

Article

Modernity: A Myth That Manufactures Consent

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Abstract: This paper argues that “modernity”, as a process, a temporality, a category, and so on, is akin to Orientalism in that those who speak of it produce it as their ideology, their stereotyping of themselves and their others. The first section, on time, employs Kristeva’s work in “Women’s Time” in regards to the gendered politics of chaos and ordering. The second section, on alterity, pulls from various “times” and “spaces”, where multiple authors from, at times, conflicting backgrounds converge on the politics of othering. The third section, on consent, is on structuring the limits of imaginable alternatives of discourse. The final section draws from the previous three in order to deconstruct “modernity” as a mythology of temporal, spacial and societal orderliness, producing forms of alterity to manufacture the consent of whomever speaks of modernity towards creating a convenient history and setting a hegemony-laden agenda. As such, modernity takes the place of “the real” to consolidate and augment hegemony by way of self-naturalization. It is a manufactured consent, of those who speak of, to and about it, to colonial aggression and arrogance by evacuating colonial relations of power from the limits of the debate.

Keywords: modernity; myth; power; colonialism; naturalization; othering

1. Introduction

Zygmunt Bauman, one of the most adamant critiques of modernity, argues in his *Modernity and the Holocaust* [1] that the project of modernity, this civilizing process that enabled the very possibility of the Holocaust, is a process of distancing violence from morality in order to devise violence more efficiently:

without the interference of ethical considerations. In this context, the modern entity is defined as rational, planned, scientifically informed, expert, efficiently managed, and coordinated ([1], p. 89). This notion of modernity, as deployed uncritically by numerous other scholars such as Mahmood [2], Badiou [3], Kaiwar and Mazumdar [4], Taylor [5], Beck [6], and Moghissi [7], depends on a binary understanding of time, space and societies (see also [8,9]), as it consistently connotes a certain notion of “superior Westernity”, in line with the presumptions of binary thought [10,11].

This above definition of modernity is also a description of a problem: if modern societies are rational, planned, scientifically informed, and so on, what are pre-modern societies? Irrational? Chaotic and disordered? Uninformed by their own sciences? The problem is one of drawing boundaries between types of societies in a certain ambiguous and highly plastic yet recognizable way. Indeed, modernity does not have a definition, and this is by no accident. It has two major characteristics: it denotes superiority even when it is deployed by an adamant critique of modernity (in Bauman’s case, a superiority of murdering); and it is a concept that is defined by who has it and who does not. It draws boundaries between “us” and “them”, past and future, exceptionally superior and exceptionally inferior, with almost no space for in-betweenness. The drawing of boundaries, on the other hand, hides some other boundaries that intermingle with these.

After all, who has modernity? Is it not convenient that modernity is a mark of superiority and that mark almost exclusively applies to Western and Westernizing (sic) societies? Is it not surprising that it is a norm that some societies belong to while others strive for? Is modernity an actual condition of our being, or was Corbin¹ [12] correct in arguing that:

There is no such thing
As your far-famed modernity.

But if she were correct, why do we even use this concept?

These are the questions that I will attempt to answer in this paper. In Section 2, I will attempt to politicize and denaturalize our notions of time by engaging Abbott [13] and Pierson [14], two comparative sociologists who argue strongly that “time matters”, with Kristeva [15], who asks us: “which time”? The consideration of time as a political project is crucial for this paper, as “modernity” is often deployed as an ordering of time. In Kristeva’s story of time, however, one encounters the repression of heterogeneity and ordering of meanings, revolving around the issue of “I” and “other”.

Hence, in Section 3, I will turn my attention to this process of othering and how it operates in various contexts. Such a discussion will allow me to look at how various bodies, desires and imaginations are repressed and constricted by ethnic, gendered, sexual and colonial processes of boundary-drawing and othering. This discussion will culminate in the idea that the “other” and its markers are intertwining discursive tools to produce and maintain hegemonic boundaries. The more their otherness (and the One’s

¹ I chose Corbin’s poem not only because she argued forcefully against temporal boundary formations based on man’s delusions, but also because, even in that argument, she was not able to escape the construction of an “Other” as an “exotic hero”. In other words, Corbin signals us that even when the very concept of “modernity” is shown to be discursive and that it cannot be presumed to exist prediscursively, that demonstration does not offer a “final solution” of sorts.

oneness) is naturalized, the more the boundaries themselves are naturalized, and the more hierarchy transforms into a subtle, elusive hegemony.

Drawing of boundaries and maintaining hegemonies, however, cannot be realized without the active participation of the agents whose activities construct those boundaries in the first place, as they become the subjects of those boundaries and orders. In other words, the maintenance of a given order cannot be sustained if the subjects of that order call its boundaries into question and if those who call such boundaries into question are not abjectified. In Section 4, I will turn my attention to consent and attempt to utilize Chomsky's [16] concept of "manufacturing consent" and "propaganda model" in order to understand the ways in which one may be able to set the imaginable limits of a given debate.

I will then focus my attention back on the issue of modernity and ask what would happen to it if we were to assume that, instead of a real condition of being, it were a process of manufacturing consent that produces certain histories and sets certain agendas, delimiting the imaginable positions of a debate, with the result that some considerations drop out of discourse when "modernity" is deployed.

