

THE POPE MUST HAVE BEEN DRUNK
THE KING OF CASTILE A MADMAN:
CULTURE AS ACTUALITY, AND THE CARIBBEAN
RETHINKING MODERNITY¹

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On the basis of the Cenù Indians' perception of the Requisition, by means of which the Spaniards legitimated their claim to the indigenous lands, what seemed to the Spaniards to be a universally applicable order of truth, was "mad and drunken speech." The crisis of today's Haiti and the paradox of the United State's response to this crisis are to be understood in the terms of a parallel contradiction.

The crisis of the Caribbean as exemplified in the Haitian situation, is the crisis, too, of our present order of knowledge where the contemporary Western industrialized order, which represents its own local culture and its conception of the human, as natural, supracultural and isomorphic with the human species, is contrasted with the culturality of all other human orders. If this crisis is to be resolved, we must deconstruct this way of thinking and recognize that our contemporary culture, together with the actuality of our Western modernity, to which it gives rise, functions according to the same laws by which all other cultures and their belief systems function. The article concludes by suggesting that the major thinkers of today's Caribbean have challenged these "truths" and opened the way to a new hypothesis—that of the functioning of universally applicable *laws of culture* as the veridical etiology of all the "ills" endemic to Haiti as well as the other ex-slave islands.

Selon les indiens Cenú, le document intitulé la *Réquisition*, qui a permis aux Espagnols d'établir un ordre de vérité universelle et donc de légitimer l'appropriation des terres indigènes, serait un texte conçu par des «fous» et des «ivrognes». La crise actuelle en Haïti et le paradoxe de la réaction américaine

devant cette crise, doivent se comprendre dans le contexte d'une contradiction comparable. La crise de la Caraïbe exemplifiée par la situation en Haïti, illustre l'état de notre savoir actuel selon lequel le monde occidental industrialisé, basé sur une «culture locale», tient sa propre conception de «l'humain» pour l'état «naturel» des choses. Par conséquent, on a tendance à le considérer isomorphe de l'espèce humaine en général et supraculturel, soit au delà de la «spécificité culturelle» par laquelle le savoir occidental caractérise les autres ordres humains.

Pour résoudre cette crise, il faudrait déconstruire ce mode de réflexion et reconnaître que notre culture contemporaine qui englobe l'actualité de notre modernité occidentale, fonctionne selon les mêmes lois que toutes les autres cultures et leurs systèmes de croyances.

C'est dans ce sens que les penseurs les plus importants de la Caraïbe actuelle ont remis en question ces «vérités» universelles et ouvert la voie vers une nouvelle hypothèse, celle qui propose des *lois de culture* qui fonctionneraient universellement telle une étiologie de tous les «maux» dont souffrent Haïti et les autres îles ex-esclaves de la Caraïbe.

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About the Pope being the Lord of all the universe in the place of God, and that he had given the lands of the Indies to the King of Castile, the Pope must have been drunk when he did it, for he gave what was not his....The king who asked for and received this gift must have been some madman for he asked to have given to him that which belonged to others.

(The Cenù Indian's reply to the Spaniard "local culture" conception of the legitimacy of the Papal Bull of 1492 as one which "gave" the New World to Spain) (Greenblatt, 1974, p.27).

This objectification of the world continually brings man into conflict with his fellows. This competition, however, is not in Heidegger's view the consequence of political or personal ambition, as Machiavelli or the ancients understood it, nor simply the result of a universal desire for self-preservation, as Hobbes might have characterized it, but the consequence of a new understanding of man's humanity and the subsequent attempt of men to realize it. (Gillespie, 1984, p.27)

