

Seven

The Otherwise Modern

Caribbean Lessons from the Savage Slot

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“Modernity” is a murky term that belongs to a family of words we may label “North Atlantic universals.” By that, I mean words inherited from what we now call the West—which I prefer to call the North Atlantic, not only for the sake of geographical precision—that project the North Atlantic experience on a universal scale that they have helped to create. North Atlantic universals are particulars that have gained a degree of universality, chunks of human history that have become historical standards. Words such as “development,” “progress,” “democracy,” and indeed the “West” itself are exemplary members of that family which contracts or expands according to contexts and interlocutors.¹

North Atlantic universals so defined are not merely descriptive or referential. They do not describe the world; they offer visions of the world. While they appear to refer to things as they exist, rooted in a particular history, they are evocative of multiple layers of sensibilities, persuasions, cultural assumptions, and ideological choices tied to that localized history. They come to us loaded with aesthetic and stylistic sensibilities, religious and philosophical persuasions; cultural assumptions that range from what it means to be a human being to the proper relationship between humans and the natural world; and ideological choices that range from the nature of the political to its possibilities of transformation. To be sure, there is no unanimity within the North Atlantic itself on any of these issues, but there is a shared history of how these issues have been and should be debated, and these words carry that history. Yet since they are projected as universals, they deny their localization, the sensibilities, and the history from which they spring.

Thus, North Atlantic universals are always prescriptive inasmuch as they always suggest, even if implicitly, a correct state of affairs—what is good, what is just, what is desirable—not only what is, but what should be. Indeed, that prescription is inherent in the very projection of a historically limited experience—that of the North Atlantic—on the world stage. Thus also, North Atlantic universals are always seductive, at times even irresistible, exactly because they manage, in that projection, to hide their specific—localized, North Atlantic, and thus parochial—historical location.

The ability to project universal relevance while hiding the particularities of their marks and origins makes North Atlantic universals as hard to conceptualize as they are seductive to use. Indeed, the more seductive these words become, the harder it is to specify what they actually stand for, since part of the seduction resides in that capacity to project clarity while remaining ambiguous. Even if we believe that concepts are merely words—a questionable assumption (Trouillot 2002), a quick perusal of the popular press in any European language demonstrates that North Atlantic universals are murky references: they evoke rather than define. More seriously, attempts to conceptualize them in the scholarly literature reveal little unanimity about their scope, let alone denotation (Knauff, this volume; Gaonkar 1999; Dussel 1993).

This chapter therefore is quite ambivalent about the extent to which modernity can be fully conceptualized. Yet at the same time, it would be disingenuous not to acknowledge that the word “modernity” evokes sensibilities, perceptions, choices, and indeed states of affairs that are not captured as easily by other words. Thus, my aim here is less to provide a conceptualization of modernity—or an illustration based on a shared conceptualization—than to bring to the table some issues we should discuss on our way to such conceptual attempts, and to evaluate both their terms and feasibility. If the seduction of North Atlantic universals has to do with their power to silence their own history, then our most immediate task is the unearthing of such silences. Only after bringing such silences to the fore will we know if and when claims to universal relevance and descriptive objectivity vanish into thin air.

This chapter thus argues that in its most common deployments as a North Atlantic universal, modernity disguises and misconstrues the many Others that it creates. A critical assessment of modernity must start with the revelation of its hidden faces. I set the ground by contrasting modernity and modernization as distinct and yet necessarily entangled. The global expansion of the North Atlantic juxtaposes a geography of imagination and a geography of management that are both distinctive and intertwined. Modernity and modernization overlap and

contradict one another as epitomes of these two geographies. Then, I suggest that as a moment of a geography of imagination, modernity is necessarily plural. It is structurally plural: it requires an alterity, a referent outside of itself—a pre- or nonmodern in relation to which the modern takes its full meaning. It is historically plural: it did produce that alterity through both the management and the imaginary projection of various populations within—and especially outside—the North Atlantic. Yet the case of the Caribbean at the time of slavery shows that many of the features associated with North Atlantic modernity could actually be found in areas thought to be pre- or nonmodern. The point is not to insist that the Antilles or other regions of the world were as modern as Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—though a legitimate argument can be made along those lines (Mintz 1971a, 1998). Rather, if my sketchy narrative about the Caribbean holds true, it suggests much less the need to rewrite Caribbean history than the necessity to question the story that the North Atlantic tells about itself.