In Section 5, I will assert that modernity may as well be a discursive tool to naturalize time and to de-problematize ensuing violence between "us" and "them", in part by manufacturing the consent of those who deploy it. Looking at various authors' deployment of this highly ambiguous term (ambiguous not because of its morality, but because it does not have a set and fixed meaning), I will claim that modernity is not an actual condition of societies, but is a manufactured consent to colonial aggression and arrogance and define it as the belief in the inherent superiority of the colonizer over its others and, thereby, its right to colonize.

2. On Time and Meaning

Andrew Abbott initiates the first chapter of his book, *Time Matters* [13], with an investigation of a problematic approach that took over quantitative research: general linear reality. Abbott argues that, in this approach, general linear models are treated as representations of the actual social world. In such models, the world consists of entities with clear-cut, unchanging and stable boundaries, fixed by their names/labels and rendered only univocally meaningful. Moreover, these models assume that neither the temporal context nor the temporal order of these entities matter in terms of their influences on other entities that may coexist with or pre-exist them.

Abbott's arguments are intriguing. In history, as he argues through the title of his book and in his first chapter, time matters. Yet, two problems arise from his approach to the sociological split and to time: the ordering of time and the dismissal that time is a politico-social construct. These two problems will also guide the critical analysis to be presented in this paper. First, he argues that "a sequence based, central-subject/event approach reverses nearly all the GLR [general linear reality] assumptions" ([13], p. 61). A sequence based approach? Indeed, when Abbott tells us that "time matters", what he means is that the order of things, or the sequence of them, matters: sequence and order are presumed; time is divided into compartments; these compartments, because sequence and order are presumed, are neatly structured. The same fetishism with the ordering of time also presents itself, among others, in Pierson's [14] work. He insists, as he agrees with Tilly, that a sociological approach to political

processes needs to take sequencing into account: “when things happen within a sequence affects how they happen.” ([13], p. 73).

Second, Abbott argues that “meaning is determined by story” ([13], p. 61) and that a “move towards a story-based model of the social world will ultimately force us to a sequential view of reality”. ([13], p. 60). Indeed, as I will argue later, meaning is produced by story. Yet, Abbott is careful as to not even imply that this story may be a political one and that his story may just be it: a story on time. This hides a strong element of his story: his assumption that “time” exists prior and outside of social relations. This unwarranted assumption causes deep problems for his defense of a singular “time”. The reader is expected to believe that time exists as an “objective reality” that is beyond us. Simultaneously, however, its essence and body remain yet to be known, as Abbott implicitly confesses. At the end, a critical reading of Abbott’s argument reveals that it is his “time” that is the only one that matters. His calls for the disembodiment of “time” and for objectivity hides Abbott’s body, along with the social relations, and especially relations of power that this body engages in/with. His “time” (*i.e.*, his discourse of time) reconstructs and strives to become the time, masquerading as time that exists outside of discourse, that is a “time” that is naturalized.

In other words, both Pierson and Abbott argue that time is already and naturally ordered. This ordering is not a political issue, or so it seems to them, even though our understanding of it is contextual. Yet, if this order is displaced or confused, the researcher’s perception of the real world becomes fogged, as it happens in applications of general linear models, if not distorted and/or corrupted. However, what if sequence did not pre-exist our conceptions of time? What if we sequence things in order to make sense of things in a certain way, with certain conscious or unconscious motivations, or within an order that depends on our sequencing and ordering of things? What if time exists within and through power relations? What if, as we sequence certain things in certain orders, we reproduce these power relations?

In an article known to be one of her most direct engagements with feminism, Kristeva [15] takes on the problem of time, order, and homogeneity, where she pulls heavily from her work on Lacanian theory of language and psychosexual development. Similarly to Abbott, she initiates her discussion with the note that there seems to be a split. Yet, simultaneously, this split is marked to be bound indefinitely by politics: it is by no accident that “Women’s Time” opens its discourse and develops its arguments on feminism and time through nation, war, fragmentation and destruction:

The nation—dream and reality of the nineteenth century—seems to have reached both its apogee and its limits when the 1929 crash and the National-Socialist apocalypse demolished the pillars that, according to Marx, were its existence: economic homogeneity, historical tradition and linguistic unity ([15], p. 188).

Additionally, it is by no accident that even this very first sentence of the article presents the reader with overwhelming ambiguity, contradictions and chaotic perceptions: dream and reality, apogee and limit, and demolition and existence coexist at one time that is as concrete and real as a year (1929) and as ambiguous and fictive as Christian mythology (apocalypse²).

² In Greek, “lifting of the veil”.

Kristeva asks the question that Abbott and Pierson implicitly dismiss: “which time”? ([15], p. 190). Time seems to have been split into two: a time that is hinted by Kristeva’s creative reading of female subjectivity and a time where history and language operates. The former is unstructurable, uncontrollable, unordered and nonlinear, but marked by eternity and repetition:

On the one hand, there are cycles, gestation, the eternal recurrence of a biological rhythm which conforms to that nature and imposes a temporality whose stereotyping may shock, but whose regularity and unison with what is experienced as extra-subjective time, cosmic time, occasion vertiginous visions and unnameable *jouissance*. On the other hand, and perhaps as a consequence, there is the massive presence of a monumental temporality, without cleavage or escape, which has so little to do with linear time (which passes) that the very word ‘temporality’ hardly fits: all-encompassing and infinite like imaginary space . . . ([15], p. 191, emphasis not mine).