THE QUOTATION of the first part of the title, i.e., "the Pope must have been drunk, the king of Castile a madman," is taken from a report of the 16th century Cenù Indian's comment on a politico-juridical Spanish document called the Requisition.² This document was drawn up about 1512-1513 by a bureaucrat of the Spanish State. It was intended to establish the grounds of legitimacy for that state's expropriation of the lands, and sovereignty of the peoples of the indigenous cultural worlds of the Caribbean and the Americas. More directly, it was intended to legitimate, in dually religio-juridical terms, the then lucrative slave-raiding missions being carried out on the mainland territories by groups of Spanish expeditionaries who had been licensed to "discover and expropriate" (*descubrir y ganar*) lands intended to expand the sovereignty of the state as well as to enrich the expeditionaries and their backers (Wynter, 1991). The direct purpose of the Requisition was to legitimate the process by which the dynamic transfer of wealth and resources from the rest of the world to the Western European enclaves of the world system was set in motion, and be effected within the terms of what made the "real real" and the "normal normal" for the invading European Christians. Consequently, within the logic of the new ethical-political distinctions juridically crafted by the document any group of the indigenous peoples who refused to accept Christian conversion and resisted Spain's sovereignty could be at once classified as *inimicos Christi* (enemies of Christ). On that basis, they could then be captured, enslaved and sold within the prescriptive rules laid down by the Church with respect to what could and could not be accepted as just causes for the enslavement of others.³

However, while deploying the classificatory terms of the Church, and its universal narrative, the Requisition now functioned within the particular terms of the new discourse of the incipiently civic humanist reasons of state, and its hegemonically political organization of reality, as effected by the modern European state, in whose primary interest the structure of our present world system was first laid down. The function of the juridical document was therefore to draw the "culturally alien" people of the Caribbean and the Americas within the classificatory logic of the Judaeo-Christian "local culture" theology, and yet to do so in specifically monarchical-juridical terms that could make their subjugation and expropriation by the Spanish state seem "real" and "normal." The central declaration of the document was therefore based on the Church's specific conception of history (*historia rerum gestarum*), in which, because Christ had given the Earth into the Pope's keeping and the Pope had donated the

lands to Spain so that the Indians could be evangelized into the only True Faith (and thereby emancipated as "barbarous nations" from their enslavement to "diabolic" religions), any resistance by the indigenous peoples would make their lands justly expropriable and they themselves justly enslavable.

The Cenù Indians, on the other hand, speaking from within the quite different categories of their still polytheistic and divinized nature religious cultures, could only interpret the discourse of the Requisition, as pronounced by the subjects of the Spanish State, as non-sense, as the speech of "drunkards" or "madmen." Their response to the Requisition's reformulation of the Papal Bull of 1493, which had given most of the New World to Spain, (and eventually, Brazil to Portugal), therefore enables us to recognize that, as Richard Rorty was to argue several centuries later, our present "objective" mode of truth is only true within the specific terms of our present culture's self-conception (Rorty, 1985). Equally, the discourse of the Requisition, like the correlated discourses which legitimated the West's global expansion, was only true within the terms of the 16th century variant of the matrix Judaeo-Christian culture of the West, and therefore within the terms of its behavior-motivational belief system and neo-Augustianian principle of explanation.

Keeping this in mind, we now turn our attention to the Caribbean 500 years later, specifically to Haiti which has recently been at the centre of the news. The call for the United States invasion to dislodge the ruling military group was made in the wake of the failure of the policy of sanctions to do the job. History seemed to be repeating itself. The first United States intervention had been effected in 1915, in the context of the First World war. The long term purpose of the American occupation of Haiti (1915-1934) had been to enforce the kind of political stability needed for private foreign investment to continue to function as the integrative mechanism of our present global order of modernity and therefore of our present hegemonic cultural system of whose "form of life" the economic system of capitalism is the central expression.

When the United States intervened in 1915 to protect its investors' "economic interests," it had therefore done so within the prescriptive terms of a specific culturally instituted order of consciousness or belief system, and therefore within the logic of the specific "understanding of man's humanity" with which these terms provided. As indicated in the second phase of my title (i.e., Culture as Actuality), the major thesis of this paper, is that it is the phenomenon of culture, rather than of either

"nature" or "history" that provides the ground of all human existential reality or actuality. Hence the inevitability with which the American occupiers of 1915 effected a process of modernization in Haiti in terms that were to benefit largely the Westernized Haitian elite—the mulatto business and political elite, and later, the Duvalieriste Black political elite or *Noiriste*⁴—thereby strengthening them against the Vodounist peasantry and agro-proletariat. Also acting within the same terms, however, the American occupiers carried out their mandate on the basis of an overt United States Southern anti-black or color line racism, displayed impartially to elite and peasantry, since racism, anti-black and non-white racism is as culturally prescribed by "our present understanding of man's humanity," and its purely biologized "metaphor of the self" (Pandian, 1988) on the model of a natural organism, as is our economically organized order of global reality.⁵

