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'Latin American Modernity, and yet...'

Adam Sharman
University of Nottingham

Abstract

The article examines two 'postmodern' critiques of modernity: a general history which argues that it was never solely Western, and a work of Latin American cultural criticism which wishes to leave a modernity seen as eurocentric. It argues that to understand the modern elements of Latin America entails keeping present the European, and in part pre-nineteenth-century, genealogy of modernity. This, in order to grasp both the pitfalls of claiming modernity is a common project (colonialism vanishes) and the difficulty of going beyond it (European modernity bequeathed the language of breaks and dialectical incorporations). The piece identifies the rhetorical choreography involved when the limits of the critique of Western modernity become apparent.

Keywords

Modernity
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The critique of modernity did not begin in the last two decades. Rousseau (Pocock 1987: 56), Weber (1989) and, perhaps above all for a generation of Latin American cultural critics who began work in the 1960s, Adorno and Horkheimer (1997) on the instrumental rationality of *capitalist* modernity are important earlier voices. However, in and beyond Latin America the critique has been renewed in recent years with the focus not first and

foremost on modernity's capitalist character but on its *westernness*. The critique is a pincer movement. From one direction comes the charge that modernity never was just Western in its origins, but rather was a 'common' project. I shall take C. A. Bayly's (2004) *The Birth of the Modern World 1780-1914*, which enjoys a strained relationship with the Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking world, as an example of this argument. In accordance with a classical rubric, modern habits, even if they do not belong exclusively to the West, emerge in Bayly's narrative as a progressive force. Modernity is a good thing. A long nineteenth-century good thing. From the other angle comes the thrust more common among contemporary critics of Latin American culture, namely, that modernity was, or leastways became, a Eurocentric, Western affair. I shall digress through various first-generation practitioners of Latin American cultural studies, but will take as my primary example of this tendency Néstor García Canclini's (2001) *Culturas híbridas*. In that text, a modernity again closely identified with the nineteenth century presents a largely negative face, provoking not only the denunciation of its Eurocentrism but the desire to supersede it altogether (hence the book's subtitle: *Estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad*).

There have been much more acerbic critiques of modernity in Latin America post-*Culturas híbridas*. The broad aim of such critiques is precisely not to rehearse the detail of a canonical European modernity, but instead to illuminate its eclipsed colonial periphery (Dussel, 1998); decouple from it, or leastways think it 'otherwise' (Mignolo, 2005; Escobar, 2007); activate the West's own discarded, because politically unsuitable, philosophical fragments, the 'South of the North', so to speak (Santos, 2009); or examine that emancipatory 'historical reason', still present in Latin America, capable of resisting the dominant, instrumental reason of Europe and the USA (Quijano, 1993). A full and considered engagement with the above writings, which would begin by considering the European — Franco-German — genealogy of the discourse of 'otherwise', is for another occasion.

Suffice it to say that I choose *Culturas híbridas* because in trying to answer the question that later works will address (how does Latin America get out of modernity?), it takes the time to trace the lineaments of a nineteenth-century, Weberian understanding of what modernity might be. In so doing, it both exhibits a degree of respect for the latter's internal complexities while, like Bayly, proceeding with its ostensibly postmodern, anti-ethnocentric critique.

Alan Knight (2007: 97) argues that the shape that modernity assumes in Latin America is not determined by modernity's European origins and 'does not warrant it carrying a permanent "made in Europe" stamp'. While not perhaps sharing his contention that the concept of modernity has been subject to a 'hostile takeover' by the 'asset-strippers of lit crit and cultural studies' (107), I share his view that, at least in its philosophical guise, 'it is historically a reasonable label to use, since it captures the idea of something new, a decisive break with the past, and a repudiation of tradition (i.e., the inherited ideas and institutions of the old regime)' (100). My argument will be two-pronged. First, and this is perhaps the lesser of the two points, the effort to name the nineteenth century as the proper place for modernity needs careful scrutiny. Such an effort has history on its side. Knight (101) observes that modernity as philosophical creature is born with the European Enlightenment. However, it is worth remembering that when Hegel coined the name 'the modern age', he did not believe that the age in question had begun in 1789, but that it had older origins which had reached a particular fulfillment with the French Revolution. My second point is that the idea of a break with tradition and the past, an idea that comes from a specific place able to direct the material manifestations of this novelty on a global scale as never before (cf. Quijano 140), is exactly what warrants the label carrying an *indelible* 'made in Europe' stamp. Knight (109-110; my emphasis): 'Citizenship, equality before the law, and free expression, though often infringed or denied, are today *indelible* features of Latin America that trace back to

Enlightenment origins'. Latin Americanists may want the region to have its own modernity, *and yet...* I reproduce in that last, adversative phrase an oft-deployed rhetorical strategy which consists in arguing passionately that the region had its own idiosyncratic modernity, before either conceding that the latter may not have been entirely its own or stumbling into contradictions that betray as much. The contents of the modern age were not all made in Europe and modern critical reason is not entirely Western (for it to be so, the West would have had to invent reason itself); and yet to ignore the historical imprint of modernity is to misunderstand its sheer invasiveness.