This “time”, in quotation marks, because it is radically detached from the time of language and because it is as much time as it is space, reminds the reader of Kristeva’s concept of “the chora , matrix space, nourishing, unnameable, anterior to the One, to God and, consequently, defying metaphysics”. ([15], p. 191, emphasis not mine). In this matrix time/space, existence is marked by a lack of boundaries and a chaotic mix of perceptions, feelings and needs. There is so much heterogeneity in this matrix, so much difference, that it is impossible to “make meaning” in it. It is from this chora that the infant will be detached as it gradually enters language: a symbolic order that operates through a logic of difference from an “other”.

As Kristeva theorizes, the infant is detached from this time/space of chaotic repetition and eternity, among others, through the abjection of the maternal. The abject, commonly defined as that which is cast off, in Kristeva’s work, is identified as that which is cast off *because* it calls into question the boundaries that are crucial for the infant’s entrance into the language and the social. In this stage, in order to become a “self”, the infant casts off the mother, the one “entity” that continuously calls boundaries into question by the maternal mode of love, and draws the boundaries of its self from the maternal body. In other words, to become a subject in language, the infant needs its “other” and finds it in that very process (the maternal body and love) that problematizes boundary formation the most.

The latter time that Kristeva identifies in *Women’s Time*, as mentioned above, is the time of language and history. Split from the former “so that everything does not happen at once”, as Einstein argued, this is a linear time, a time that interferes with chaos, that gets destabilized when boundaries are called into question, and lends its subject to control. It begins, progresses, ends, departs and arrives. A structured time of ordered differences, it passes off as natural time. It is this time that gives the illusion that we (can or do) control everything; that we start and finish the sentence. Simultaneously, it is this time that engages one in a belief of an all-powerful being/structure; that we progress to a fixed destiny.

Kristeva’s discussion of (a multiplicity of) times tells the story of signification: signification enables meanings, but meanings require a certain kind of difference; a difference that can be attributed. Additionally, for difference to be attributable, it needs to be reduced from endless heterogeneity into an ordered meaning system. This reduction, on the other hand, not only represses heterogeneity, but also constricts imagination and engages its subject into an endless cycle of violence: for the subject to exist in

language, it needs its other³. For this other to exist, it needs to be produced in language and presented as real to its subjects. The process of signification, and therefore, the time of language, history and science, is a process of variable violence and of death.

3. On the Other and Violence

If the contemporary symbolic system depends on producing “other”s, language becomes one of the most political and violent process one can encounter. A brief travel in time and space of the diverse literature on the issue of “other” seems to be “in order”.

Writing in 1949 in France, in search for an answer to the question of “what is a woman?” ([17], p. 32), De Beauvoir argued that “... no group ever sets itself up as the One without at once setting up the Other against itself” ([17], p. 33). As any subject that required, in an attempt to be defined, difference and opposition, “man” required its Other, “woman”, a becoming relative to him, in order to be a subject. However, in contrast to the reciprocity of otherness that is recognized in other cases, men set up themselves as the sole essential, a being in and of itself, erasing the relativity of otherness and transforming women into pure Others; hence, De Beauvoir argued, “He is the Subject, he is the Absolute—she is the Other ...” ([17], p. 33).

Despite (or, perhaps, because of) the universalist approach De Beauvoir took, the significance of what Spivak later called “othering” in the process of oppression is difficult to ignore. Sartre, writing in 1968 in his preface to Fanon’s *The Wretched of The Earth* [18], echoed De Beauvoir’s arguments in his critique of colonialism. Referring to the process of othering that is intrinsic to colonialism, and hinting to the subjecthood of the colonizers⁴, Sartre pointed to not only the transformation of the subject into an Other, but also the Other’s “ever-present desire to kill” ([18], p. 17), as it itself transforms into the One: “they have become men: men *because of* the settler, who wants to make beasts of burden of them—because of him, and against him. Hatred, blind hatred which is yet an abstraction, is their only wealth” ([18], p. 17, emphasis in the original). An Other is produced through colonial relations. This Other is positioned against the settler by the settler. Both are men (sic) fused with violence: the settler with its attempts to make beasts of burden of the colonized Other and the colonized Other to kill (the settler). Yet, because their difference is meaningful only through colonialism, because such a difference can only be produced as the difference of contrast in colonial boundaries and relations of power, they are dependent on each other.

Writing a decade later and published in 1984, in the U.S., Audre Lorde [19] took a much more nuanced approach to explicating the “Other”. Lorde’s analyses, unable to be encapsulated by the conventions of the prose, were not restricted to one relation of power at a time; for instance, she fused

³ Lacan argues that the symbolic system is a system whose meanings have nothing to do with the Real. That is, signifiers such as the word “father”, do not have referents to stabilize their meanings. In this order/system, meanings are stabilized by their network to their others. “Father” makes sense, not because it refers to a “real” person or because it is inherently meaningful, but because it is in constant relation in a network of meanings to what it is not and what it may have: mother, son, daughter, law, authority, and so on. In other words, for a subject to be meaningful in the symbolic system (language), the least it requires is an other with which it enters into a “dialogue” (of death, as Kristeva reminds us).

⁴ “[Colonizers] had the Word; and [colonies] had the use of it” ([18], p. 7).

her analyses of racial othering with considerations of sexual and intellectual othering [19]. She argued that there was a fundamental “inability to recognize the notion of difference as a dynamic human force, one which is enriching rather than threatening” ([19], p. 45), leading to a transformation of unstable and open (to interpretation, like a poem) multiplicity between humans, into a fixed homogeneity between “us” and “them”, two subjects defined to be different by their relation of violence against each other.