Management of Imagination

From their joint beginnings in the late Renaissance to the recent dislocations attributed to globalization, the development of world capitalism and the cultural, ideological, and political expansion of the North Atlantic can be read through two different sets of lenses, two related mappings, two intertwined yet distinct geographies: a geography of imagination and a geography of management. Modernity and modernization each call to mind one of these two geographies and their necessary coexistence.

Commenting on the cultural domination of the North Atlantic, Martinican writer Edouard Glissant writes: “The West is not in the West. It is a project, not a place” (1992:2). Indeed, the geography of imagination inherent in that project did not need the concreteness of *place*. Rather, it emphasized *space*. More precisely, it required from the beginning two complementary spaces, the Here and the Elsewhere, which premised one another and were conceived as inseparable (Trouillot 1991). Yet inasmuch as Renaissance imagination entailed a universal hierarchy, control and order were also premised in the enterprise. So was colonization. That is to say, the geography of imagination went hand in hand with a geography of management, the elaboration and implementation of procedures and institutions of control both at home and abroad. That the two maps so produced do not fully overlap should not surprise us. Indeed, it is in the very disjuncture between these two geographies that we are likely to identify processes most relevant to the joint production

of sameness and difference that characterizes the dual expansion of the North Atlantic and of world capitalism.

As moments and aspects within the development of world capitalism, yet figures within two distinctive geographies, modernity and modernization are thus both discrete and intertwined. Thus, a rigid distinction between societal modernization and cultural modernity can be misleading (Gaonkar 1999:1), especially when it couches them as separate historical developments that can be each judged on its own terms. The distinction remains useful only if we keep in mind that the bundle of facts and processes we can package under one label was at any moment of world history, *as a package*, a condition of possibility of the processes and phenomena that we cover with the second label. Better, the distinction becomes necessary inasmuch as it illuminates specific historical moments and processes.

To speak of modernization is to put the accent on the material and organizational features of world capitalism in specific locales. It is to speak of that geography of management, of these aspects of the development of world capitalism that reorganize space for explicitly political or economic purposes. We may note among the continuities and markers along that line the French Revolution as a moment in the modernization of the state—that is, a reorganization of space for political management. We may read the English Industrial Revolution as a moment in the reorganization of labor relations—here again a reorganization of space, primarily for economic purposes. Similarly, the wave of decolonization after World War II can be read as a moment in the modernization of the interstate system—one more moment of reorganization of space on a world scale, one that provides a new geography of management. Finally, and closer to our times, what we now call globalization—and which we too often reduce to a concoction of fads and slogans—inheres in a fundamental change in the spatiality of capital (Trouillot 2001a). In short, modernization has everything to do with political economy, with a geography of management that creates *places*: a place called France, a place called the third world, a place called the market, a place called the factory or, indeed, a workplace.

If modernization has to do with the creation of place as a relation within a definite space, modernity has to do with the projection of that place—the local—against a spatial background that is theoretically unlimited. To put it differently, modernity has to do not only with the relationship between place and space but also with the relation between place and time. For in order to prefigure the theoretically unlimited space—as opposed to the space within which management occurs—one needs to relate place to time, or, better said, to address a unique tempo-

rality, that is, the position of the subject located in that place. Thus, modernity has to do with these aspects and moments in the development of world capitalism that require the projection of the individual or collective subject against both space and time. It has to do with historicity.

