CHAPTER ONE

MULTIPLICITY IN MODERNITY: REPRESENTATIONS

> And the specters, tools of empire,
>
> melted into the insular clocks,
>
> in a structure of insular clarities
>
> and secular condiments,
>
> patron saints and toppled fortresses,
>
> cheap wines and shared dawns.
>
> – Conceição Lima, "Afroinsularity."

The aim of this chapter is to offer a working model to explore the possibilities of multiple modernities, going through transformations and developments, as well as abandonments and terminations.

The hypotheses are

1) that the categorisation of modernity and tradition is arbitrary and vague;

2) that the universalisation of the Western Enlightenment model of modernity fails to acknowledge the particularities of peoples and cultures;

3) that modernity is an unfinished project, and is best viewed without any proprietary links or attachments to any specific community or culture; and

4) that historically, different modules/ visions of modernity have been abandoned, terminated, revisited due to colonialism, slavery and the rise of market economies.

Heidegger speaks of modernity in *Poetry, Language and Thought* (1971) as "an epoch too late for the Gods and too early for the Being" (qtd. in Kearney 11). The sentiment underlined here is 'transition,' as having no fixed space to dwell on and if the metaphor can be extended, even no fixed realities to define. Rather than marking a certain date of when modernity started (if it did, that is) and ended (if it did, again), modernity, in this project, is the middle ground that cultures tread on. This is not a perennial quest for Enlightenment in the 'western' sense but a reality that shows up to these peoples in view of changing times. How they accommodate these changes, and what elements are retained in the process, is a long diversion—when local modernities are not fully articulated—from western modernity. In coming up thus, these putatively un-modern people establish new, alternative modules to the prevailing ones and also create a template for the world in the process. What matters is how progress is viewed, expressed and designed from within specific cultures. That does not in any way stop one culture from transecting with other

culture or cultures and mutate into something that is not seen or expressed in western theories of modernity.

Criteria of Western Modernity

A feature of modernity is the criteria adopted to separate it from the traditional or indigenous or savage or the uncivilised ways of living and thriving. Modernity, now, has transcended the yardsticks of the phenomenon which was largely considered as a western import. It is important here to note that the "West" here is itself an imagined world. Trouillot, for instance, uses the term "North Atlantic universals" to point towards the irony inherent in the term. While being region specific, it strives towards a universal, thereby bringing under it area/ regions/ cultures which, within the ambit of the geographic North Atlantic, too, are diverse and varied. A claim towards universality is in this sense dismissive towards the putative corollaries of modernity: progress, self-fashioning, rationality, democracy etc. are manifested in ways breaching the western mode of self-definition that is not available (that is, insular and unfamiliar) insular to the 'other' created in the process. To put it more simply, the non-West has at various points of time in history and geographical spaces manifested traits of modernity that culminates in a sort of self-fashioning, hence the term 'alternative modernities.'

The problematic associated with the attribution of modernity to certain cultures and 'othering' the varied people proceeds from an understanding of how already decided yardsticks have been prioritized. During the Enlightenment, modernity was defined by the new scientific awakening and rational thought and hence seen in terms of an evolution from the 'darkness' of the Middle Ages. However, once the Enlightenment model started spreading, the chronological base shifted to a geographical one. In other words, in a mode of territorialising time, the 'other,' 'exotic,' 'oriental' etc. came to be identified particularly with the East and the South.

The generic image fostered by the 'other' was of violence, lack of civilisation, irrational; hence apt to be governed or ruled by their counterparts: the 'civilised' and 'rational' lot. In justifying the civilising mission of the West, the East, though acknowledged to have culture, "was a place of violence and lascivious sensuality, the rape of which was invited as much literally as metaphorically" (Goldberg 290). Africa, to the South, again, was considered to be lacking in culture and language and hence "taken to occupy a rung apart on the ladder of being" (290). The mention of these arbitrary and

anonymous yardsticks of classification becomes important in view of the fact that modernity requires a 'localization of space,' to use Trouillot's term. In chronologising geography, a line is drawn where the actors of modernity are placed in different positions, though remaining connected through the line all the same. If the past, present and future are drawn in that line, modernity places the "other" actors behind in that line. Now, being behind connotes a space or an elsewhere that might be either within or outside of that imaginary line. Being placed outside of that line presumes that others have not yet reached that place where any thought of establishing continuities can be entertained. Being placed within connotes a space from which the other can be perceived. Modernity, thus, creates multiple spaces for the other. Trouillot talks about the plurality in modernity from the viewpoint of structure, such that it requires a "heterology, an Other outside of itself" (Dube 57). In this respect, the modern requires a non-modern to legitimize itself.