Meanwhile, writing in the 1970s in France, Irigaray [20] argued that the male philosophical canon privileges the masculine subject, functioning as a distorting mirror, where the mirror reflects back man as the master of the Universe and woman as different, lacking or hysterical. Yet, very much resonating with Lorde’s argument of difference as a dynamic human force, she insisted that, by destructively transforming women and nature into raw materials for furthering male desire, taming the chaos and the multiplicity in nature and bodies, patriarchy⁵ thus represses sexual difference, closes off possibilities for subjects to freely “become” and turns difference into “a marker of human deficiency” ([20], p. 205), rather than a positive force of humanity.

Indeed, the colonized in Sartre and Fanon, the woman in De Beauvoir, the interlocking Others in Lorde, and both nature, woman and female sexuality in Irigaray reveal to us that the “Other” is a means of establishing (forming) oppositional binaries of power, which then operate to assert not only the naturalness and primacy of the binary system and the “One”, but also the self and mutual destruction of the “opposites” in an ever-continuing war of domination.

In this othering tug-of-self-destruction [22], nation is no exception. In her conversation with Spivak, pulling from the work of Agamben (*The State of Exception*) and Arendt (*The Human Condition* and *The Origins of Totalitarianism*), in 2007, Butler [23] similarly argues that the problem of statelessness is not a “problem” for the nation-state, but the very requirement for its stabilization of itself as a home to belong. She proposes that in order for the production of a nation, “that nation must be purified of its heterogeneity except in those cases where a certain pluralism allows for the reproduction of homogeneity ...” ([23], p. 32) As such, “the nation-state as a political formation ... requires periodic expulsion and dispossession of its national minorities in order to gain a legitimate ground for itself” ([23], p. 33).

Because the power of sovereignty is the power “to suspend the rights of individuals or groups to cast them out of a polity” ([23], pp. 33–39), the notions of national “belonging” and “home” ([23], p. 49) become suspicious, if not defunct. Looking at the property laws in Israel and its efforts to attach statelessness “like a curse” ([23], p. 53) to Palestinians as a presupposition of its own existence, Butler argues that the nation is not a sphere of commonality, equality and belonging, but of containment, rhythmic expulsion and dispossession, and a violent play on the desire and deprivation of citizenship, where “... age, gender, race, nationality, and labor status not only disqualify ... for citizenship but actively ‘qualify’ ... for statelessness” ([23], p. 15).

Similarly, as Ashcroft *et al.*, focusing on colonialism, yet implicitly hinting at sexuality, argue,

⁵ Calhoun [21], proposing to separate lesbian theory from feminist theory, would argue that there are two systems of oppression at play in Irigaray’s theory, even though she does not acknowledge them—patriarchy and compulsory heterosexuality.

the existence of others is crucial in defining what is "normal" and in locating one's own place in the world. The colonized subject is characterized [produced] through discourses such as primitivism and cannibalism, as a means of establishing the binary separation of the colonizer and colonized and asserting the *naturalness and primacy of the colonizing culture and world view* ([24], p. 169, emphasis mine).

And Yuval-Davis, focusing on gender, continues

Strict cultural codes of what is to be a "proper woman" are often developed to keep women in this inferior power position. The collective "wisdoms" which are used to justify this state of affairs often sound very similar to other "common sense" notions which are used to exclude, inferiorize and subjugate "others"... In other words, any culturally perceived sign could become a boundary signifier to divide the world into "us" and "them" ([25], p. 47).

In Section 2, through Lacan's and Kristeva's theories, I argued that the contemporary system of ordering requires the production of "other"s in order to stabilize and even naturalize its process of meaning making. In such occasions, it seems to me, a subject is created and constructed as if it existed prior to language and "naturally" inferior, so that the boundaries it maintains cannot be called into question and that those who call into question the naturalness of such boundaries are violently abjected [11].

This "Other", however, in an attempt to "speak" (*i.e.*, in an attempt to force its own discourse into or against the dominant one), not only assumes that this binary existence (of the "One" *versus* the "Other") is a natural condition, but also argues (implicitly or explicitly) for the inferiority of the "One" against which it itself is constructed, furthering a cycle of violence and destruction:

A counterstance locks one into a duel of oppressor and oppressed; locked in mortal combat, like the cop and the criminal, both are reduced to a common denominator of violence ... It's a step towards liberation from cultural domination. But it is not a way of life ... The answer to the problem between the white race and the colored, between males and females, lies in healing the split that originates in the very foundation of our lives, our culture, our languages, our thoughts ([22], pp. 180–81).

That is, the "other" and its markers are intertwining discursive tools to produce and maintain hegemonic boundaries. The more their otherness (and the One's oneness) is naturalized, the more the boundaries themselves are naturalized and the more hierarchy transforms into a subtle, elusive hegemony. In other words, the notion of difference is transformed from potentially a dynamic human force into one that drives control and outputs destruction [19,20].