Despite its singular name, 'modernity' has conventionally been defined in two conflicting, but not unrelated, ways: modernity as historical phase or socioeconomic reality and modernity as aesthetic concept (Calinescu, 1987: 41). Hegel versus Baudelaire. These competing definitions resurface in C. A. Bayly's book. There, modernity is an 'aspiration to be "up with the times"', a '*process* of emulation and borrowing', but also a historical period, 'a *period* which began at the end of the eighteenth century and has continued up to the present day in various forms' (Bayly, 2004: 11):

It seems difficult to deny that, between about 1780 and 1914, increasing numbers of people decided that they were modern, or that they were living in a modern world, whether they liked it or not. The Scottish and French philosophers of the eighteenth century believed that a good deal of all previous human thought could safely be dumped. By the end of the nineteenth century, icons of technical modernization — the car, the aeroplane, the telephone — were all around to dramatize this sensibility. By 1900, many elite Asians and Africans had similarly come to believe that this was an age when custom, tradition, patriarchy, old styles of religion, and community were eroding and should erode further. (10)

Some important scholars (Cassirer, 1963: 10; Calinescu, 1987: 13-14; Hall and Gieben, 1997; Arendt, 1993: 27; Habermas, 1994: 5) would blanch at the notion that the European modern age ‘began’ at the end of the eighteenth century. But even if his periodisation looks like a land-grab which not only seizes modernity for historians of the nineteenth century, but makes it easier to argue that it is a shared, as opposed to Western, phenomenon, Bayly is conscious that not all the things he lists as the contents of modernity are ‘born’ in the nineteenth century; rather, they achieve a certain generalisation throughout the society of the time.

In fact, the check-list Bayly (11) produces for this nineteenth-century condition (the rise of ‘the nation-state, demanding centralisation of power or loyalty to an ethnic solidarity, alongside a massive expansion of global commercial and intellectual links. The international spread of industrialisation and a new style of urban living’) corresponds to an ideal European modernity whose status as archetype he will spend the rest of the book trying to disqualify. Such a disqualification will not be easy. Each and every negation of the name simultaneously reaffirms it. Even to insist that the canonical contents of European modernity (capitalism, the nation-state, a rational world-view, the Subject) were precisely features of a *European* trajectory, and that other countries took ‘very different roads to modernization’ (Touraine, 1995: 11), is to posit as singular, *because one has used the same name (modernization)*, the very thing whose singularity one rejects. The insistence on multiple paths, and on the varied contents of different modernisations, cannot hide the fact that all these roads appear to wind up at the same place, that is, at *modernisation* (‘the vast majority of countries in the world took very different roads to modernization’). This definitional aporia has particular significance for the anti-ethnocentric critique of modernity. For the road to the analysis of the respective roads to modernisation passes by way of a series of related *European* languages and traditions, and by way of one language and tradition in particular. *Modernisation, modernity, modernité* and *modernidad* all point back to the late fifth-century

AD Latin word *modernus*, meaning ‘now’ or ‘the time of the now’ (Calinescu, 1987: 14 and Jameson, 2002: 17), a word given renewed currency around the end of the eighteenth century, and specifically in Hegel, as a polemical means to suggest that parts of Europe had ushered in a new age (Habermas, 1994: 83). In short, it is impossible to disentangle from the word *modernidad* the European sense of modernity as novelty or break with tradition and the past. This is what unites the two conflicting interpretations of modernity. And it is this linguistic and conceptual tie to the European tradition that renders problematic efforts to disavow the centrality of Europe to the modern age.