It is worth mentioning that recent trends in studies of 'alterity' have taken a turn towards affect studies–as in, how the consideration of various cultures necessitates also the considerations of one's 'emotions' towards the 'Other'. Sara Ahmed studies this in two of her works, "Affective Economies" (2004) and *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004). Even though this dissertation restricts itself to the visual angle in terms of seeing and being seen by the Other, it is important to acknowledge what Ahmed calls the "shared emotional visceral response of hate" (Ahmed 3) as what the words suggest, a "shared" affect. In terms of this dissertation, the acts of seeing and being seen and the emotions accompanying these are shared tendencies of the respective races.

Challenges to Modernity

While modernity has received challenges with postmodernity, postmodernism, the 'end of history,' 'cultural crystallization,' to name a few terms, the seduction endures in newer readings and perspectives in view of the fact that signal the exhaustion of modernity. Arnold Gehlen, for instance, has proposed "cultural crystallization" to theorize the modern condition. In his own words, "the premises of the Enlightenment are dead, only heir consequences remain" (Delanty 73). The redundant character of cultural critique is highlighted in this theory: for institutions have absorbed culture and, in the process, culture is 'routinized'. Consequently, there are no possibilities for anything 'new', something very integral to any vision of modernity. Gehlen argues that modernity has reached its end, having arrived at 'posthistory': "the routinization or normalization of

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newness and progress" (73). The consequent overemphasis on institutions and an exhausted culture leads Gehlen to vouch for 'cultural neutralization,' which places man in a position which is weak and at the mercy of institutions. Luhmann's opinion of modernity, as evident in his *Observations on Modernity* (1998), is that it is "self-limiting," of "endless possibilities and paradoxes" (Delanty 81). In these possibilities, paradoxes and routinization though, here are constant efforts to rethink modernity in terms of what has become redundant in terms of changing social landscapes.

'Alternative' in Modernity

To give a sound resonance to the seductions of modernity, the concept of 'alternative modernities' can be cited as a primary reference. While the primary answerability is to the multiplicity of modernity—meaning it could be identified in varied geographies and even histories—it also reiterates the common tendency to prove the modernity of the commonly deemed non-modern or traditional. The thesis underscores the importance of attentively reading a diverse and unrelated group of African American writers who seem to be writing back to each other -and one another- while developing their own theses of modernity. The literature on "alternative modernities" that is itself becoming exhaustive foregrounds, in essence, the possibility of manifesting itself in backgrounds and contexts not restricted to capitalist West. Any attempt to ignore the possibilities of these contexts will produce a distorted understanding of what constitutes the modern and more so, 'how' it is constituted. The speculative glance with which the non-West and its population are viewed then is a rarefied case of overemphasizing the power and control that one part of the world assumes to have on the other.

Historically, concepts inextricably related to modernity have been: colonialism, empire and capitalism. The crypto colonial thrust of modernity appropriates time as a prop to place cultures and societies in an imaginary line. In the long history of colonialism, a unitary idea of one Earth/ planet was distorted to make different regions inhabit different temporalities. The expression "denial of coevalness" was coined by the anthropologist Johannes Fabian to denote the strategic use of time for the colonising mission of modernity. Europe/ West was the present: rational, civilised and modern. The non-West, in this sense, was the other: barbarian, traditional. Modernity, intertwined with colonialism, makes it impossible to conceive of a "universal domain of free discourse, unfettered by differences of race or nationality" (Chatterjee 204). Race, in terms of the

African American intellectual tradition taken up in this project, features predominantly in the identification of peculiar circumstances in which the apparently all-embracing and all equal façade of a western modernity operates. With a multitude of definitions on what modernity 'is' and what it is 'supposed to be,' Partha Chatterjee makes 'modernity' the very basis of the definition of modernity:

> ..true modernity consists in determining the particular forms of modernity that are suitable in particular circumstances; that is, applying the methods of reason to identify or invent the specific technologies of modernity that are appropriate for our purposes. Or to put it another way, if there is any universally acceptable definition of modernity, it is this: that by teaching us to employ the methods of reason, universal modernity enables us to identify the forms of our own particular modernity. (Chatterjee 198-99)

The project of a 'universal' definition of modernity here strives towards identification and acknowledgement of multiplicities, in its quest for the 'forms' (plural) of one otherwise arbitrarily defined modernity. Put simply, it is clear that modernity is a self-defining and self-begetting project, irrespective of its geographical locus.