I will further expand on that argument by discussing the work of Reinhart Koselleck (1985) and by discussing features of Caribbean history. For now, we may note as markers of modernity historical moments that both localized the individual or collective subject while opening its spatial and temporal horizons and multiplying its outside references. The invention of private life in the Renaissance and the accompanying features noted by Chartier (1993) and others, such as the spread of silent reading, of personal journals, of private libraries, the translation of the Bible in vernacular languages, the invention of the nation and national histories, and the proclamation of the United States Bill of Rights, can all be read as key moments in the spread of modernity. Closer to our times, the global production of desire, spurred by the unification of the world market for consumer goods (Trouillot 2001a), expands further the geography of imagination of which modernity is part.

This last example is telling. That this global production of desire, as a moment of modernity, parallels globalization as a moment in the spatial history—and thus the management—of capital does suggest that although modernity and modernization should not be confused, they are inherently intertwined. Indeed, one could take the two lists of markers that I have just suggested, extend them appropriately, and draw lines across them that spell out this inextricability. From the printing press to silent reading, from the political rise of the bourgeoisie to the expansion of individual rights, from the elusiveness of finance capital to the elusiveness of global desires, the geography of management and the geography of imagination are intertwined. Just as the imaginary projection of the West constantly refuels managerial projects of modernization, so is modernization itself a condition of possibility of modernity.

Historicity and Alterity: The Modern as Heterology

As part of the geography of imagination that constantly recreates the West, modernity always required an Other and an Elsewhere. It was always plural, just like the West was always plural. This plurality is inherent in modernity itself, both structurally and historically. Modernity as a structure requires an other, an alter, a native—indeed, an alter-native.

Modernity as a historical process also created this alter ego, as modern as the West, yet otherwise modern.

If we follow the line of argument drawn from Reinhart Koselleck (1985) that modernity implies first and foremost a fundamental shift in regimes of historicity, most notably the perception of a past radically different from the present and the perception of a future that becomes both attainable (because secular) and yet indefinitely postponed (because removed from eschatology), we come to the conclusion that modernity requires a localization of space. Koselleck does not reach that conclusion himself, yet those of us who claim that modernity requires a geography of imagination (Mudimbe 1988; Trouillot 1991) are not necessarily at odds with his analysis. For as soon as one draws a single line that ties past, present, and future, and yet insists on their distinctiveness, one must inevitably place actors along that line. In other words, not everyone can be at the same point along that line. Some become more advanced than others. From the viewpoint of anyone anywhere in that line, others are somewhere else, ahead or behind. Being behind suggests in and of itself an elsewhere that is both in and out of the space defined by modernity—*out* to the extent that these others have not yet reached that place where judgment occurs, and *in* to the extent that the place they now occupy can be perceived from that other place within the line. To put it this way is first to note the relation between modernity and the ideology of progress (Dussel 1993), between modernity and modernism, but there is more to the argument.

In his treatment of modernity, Koselleck insists upon historicity—that is, in part, a relation to time of which the chronologization, the periodization, the distanciation, the increasing speed and range of affective relations from hope to anxiety help to create a new regime. But if he is correct, as I believe he is, this new regime of historicity requires also a localization of its subject. Time here creates space. Or more precisely, Koselleck's historicity necessitates a locale, a *lieu* from which springs this relation to time. Yet, by definition, the inscription of a *lieu* requires an Elsewhere—a space of and for the Other. That this space can be—indeed, often is—imaginary merely suggests that there may be more continuities than we think between the geography of imagination of the Renaissance and that of the Enlightenment.