Reactions to the overt brand of United States type "racism" amongst certain sections of the French educated elite in Haiti led to the movement of *Indigénisme* whose thrust was to lay claim to and revalorize the African components of Haitian culture, specifically the popular neo-agrarian religion of Vodoun which, although syncretized with Roman Catholic elements, is essentially African-derived; as a religion that has been made, within the logic of contemporary Western thought, into the byword of an antithetical irrationality to its own ostensibly supra-cultural order of rationality, into the Derridean Fool to its Logos.⁶

TWO UNDERSTANDINGS OF HUMANITY,
TWO MODES OF REFLECTIVE THOUGHT: THE
NEO-AGRARIAN WORLD OF VODOUN, THE TECHNO-
INDUSTRIAL WORLD OF THE WEST

From the point of view of empirical science, Vodouisants would say that the entire cosmos, including all of the principles inherent in its mechanical, biological, and stellar functions, can be reduced to one higher principle, Bondye, who is the ensurer of universal order and the source of all human actions. The highest wisdom consists not only in recognizing the wholeness of the universal order as contained in Bondye, but also in affirming that same wholeness in the human community. (Desmangles, 1992, p.96)

Before the shock of the United States 1915 occupation, the popular religious culture of Vodoun, even where repressed and stigmatized by the elite as the "price of the ticket" for its assimilation into being "magnificent

coloured Frenchmen" (Price-Mars, 1983, p.8), had been nevertheless inscribed in the Haitian collective psyche, because of the unifying role that this counter-belief system had played in making possible Haiti's anti-slavery, independence struggle and victory against the French. The "return" of the elite to a reclaiming of this legacy was therefore part of the intellectual challenge to what most Haitians now saw as their island's neo-imperial occupation by the Americans. There were two variants to this challenge. One thrust, that of Price-Mars, laid the emphasis on the calling into question the distortions of Western ethnographic accounts of Vodoun. The other, that of Francois Duvalier (and his *Noiristes*), was to manipulate Vodoun, together with its secret society system⁷ as a powerful semi-official tool with which to displace the hegemony of the largely mulatto upper-class elite, replacing it with its own socially mobile lower middle black, but no less educationally Westernized, elite.

For the Haitian popular classes, however, the peasantry and agro-proletariats, whose practitioners of Vodoun lived within the terms of its quite different "understanding of man's humanity," the major issue was not the Southern style white racism of the Americans. Rather, it was the issue of the direct impact on their lives of the processes of modernization that the Americans carried out within the terms of a cultural logic and principle of organization directly opposed to their own. This clash would lead to their armed revolt under the leadership of the peasant leader Charlemagne Peralte (Wilentz, 1989). Although Peralte was eventually defeated and executed, semi-lynching style, by the Americans, he became both a national hero for the new Duvalieriste Haitian elite, as well as a revered popular icon for the Vodouisant masses. This armed revolt had therefore been the expression of a profound clash between the Americans, as the bearers of the West's techno-industrial "understanding of man's humanity" and the still hegemonically neo-Agrarian and symbiotic African-cum-Judaeo-Christian "understanding," of which the Haitian Vodouisant were and are the bearers.⁸

For in spite of the far-reaching impact of the techno-industrial mode of reflective thought⁹ which the Americans expressed through their modernizing activities, this thought was and is generated from the now purely secularized variant of the matrix Judaeo-Christian "local culture" of the West, as a variant which although now globalized, is itself "one of the forms life has locally taken" (Geertz, 1983). In consequence, the clash between the American occupiers and the Vodouisant Haitian peasantry was one between two ways of life, two orders of consciousness, or modes

of being, two modes of the "real and the normal," both of which had until then, coexisted in the hegemonic cultural terms of the former; and therefore within the structural logic of the world system put in place by the West from the 16th century on (Wallerstein, 1974).