Resisting a Defined Modernity

Intellectual traditions across the world, from the viewpoint of modernity studies, can be seen to engage in a struggle between an analysis of the West (and its ways) and the resistance by the 'other' to subversive western discourses. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, in her book *Decolonising Methodologies* deconstructs the very basis of apparently 'objective' research in order to understand "the complex ways in which the pursuit of knowledge is deeply embedded in the multiple layers of colonial and imperial practices" (Smith 14). The writer, herself hailing from an indigenous community (Maori) in New Zealand writes from a position where she aims to move from marginalization to one of resistance. Of course, she uses the term 'indigenous' in a way that internationalises the collective experience of the colonized people across the globe. Smith contests the notion that 'research' is an innocent or objective term. Beginning from 'scientific' research that predicated itself on the belief that it was possible to enquire which cultures (and their men) could 'contain' more knowledge in their skull, research has always been informed by racist and imperialist ideologies. From the point of view of the colonized, Smith points to the ideologically motivated lens through which research operates in the western world.

Her work has a significant bearing in this thesis in that it helps us to understand how a culture receives disruptions and abandonments while being dismissed as 'indigenous' while its resources are utilised for the prosperity of the West.

The "ruptures" and the "enchantments" (Dube 1) which modernity seeks to demystify create their own enchantments. In understanding previously incomprehensible knowledge, in subjecting it to the faculty of reason, modernity attempts to let go off the 'spectres' of the mediaeval past. These spectres of the past, while focused on being reasoned, and hence eliminated, nevertheless become the yardsticks through which modernity is presented and measured. In other words, this delineation concerns itself with a shedding of the past under the assumption that everything concerned with it is irrelevant to the achievement of modernity. In such descriptions and delineations, the sense of rupture is apparent: breaking away with tradition, surpassing the medieval.

It can be argued that such clear-cut rupture is the creation of a universal 'imaginary' model of modernity that considers the West as the rational model that each culture should aspire to follow, emulate and produce. This is then writ large on the history and destiny of different historical and geopolitical groups and prescribed as an 'ideal' to be achieved, irrespective of their specificities of location and civilizational trajectories.

The exclusivity of the West extends to research too. It is necessary to revisit the overarching version or vision of production and pursuit of knowledge, given how it is "deeply embedded in the multiple layers of imperial and colonial practices" (Smith 2). Taking the cue from Smith, the thesis aligns modernity to the "indigenous perspective" (3) on modernity and its consolidation and transformations. In a similar context, Ulli Beier's experiences in Papua New Guinea, as recollected in *Decolonising the Mind:The Impact of the University on Culture and Identity in Papua New Guinea*, were the consequences of designing a university curricula which would foreground the 'indigenous perspective' of the local people and the region. The design included an embracing of one's roots — the students were expected to identify the literary device employed in different cultures of the region through their translation of some form of orature. However, this would be followed by some acquaintance with new literatures in English from Africa. The intention: "I hoped that a course on New African Writing would encourage the students to appropriate the English language and use it as a vehicle for their own creative expression" (Beier 3). At an advanced stage, there would be introduction to writers like Sartre and Brecht in translation and that would consolidate

Beier's aim at decolonisation of the mind, which to him meant "the attainment of a wider outlook" (3). The indigenous perspective here acknowledges the roles of both the local and the global in reimagining research and education practices.

The African American writers chosen for this project "disaggregate" (Mohanty 3) the features crucial to the prospects of modernity and recombine these in specific contexts. In effect, what emerges as an inevitable model of clearly defined ways and structures in which the features operate in combination, is challenged by the formulation of these alternative modernities. Mohanty uses the term 'alternative modernities' in the sense of a project of "historical retrieval" and "imaginative philosophical reconstruction" (Mohanty 3). The African American tradition examined in this project stands on the foundations of these indices of retrieval and reconstruction. This also in a way is an epistemological challenge to how they have been 'seen' and 'read'. A point that emerges from the thesis is that African American contribution to American history and culture have been occluded in an overemphasis on the violent and the turbulent part of it.

Race and Modernity

The concept of 'race' is a key point to consider modernity and its trajectories as well as consequences repercussions; for it was a matrix through which the struggle of domination-subordination was carried out. This is in sharp contrast to what Gilroy critiques as "innocent modernity" and "happy social relations that graced post-Enlightenment life" (Gilroy 44). In chronicling the history of modernity, what cannot be ignored is the dynamic of domination- subordination that defined the Occident-Orient equation. It can be said that modernity became in its pseudo universalistic claim, a more or less Occidental phenomenon. 'Race' and racist ideologies are the torpedo through which the project of European modernity was exercised. However, in its aim at universal applicability, the particularity embedded in this western-born modernity was dismissive of any possibilities of modernities growing and taking form outside itself. It would be interesting to examine how indigenous modernities would have shaped up had it not been interfered with and terminated by alien cultures and colonial powers.