Within that geography, elaborations of a state of nature in Hobbes, Locke, or Rousseau, as varied as they indeed are between and across these authors, emerge as alternative modernities—places, locales against which we can read what it means to be modern. Rousseau is the clearest on this for two reasons. First, he is not a modernist. He does not

believe in either the inevitability or the desirability of linear progress. Indeed, critics wrongly accuse him of naïveté vis-à-vis the noble savage and earlier stages of human history. Second, that critique notwithstanding, Rousseau explicitly posits his state of nature as a structural and theoretical necessity of which the historical reality is largely irrelevant. He needs that fictional time to mark his own space as a modern one. Later observers will be less perceptive. Indeed, as the line that ties past, present, and future gets more acute and more relevant, as both the momentum behind it and the goal to which it aspires become clearer—otherwise said, as teleology replaces eschatology—from Condorcet to Kant and from Hegel to Marx, the place assigned to the Other may fall not only within the line but also *off* the line. Hegel’s dismissal of Africa and Marx’s residual “Asiatic” mode of production—maybe his most unthought category—are exemplars of a hierarchy of spaces created through a relation to time. Not only does progress and its advance leave some people “behind” (an elsewhere from within), but increasing chunks of humanity fall off its course (an elsewhere on the outside but that can only be perceived from within). In short, the temporal-historical regime that Koselleck associates with modernity creates multiple spaces for the Other.

If that is so, modernity necessitates various readings of alterity, what Michel de Certeau calls an heterology. The claim that someone—someone else—is modern is structurally and necessarily a discourse on the Other, since the intelligibility of that position—what it means to be modern—requires a relation to otherness. The modern is that subject which measures any distance from itself and redeploys it against an unlimited space of imagination. That distance inhabits the perspectival look to and from the painted subject in Raphaël or Titian’s portraits. It fueled the quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns in Louis XIV’s France. It is crucial to Baudelaire’s (re)definition of modern art and poetry as both recognition and rejection of time.

Baudelaire’s Shadow

Idiosyncratic as it may, the case of Baudelaire suggests in miniature the range of silences that we need to uncover for a critical assessment of modernity that would throw light on its hidden faces. As is well known, Baudelaire had just turned twenty when his stepfather forced him to embark for Calcutta. He went only as far as Mauritius and Bourbon (now Réunion), then part of France’s plantation empire. That trip inspired—and may have seen the first drafts of—many of the poems that would later be published in *Les Fleurs du Mal*. Back in Paris, Bau-

delaire entered into a relationship with a “mulatto” actress, better known as Jeanne Duval, widely said to be of Haitian descent. Although Baudelaire’s liking of dark-skinned females seems to have preceded that liaison, his tumultuous affair with the woman he called his “Black Venus” lasted over twenty years, during which she was for him a major source of poetic inspiration.

Only recently has the relationship between Duval and Baudelaire become a central object of scholarly research.² Emmanuel Richon (1998) points out that Baudelairean scholarship has not even bothered to verify the most basic facts about Duval, including her actual origins. The many sketches of Duval by Baudelaire and other portraits, such as Edouard Manet’s “La maitresse de Baudelaire couchée,” only confirm her constant presence in his life. Many visitors recount entering the poet’s place and finding him reading his unpublished poetry to Jeanne. Literary scholarship has attributed some of Baudelaire’s work to a “Jeanne Duval cycle” while insisting on her role as “femme fatale” and relishing the assertion that Duval infected Baudelaire with syphilis. Richon, who demolishes that assertion, convincingly argues that the opposite was more likely.

However, the main lesson of Richon’s work goes beyond biographical rectification. His claim that the Indian Ocean trip, and especially the relationship with Duval, fundamentally shaped Baudelairean aesthetics suggests that Baudelairean scholarship may have produced what I call a “silence of significance” through a procedure of banalization. Well-known facts are recounted in passing, yet kept in the background of the main narrative or accorded little significance because they “obviously” do not matter (Trouillot 1995). Yet can it not matter that Baudelaire was living a racial taboo in the midst of a Paris sizzling with arguments for and against the abolition of slavery and the equality of human races? Slavery was abolished in Bourbon and other French possessions less than seven years after he had been there and while he was enthralled in his relationship with Duval. Can it not matter that the eulogist of modernity was also Jeanne Duval’s eulogist?