4. On Manufacturing Consent

The above discussion problematizes not only language and its imposition of order through an "other", but also this "other" itself. In an attempt to resist, as Anzaldúa, Kristeva and Lorde inform us, it seems to accept a contract of mutual destruction in a continuous struggle to gain force in the ordered hierarchy of the symbolic system; but why? I do not mean to ask why it enters such a system: by the time it is

produced as an othered subject, it already is in that system; and for it to exit the system, it has to cease to exist (cf. [26]). Yet, it is not devoid of any agency of its own⁶. Neither Lorde nor Anzaldúa, nor Irigaray, Kristeva nor Butler theorize a subject that is not one. For Lorde, for instance, anger is a means for the “other” to disrupt the system. Additionally, because anger itself is produced as an effect of the system, the “other” has agency at the instant it is produced. For Irigaray, “this sex” [28] is not one: it is none and multiple, heterogeneous and chaotic, always autoerotic, active; this subject’s agency is what defines her for Irigaray. Kristeva recognizes agency as part of being an “other” and points to the moments when that agency becomes yet another propeller of violence and death. Additionally, for Butler, as the deed preexists the doer, the subject is already a doing in process.

Moreover, almost each and every author cited above either hints, or outright theorizes, that the “other” and its difference from the “one” is naturalized to secure the “order of things”. However, what is it that hinders “anger” [19] so successfully from being directed towards this naturalization in the form of critical analysis? What is it that prevents agency from finding its resistive target in the way things are ordered and disordered, but never unordered or de-ordered (if that is possible in a process that depends on signification)? What is it that canalizes almost each and every attempt of critical analysis towards self-destruction; and, in some cases, to the destruction of a society? How is a process naturalized so fully that it is no longer visible? I will argue, below, that one of the many ways of hindering critical analysis is by the manufacturing of consent.

Chomsky [16,29] borrows the concept of “manufacturing consent” from Lipman [30] and looks at the ways in which one can manufacture consent (*i.e.*, how is information produced) to maintain a system of oppression and at the effects of such maintenance on those whose consent is being manufactured. Chomsky maintains that at any time in history⁷, certain forms of oppression are scrutinized, while others escape such scrutiny. For any of them to maintain their stability, even when no significant scrutiny is encountered by some, they have to legitimize themselves to the public. The more forcefully they are legitimized, the more they become naturalized, and the more they can escape scrutiny.

In Chomsky’s theorization, the manufacturing of consent is a conscious, intentional activity, by the elites (and their collaborators) of an authoritative order, to maintain their location in the *status quo* (and therefore, the location of their others in the network), through the production of oversimplified “necessary illusions” [31] served to the masses through mass media (e.g., national and international broadcasting companies), whose primary *raison d’être* is to mobilize public support for the interests of the elites that dominate the government and the private sector. These elites, in this theory, are identified by a relatively concentrated network of major capitalist corporations [32] and have a predominant role in the determination of what happens when and how in the society.

⁶ In a recent conference, Halberstam [27] argued that even the doing through which the subject ceases to exist (as part and parcel of the discourse that produces it as its subject) may be considered to be an effective form of resistance. Emphasizing the importance of “failure” (e.g., failure to become a subject) in noticing the sites where discourses lose their coherence (hence, signaling to us their narrativity rather than naturality), Halberstam argued that the very actions that seem to us (from within the limits of the discourse in question) as devoid of any agency may in fact be some of the sites where the most powerful attempts of resistance are undertaken.

⁷ The reader may now feel the need to ask “which time”? and “whose history”?

The manufacture of consent targets two major groups: the political class (those who are relatively more educated and have more or less a say in social life, including teachers and writers) and the rest of the population (those who are to be disallowed from thinking and pay most of the costs of “being manufactured”). Perhaps two of the most interesting (and the most relevant to this paper) elements in Chomsky’s “propaganda model” ([31], p. 10) is the agenda-setting and history-creating roles played by the media.

Chomsky maintains that corporate controlled mainstream media not only eliminates dissenting voices that might lead to the destruction or disintegration of the propaganda model, but they actively create a certain history. Treating their archives as the representation of history and truth, they shape their archives in “appropriate” ways, therefore shaping time and history; time and history that were already perceived as objective and disembodied, hence natural and unchangeable. The organization and presentation of the news archive, in this way, becomes one of the ways of the propaganda model in which reality is produced and sold to the masses.

For instance, many Americans have become familiar with Rev. Wright’s speech “God Damn America” (which was, in fact, a selection (by ABC and FOX News) of excerpts from “The Day of Jerusalem’s Fall”, 2001, and “Confusing God and Government”, 2003) and President Obama’s subsequent hasty disowning of him. It is by no accident, from the perspective of the “propaganda model”, that no mainstream media ever showed these speeches in their entirety. This restriction shaped part of how his speech was going to be perceived by the public: as an insult to America and its values. Conveniently enough, his dissident voice (against American empire building) was therefore erased from the historical record. Yet, this dissident voice was not radically different in what he argued from, say, Martin Luther King, Jr. In his Vietnam speech (“Beyond Vietnam”), King adamantly opposes the violence that ensued from the white supremacist American project of empire building in no less radical words than Rev. Wright’s dissent to the very same project half a century later.

Yet, this connection is lost for the mainstream American public, who grew up not with this radically dissident King, but with a whitewashed version (always cut, never shown in its entirety) of his “I Have a Dream” speech; a speech that can much more easily be adapted into the deception of the “American Dream”. The media archives, in short, produced a new, convenient reality, marked by the contrast of “God Damn America” from “I Have a Dream”, instead of the parallels between these two with the Vietnam speech; a parallel that would radically problematize the American left’s almost monolithic support for President Obama at the time. In other words, the shaping of the archive (and therefore of time and history) allowed the project (of strengthening and stabilizing racial and imperial power relations) to continue unchallenged by many, as it simultaneously shaped the dissident discourses of both King (by appropriating his words) and Wright (by excluding his).