Seen in this context, one group's pathway to modernity can be categorised as different, not necessarily replicating the western model, inferior or subordinate to it. In "Our Modernity," Partha Chatterjee makes a specific case of 'our' modernity by examining through basic examples of health and medicine, makes a specific case of 'our'

modernity. This is an Indian variant or even a Bengal variant. It is imperative that we acknowledge the fact that modernity in whatever form it adapts, resists universalization or a singular project mode irrespective of geography, science, time, environment or social conditions (Chatterjee 204). The specific passages to modernity vary depending upon specific circumstances and social practices. Instead of polarising the thrust of modernity in one direction (the West), therefore, a more logical argument would be to consider it within the criteria of multiplicity and alterities. Multiplicity can be understood not in the context of a west and non-west, which again is a homogenization of the world but in the possibilities/ contradictions and pathways to modernity in these worlds.

The idea that one western world with a singular, coherent structure exists as opposed to an equally singular, coherent 'other' world is unacceptable to the scholarship of alternative modernities. Instead, multiplicities are to be seen both in the structures and features: "multiple contradictions within social formations and multiple interactions between different units" (Islamoğlu 3). It can be argued that 'black modernities' (specifically African American tradition) is not a homogenous and coherent unit but has responded variously and creatively to indigenous and global transformations, building up both from within indigenous roots, and appropriating putative benefits of western modernity. This kind of formulation sees alternative modernities as part of a history of resistance that interrogate attempts to obliterate indigenous traditions. Seen this way, the west is not ignored primarily because it did interfere with the models of modernity that were building up in varied geographies and temporalities. Reference here can be drawn to the Gramscian insight which focuses on the indispensability of understanding subordination vis-à-vis domination, for, as Ranajit Guha says, "subaltern groups are always subject to the activity of ruling groups, even when they rebel and rise up" (4). The writers taken up hence make whites as much a subject of their art and literature as the blacks. Since race overwhelmingly determines power relations in the African American context, the subordinate and dominant groups receive simultaneous attention both in understanding injustices and to trace how the subaltern comes up with their own forms of modernity under one dominant group/ race/ culture.

The idea that modernity is linked with slavery owes substantially to Hegel's philosophy. In contrast to Berman who says that modernity is an all-encompassing quality, that it affects every race/group/ culture in the same way, Hegel recognises that slavery, which is a by-product of modernity "leads both master and servant to self- consciousness

and then to disillusion, forcing both to confront the unhappy realisation that the true, the good and the beautiful do not have a single shared origin" (Gilroy 50). Habermas attributes much of the contemporary debates over modernity, particularly criticisms of the modernity cast in the Enlightenment model and the master-slave binary that is unavoidable in these discussions to Hegel. Though Hegel did not delve deep into it, he was the first to problematize the use, potency and legitimacy of the term. Subsequent discourses followed, like in Habermas, who restricts himself to a psychological analysis and Alexander Kojève who extends it beyond the psychological and makes it more historically specific. Gilroy suggests that since slavery, race and the subordination- domination contexts are indispensable, "dependency" and "antagonisms" (Gilroy 48), are intimately associated. Any attempt at understanding these racial relations therefore resists broad separation of the two groups into separate culture forms and concentrate on the "complex interpenetration" of these peoples.

African American Modernities

Focusing on the work of W. E. B. Du Bois and Richard Wright, and especially on the rich polemical interchanges between Du Bois and Wright, and then on Baldwin, Toni Morrison and bell hooks, this project examines the possibility of 'constructing' a black revisionist tradition. This tradition, it is argued, either refuses to accept the putative benefits of modernity or antedates some of its most crucial attributes of modernity by tracing them to non -Western sources, notably Asian or African. Seen in this context, one group's pathway to modernity can be categorised as different, not necessarily as a replication of the western model, and certainly not inferior/ subordinate to it.

In the intellectual tradition under study, modernity is seen to be plural rather than singular. In addition, if western modernity operates through ruptures, in the sense that it is a break with the past, then black modernities operate in fluidities. There is no hierarchical binary of science/ superstition, rational/ irrational, reason/ emotion, history/myths etc. Within black cultures there are multiple theses of modernity: all of these aimed at self-fashioning but articulated differently in the contexts of geography, culture, gender etc. Black modernities too, as evident in its plurality, resist a homogenous attribution to one line of thought or one set of ideology.