The issue is even more intriguing in light of Baudelaire’s own disdain for the modernization—here, the concrete management of places and populations by the French state, republican and imperial as it was—that was a condition of possibility of his own modernity. As in Rousseau, Baudelaire’s relation to time, a hallmark of his modernity, does not imply a blind faith in either the desirability or the inevitability of progress. Indeed, Baudelaire is resolutely antimodernist (Froidevaux 1989). His modernity is founded upon the search for a furtive yet eternal present. The past has no legacy; the future holds no promises. Only the present

is alive. With Baudelaire, we are thus quite far from either side of the quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns and from Koselleck's regime of historicity. Baudelaire's historicity is indeed a new brand.

How interesting, then, that this new brand of modernity also leads to "the spatialization of time" (Froidevaux 1989:125). Baudelaire's escape from chronological temporality is space—more specifically, the space of the Elsewhere. Here again, time creates space, and here again, space generates a heterology. Literary scholars have long noted the importance of themes and metaphors of space and of travel, as well as the role of exoticism, in Baudelaire's poetry. While we should leave to specialists the task of mapping out further the many locations in a geography of imagination that links space and time, the Here and the Elsewhere, routine and exoticism, we may want to provoke them in finding out the extent to which the modernity of Baudelaire, the critic, establishes itself against the background of an ethereal Elsewhere that Baudelaire, the poet, inscribes somewhere between Jeanne's body and the islands of the Indian Ocean?

Differently Modern: The Caribbean as Alter-Native

I have argued so far that modernity is structurally plural inasmuch as it requires an heterology, an Other outside of itself. I would like to argue now that the modern is also historically plural because it always requires an Other from within, the otherwise modern, created between the jaws of modernity and modernization. Here again, that plurality is best perceived if we keep modernity and modernization as distinct yet related groups of phenomena with the understanding that the power unleashed through modernization is a condition of possibility of modernity itself. I will draw on the sociohistorical experience of the Caribbean region to make that point.

Eric Wolf once wrote in passing but with his usual depth that the Caribbean is "eminently a world area in which modernity first deployed its powers and simultaneously revealed the contradictions that give it birth." Wolf's words echo the work of Sidney W. Mintz (1971a, 1974a,b, 1996, 1998), who has long insisted that the Caribbean has been modern since its early incorporation in various North Atlantic empires. Teasing out Wolf's comments and drawing from Mintz's work, I want to sketch some of the contradictions from the Caribbean record to flesh out a composite picture of what I mean by the "otherwise modern."

Behold the sugar islands from the peak of Barbados's career to Cuba's lead in the relay race—after Jamaica and Saint-Domingue—thus

roughly from the 1690s to the 1860s. At first glance, Caribbean labor relations under slavery offer an image of homogenizing power. Slaves were interchangeable, especially in the sugar fields, which consumed most of the labor force, victims of the most “depersonalizing” side of modernization (Mintz 1971a). Yet as we look closer, a few figures start to emerge that suggest the limits of that homogeneity. Chief among them is the slave striker, the one who helped decide when the boiling of the cane juices had reached the exact point when they could be transferred from one vessel to the next.³ Some planters tried to identify that moment by using complex thermometers. Yet since the right moment depended on temperature, on the intensity of the fire, on the viscosity of the juice, and on the quality of the original cane itself and its state at the time of cutting, other planters thought that a good striker was much more valuable than the most complex technology. Indeed, the slave who acquired such skills would be labeled or sold as “a striker.” Away from the sugar cane, especially on the smaller estates that produced coffee, work was often distributed by task, thus allowing individual slaves at times to exceed their quota and to gain additional remuneration.

The point is not that plantation slavery allowed individual slaves much room to maneuver in the labor process; it did not. Nor is the point to conjure images of sublime resistance. Rather, Caribbean history gives us various glimpses at the production of a modern self—a self producing itself through a particular relation to material production—even under the harshest possible conditions. For better *and* for worse, a sugar striker was a modern identity, just as being a slave violinist, a slave baker, or a slave midwife (Higman 1984; Debien 1974; Abrahams 1992:126–30).