It was, similarly, by no accident that President Obama’s views on empire building were never seriously questioned by mainstream media. Chomsky’s “propaganda model” is insightful in this instance, as well. According to the model, media not only “writes history”, but also sets the agenda through the careful selection of topics and emphasis, the distribution of concerns, framing of issues and the appearance that all possible and imaginable approaches to an issue are being addressed, filtering of information and therefore, bounding of the debates within certain limits. In other words, propaganda not only excludes

some dissidents and appropriate others, but also shapes the general framework of the public's imagination (symbolic order) that configures forms of acceptable dissent.

5. Manufacturing Modernity: The Colonial Pursuit of Arrogance

Chomsky's model that I attempted to summarize above depends on the idea that someone or some group (capitalist elites) determine what we see, what we do not see and how we may interpret the information we receive. In other words, Chomsky's model is not a model explaining how language operates, but how certain interest groups shape and reshape language: a subject preexists language and creates it in a way that will determine the behaviors and thoughts of other subjects. This contradicts my above summary on the establishment of an "other": at the moment that language produces a "one", its "other" is produced simultaneously, because of the differential logic of language and social order. However, once produced, there is no reason to presuppose that these subjects have equal access back to that order and how that order speaks of itself. Certain consents are indeed manufactured according to certain interests, so as not to change the hierarchical relationship between the "one" and the "other", but not necessarily with a consciously malicious intent by some groups against others: one such concept/consent is the sign (the symbol, as Lipman [30] would call it) of the modern.

In spite of implicit calls not to do so [33–35], the concept of modern is often deployed to organize time towards a specific order: pre-modern, modern and postmodern times. This organization of time, the chasms that it presupposes between societies, does not only imply that two societies can exist at the same time in different periods of time, breaking with the linearity of historical time, as would Abbott and Pierson argue (see the beginning of Section 2). More than that, it creates a new split, a new linearity in time, a structured time of ordered differences, as would Kristeva say (see page 609), regressive, repressed, constricted, a binary-fetishist difference between those societies and times who "are" pre-modern and those who are not.

This conceptualization of time also structures space, which could initially be thought of as boundaryless [33], chaotic, meaninglessly heterogeneous (see my discussion of the "chora", page 610), into a space of those who "have" it and those who do not (hinting that it is intermingling with the phallus [28]). We are confronted with supposedly modern nations (nations who "have" modernity), modern genders (a modern womanhood), modern sexualities (and postmodern ones, too, as described in [36]), modern ethnic groups, and so on.

In other words, "modern" is not limited to an issue of the neutrality of time, but it operates through and naturalizes a relation between "have"s and "have not"s—"one"s and "none"s... The very deployment of "modernity" divides time, space, societies, genders/sexes and sexualities into "us" (moderns or postmoderns) and "them" (premoderns). Through its naturalness and primacy, it forces subjects into self and mutual destruction in an ever continuing war of domination. It creates certain criminals (premoderns) and stabilize power as it is exerted on them through violence. Furthermore, it forces these subjects to "fuse violence" [15,18,19] into themselves (into their very state of being as a condition they are trapped in) and legitimizes the violence they exert onto themselves.

Indeed, I am speaking of a manufactured consent: a consent that is manufactured by all, against all, capturing all in a seemingly unchangeable, natural condition of non-hierarchical relations of non-power. In this case, in contrast to Chomsky's model, the manufacturer is not a powerful group in control of an all-powerful structure. It is a collective action of "speaking in such terms" that manufactures the consent of the speakers. It is a performance (through speech and writing; representations that produce what they stand to represent), perceived as natural and unquestionable by its performers, that forces them to create a history and set an agenda, the production of which is not limited at all to the media and not shaped/determined by, but often corresponding to the interests of an oppressive group in a power relation of us vs. them. The point of this performance, as I will argue below, is to maintain the network of power; to imprison the speaker/performer inside a logic of destructive differential meaning-making.

In Chomsky's model, consent is manufactured to create a history and set an agenda for a specific political purpose; a purpose not as all-encompassing as the "maintenance of us vs. them". I concur: the sign/symbol of modernity too is deployed for a specific political purpose. I will attempt to demonstrate this not by identifying some "all-powerful guilty actors", but by exposing examples of its textual deployments, in an effort to explore the agenda that is being set by the concept.

One's defense of modernity may be as subtle and implicit as Kristeva's, as exemplified in the quote below:

Necessarily opposed to the bourgeois democratic regimes in power, this terrorist violence offers as a program of liberation an order which is even more oppressive, more sacrificial than those it combats. Strangely enough, it is not against totalitarian regimes that these terrorist groups with women participants unleash themselves but, rather, against liberal systems, whose essence is, of course, exploitative, but whose expanding democratic legality guarantees relative tolerance ([15], p. 204).

or less subtle, as exemplified in the quote below by Chomsky:

... at least in the technologically advanced societies of the West we are now certainly in a position where meaningless drudgery can very largely be eliminated, and to the marginal extent that it's necessary, can be shared among the population; where centralized autocratic control of, in the first place, economic institutions, by which I mean either private capitalism or state totalitarianism or the various mixed forms of state capitalism that exist here and there, has become a destructive vestige of history [37].