Néstor García Canclini is not the first Latin American to write about modernity. A certain Latin American tradition of writing on modernity would include: Domingo Sarmiento, of course, but also his Chilean contemporary, Francisco Bilbao (2007), on the shiny ‘new age’ that comes out of Europe with the French Revolution; José Enrique Rodó’s more critical perspective on the materialism of the modern USA; the nationalism of José Martí and the Marxism of José Carlos Mariátegui; and the Octavio Paz of *Los hijos del limo*, one of the seminal aphoristic articulations — in effect, of Calinescu’s aesthetic concept of modernity — on modernity as perpetually renewed criticism and change (Sharman 2006: 8-9 and 102-103). Subsequently, Latin American cultural criticism of the 1960s becomes particularly critical of modernity. First, because of the tendency of what is called the philosophical discourse of modernity to segregate and stratify people and things on the basis of their quotient of ‘modernness’. ‘Modernity’ operates as a qualitative as much as a chronological category. Modernity, say its advocates, is better than the period of (European) history which preceded it (Eisenstadt, 1983: 231-232); or, indeed, superior to the contemporary reality of other parts of the globe, which might be simultaneous with it but which are adjudged to be ‘behind’ it (see Osborne, 1992: 75). Secondly, on account of the wave of US-inspired socioeconomic modernisation which swept across Latin America principally after the Second World War, a

passively received ‘failed or deficient “modernization”’ (Quijano, 1993: 141), in the eyes of many Left intellectuals, which merely led to a state of dependency. For both reasons, the actually existing strains of the modern found in Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s are viewed negatively, as a dominant or neo-colonial force. However, there is an important difference between these revolutionary dismantlings of ‘imperialist’ or ‘neo-colonialist’ modernity that were nonetheless keen to make good on some of the original contents of the modern European project, and other, post-Glasnost work on the question of modernity in Latin America, such as that of García Canclini, in which the modern cultural project as a whole appears to come under attack.

García Canclini’s definition of modernity in *Culturas híbridas* begins on a Habermasian note by restating the standard acceptance of it as a historical phase (‘la modernidad como etapa histórica’ [40]). However, by the end of the book it has become a ‘condition’ (‘una condición que nos envuelve’) (322); and, somewhere *en route*, four ‘projects’:

Por proyecto *emancipador* entendemos la secularización de los campos culturales, la producción autoexpresiva y autorregulada de las prácticas simbólicas, su desenvolvimiento en mercados autónomos. Forman parte de este movimiento emancipador la racionalización de la vida social y el individualismo creciente, sobre todo en las grandes ciudades.

Denominamos proyecto *expansivo* a la tendencia de la modernidad que busca extender el conocimiento y la posesión de la naturaleza, la producción, la circulación y el consumo de los bienes. En el capitalismo, la expansión está motivada preferentemente por el incremento del lucro; pero en un sentido más amplio se manifiesta en la promoción de los descubrimientos científicos y el desarrollo industrial.

El proyecto *renovador* abarca dos aspectos, con frecuencia complementarios: por una parte, la persecución de un mejoramiento e innovación incesantes propios de una relación con la naturaleza y la sociedad liberada de toda prescripción sagrada sobre cómo debe ser el mundo; por la otra, la necesidad de reformular una y otra vez los signos de distinción que el consumo masificado desgasta.

Llamamos proyecto *democratizador* al movimiento de la modernidad que confía en la educación, la difusión del arte y los saberes especializados, para lograr una evolución racional y moral. Se extiende desde la ilustración hasta la UNESCO, desde el positivismo hasta los programas educativos o de popularización de la ciencia y la cultura emprendidos por gobiernos liberales, socialistas y agrupaciones alternativas e independientes. (51)

Here modernity is presented as a taxonomy from which historical causality is removed (nowhere does it say what brought about such ‘projects’). The result of this taxonomic approach is to infer that there might be more than one road to modernity (although even here there is a species of blueprint and thus prescriptiveness is not altogether avoided). Rationalisation plays a role, but is not the sole cause; capitalism rears its head, but is one possibility among others; the nation-state is mentioned, but only metonymically, in the shape of ‘liberal governments’. García Canclini’s contention is that *cultural* modernity in Europe came about in socioeconomically unmodernised places; and thus that it makes no sense to compare Latin American cultural modernity melancholically to the European blueprint of a full and harmonious cultural modernity that never actually existed in the so-called modern heartlands. Aside from the fact that the contents of modernity are described variously as positive and negative, and thus that the intellectual and moral judgement on it is a complex one, the other essential point of García Canclini’s commentary-definition, which I have

insisted on at greater length elsewhere (Sharman 2006), is that the equivocal evaluation of the projects of modernity does not alter the fact that the projects define part, rather than the whole, of the historical phase called the modern age. Not everything in the modern age is modern (Latour, 1993: 68). This caveat will assume its significance in due course, when we witness attempts to demonstrate that Western modernity borrowed things from elsewhere, and was thus not the sole originator of modernity, whereas in fact the things in question were borrowed during the historical phase called modernity but were not themselves modern.

