can either stimulate a single Human being or establish a connection between two separate Human beings through which the sensational experiences of all three of them are transmitted. It is an extremely pleasurable experience, yet Human beings do not at all like the fact that they are completely controlled by the ooloi. Since, as Jacobs points out, these tripling linkages "involve complete loss of agency and a terrifying dissolution of the boundaries of the self" (13), an experience which, she adds, "is more than once described as 'drowning'" (99), most Human beings are utterly afraid of them. Therefore, they attempt to convince themselves that they do not find the symbiotic connection with the ooloi even remotely pleasurable – often to no avail.

The Human fear of symbiosis must be truly alien to the Oankali, yet Akin, himself a product of symbiosis, seems to share it, albeit only moderately. When a number of Oankali adults come together to discuss a certain matter and connect through their tentacles to reach a consensus, Akin finds himself wondering how they do not lose themselves. When they seem to be completely blended, he thinks: "[h]ow did they continue to think at all as individuals?" (*LB* 453). Akin appears to be confused and amazed at the same time when he is brought into such a blending himself. "It was as though two containers of water had been poured together,

then separated – each molecule turned to its original container" (*LB* 454). The Oankali adults explain to him that they are able not only to perceive molecules, but even subatomic particles. As a result, "[m]aking and breaking this contact is no more difficult for us than clasping and releasing hands is for Humans" (*LB* 454). At first it scares Akin – a reaction that might be caused by his Human side – but then he realizes that he is, indeed, capable of not losing himself.

The way in which the Oankali and also their construct offspring can fluidly connect to and be part of a whole without being completely and irrevocably absorbed by it, very much echoes Glissant's notion of Relation, which, in *Poetics of Relation*, he describes as "the possibility for each one at every moment to be *both solidary and solitary* there" (*PR* 131, emphasis added). This is exactly how Akin experiences his connection with the group of Oankali: "[n]o matter how closely he was joined to the two ooloi, he was aware of himself. He was equally aware of them and their bodies and their sensations. But, somehow, they were still themselves, and he was still himself" (*LB* 455).

As Akin is thus reassured that "[p]eople don't lose themselves" (*LB* 456) in symbiosis, it is no longer to be considered as a process that forms a threat to the self, but rather as a means to complete the self.[91] In fact, in its study of the Human body, the ooloi Nikanj has discovered that all along, Human beings have been depending on symbiotic relationships too. It encourages his Oankali parents to have a closer look at Tino's human body.

[91] It is, then, also important to note that the human-Oankali symbiosis does not lead to sameness, like Michaels seems to argue. Goss and Riquelme counter Michaels' suggestion that "in a thoroughly miscegenated world […] everybody would be the same" (658) by claiming that "in Butler's narrative, species differences are not reduced to homogeneity of body types or thinking. Both physically and mentally, the posthumans and their world are variegated" (442). Goss and Riquelme are right to point this out, for, indeed, the many construct children all seem to be different. As Tino's observation of the inhabitants of Lo illustrates, they can be "nearly Human with a few visible tentacles" (*LB* 285), "half-Human, gray with strangely jointed limbs and some sensory tentacles" (*LB* 285), but also "Oankali with Human features contrasting jarringly with their alienness" (*LB* 285).

> Examine Tino. Inside him, so many very different things are working together to keep him alive. […] Even before we arrived, they had bacteria living in their intestines and protecting them from other bacteria that would hurt or kill them. They could not exist without symbiotic relationships with other creatures. Yet such relationships frighten them. (*LB* 427)

Peppers brings forward that, here, the traditional biological origin story of the Human, i.e. Darwin's theory of evolution, is being countered by an alternative – yet still biological – origin story, namely Lynn Margulis' theory of symbiogenesis. Margulis claims that it is impossible for an individual to survive without the close cooperation of others. It is very powerful that this alternative narrative is not only acted out and propagated by the alien Oankali species, but that it is explicitly revealed to be a vital part of the Human him/herself. Pepper further states that "Margulis' theory that many of the microbiotic components of our cells […] evolved from free-living species which later entered into symbiotic relationships, posits a human identity which suggest that 'All of us are walking communities'" (Peppers 54). It could, thus, very well be argued that perhaps the Human species are not as different from the Oankali as they would like to think.