or as sincere as that of a colleague:

... but I don't understand! How can you say that modernity does not exist? We [the modern societies] have a radically different bureaucracy. We operate on efficiency and rationality. We have an advanced technology ... [38]

or as blatant as the quote below by Yuval-Davis:

... the hegemony of the modern nation-state in the post-colonial world has been very limited and mostly confined to urban centers and upper classes, the use of cultural and religious traditions ... has enabled ... the continued coexistence of the 'modern' center with premodern sections of society ([25], p. 61).

or as arrogant as this one by Giddens:

... modern society or industrial civilization ... is associated with (1) a certain set of attitudes towards the world, the idea of the world as open to transformation by human intervention; (2) a complex of economic institutions, especially industrial production and a market economy; (3) a certain range of political institutions, including the nation-state and mass democracy. Largely as a result of these characteristics, modernity is vastly more dynamic than any previous type of social order. It is a society (more technically, a complex of institutions) which unlike any preceding culture lives in the future rather than the past ([39], p. 94).

Indeed, it is a painful process to listen to the “modern” in his/her act of speech. For instance, should we believe Giddens’ discourse in its claim that modern societies are sharply distinct from premodern ones? What does it mean to be a society who has the openness to transformation by human intervention for the other society who is presumed not to have it? What does it mean for a society to be marked as “not industrial”? What are the social and political implications if your society is judged to be “more dynamic” than any society that ever existed? What is the agenda that we are setting ourselves for? How does the history that is being created in this text function with this agenda setting? What is being hidden from imagination, and what is emphasized instead?

Among many others, Chomsky’s [40] take on the last five centuries provide us with a depressing image that is being dismissed by Giddens’ above paragraph. What Giddens calls transformative human intervention turns out to be a continuation, still ongoing, of colonial aggression and violence. The “industrial” is but a machinery, like any other machinery in any other empire, that appropriates political, economic and social wealth from a colony into the empire. The dynamism that is being spoken about turns out to be the dynamism of mass murder, as Davis [35] so forcefully demonstrates. In Giddens, the symbol of “modern” operates as a switch of agenda setting, where the emphasis, attention, and content are switched from colonial aggression and arrogance to a differential state of being of those who are modern. The five-century-long history of colonialism (that would call into question the differences between societies as portrayed by Giddens) is abjected by the new history that is created by the deployment of the “modern”.

The “framing of issues” and “filtering of information” (see page 615) is no less problematic in Yuval-Davis’ above quote. What does it mean for us to assume that religious and cultural traditions are not an integral part of a so-called modern state? Additionally, what do we miss by looking at a so-called modern state as if it has limited control of its territory and that it needs certain “traditional” tools for the control of its so-called premodern sections of society? It means that the “premodern” condition of that section of society is not related to the activities of the “modern” state. At the moment when the text deploys “modern”, it constricts its own imagination inside a boundary that presupposes post-colonialism, that the premodern and modern sections are not intertwined in their struggles for power, that we are not to imagine a condition where the so-called premodern difference of one section of society is not because of the (internal) colonial activities of the other section. The deployment of “modern”, again, constricts discourse and expunges considerations of colonialism from debate.

The distribution of concerns in my colleague’s deployment of modernity is insightful, too. After all, I would not agree that all societies are the same across time and space. . . There are “differences”,

and Lorde's work on sexism, homophobia and racism, Kristeva's concerns with time and language, and Irigaray's questioning of femininity [28] tells us that we live in an order where heterogeneity is repressed for a form of difference ("have" and "have not"; "us" and "them"; "one" or "none") that destroys the parties that enter into a dialectic within that order. Neither Kristeva nor Lorde ignore that oppression exists, that certain groups are "different" *vis-à-vis* others in terms of access to and use of power. Yet, my classmate distributes the concerns of difference, as she/he manufactures a certain consent in her/himself, in such a way that the relation of power is erased from the text where "modern" is deployed. The emphasis is on difference, but that difference is constructed in terms of modernity: "we" have bureaucracy; "we" have rationality; "we" are efficient.

One wonders, then, how the Ottoman Empire held its power, if it did not have such characteristics, *i.e.*, did it not operate through a bureaucracy of its own, with an emphasis on maximizing its gains from its territories as efficiently as possible? One wonders how it feels to be able to claim such superiority and exceptionalism "against" "other"s and do so on the basis of a difference that was constructed by the speech act that presupposes that difference. However, perhaps more importantly, one questions the source of this casually-hidden feeling of superiority. Additionally, one raises the question: if "you" are bureaucratic, rational and efficient, what are "we" and what should "you" do to "us"? The agenda of colonial conquest looms around, as my classmate tells me the story of his/her superiority, almost echoing British Prime Minister Gordon Brown's call to the U.S. Congress, itself not much innocent in the project of empire building [40], to:

... spread the values of peace, political liberty, and the hope for better lives across the world, perhaps the greatest gift our generation could give to the future, the gift of America and Britain to the world could be ... [41]

and we know how empires spread their values.