In what concerns periodisation, García Canclini and other contributors to the debate on Latin American cultural modernity of the same time are close to the years (1890-1914) that Bayly regards as the ‘crucible of modernity’. This periodisation coincides with Marshall Berman’s (1983) third phase of what is essentially a European-Anglo-American affair. The exact dates may be contested, but what Beatriz Sarlo, García Canclini, Jesús Martín-Barbero (1998: 150ff) and José Joaquín Brunner (1992: 59) tacitly agree on is that Latin America’s variant of modernity is closely wedded to the second industrial revolution. For Sarlo, modernity only really arrives in Buenos Aires in the early decades of the twentieth century (Sarlo, 1988; 1992; 1993; and 2000: 109-110). García Canclini (2001: 95) and Brunner (1992: 71) go further. They claim that cultural modernity only takes hold in Latin America in the 1950s, principally through schooling and television. For Brunner, what might be considered elements of modernity, such as Sarmiento, the *modernistas*, aspects of the Mexican Revolution, the ideas of Martí and Mariátegui, and early-twentieth-century university reform, are all isolated ‘new’ (not ‘modern’) moments which do not amount to a genuine ‘constelación de cultura propiamente moderna como tal’ (50-51).

Brunner’s aggressively modernist narrative of Latin American modernity has the virtue of being able to identify the date by which certain modern habits have achieved a generalisation throughout the region, but the dual vices of downplaying the spread and

significance of modern ideas and practices in the earlier period (we recall Thomson) and of overstating the propriety of that constellation of modern Latin American culture, which, even in the 1950s, was in practice ‘contaminated’ at every step by tradition. In contrast, both Bayly and García Canclini insist that there were abundant residual traditional forms in modern societies, even in the ‘original’ heartlands of modernity: hence Bayly’s chapters on ‘Empires of Religion’ and ‘The Reconstitution of Social Hierarchies’, and García Canclini’s different ‘historical temporalities’. Not everything in the modern age is modern. And not all the ‘modern’ contents of modernity begin in the modern age, a fact evidenced by Bayly’s point that the tradition of civic republicanism can be traced back to Renaissance Italy and, indeed, classical times.

I have so far touched on just one of the main criticisms of that Western modernity outlined by Bayly and García Canclini, which consists in telling it that it never was especially modern. The second way of puncturing Western modernity’s self-image is to tell it that someone else invented it. While Bayly and García Canclini are at one in stressing the many premodern contents of the historical period known as modernity, Bayly differs from García Canclini and Calinescu on the question of origins. For Calinescu (1987: 41) — and this is the standard definition — socioeconomic modernity necessarily refers to a ‘stage in the history of Western civilization’. Cassirer, Habermas, Arendt and Berman, but also García Canclini, Sarlo and Martín-Barbero, may dispute the precise temporal beginnings of modernity, but not the fact that the name designates a phase of Western history. At this juncture, it is important to recall Calinescu’s other meaning of modernity, that is, modernity as concept, attitude or condition. For as soon as the word *modernity* is applied to non-Western parts of the globe, it cannot mean ‘a stage in the history of Western civilization’. It would make no sense to say that a stage or phase of European history had arrived in Peru. Historical phases do not arrive elsewhere; elements of a historical phase arrive elsewhere. To speak of the ‘modernity’ of

Peru is to abstract and generalise the word (to speak of the modernity of Manchester is to do likewise; there is no ‘proper’, non-abstract use of the word). This is Habermas’s (1994: 2) point about the part played by 1950s’ sociological functionalism: namely, that its theory of *modernisation* performs an abstraction on the (Weberian) concept of *modernity*, dissociating the latter from its modern European origins and stylising it into a ‘spatio-temporally neutral model for processes of social development in general’. In short, and in this view, places beyond modern Europe get fragments, pale versions, hand-me-downs even, of the European project: the original (Modernity) is ‘stylised’ and finds its copies (modernisations) transplanted into alien contexts.

Anibal Quijano (1993: 141) argues something similar: Latin America finds itself not only without a modernity to speak of, but, by virtue of the region’s failure to industrialise, saddled with a deficient modernisation to boot. However, there are significant differences between Habermas and Quijano. Whereas Habermas maintains that Europe continues to encourage both modernisation and the emancipatory project of modernity, Quijano holds that Europe (he writes specifically about ‘England’) puts paid to the liberating tendencies of modernity (i.e. historical reason), English hegemony ushering in instead the new age of modernisation by instrumentalising reason (we are back with Adorno and Horkheimer). Somewhat enigmatically, for Quijano it is Latin America, and above all its non-European populations, that will carry the torch of historical reason — a flame that comes from indigenous and modern European sources alike —, since, and this is a further difference from Habermas, Latin America was in on the original project of modernity from the beginning.