That modern self takes firmer contours when we consider the provision grounds of slavery. Sidney Mintz (1974b) has long insisted on the sociocultural relevance of these provision grounds, small plots in which slaves were allowed to grow their own crops and raise animals on the margins of the plantations on land unfit for the main export crops. Given the high price of imported food, the availability of unused lands, and the fact that slaves worked on these plots in their own free time, these provision grounds were in fact an indirect subsidy to the masters, lessening their participation to the reproduction of the labor force.

Yet Mintz and others—including myself—have noted that what started as an economic bonus for planters turned out to be a field of opportunities for individual slaves. I will not repeat all these arguments here (Trouillot 1988, 1996, 1998). Through these provision grounds, slaves learned the management of capital, the planning of family production for individual purposes. How much to plant of a particular food crop and where, how much of the surplus to sell in the local market,

what to do with the profit involved decisions that required an assessment of each individual's placement within the household. Thus the provision grounds can be read not only as material fields used to enhance slaves' physical and legal conditions—including at times the purchase of one's freedom—but also as symbolic fields for the production of individual selves by way of the production of material goods.

Such individual purposes often found their realization in the colonial slave markets, where slaves—especially female slaves—traded their goods for the cash that would turn them into consumers. Here again, one can only guess at the number of decisions that went into these practices, how they fed into a slave's habitus, how they impacted on gender roles then and now in the Caribbean. Individual purposes also realized themselves through patterns of consumption from the elaborate dresses of mulatto women to the unique foulard that would distinguish a slave woman from another one. The number of ordinances regulating the clothing of nonwhites, free and enslaved, throughout the Caribbean in the days of slavery is simply amazing. Their degree of details—for example, “with no silk, gilding, ornamentation or lace unless these latter be of very low value” (Fouchard 1981:43), is equally stunning. Yet stunning also is the tenacity of slaves who circumvented the regulations and used clothing as an individual signature.

Moreau de St.-Méry, the most acute observer of Saint-Domingue's daily life, writes: “It is hard to believe the height to which a slave woman's expenses might rise. . . . In a number of work gangs the same slave who wielded tools or swung the hoe during the whole week dresses up to attend church on Sunday or to go to market; only with difficulty would they be recognized under their fancy garb. The metamorphosis is even more dramatic in the slave woman who has donned a muslin skirt and Paliacate or Madras kerchief” (in Fouchard 1981:47). Moreau's remarks echo numerous observations by visitors and residents of the Americas throughout slavery's long career.

If modernity is also the production of individual selves through patterns of production and consumption, Caribbean slaves were modern, having internalized ideals of individual betterment through work, ownership, and personal identification to particular commodities. It was a strained and harsh modernity, to be sure. Otherwise modern they were—yet still undoubtedly modern by that definition.

One could argue—although the argument is not as easy as it seems—that the selves on which I just insisted may have existed elsewhere without the forced modernization imposed by colonialism. I would readily concede that point if it leads to the realization that the modern individual self claimed by North Atlantic consciousness is not unique to the

North Atlantic. At the extreme opposite, one could also argue that the detached individual self is only a fiction of the North Atlantic geography of imagination, an ideological by-product of the internal narrative of modernity. Surprisingly, perhaps, I am even more willing to concede that point. Indeed, in either case, the central issue is not that of an allegedly modern individual subjectivity—whatever that may be—but the insertion of that subjectivity into a particular regime of historicity. Clothing as individual signature may be as old as human society. So may be the production of identity through labor. At any rate, I doubt that these two features—or any of the markers usually claimed to signify the rise of the modern self—first obtained as such in Renaissance or post-Renaissance Christendom. Intellectual and art history, literature, and philosophy may have misled us in overrating these individual attributes of the modern self to the detriment of the historical context within which these selves were fashioned. François Hartog (1980) sets the projection of alterity as the context for self-identification as far back as Herodotus. Horkheimer and Adorno (1972) see in Odysseus the precursor of the modern subject. Closer to ground, Ariès and Duby (1988) and their collaborators in the *History of Private Life* project effectively extend notions of privacy or even intimacy back into the Middle Ages. I suspect that with similar data, one could make as potent discoveries outside of Christendom, thus relativizing the narrative that makes the modern individual self such a eurocentric product.⁴