Hence the paradox that it was to be the modernizing and debt-collecting imperative of the first 1915 United States intervention that was to lead directly to today's escaping-only-to-be repatriated-again-by the patrolling American coast guard vessels—boat-people—that is, as refugees that were only secondarily economic refugees (as they are classified as being, in order to be denied asylum status), but rather primarily escapees from the global effects of the implacable logic of our present techno-industrial mode of "reflective thought." It is this mode of thought that motivates and legitimates the economic policies, not only of the Americans but also of Haiti's Westernized elites, while these are the very policies that have set in train the world-systemic uprooting and jobless impoverishment of today's escaping boat peoples of the G.7's satellite worlds.

One needs to point out here that the Haitian boat people are, in their majority, the descendants of African slaves rather than, as in the case of Cuba, primarily of European settlers and their mixed descendants. Therefore, unlike the Cubans, the Haitians are black and not fleeing from a Communist, but only from a neo- or peripheral-capitalist, military dictatorship.

This is not to say that the call by both white and black Americans for the intervention to "restore democracy" by restoring Aristide to power is not sincerely meant. But rather that it is, in the larger context of the now fully effected shift to a consumer-driven, as distinct from the earlier production-driven, phase of the global-systemic accumulation of capital that the goals of blocking the entrance of a large mass of black Haitians refugees into the United States and of "restoring democracy" in its Western bourgeois definition¹⁰ to Haiti coincide. A democratically elected and restored Aristide or his like, together with a new cadre of technocrats, in the place of the military elite and/or dictators such as the Duvaliers, are now needed to enable the re-modernization of Haiti, in the new terms required by the ongoing re-ordering of the Western world system.

New prescriptive rules are now needed by the global economic system as a function of the stable replication of our present "local culture" and its Western bourgeois "understanding of man's humanity." If we see our present "understanding" as a transumed form (i.e., a new form which

nevertheless carries over the old meanings) (Bloom, 1983) of the original matrix "understanding" put in place by the rise of the Judaeo-Christianity's then new conception of being human),¹¹ a culture-historical continuity can here be identified. For while even refugees from Castro's Cuba are also being detained, it is against the would-be migrants of Haiti as the largest nation-state island of the ex-slave, and therefore in its majority, black Caribbean, that the most total exclusion is being carried out. The continuity here is that it had also been on these islands and specifically on the island shared today between Haiti and the Dominican Republic that the initial culturally legitimized division of labour, based on the West's 16th century "invention of man" (Foucault, 1973, p.386), had established the hierarchical structures that were to be founding both to the Caribbean and to what is today's world system. This first hierarchical structural pattern, one that had been based on the dominance/subordinate relationships of settler to natives or of Europeans to *indios*, on the one hand and of masters to slaves, Europeans to "negros"¹² on the other, had been put in place on the basis of two forms of forced labor institutions. These had been that of the neo-serf, the *encomienda* system¹³ manned by *indios*, and that of the slave plantation system manned by "negros," both of which had been put in place by the Europeans, in the terms of their then specific 16th century "local culture" "understanding of man's humanity."

Another culture-historical continuity was to underlie the more total degree of exclusion being inflicted today on the Haitians, as contrasted to the Cubans. This was that, in the wake of the abolition of slavery and in the context of the West's second invention of Man in a now totally secularized form, it was to be, as Jacob Pandian, the anthropologist further points out, the peoples of African hereditary descent, who were to be made into the physical referent of the ostensibly genetically dysselected Human Other (or nigger/nègre) to Man's¹⁴ new self-conception (Pandian, 1988). That is, as the Eugenic (i. e., genetically selected) Self within the now biologized "understanding of man's humanity."

It is, therefore, within the terms of this now globalized "understanding" that the black popular majority of the ex-slave Caribbean and centrally of Haiti now find themselves imprisoned today, driving them to seek escape by migration as boat people to the United States at the same time as they are blocked by United States Coast Guard vessels.

There is another central continuity here. At the time of the initial putting in place of the founding structures of the post-1492 Caribbean by

the Spaniards, who had then coercively (with *their ships* hovering offshore), put these structures in place, these Spaniards too would have understood their own actions as *aculturally* as we understand our actions, too, today. That is, as actions/behaviours prescribed and legitimated by a universally applicable "understanding of man's humanity" and its mode of truth.