It seems that the Oankali, despite their destructive deterministic view of the Human that I discussed earlier, could in various respects serve quite well as an example for the Human. Their non-hierarchical existence that is based on the appreciation of difference does not require categorization, which means no degradation and no exclusion. When Jodahs returns to its soon to be ooloi sibling Aaor, it speaks the wise words that perhaps say it all: "[e]xamining it [Aaor] would teach me more about myself by similarity and by contrast" (*LB* 656). There is, however, more to Butler's trilogy. Nikanj's discovery and also Pepper's analysis of it, strongly suggest that it is also the Human body that is to be considered as a

source of inspiration. The body's reciprocal relation with difference, which is presumably overlooked or ignored by Human beings themselves, should thus be read as a centuries-old example for interspecies and also interhuman encounters. As Miller concludes "Butler's ideal society […] is one in which the relationship between the individual and the larger society is reciprocal and mutually enriching" (347). This mutual reciprocity, that is also very much part of Human and Oankali biology, is vital for Butler's conception of a new Human. As the key to this alternative has been right under the nose of the entire Human species, I propose to read *Xenogenesis* first and foremost as an invitation, or rather, an urgent incitement for introspection and self-reflection, in order to become less ignorant.

CONCLUSION

The theoretical and literary texts that have been discussed in this thesis lay bare the very real connections between practices of dehumanization and Eurocentric humanism. This version of humanism that all too often is assumed to be universal is exposed to be founded on the binarism of Self and Other, which has in fact systematically marked out a substantial part of humanity as the human's Other. I have argued, with Judith Butler, Gilroy, and, of course, Wynter, that in the globalized world of today a great number of human beings is still not included in the humanist category of the human. The "Black Lives Matter" movement, but also the refugee crisis that developed in Europe during the writing of this thesis has once more painfully made clear that this is, indeed, a very real and urgent issue.

While in the Western world a great number of theorists and philosophers decided to break with the European humanist tradition after the Second World War, Fanon expressed a firm belief in the importance of humanism. He proposes to think a new kind of humanism that is not corrupted by racialized hierarchies and, instead, approaches the question of the human from a transnational perspective. As decolonization has never been fully realized – the deeply rooted opposition of "the West and the rest" has not at all been debunked – Fanon's works strongly resonate with our contemporary world. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon has shown the workings and the impact of racialized thinking on the ways in which human beings experience who and what they are. The colonial system designated white skin as the token of superiority and black skin as the token of inferiority, which leads Fanon to speak not exactly of the black man's internationalization, but of his "epidermalization" of inferiority (*BSWM* 4).

For the black human being, the only way to actually become human seems to be to put on a white mask, that is, to mimic the white man who has, as Fanon stresses, wrongfully

installed himself as the normative human and, subsequently, the only source of recognition for the black man. Glissant undermines this supposed superior position of the white man in the novel *The Fourth Century*, in which the history of Martinique is reimagined by the quimboiseur Papa Longoué. While his stories are obviously concerned with slavery, exploitation, and oppression, it is the opposition between two black men that the narrative evolves around. It is implied that it is most important to identify as either a Longoué or a Béluse, to the effect that the white man does not even enter as a possible source of recognition. It is a very clever discursive move, though for Fanon, the undermining of the hegemonic categories of black and white, oppressed and oppressor, Negro and settler, is quite a different story. Although he repeatedly points out that these categories are indeed human-made myths, for him, the violent reality of colonialism first of all requires a violent response; it is only through action that the black man will be able to retrieve his subjectivity and to come to believe in his equality with the white man. Not only Glissant, but also Wynter proposes instead to fight with words, as this is a fight against concepts and categories that are created and imposed by human beings.

While his body of thought is very much grounded in the colonial situation, Fanon's texts, in particular *The Wretched of the Earth*, could be said to be quite future-oriented. I have noted before that Fanon is cautious to act, and not to react, as he claims that reactions to what has happened in the past will always also entail resentment (*BSWM* 173). Yet, a substantial part of this thesis is concerned with texts that precisely use history as a source of inspiration for action. Both novels by Glissant that I have discussed go way back in time. The family histories that he relates are, however, not exactly presented as resentment with the system of slavery or the colonial regime; as said above, Glissant shifts the focus from the opposition between black and white to an opposition between black and black. I have discussed elaborately how Glissant aims to foreground the complicity of the hegemonic discursive

structures with the inferiority complex of the black man. He counters the dominant mode of historiography that allows for simplified and biased versions of the past, and he exposes state-official newspapers to be persistently ignorant of the reality that is happening right under their eyes. He blames them for the strategic amnesia that the people of Martinique appear to suffer from; a forgetfulness about the past, but also about the present.