Within the plurality of black modernities, there are attempts at biologizing, de-colonizing, de- civilizing and de- territorializing the western assumptions regarding body,

race, governmental systems and habitats respectively. It is through such attempts that multiple models emerge. Having said that, African American modernities are 'alternative' modernities in a Mark Fisherian sense of the term alternative: "'Alternative' and 'independent' don't designate something outside mainstream culture; rather, they are styles, in fact *the* dominant styles, within the mainstream" (Fisher 9). In the context of this study, African American modernities are not mere "appendage of Western modernity" (Gaonkar 274). These are there, very much there as a potent few of the divergent paths to modernity and go beyond mere critiques of western modernity. In this sense, African American variants are, to borrow from Hanchard, not just "mimicry" of Western model of modernity but "innovations on its precepts, forces and features" (Gaonkar 274). Hanchard writes this from within the precinct of 'Afro modernity', which can be seen as a legitimate statement for African American corollary. He also hints at distinct black experiences for an African population spread across the globe in terms of being subjected to different temporalities with regards to access to institutions, services and knowledge that modernity facilitates. African American modernities would then be derivative of Afro modernity in its shared history of slavery. However, it is distinct from it in its relationship to the whites owing to co-inhabiting the American landscape and sharing a larger American identity, irrespective of race. In the United States again, the African American population had to endure a different temporality. Legalised segregation ensured that the benefits of modernity, in education, healthcare facilities, transportation were availed by the whites and the black in incongruous spatio-temporal dimensions. The whites got these 'anew'; the blacks had to traverse through the passage of 'waiting' and receiving it outmoded, used and experimented by the privileged half.

The tendency of homogenization or Americanization of African American cultural traits is resisted and altered by a distinctive African touch. In this sense, African American modernity, while harvesting the American flavour, retains an indigenous touch and also sets a template for global cultural phenomenon. The tapestry of imagined homogeneity thus is a fractured mirror to the visceral reality of the blacks. What fits the whites, what represents them (in art forms) is rarely specific or instrumental for black culturalism. In this thesis, culturalism is used in the sense used by Appadurai (15). Rather than being 'hitched' always with words like bi, multi and inter, he uses it to "designate a feature of movements involving identities consciously in the making" (15). This is a global phenomenon where groups and identities with diversities are pushed to fit in a

straightjacket, oblivious of the distinctive features and demands of each of these. This forced assignment as well as depiction has made it necessary for ethnic diversities to present their own theses of modernity, identity and in this sense, culturalism.   Black culturalism, if we use the term strictly in the sense of movements involving identities, is concentrated on resurrecting traditions lost, devising alternative models to 'mainstream music', poetry and art. It resists wholesale Americanization which, in its homogenizing tendency, obliterates all that is hyphenated. This becomes a perspectival construct where the locus of the individual cannot be specified, but a group is at play as agents who have been affected and transformed by historical, political and linguistic situatedness.

The thesis starts with a line of thinkers who 'could have' fallen to the tendency of homogenizing, until the landscape is changed by miniature models of diversity and 'ethnoscapes'. Ethnoscape comes to signify "the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live" (Appadurai 36). Appadurai's use of the suffix 'scape' in the terms ethno, media, techno and ideo characterize the fluidity of these spaces and landscapes. When an ethnoscape indigenizes in one way or another, there is the fear of miniature homogenizations that may occur because of the unaddressed challenges that show up due to certain 'ideoscapes'. This use is in conformity with signifying "elements of the Enlightenment worldview, which consists of a chain of ideas, terms and images, including freedom, welfare, rights, sovereignty, representation, and the master term democracy" (36). The master term, as democracy is referred to, is injected with new meanings in the global discourse and hence the fluidity of the western Enlightenment as an ideal comes to the fore. The use of the suffix 'scape' therefore is legitimized by the new meanings that are imported or generated by such ideas as 'equality,' 'freedom,' 'democracy' within groups that are characterised by diversity and multiple ethnicities.

The African-American experience in its hyphenation acknowledges a multiplicity of identity in and of literature, art and so on. This multiplicity of voices is asserted and often only implied in the texts that come out from the black intellectual tradition. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. in "Criticism in the Jungle" mentions the dual traditions in which the black texts are embedded as well the dual voices these speak in. The traditions that these texts are rooted in are at least two: "a European or American literary tradition, and one of the several related but distinct black traditions" (4). Interestingly, he mentions two 'heritages' of each black text, one, visual (the tones of which are black and white), and two, aural (the tones of which are standard and vernacular). When voices, heritage and

traditions are multiple and varied, it is only natural that modernity, which has more to do with the spirit than a temporal characteristic, is also produced and partaken of multiplicities.

The selected tradition then navigates through diversities in art committed (a) to telling things as they are (without glossing through); (b) representing the non-represented; coming out (in terms of one's sexuality); and (d) to highlighting how women in black life and in popular culture are frequently in danger of not only being assimilated but also obliterated of her individuality. The transformational patterns are witnessed not only in the contemporary lifeworld of African Americans but also in the historical treatment of African and African American lives. In contrast to the sanitizing logic of European modernity and the advancements it introduced and made popular, the intellectual tradition under study shows how 'indigenous' identity is being thwarted, given that the non-West module is put under a patronizing gaze in capitalism and colonialism. The result is a representation of African American culture, art and people but always on the sidelines, as the 'other' to European aesthetic standards, and hence the alternative reading and attention to multiplicities.