Yet again, necessary as this revisionist narrative is, it is not the central issue. Too often, critics of eurocentrism flesh out their arguments in terms of chronological primacy. They spend much energy demonstrating that such-and-such a feature claimed by North Atlantic narratives to have been a European first could actually be found elsewhere before European presence. The mistake here is to forget that chronological primacy is itself a central tenet of North Atlantic imagination. That is, the value of being the first comes from a particular premium on time, a specific take on historicity. The existence of certain social features outside of Europe matters less than the inscription of these features in social and political regimes *then* and much less even than the inscriptions of these same features—as found in Europe *then*—in North Atlantic narratives *now*. From that perspective, the modern self may be less a matter of the content of an individual subjectivity than that of the insertion of that subjectivity into a particular regime of historicity and sociopolitical management. On that latter issue, the most crucial one in my view, the Caribbean story is most revealing.

Modern historicity hinges on both a fundamental rupture between past, present, and future—as distinct temporal planes—and their re-

linking along a singular line that allows for continuity. I have argued that this regime of historicity in turn implies an heterology—that is, a necessary reading of alterity. Striking, then, is the fact that Caribbean history as we know it starts with an abrupt rupture between past and present—for Europeans, for Native Americans, and for enslaved Africans. In no way could the enforced modernization imposed by colonization be perceived by any of the actors as a mere continuation of an immediate past. This was a New World for all involved, even for those who had lived within it before it became new to others.

For indeed, the consciousness that times had changed, that things were falling apart and coming together in new ways, was both inescapable and yet inseparable from the awareness that others were fundamentally different—different in where they came from, in the positions they occupied along any of the intersecting hierarchies, in the languages they spoke, in the costumes they wore, in the customs they inhabited, in the possible futures they could envision. The sensibility to time and the recognition of heterogeneity associated with modernity are inescapable here. Indeed, they have been central themes of Caribbean scholarship (Trouillot 1992, 2001b).

Here again the slave quarters are telling. There was imposed the sudden discovery of a common African past but also the awareness that this commonality barely covered fundamental differences. One could not address that other next door, who looked so strikingly similar, without using a language derived at least in part from that of the masters. Was not that as modern as the vulgate version of the Bible? More modern than the quarrel between seventeenth-century French intellectuals as to whether the king's engravings were best written in French or in Latin? If the awareness of one's position in history not just as an individual but as part of a group and against the background of a social system brought to consciousness is a fundamental part of what it means to be modern, the Caribbean was modern from day one—that is, from the very day colonialism imposed its modernization. If the awareness of sociocultural differences and the need to negotiate across such differences are part of what we call modernity, then the Caribbean was modern since at least the sixteenth century—that is, from day one of North Atlantic modernity. But if that is so, the chronological primacy of the North Atlantic falters.

Yet chronology here is only an index. My goal is not to replace North Atlantic chronological primacy over the rest of the world with a Caribbean chronological primacy over other colonies and postcolonies. To be sure, historical particulars made the Caribbean, for better and for worse, the area longest under European control outside of Europe itself and the

only one where Europeans moved as if it was indeed empty land, *terra nullius*, to be fashioned along modern lines. To be sure, now-dominant North Atlantic narratives—reflecting the international reach of the English language, the expansion of Protestantism as a variant of Christianity, and the spread of Anglo-Saxon and Teutonic sensibilities—reduce the crucial role of Portugal and Spain in the creation of the West. To be sure, a related emphasis on the Enlightenment and on the nineteenth century and the downplaying of the Renaissance as a founding moment also lead to a neglect of the role of the Caribbean and Latin America in the production of the earliest tropes associated with modernity, a chronological amnesia that crucially impedes our understanding of the North Atlantic itself (Trouillot 1991, 1995; Dussel 1993).