I have described Fanon's works as a profound reality check, and it would be safe to say that Glissant, but also Butler and Wynter follow his example. The discrepancy between how the human is conceptualized in humanist thought, and how being human has been experienced throughout the world is well captured in Wynter's phrase "the overrepresentation of Man" ("Unsettling" 267), with which she counters humanism's supposed universalism. In Butler's *Xenogenesis* trilogy, a large part of the human beings who do not want to partake in the genetic trade with the alien Oankali species is rather convinced of the superiority of their own being and their way of living. The louder they proclaim to be civilized and superior to the Oankali, the less "civilized" they behave – they kill, rape, and destruct. The human settlement of Phoenix has turned out to be of great importance to my reading: it is here that the most ignorant turn out to be the most destructive. I have suggested to read the "Awakenings" of human beings as attempts to open their eyes for their own destructive behavior. Or, to use Fanon's words once more, "to wake up and shake themselves, use their brains and stop playing the stupid game of the Sleeping Beauty" (*Wretched* 84).

Besides what is and what is not told, Glissant also targets how it is told. Both *The Fourth Century* and *The Overseer's Cabin* offer a warning against the supposed need for transparency, i.e. to think of history – and, therewith, reality – as a linear and unambiguous story that consists of clear causes and effects. Glissant counters this with the disorienting narratives of Papa Longoué, whose style I have described as an exercise in errantry. Papa Longoué defies categories and fixed definitions, and instead invites his listener, Mathieu (and

of course also the reader) to engage with that which is opaque. That is, to not run away from that which cannot be grasped, but instead to accept and eventually also value its presence. For Mathieu, who is trained to think in categories and, subsequently, in hierarchies, this is quite a challenge. Also the very Western human beings represented in Butler's *Xenogenesis* struggle to let go of their systematic mode of thinking. It seems that for them, that which is unknown is either to be rejected or appropriated. That can be in actions – like the cutting off of the tentacles of human-Oankali children – but also through language – for example by referring to the tentacles as hair, or by using the pronoun "he" for the neuter third sex of the alien species. Glissant has stressed the danger of such a reduction of the other to the self also in *Poetics of Relation.*

For Wynter, Fanon's concept of sociogeny is quintessential to come to an understanding of how the hegemonic systems of knowledge are connected to the ways in which human beings experiences themselves. Her work, and so also my reading of it, is built around what she calls the sociogenic principle. Wynter shows that the notion of the human is produced within a self-generating and self-maintaining system of codes and narratives. For good reasons, she explicitly refers to the human as *homo narrans*. After all, these codes and narrative are human-made, yet human beings have turned out to be experts in obscuring the reality of their own agency to themselves. In order to expose what has been repressed, also Wynter's project to reimagine the human is strongly focused on the past. Her rehistorization of the human is to reveal how narratives about the human have come into being and how they have prescribed human reality and behavior. I have shown that she is particularly interested in discontinuities, or "root expansion[s] of thought" (Wynter, "1492" 19), for these might inspire a breakthrough of the current hegemonic concept of the human. For Wynter, to look at the past in this way is exactly a move beyond resentment.

According to Wynter, the human is currently explained in terms of the Darwinian narrative of evolution. The human is understood as a mere biological being whose behavior is genetically driven. While this biocentric version of the human is presented as a purely scientific truth, Wynter very importantly underlines that also this explanation of the human is a narrative that is created by human beings. Herewith, she creates the possibility to think outside of this seemingly final and fixed notion of the human. In *Xenogenesis*, Butler engages exactly with this biocentric narrative and its dangerous implications. The Oankali have come to the conclusion that human beings are, indeed, (mal)programmed by their genes only. They continually assure the human beings that nothing can change the human fate; resistance, hope, any such thing is considered to be futile. I have argued that far from endorsing this point of view, Butler evokes this deterministic outlook to foreground its paralyzing effect. The Oankali deprive the human of his/her autonomy and agency, and, consequently, also the possibility of any form of human responsibility is undermined.

