Jane Hiddleston

Decolonising the Intellectual: Politics, Culture and Humanism at the End of the French Empire. Liverpool: University of Liverpool Press, 2014. viii + 280 pp. (Cloth £70.00)

Thinking across conventional geographic boundaries, this study examines politically engaged writers from Senegal (Léopold Senghor), Martinique (Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon), and Algeria (Jean El-Mohoub Amrouche, Mouloud Feraoun, Kateb Yacine) during decolonization. It is a welcome addition to scholarship on colonial thinkers that does not only attend to expressions of cultural difference or revolutionary separation. Chapters on these individuals are independent essays that are thematically linked by common questions regarding intellectuals and masses, politics and literature, and ethics and politics. Throughout, Jane Hiddleston examines their attempts to rework dominant European conceptions of humanism, beyond the binary between cultural specificity and universal humanity, in the service of anticolonial struggle. She intervenes in current scholarly debates about these Francophone writers and usefully places them in dialogue with canonical philosophers and recent theorists.

The case studies offer rich insights into these writers' difficult engagements with humanism. Notable are: Senghor's insistence that Negritude is less a fixed identity than a (black-African) way of being and living like a human, and his efforts to align human solidarity to solidarity with the natural environment; Césaire's poetic attempt to develop a dynamic, relational, and ethical form of humanism grounded in creative action and worldly interaction; Fanon's extension of this ethical orientation to alterity through a humanism founded on immediacy, embodiment, and lived experience, and rooted in a dynamic national culture and consciousness; Fanon's slippages between humanism and masculinism; Amrouche's dream of being a "universal Algerian," mediating between cultures, fostering dialogue among adversaries, and affirming Algerian pluralism; the concern he shared with Senghor to link cultural rootedness, humanist intersection, and Christian redemption; Feraoun's attempt to bear witness to the everyday violence of the Algerian War in realist diaries that express an ethical humanism based on common suffering, which is compared to Albert Camus's position; and the political implications of Kateb's use of literary opacity and the role of circularity and repetition in his work.

These exciting and promising lines of inquiry, however, are frequently overshadowed by Hiddleston's insistence on tensions between these intellectuals' confident political or ideological assertions concerning unity, solidarity, cultural synthesis, and a new humanism and their literary expressions of solitude,

alienation, or anguish; their commitment to being political or cultural spokespeople and their detachment from ordinary people in whose name they wish to speak; and their faith in the transformative power of language and their literary confessions of doubt or failure concerning this power. It is commendable that she attends directly to tensions and struggles in these writers' lives and texts. But by reprising, without qualification, these worn tropes of alienation and detachment the book risks reverting to the scholarly space beyond which its best insights point. This old story about deracinated intellectuals caught between worlds tends to decontextualize and homogenize these distinctly situated actors. It shifts the focus from worldly dilemmas to individual experiences, distracts attention from the political specificity of their intellectual interventions and the intellectual specificity of their political engagements, and reproduces dubious notions of class and cultural authenticity. It also affirms conventional assumptions about politics as public, referential, popular, and instrumental, and aesthetics as private, subjective, rarefied, and abstract. Aren't such literary texts valuable precisely insofar as they stage, and struggle with, real problems of cultural specificity and human solidarity that could only be pursued through and beyond decolonization, rather than solved textually?

These points about alienation and failure would be more effective if Hiddleston had developed their significance for her claims about intellectuals and anticolonial humanism. Given the book's framing as a study of "the dilemmas and innovation of the francophone intellectual ... in the dying years of empire" (p. 1), it would be useful to hear more directly about how intellectuals and literature might illuminate decolonization differently and how francophone postcolonial writers during decolonization might illuminate (postwar) intellectuals or thought differently. In contrast to her thoughtful reflections on humanity and humanism, she does not reflect explicitly on decolonization and we never do learn what she means by "decolonising the intellectual."

Hiddleston concludes, importantly, that these intellectuals "continue to address us now" (p. 260). She draws insightful connections between their efforts to rework humanism and recent writings by Jean-Luc Nancy on being-singular-plural and Judith Butler on shared vulnerability. But rather than develop these connections, or the implications and grounds of such comparison, she discusses how humanity has reappeared in current debates about human-animal and human-natural relations. These are interesting issues that she treats thoughtfully, connecting them loosely to these Francophone intellectuals' relational thinking. But she does not link their specific postwar engagements to ongoing political attempts to reconcile rooted belonging or cultural specificity to long-distance solidarity or planetary politics. Doing so might have further

challenged the common assumption that these intellectuals grappled primarily with local, particular, or personal predicaments, but were not themselves global thinkers of their world or ours.

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