Yet I want to insist that the lessons learned from the Caribbean are applicable elsewhere. As a historical process inherently tied to modernization, modernity necessarily creates its alter-native in Asia, in Africa, in Latin America—in all these areas of the world where the archetypal Caribbean story repeats itself with variations on the theme of destruction and creolization. Modernity creates its others—multiple, multi-faceted, multilayered. It has done so from day one: *we* have always been modern, differently modern, contradictorily modern, otherwise modern—yet undoubtedly modern.

I don't want to conclude with this pun on Bruno Latour's famous title, however tempting a *bon mot*. In *We Have Never Been Modern*, Latour (1993) suggests that the North Atlantic's "modern constitution" rests on a divide between scientific power, meant to represent things as they are, and political power, meant to represent subjects as they wish to be. Latour sees the formulation of this divide (science/politics, object/subject, nature/culture) as the impossible dream of modernity, since the world so neatly divided is actually made of hybrids. Nevertheless, Latour does admit, almost in passing, that blind faith in this divide also makes the moderns invincible. I am interested in this invincibility. Latour's witty title could be misread as to imply that we could have been modern according to definition. But if modernity is as much blind faith in this narrative as its global consequences, we have long been modern, except that the *we* here is not only the North Atlantic but also the hidden faces of modernity necessary to North Atlantic hegemony—if not invincibility.

Ultimately, however, that modernity has long obtained outside of the North Atlantic is only a secondary lesson from the Caribbean savage slot, a conclusion that still makes us what is there to be explained. Yet is the alter-native really what is there to be explained? Is the puzzle the female slave who used her kerchief as individual signature, or the laws

that repeatedly tried to curb her individual expression? Is the puzzle the resilience of the creolization process under slavery, or the expectation that enslaved Africans and their descendants would be either a *tabula rasa* or mere carriers of tradition (Trouillot 1998)? In short, is not the puzzle within the West itself?

The Caribbean story as I read it is less an invitation to search for modernity in various times and places—a useful yet secondary enterprise—than an exhortation to change the terms of the debate. What is there to be analyzed further, better, and differently is the relation between the geography of management and the geography of imagination that together spurred and underpinned the development of world capitalism. And in the context of that reformulation, the Caribbean’s most important lesson is a formidable one indeed. For that lesson, as I see it, is that modernity never was—never could be—what it claimed to be.

Notes

1. Belonging to that class does not depend on a fixed meaning. It is a matter of struggle and contest about and around these universals and the world they claim to describe. For instance, only time will tell if newly popular expressions such as “globalization” or “the international community” will become North Atlantic universals.
2. That relationship provides the thread of Haitian novelist Fabienne Pasquet’s *l’Ombre de Baudelaire* (1996), whose title I borrow here.
3. According to Higman (1984:170–72), the head sugar boiler added lime, controlled evaporation, and decided when to strike the sugar at the point of crystallization. He “was depended on by the planters to make correct decisions in what required ‘practical chemical knowledge’ but remained more an art than a science” (1984:172). Mintz (1985:49–50) who discusses striking at length, notes: “boiling and ‘striking’ . . . required great skill, and sugar boilers were artisans who worked under difficult conditions” (1985:49).
4. Sometimes the data are there and only the perspective is missing. Reversing the dominant perspective, Sidney Mintz asks: “Who is more modern, more western, more developed: a barefoot and illiterate Yoruba market woman who daily risks her security and her capital in vigorous individual competition with others like herself; or a Smith College graduate who spends her days ferrying her husband to the Westport railroad station and her children to ballet classes? If the answer is that at least the Smith girl is literate and wears shoes, one may wonder whether one brand of anthropology has not been hoisted by its own petard” (1971b:267–68).

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