The Poetics of Remembrance

Since African American experience is inextricably related to slavery -a historical process and product offers instances of-pain and fortitude. 'Remembrance' becomes a key idea to the art and culture that comes out of it. In this context, Saidiya V. Hartman talks of how tourism-visiting places and people, that is- has become an important means to revisit the past. For instance, a memorial plaque at Elmina Castle reads:

> In everlasting memory of the anguish of our ancestors. May those who died rest in peace. May those who return find their roots. May humanity never again perpetrate such injustice against humanity. We the living vow to uphold this. (Dube 429)

Remembering assumes a special significance in historical narratives. Hanchard points out two aims of historical narrative in the African context: (a) to project a history and (b) to acknowledge that the existence of people of African descent is worthy of 'text' (Gaonkar, ed. 277). Textualizing or writing down a history has broader implications when seen in the context of who writes, which, in turn, significantly shapes the discourse of modernity. It is significant that he brings into the frame two terms, 'tabula rasa' (erased slate) and 'tabula

blanca' (blank slate) to assess the differences between western and non-western discourses of modernity. The former would cause "metaphorical violence," of obliterating narratives of prior agents and actors (278). The latter can be taken to characterize the people of African descent, whose slate was blank and waiting to be inscribed. However, when history of the Africans was written down, it was either written down by the Western powers or influenced by them. Either way, it led to a distorted historical narrative. Black intellectuals, irrespective of their geographical placement therefore disseminate this impulse to reconstruct their history. This reconstruction, they argue, will not only establish a continuity but also a coherence in voicing themselves. The multiple modernities in this project too choose to 'remember' and hence reconstruct the past, going across the boundaries set by landmarks like slavery and emancipation.

Remembrance, however, creates a political template, especially given the fact that creative and expressive traditions are also meant for upholding histories and identities that have been glossed over. In the writers selected for the work, there is a considered emphasis on remembering: remembering the dead, the striving, the starving, the enslaved. Remembering here touches facts and figures of expressive mediums. This is an alternative model at establishing individuality of a collective (the African American lot). Black modernity is shaped by a going back to tradition, to an acknowledgement of the fact that the present is a result of the past. Frank Kirkland's essay "Modernity and Intellectual life in Black" builds up this argument of a past oriented present of black modernities as opposed to a future oriented one of the West. In his words:

> Whereas modernity in the West fosters the belief that a future-oriented present, severed from any sense of an historical past, can yield culturally distinctive and progressive innovations, modernity in black promotes the conviction that a future oriented present can be the fortunate occasion in which culturally distinctive innovations are historically redemptive of a sense of past. (159)

Building up from Kirkland's premise, the thesis returns the texts examined to their pasts and how those carry to the present, in reportage, in fiction, as well as 'fragments' of time facilitated by the visual medium (as in photographic images). The past of the African Americans, in this sense, determine their unique ways in which they participate in a western modernity. This modernity, it has been reflected, espouses in theory as much as it

contends in practice the ideals of egalitarian democracy and accessibility to rights irrespective of one's racial identity.

While a nation grapples and lives through in the course of two World Wars (this is the time period this thesis mostly covers), it is particularly interesting to note the simultaneity of the African American entrance into western modernity and events which revolutionized changes in basic accommodation, educational facilities and modes of production. Black struggles, as well as their many cultural forms, fall within the rubric of modernity as well as its redefinitions and alternatives. This mode of inquiry calls attention to modernity itself and its varied manifestations both in a culture's past as well as in its simultaneity with the West's model. Having belonged to a "stigmatized subculture" (Appiah 7) and inhabiting a world where everything, from one's physical characteristics to a community's cultural forms are seen as decidedly inferior by the dominant mainstream discourse, the African American variants of modernity are as diverse as much as they are rooted in a common ancestral background.

It is clear that European or American models of modernity do their best to sustain, encourage and further rather than eradicate the kinds of inequality that slavery fostered. Since western modernity in its developmental thrust peaked by utilising the body and labour of a particular race, African American modernities thrive to obviate these pseudo-progressive forces. Instead, these reinvent and signify those very practices that the western model tagged as irrational. The relationship of black intellectuals to the West can be suggested as paradoxical. This is in the sense that while a particular group strives towards maintaining its identity, the same group also utilises the products of modernity if that can in any way be utilised to shape and prioritize its identitarian projects. This ambivalence and the multiplicity of consciousness come to the fore in individual writers when they try to balance the enchantments that preexisting models of modernity entail and their own alternative models, the latter without compromising on the African American dimension.