Leaving aside the (romantic) antinomies of the schema proposed by Quijano (Europe modernised and lost its modernity; Latin America modernised badly but held onto its modernity), he comes close, with one important difference, to the central proposition of Bayly’s book: not only were there subsequently different modernities, it is an error to

concede that the first modernity was ever simply Western in origin. Latin American modernity is not, then, a general condition extrapolated from a phase of Western civilisation. This is a proposition with which Quijano and Dussel can happily concur. However, Bayly is not thinking of their, sixteenth-century modernity. His anti-diffusionist argument is that, notwithstanding the undeniable growing economic dominance of the West, peoples beyond Western Europe and North America were actively engaged in making the modern world *in the nineteenth century*, and it represents the most servile submission to the image of the West as the Essential Protagonist of World History to claim otherwise, a view echoed by some Latin Americanists (Thurner, 2003: 29-30). Bayly's general historiography has, nevertheless, attracted criticism from historians of Spanish America, not because they think he has got his dates wrong, nor because they consider his thesis incorrect, but, contra Dussel and Quijano, because he downplays the role of the Hispanic world in the birth of the modern, thereby perpetuating the view of a backward Spain dragging behind it a clutch of no less retrograde former colonies. Guy Thomson (2007) has shown that recognisably 'modern' political and cultural habits could be found in the period from the 1850s to the 1880s in relatively rural parts both of the provinces of Córdoba, Málaga and Granada in southern Spain and of the Puebla Sierra of East-Central Mexico. However, the upshot of this particular critique of Bayly is that his thesis receives greater confirmation: even Spain and Spanish America (yes, even they) exhibit clearly modern habits, and thus modernity is even more of a shared enterprise than we thought.

Bayly's would-be anti-ethnocentric approach characteristically has two aspects: the question of origins and the question of appropriation. The weaker aspect, the question of appropriation, has become a critical commonplace: it insists that Western ideas were taken up, reworked and transformed elsewhere. This is Bayly's point about the Asian response to the modern state: yes, it was European expansion which stimulated the rapid development of

modern state forms in Asia, but some areas already had a sophisticated bureaucracy or public authority beyond a particular dynasty, and likewise possessed the ability to borrow European forms. Such an argument acknowledges pre-existing non-Western structures; suggests that non-Western populations were not inert victim-receptacles into which Western liquid was poured; and contends that some of the diffused liquid washed back, altered, onto Western shores and thus changed the original mixture. Nevertheless, and for all its recasting of a certain view of non-Western peoples as hapless imitators of the West, to speak of appropriation is still to speak of reception rather than production at source and does not sink the diffusion metaphor (the idea that modernity is diffused from its European and, later, North American centres). All that happens, following diffusion, is that non-European peoples 'set limits to the nature and extent of their domination by European power-holders' (Bayly, 2004: 3). That is a modest claim.

The stronger aspect, the question of origins, holds that non-Western parts of the globe were the originators, not just the adapters, of some of the palpably modern contents of the modern world. One must proceed carefully here. A simple list of the many things borrowed by modern Europeans would not suffice to prove that such borrowings were modern nor, hence, demonstrate the existence of an entirely *non-European* modernity. 'Herbal medical remedies developed by indigenous peoples in Africa and South America' may have been 'borrowed and adapted by Europeans in the eighteenth century' (Bayly, 2004: 77), but such remedies were precisely traditional and thus contributed to the period without themselves being modern contents of modernity. In contrast, the classic example cited by Bayly to prove that the modern contents of modernity were not only made in the West is Japanese industrialisation. The conventional narrative of modernity is that it was driven economically by the industrial revolution and that the latter was born in England. Bayly (2004: 12) suggests that Japanese industrialisation ran *pari passu* with it: that the Meiji regime (1868-

1912) shows a non-Western country plainly giving birth to modern contents of modernity, and in a manner that does not conform to the Western blueprint (the country had a markedly traditional social order and no representative government), such that one ought to speak rather of a ‘common modernity’.