We see similar elements in Chomsky's and Kristeva's above quotes, as well. Both, careful as not to deploy the concept itself, seem to operate from the same framework of difference as a state of being rather than a discourse of power. Chomsky manufactures his own consent to totalitarianism and to the dismissal of the role of colonialism in the maintenance and stabilization of totalitarianism (an emphasis that marks his more recent books, such as *Year 501* [40] and *Hegemony or Survival* [42]) in "less technologically advanced societies" (*i.e.*, what Gordon would identify as premodern; "inferior" in plain language) by arguing that oppressive relations in such societies may as well be needed to maintain survival (and not order). Authority is meaningless, but it is so less if your society is marked by premodernity.

Kristeva "queers out" (as "strange") violence against the empires as incomprehensible (as outside the boundaries of debate) as she constructs the struggle of power between actors as violence against democratic legality (read: modernity of bourgeois regimes). No longer able to see colonial power relations between these processes, she demonizes their agency as an agency of sacrifice worse than what it combats. She manufactures a certain consent to the violence of these so-called democratic regimes by stigmatizing the forces that they stand against as terrorist, sacrificial and perhaps, most importantly, illegible. Her call to pro-Western (pro-imperial) "tolerance", enabled by her consent to hide colonial aggression behind the discourse of modernity (itself carefully hidden) is problematic, to say the least.

A similar emphasis characterized a recent lecture by Koonz [43] as she appealed to American tolerance when confronted by the veiling of Muslim women. Koonz initiated her lecture by ordering

historical time into three compartments: pre-modern, modern and post-modern. This structuring soon forced her lecture to drop her previous stated concerns on the “hidden other” and Western “perceptions of danger” when confronted with the veil and allowed her to claim that “we” (Americans and those who supposedly strive to enter the realm of Americanness) will achieve equality in sameness and that the veil (as the mark of “otherness”) should be normalized and tolerated by the American public (something that the American public knows how to do, she said). In the meantime, she continued, the “veiled women of Muslim societies” should accept that “modern societies require them to show their faces”. In other words, in structuring her own time through the framework of modernity, which simultaneously centers time on the empire, yet erases the empire from the limits of the debate, she was able to idealize the empire, expel issues of colonial aggression and, (at least) by corollary, the issues of racism and white supremacy that mark the multi-layered violence exerted within U.S. society against itself and its others. In short, her manufactured and manufacturing of consent (deployed in her use of “modern”) allowed her to reproduce an image of the empire (exceptional and superior), which is quite convenient for the privileged citizens of that empire.

6. Conclusions

In sum, modernity is not an actual condition of societies, but is a manufactured consent to colonial aggression and arrogance by evacuating colonial relations of power from the limits of the debate. In the above discussions of how a society is marked by modernity and what the implications are for such societies and their “other”s, I claimed that the speech of modernity “realized” itself as a mark of a subject. In other words, I proposed that modernity is not a condition of being, but a belief motivated by colonial exceptionalism: the belief in the inherent superiority of the colonizer over its others and, thereby, its right to colonize (as implicitly as it operates in Kristeva’s text and as explicitly as it tells itself to us in Gordon’s speech to the U.S. Congress).

Two issues need to be raised regarding my definition of “modernity”. As I argued in footnote 1, a radical critique of the sign / symbol / myth / consent of modernity is far from being able to provide a singular solution to the problem (of “modernity” and of the conflicts that it naturalizes, including itself).

First, what are the implications if modernity is “actually” a myth; and what are the implications of attributing “myth”ness to modernity? I leave the question of “what is an actual condition”? open ended for the reader. Yet, one should note that it is absurd at this point to argue that the myth/symbol/sign “modern” has no effect on those who “utter” it and, hence, on those who are produced through such “utterances”. It should be noted that, as Bourdieu [44] argues about the state, the concept is not one of “false consciousness” ([44], p. 14), because what one might call a “belief” might as well belong to “the level of the most profound corporeal disposition” ([44], p. 14). Additionally, as Butler argues in regard to gender,

To claim that gender is constructed is not to assert its illusoriness or artificiality, where those terms are understood to reside within a binary that counterposes the “real” and the “authentic” as oppositional ([11], p. 45).

Indeed, it was precisely my point that modernity, as a mythological consent to reproduce binary relationships between imaginarily coherent and supposedly mutually exclusive “societies” (or “times”):

take the place of “the real” and consolidate and augment their hegemony through that ... self-naturalization ([11], p. 45).

Second, it is crucial to clarify that my definition of modernity (not only as consent to arrogance, but also as) “the belief of the colonizer’s superiority over its others and thereby its right to colonize” is an adaptation of Audre Lorde’s definition for racism. According to Lorde, racism is “the belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others and, thereby, the right to dominate” ([19], p. 45). It is important to note, however, that bell hooks argues that one should distinguish between racism, a belief that might be held by and affect anyone and white supremacy, a structure that affects certain people differently than others. Therefore, so far, an implicit argument in my paper has been that racism is to white supremacy what modernity is to colonialism.

However, this argument is problematic. It severely understates the matrix-like [45] intermingling relationship between modernity, colonialism, racism and white supremacy. Indeed, it is quite hard to distinguish clearly between when modernity ends and racism begins, or when colonialism ends and white supremacy begins. The reader should note that the distinction I propose between modernity and racism in my appropriation of Lorde’s definition of racism is a rhetorical move of clarification. The reader should also note that, if relations of power are intermingling with each other and if the sign/symbol of “modern” is a discursive consent to produce a binary differential logic between “one” and “other” and simultaneously to evade considerations of colonial relations of power, it becomes a necessity to argue that colonial relations are not the only relations of power that it might be re-configuring and evading.

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