Wynter's emphasis on the human as storyteller opens up this dead-end street and acknowledges the very agency of the human. The human is, then, what the human tells him/herself he/she is. Therefore, the hope for change is not at all naïve or futile; instead, it is a matter of taking responsibility for creating new narratives. In other words, the potential of the concept of the human lies exactly in his/her capacity to narrate him/herself. And so also literature has a prominent role to play in the imagining of a new human and a new humanism. It is, thus, rather significant that the central figure of Glissant's *The Fourth Century*, Papa Longoué, is a storyteller by profession. Also *Xenogenesis* reflects on the possibilities of narratives, specifically fiction. It is suggested that fiction enables human beings to connect and to share with that which is different and, as such, it is presented as a cure for xenophobia. It is, furthermore, important to note that also Fanon calls for invention (*BSWM* 179).

That is not to say that we should all start inventing fictions in order to deal with reality; rather, Fanon, Wynter, Glissant, and Butler stress the importance to take a better look at the actual reality, which does not consist of categories, fixed definitions and homogenous groups. Glissant's focus on specificities and diversity serves to counter the very ideology that intends to grasp human beings in a single category, to reduce them to a single truth. The true universalism that also both Wynter and Fanon strive for will necessarily have to be heterogeneous; a collective of interconnected lives. While traditional Eurocentric humanism could be said to evolve around the rational individual, the new humanisms that have been discussed in this thesis, all aim to conceptualize the collective. In *Xenogenesis*, the Oankali serve as a classic example of a collective existence in which individuals are strongly interdependent; they live in mutual reciprocity with each other and their environment and are able to directly share their thoughts and feelings. Butler seems to sooth those human beings (in the narrative, but presumably also the reader) who are frightened by this symbiotic way of life, who fear to be absorbed by the whole. In order to put things in perspective here, Butler again looks at reality, and foregrounds that the human body is to be considered as symbiotic too, as it actually is in need of difference. The boundaries that are said to define the human are, thus, not at all fixed.

Glissant experiments with the voice of collectivity. In *The Fourth Century*, he installs Papa Longoué as the voice of many, though when he shifts to the less authoritative first person plural perspective in *The Overseer's Cabin*, he appears to intensify his critical engagement with the collective. I have stressed that this "we" reflects both a notion of continuity and discontinuity. Far from a marker of uniformity, the "we" turns out to be an utterly ambiguous and potentially heterogeneous pronoun, which does not at all absorb every single individual. Rather, the various "we's" are to be read as the nodes of a necessarily ever-growing and ever-changing network of connections and relations that spans over time. The

following quote says it all: “The Longoué’s who had run dry were buried in everyone” (*FC* 293). One is, thus, always related in and to the past, the present, and the future.

Most of the texts that have been discussed in this thesis are to be read as networks themselves. I have pointed out that the novels by Glissant are part of a series of interconnected novels, that Wynter’s texts are to be considered as ever-expanding networks, and that also Fanon engages with various other texts. Inevitably, the connections I have made in this thesis comprise only a part of the network; other connections are still to be made. Although Wynter appears to be right to suggest that every contemporary struggle, whether it relates to race, gender, or even issues of global warming, are ultimately a struggle of the humanist concept of Man versus the actual human, I have approached the question of the human obviously through the issue of race. An approach to the question, with these particular texts, through the issue of gender, could, of course, offer very interesting and necessary insights too. Given the focus of this thesis, I have only shortly reflected on the paternalistic outlook of Papa Longoué, I have unfortunately had to pass over the significance of the third sex and the female protagonist in Butler, and I have not even been able to touch upon the role of gender in Wynter and Fanon.

Another and, to my opinion perhaps more pressing connection that is made in both the novels of Glissant and the trilogy of Butler, is the relation of the human to his/her natural surroundings and relation to other life forms. For Butler, the Human – capitalized, just like the Oankali alien species – is just another species who is to accept that he/she lives in a what could be considered posthuman world. As said before, the Oankali set the example: they are connected with all other life forms, like the ecological “space ship” whose needs they serve and who, in their turn, serves the need of the Oankali. In Glissant, nature is, like the “we,” another continuity through time. When leaves are said to “let us in on all the details” (*OC* 73), it becomes very clear that the Martinican landscape could also be considered as a very

prominent character in the woven narratives. While also here, Butler and Glissant seem to, at first sight, be rather different, it could be very interesting to compare how ecology informs who and what we are as human beings in both their works. Yet, I very much like to think that this thesis has been a very necessary first step for such further readings. For, and this is a quote that has inspired me throughout the writing of this thesis, "[h]aving a bit of earth amounts to nothing when the earth as a whole does not belong to everyone" (*FC* 252).

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