The proposed parallel here is that the legitimating speech put forward by President Clinton to defend the paradox of both attempting to "restore democracy" to Haiti (with warships and marines) at the same time as his Coast guard vessels enforce the exclusion of Haitian migrants to the United States, makes sense and therefore is not a parallel "mad" discourse, only within the terms of our present "understanding of man" and its "local culture" order of truth. Since if for the Americans, Aristide's return (as a popularly elected leader) will, it is believed, serve two purposes (i.e., be the most effective guard against the threat now posed by the boat people to the racial-national interests of the United States, a country that still conceives of itself as being culturally, a Euroamerican, and, biologically, a white nation,¹⁵ and second, provide a stable atmosphere for United States investments), the Haitians themselves, including the boat people stopped at sea, are being asked to believe that the only goal of the Americans is to "restore democracy" represented as the only cure for the "affliction" that ails Haiti. As if Haiti's past ills, exacerbated by its political leadership, are not themselves fundamentally due to the world systemic role of "underdevelopment" imposed upon it within the terms of our present Western bourgeois "understanding of man's humanity" and the attempt of people to realize it; an understanding of which the United States is now the global enforcer.

Yet the issue here, as Heidegger brilliantly implies (1977), is not the issue of those who seek to realize this understanding or to militarily enforce it. The issue here is that of the "understanding" itself, and of those, we the scholars of contemporary academia, who formulate, elaborate and represent this "local culture" understanding as if it were a universally applicable and acultural one.

HISTORY AS "HUMAN ACTUALITY"? OR THE "LOCAL CULTURE" OF THE WEST AS THE GROUND OF CONTEMPORARY HISTORY, OF MODERNITY

As we have seen, the question, 'What is history?' asks whether history is human actuality or merely the product of human imagination, i.e., whether it is the *res gestae* or only the *historia rerum gestarum*. Modernity has come to the conclusion that it is the human

actuality....The philosophical development that occurs ... represents the increasing and ultimately utter historicization of Western life and thought.... It is thus not accidental that in our times we note an even more vehement and partisan attachment to particular conceptions of history. (Gillespie, 1984, p.24)

The post-1492 Caribbean, the world system of which its islands were to be founding units, and the era of modernity, were all three brought into existence by the same dynamic process of cultural discontinuity, and therefore of historical rupture. This discontinuity/rupture was effected by the intellectual revolution of lay humanism in the context of the rise of the modern European state, as the first, if still partly religious, form of a secularizing mode of human co-existence. While it was in the context of these dual movements of intellectual and socio-systemic transformation that a new order of transculturally applicable truth, that of the natural sciences, was also to gradually emerge.

This new order of truth, which had emerged in the wake of both the 15th-century voyages of the Portuguese and Columbus, and of Copernicus' challenge to the earlier correlated belief system in the ostensibly divinely-ordered non-homogeneity of a universe divided between the moving celestial realm as the realm of the Redeemed Spirit, and the terrestrial realm of the Earth which, as the abode of "fallen" mankind, had to be fixed and unmoving at the centre of the universe, based itself on a new hypothesis. This hypothesis was that nature functioned in the same way "in Europe" as "in America," "in heaven as on earth," and all according to the same laws, to the "same accustomed course of nature" (*cursus solitus naturae*).¹⁶ While given that these laws could now be recognized as governing all parts of the universe, they could be made the basis for the elaboration of a new order of knowledge in whose terms, the knower could now extrapolate from the qualities of bodies that are "found to be within the reach of our experiments," what the qualities of all bodies whatsoever, however distant, would have to be (Funkenstein, 1986, p.29).

This new image of Nature as an autonomously functioning force or cause in its own right was to accompany the parallel process of the secularizing or degodding of the criterion of being human at the public levels of existence that was to be the defining characteristic, both of the process to which we give the name modernity, and of the world system that was to be its condition of existence. The foundations of both modernity and our present world system were therefore laid down in the context of the rise of the post-feudal European state, whose first project of

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