In choosing to modernize, it is clear, the African American writer 'remembers'. This is in line with Ricouer's argument that tradition is not something complete in itself, or impervious to reinterpretation (Kearney 81). He, on the other hand, sees tradition as a fertile ground for possibilities: "as an ongoing history, thereby reanimating its still unaccomplished potentialities" (81). Projects left abandoned in African American history, like oral tradition, music are reimagined in the light of the contemporary. These do more

than revisit the past, these show the past's continuity to the present, a potent medium to address the African American condition in the contexts of slavery, segregation, gender inequality, racism, sexism etc. In contrast to the Enlightenment pretext to repudiate tradition towards achieving rationality and scientific fervour, African American modernities both acknowledge and build up from the past.

A critical "hermeneutics of tradition" (Kearney 84) sticks to the motive of distinguishing between true and false interpretations of history. African American modernities in their reconstruction of history tread a risky passage of falling either to over-glorification or understatement. Mary Lefkowitz's *Not Out of Africa: How Afrocentrism Became an Excuse to Teach Myth as History* is a writing back to the over-glorification and false interpretations of history. Her thesis warns against "false assumptions and faulty reasoning," and historical understanding and consequent models which "cannot be supported by time-tested methods of intellectual inquiry" (Lefkowitz 13). These distortions seem to be motivated by political aims, where such politicizing becomes dangerous because "it requires the end to justify the means" (13). However, African American modernities highlighted in this thesis decidedly explore historical reconstructions away from 'communal' romanticizing, examining lived lives. Such arguments accommodate shifting priorities with changing times and landscapes, remaining alive to a history couched in slavery. Rather than prescribing one model as the final and legitimate one, such multiple models of understanding modernity and its lasting impression on generations contest mythicizing history or allowing the West to write a black history where trouble and chaos of the perennial conflict of races is obliterated.

Black modernities do not resile from tradition. The western tendency to polarize the differences between the 'tradition' and the 'modern' through the attribution of progressive attitudes to one and regressive to the other receives serious challenges in the responses to these ideologies by newer literary and cultural forms. These literary articulations, often turn into experimentation with genres and provide a frame through which to "mediate on the ways in which subalternized subjects critically negotiate (neo) colonial modernity (Mohanty 26). The reanimation of the commonly obviated possibilities in tradition is an important strand through which colonial modernity is negotiated. In creating an admixture of texts (writing), documentation, photography, sketches, paintings, protest literatures, gender concerns, etc., African American literature and art resist the polarization already mentioned. Such reimagining and rearticulation of obliterated art and

cultural forms interrogate the notion of a "singular modernity" and its incompatibility with the adjunct values of modernity such as equality, rationality and democracy.

When the demands of a particular age or society are at variance with the others, the ever-changing social realities demand changing questions to be answered. This is theorized and answered for the African American literary and cultural scene by a diversity of efforts and foci. The attempts at creating a tradition, characterized by dissonant efforts towards the same motivate the thesis objective of tracing alternative modernities in what is glossed over is any presentation of a single, unified, African American identity/ culture/ tradition. In this mapping of relations, the key is the perspective of comparative analyses. This is the perspective through which a particular group with a shared historical basis models its intellectual landscape. Comparative perspectives also have wider implication in understanding of global cultural flows and phenomena. In the enchantments and enshrined values of modernity as an aspired idea/ ideal, the universals are achieved by individual routes and routines, in contrast to the familiar ones.

If 'intellectual tradition' is indeed a correct term to use, the African American variation of it is marked by cultural dissonances and efforts of individual writers, both subversive and substantial, in sync with the times they live in. The result: new genres of writing, aspects of modernity infused into art forms and newer perspectives that accommodate changes, especially as the Enlightenment ideals seem to have been exhausted. That said, modernity endures more as an attitude of mind, or spirit, rather than merely a temporal dimension. The works/ writers covered in this thesis span a century and two decades. The consistent features seen and pursued are (a) resistance to homogenization, (b) reconstruction of history and (c) resistance to proving itself fit for a western modernity or as opposed to western modernity but as simultaneous modernities across cultures. In "Modernity and Intellectual Life in Black," Frank Kirkland analyses the distinctive understandings of modernity by a few writers. This is taken up in more detail in the next chapter since Kirkland's launchpad, as regards a comprehensive theory of modernity rooted in Du Bois, coincides with the selection of him as the first thinker in this thesis.