Bayly is trying to dislocate the image of a West which, before 1500, believed God to be the originator of the universe, and which, after 1500, believed itself to be the creator of the modern world. The proper name ‘*Western* modernity’ attempts to capture for the West all things considered modern, when the reality is that, first, Europe and, then, the US begged, borrowed and stole things from elsewhere (‘techniques of dyeing and glazing from Asia [...] were still being borrowed and adapted by Europeans in the eighteenth century’ [Bayly, 2004: 77]). Bayly’s recognition of non-Western things and actors in the modern age renders the name ‘*Western* modernity’ improper and may well persuade us of the need to speak instead, with or without piety, of an ‘alternative’, or even a ‘common’, modernity. And yet... There is something too reassuring about this notion of a do-it-yourself modernity:

Everyone knows the formula by now: this means that there can be a modernity which is different from the standard or hegemonic Anglo-Saxon model. Whatever you dislike about the latter, including the subaltern position it leaves you in, can be effaced by the reassuring and ‘cultural’ notion that you can fashion your own modernity differently, so that there can be a Latin-American kind, or an Indian kind or an African kind, and so forth. [...] But this is to overlook the other fundamental meaning of modernity which is that of a worldwide capitalism itself. The standardization projected by capitalist globalization in this third or late stage of the system casts considerable doubt on all these pious hopes for cultural variety in a future world colonized by a universal market order. (Jameson, 2002:12-13)

One wonders whether Japan was not rather an instance of appropriation. As Bayly says, the Meiji regime constantly sent missions to the West to learn the latest military and industrial techniques, the better to outflank the West. The upshot of this case-study is the first illustration in Bayly's book: the nineteenth-century Japanese print depicting the Japanese woman in Western dress seated at a Singer sewing machine. The image appears to confirm the conventional, rather than Bayly's, view: namely, that for 'uniformity' read 'westernisation'. While the Western dress does not annul the Japaneseness of the woman in print, the Westernness of her would-be Japanese modernity is inscribed on her body.

This is even more so in the case of the Latin America. It has become an article of faith to insist, for instance, that the contribution of Latin American science to modernity be given its proper dues. One finds this insistence in someone like Quijano (1993: 143) but also in Whitaker's (1963) classic volume on enlightenment in the region. Saldaña (2006: 16) claims that Latin American science such as New Granada botany, Mexican herbalism, colonial Peruvian mathematics, and New Spanish metallurgy was at various moments central to European science. Elías Trabulse's (1985: 41-44) exhaustive reconstruction of the Creole and indigenous Latin American scientific tradition leads him to argue that European observations on botany, zoology, geology, hydrology and geography gleaned from the New World almost always included reports on Indian scientific advances, and that such things as nahua medicinal plant remedies were used extensively in Europe. Tellingly, however, he goes on to concede that while indigenous medicine may well have been as effective as the still essentially late-medieval European medicine of the day, in truth this was because both were equally poor, or, as Quevedo and Gutiérrez (2006: 163) see it, both would fail to pass muster once the new European anatomical and clinical medicine was introduced in the first part of the nineteenth century. In other words, the point would seem to be that the modern science that takes place in Latin America is profoundly shaped by the European tradition,

above all by an intermediary such as Feijoo (Saldaña: 126), and carried out by the descendants of Europeans; and thus that to rush hastily, with Bayly, to an unquestioning use of the word *common* is to risk masking the Western and, indeed, imperial-colonial dimension of modernity. In this imperial-colonial dimension (which is not the only dimension) it is the West which manages most to shape modernity, and to occupy the common ground, not to say the common land — both of which henceforth cease to be common. But then Bayly knows this. The dominant rhetorical form of *The Birth of the Modern World* is the adversative: bold anti-ethnocentric proposition followed by ‘however’, ‘That said’, ‘All the same’ or ‘and yet’ (Bayly, 2004: 20, 79, 81, 290 and 318).

This rhetorical strategy emerges early in the book with Bayly’s treatment of Jan de Vries’s idea of demand-side ‘industrious revolutions’. If the conventional idea of the industrial revolution posits certain European countries as the prime movers of modernity, the concept of industrious revolution points to the phenomenon in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries whereby family labour was used more efficiently by buying in goods and services from outside the household. Once it is realised that industrious revolutions ‘could increase prosperity in a much stealthier way without benefit of a rapid ratcheting up of industrial production’ (2004: 52), Bayly can argue that Western and non-Western people were simultaneously engaged in a new commercial dynamic which had more to do with changing socioeconomic patterns in many parts of the globe than with a Big Change in just one. For our purposes, parts of the valley of Mexico and coastal Brazil now appear on the radar as places which contributed a new dynamic to the expansion of commerce and, hence, of modernity itself. However, by the beginning of the fourth of the six pages Bayly dedicates to the notion, the ostensible objective of highlighting the non-European dimension of modernity gives way to a concession explaining instead why these non-European industrious revolutions amounted to little, before Bayly then moves to explain, in a section entitled ‘Trade, Finance,

and Innovation: European Competitive Advantages’, why Europe is after all the driving force of the modern world. Despite advancing the idea of a common modernity, Bayly (2004: 168) lists the multiple factors which ensured that, from the middle of the nineteenth century, ‘the flow of events was now more firmly from Europe and North America outward’. These factors include: usable land, agriculture, food availability, coal, inventions, stable legal and financial institutions, the commercial middle classes, the public sphere, and military capability (above all see 60-64).

Of even greater significance than this concession to Europe and North America’s domination of the modern world from the middle of the nineteenth century is that regarding the historical primacy of the West in the ‘shift to modernity’. The following sentences appear to petition for a ‘common modernity’, but buried in their midst are the key concessions ‘The shift to modernity certainly occurred somewhat earlier’ and ‘For a time the West was both an *exemplar* and a *controller* of modernity’:

The shift to modernity certainly occurred somewhat earlier, and initially much more powerfully in western Europe and its North American colonies. Before 1914, people in most parts of the world were grappling in many different ways with this common modernity and were not simply imitators of the West. For a time the West was both an *exemplar* and a *controller* of modernity. By the mid-nineteenth century, there were many new controllers and exemplars around the world, among which Japan’s partially self-fashioned modernity was the most important. (Bayly, 2004: 12)

The concessions on chronology are crucial. For one can only advance the idea of a common modernity by focusing on the nineteenth century, that is, by beginning the story too late. By that time, the West has already named and put its indelible stamp on the modern age, something to which Bayly is not oblivious. In addition to the factors listed above, he sees

certain things that are not 'common' but rather unique to the West, the 'most significant' being the European idea of progress in knowledge and the material rewards to be had from it (the second being the triumvirate of liberalism, socialism and science). In the final analysis, Bayly (2004: 80) restates a commonly-held view (see Roberts, 1997: 610), which undermines his claim to have written a new history of the birth of the modern world, according to which 'It is probably [...] in the intellectual buoyancy of the European idea of the advance of knowledge and its material rewards, rather than any practical application of any particular technology as such, that we must seek the most significant difference'.

If this attitude to knowledge and the world is found throughout a significant part of the European social body by the nineteenth century, this is in part because it represents the generalisation of the older, techno-scientific and philosophical idea of modernity as the passage from an age of revelation understood as the discovery of that which was already there, to an age of invention understood as the production of something new. The history of the genesis of its contours, which includes the experimental-observational method in science, the mathematisation of nature and the discovery of universal laws, is conventionally reduced to a series of metonyms (Galileo, Bruno, Bacon, Descartes, Newton) and the philosophical idea of modernity as production thought to stabilise roughly, 'perhaps', somewhere between Descartes and Leibniz in the seventeenth century (Derrida, 1987: 42). Pocock (1987: 52) cautions that the 'new philosophy' was in certain respects conservative ('a successful reduction of metaphysics and enthusiasm within the bounds set by experimentalism and empiricism'), and it is undeniable that the experimental-experiential attitude, which is not the exclusive work of Europeans (Roberts [1997: 327] singles out the importance of Arab knowledge in the opening up of the Middle Ages), has a dominating-rationalising drive that will produce Taylorism. However, at a determinate historical moment in European history, and in opposition to a very specific tradition, a strain of the modern attitude was radical in a

way that few things since have been. For a Spinoza combatting theocratic power, ‘modernity’ meant criticism and challenge, experience and experiment in the face of the ‘divinely ordained system of aristocracy, monarchy, land-ownership, and ecclesiastical authority’ which held near-absolute sway in the West until 1650 (Israel, 2001:3-4). The interesting point for our purpose is that much of this work of what Quijano would call historical reason is carried out before Bayly’s start-date of the 1780s. One thinks of the work on natural law of Grotius, Pufendorf, Locke and Hutcheson, and of the challenge to a murderous Christian orthodoxy in somewhere like Scotland around the late 1600s (Herman, 2002); a modern attitude, moreover, which appears to have been produced largely in Europe, or by descendants of Europe, where the shift from personal ties to market relationships, and from a corporate vision of society to an individualist one, was well advanced in the United Provinces and Great Britain as early as 1700 (Roberts, 1997: 543).

As a consequence, I venture the following proposition: that wherever it is a question of modernity, we would do well, while remaining sceptical of its periodising tendencies, not to forget the older, techno-scientific and philosophical understanding that is the ‘new philosophy’. The irony of this is that the earlier moments of this earlier modernity prove Bayly’s point better. I do not mean that all we have to do is go back to Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora’s challenge to the Aristotelian view of comets in Mexico in 1680, or to José de Aguilar on Cartesianism in Peru in 1701, or to José Eusebio Llano Zapata’s work on nature in Peru in the 1750s. I take it that all these invaluable contributions to a Latin American intellectual context dominated by the Inquisition are made by individuals — Creoles, Jesuits — steeped in a would-be ‘universal’ thought that yet has a pronounced European inflection. I mean, rather, that we would have to go back a little further. It is probably the case that, thanks largely to the ‘transmission function’ of Arab culture, and in particular to the Arab science and mathematics that would underpin the calculations of modernity (Roberts, 1997:

327-330 and 519-520), much of which entered Europe through the portal of Spain, early modernity was more non-Western than the late one; it is certainly the case that for Bayly to begin his narrative in the 1780s is to begin too late. By the time of the long nineteenth century, the modern contributions to the modern world made by non-European peoples have a certain European air about them. The attractions of the word *common* are understandable, since gravity and aerodynamics are universal, not European, principles, and one would not want to make the mistake of saying that modern science or, worse still, modern reason are *wholly* European (an astonishing piece of totalising logic which presupposes that there was neither science nor reason before modern Europe applied its mind to the matter). However, if a proper name like ‘European modernity’ hides both the non-European input into *and* the ‘universal’ contents of modernity, and thus requires scrutiny, the notion of a ‘common modernity’ requires even more careful qualification and risks underestimating both European inventiveness (just how many of the modern contents of modernity were franked in Europe) and Western invasiveness (the fact that vast tracts of the globe find that ‘the times’ they want to be ‘up with’ are Western in far-reaching ways).

García Canclini affirms the need to stop melancholically comparing the way in which modernity ‘enters’ Latin America to an idealised (though illusory) ‘original’ European trajectory. Let us speak, then, of an exclusively *Latin American* modernity. And yet... The European matrix of modernity is precisely invasive, and comparativism impossible to avoid. The history of European colonialism, and the philosophemes of modern Europe, are embedded in the name *Latin American modernity*. This is the legacy of the modern West — though not just of the modern West, since *the European element* of the juridico-theologico-political culture of post-independence Latin America is not exclusively modern. This legacy is passively accepted by some; by others it is transformed, resignified and resisted, as Bayly (2004: 307) remarks. And it could be no other way. If Europe was the first organising centre

of modernity, and if certain European languages are closely bound up with the possibility of thinking modernity in general, Europe is not identical with modernity, since modern science or modern reason in general always exceed any particular, even central, instance of the general, and non-Europeans can perfectly well do modern science or use modern reason. Because Europe never could completely centre the modern world-system, and because its highly successful attempts to universalise its thought do not amount to a universalism, the European centre ends up being displaced in importance by its colonial periphery. Nevertheless, in its new contexts modernity does not altogether shed its history; and among the ‘many new controllers and exemplars’ of modernity its European or Western imprint is not lost. Unless one preserves the critical memory of this appellation, one utterly fails to grasp the nature and reach of colonialism.

The nineteenth-century discourse of progress peddled by the region’s positivists must remain problematic for Latin America, especially when it witnesses the emancipatory possibilities of modernity blocked from entering the materiality of society (Quijano 144), and ends up instead with a crude modernisation. One understands why *Culturas híbridas* petitions for a violent overcoming of both the discourse and historical phase of nineteenth-century modernity. What has been less noticed in that book is García Canclini’s (2001: 322) unwillingness to abandon the armoury of modern concepts. There is a stubborn residue in that text reluctant to conclude that the displacement of the categories of modernity should amount to their simple abandonment. Besides, there could be no more modern gesture: modernity dreams of the guillotine, in the wake of which the old order and concepts fall bloodily into the basket. On the contrary, to think the birth of the modern world, for which there is no greater ‘crucible’ than Latin America before and during the nineteenth century, cannot but involve the nineteenth-century trio of liberalism, socialism and science. But it must also involve going beyond Bayly’s and Berman’s and García Canclini’s and Sarlo’s

preoccupation with the nineteenth century, to the older 'Nueva Filosofía', with its impulse towards experience and experiment, criticism and change. It then becomes possible to think modernity positively and negatively at the same time: to think the critique of dogmatic tradition alongside the triumphalist assertion of European superiority; or the gains of a common law, common schooling and universal rights against the abuse of universality and the common ground.

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