However, it is necessary here to consider how the past features so prominently in a thesis of African American modernities. Beginning from Orlando Patterson's claim that the African Americans can be the most truly modern of all people because they have no

sense of the past to Du Bois who believes that African American modernity must be historically redemptive, the past and its implications prefigure any contemplation on African American modernity. Kirkland expresses this punctuation by the past yet not ruled by it in:

> Modernity in black thus retrieves a sense of the past not to be subject to its binding authority, but rather to deliver it from a silent oblivion threatening to deprive it from any novel role it could assume in a future-oriented present, in the light of the "need of new ideas and new aims", if I may use here the words of Crummell. (Kirkland 160)

Historical moments of racial crisis, and the resultant transformations are therefore incorporated either implicitly in the fictions of the writers in this study or by reinventing otherwise unexperimented genres of writing and other arts. The focus is to make these past known to the presents and the futures in a way that is both accessible and in many ways a deviation from the bourgeois art forms like paintings and sculpture. Writing and the visual medium therefore cater to a larger audience. If the problem of black representation is taken up, it is also important to consider how the politics of representation involves representation *of* African Americans *by* the white world versus *by* African Americans themselves. In establishing the intimacy of an African American past with the present and the future, the representational aspects, so as to say, the 'gaze' from within or outside is pertinent.

The project of representation has to be seen along with the problematics associated with it. It can be debated on who and what constitutes and represents African American culture and people. While the past and tradition are relevant, it shows how not to glorify what Hazel V. Carby terms a "limited vision" while such line of tradition (here, intellectual) is proposed. Her reservations against this limited vision in which "romantic evocation of the rural and the folk" are premised on the consequent avoidance of "some of the most crucial and urgent issues of cultural struggle" (Carby 175). In this sense, the project therefore aims at proposing alternative modernities not buried in the past but punctuated by the past; not represented by an exclusive line of thinkers but by a few strands of thoughts and experimentations which are relevant, or to be more precise, permanent.

Multiple Productions

The question of which culture is studied, and in the process, what markers or routes are being used is essential to any understanding or positing of an alternative modernity. It also becomes important to understand the different registers through which African American modernities find consolidation. If the African Americans scattered across the land were to resist homogenization and stick to its identity and know its history, it also necessitated newer comprehensible media through which it could be generated. The visual played an important role here. The image, so as to say, struck the audience with a greater and more importantly, wider intensity. Building up from Berger's insistence on the ocular, the clarity of 'what we see' as opposed to what is being written down necessitates an understanding of what the 'visual' signifies for any group of people. The vision is one faculty that is "continually active, continually moving, continually holding things in a circle around itself, constituting what is present to us as we are" (Berger 9). It also determines the relations between the self and the other, something so important in race relations, especially in the African American context, where identities are hyphenated. The visual is an ever-present factor here: for 'seeing' does not merely put words into pages of books and facilitate self-determination, it impacts lived inequalities and the dubious ways in which modernity is imposed on the subaltern.

With these perspectives put into place, 'modernities'—alternative, multiple—in this thesis interact with changing social realities and consolidate itself themselves in newer ways. Changing patterns in journalism, photography is one of the many ways in which indigenization takes place. This is often "a product of collective and spectacular experiments with modernity, and not necessarily of the subsurface affinity of new cultural forms with existing patterns in the cultural repertoire" (Appadurai 90). These putative benefits of modernity put to use in the African American modernities, so to speak, look away from forced affiliations of incongruous cultures by keeping in pace with newer media at disposal to reconstruct history and identities. Hence, experimentations in writing inform the link between expressive articulations of modernities and modernism(s).

Visualities in Modernity

Just as modernity is not a universal phenomenon and is marked by distinctive passages in cultures and groups, visuality is also identified and appropriated in different ways. Since the thesis deals with the intellectual history of the African American modernities, race, as

discussed already, assumes an important facet. The whole idea of racial distinction, or the idea of 'othering' one group from oneself, falls back on 'seeing'. One sees somebody else in a way that renders him different/superior/inferior to the other. In this intellectual discourse then, 'seeing,' 'being seen,' 'vision,' and 'visualizing' assume various possibilities. While the thesis does not privilege 'sight' over any other mode of engagement, it definitely is a connecting link to show how discourses tend to change over time. Theorizing the act of 'seeing' to participating in visual 'projects' like photography, documentation and even visual criticism, African American intellectual discourse treads the passage of modernity in this thesis through visual experiments.

When Mirzoeff declares in the opening line to his book *An Introduction to Visual Culture* that "Modern life takes place onscreen," he considers the predominance of the visuality embedded in the television screens to the internet to CCTV cameras to the visual intervention in th e field of medicine, where everything can be recorded, say the activity of the brain to the heartbeat. However, his understanding of visual culture is what binds this thesis together: that "visual culture directs our attention away from structured, formal viewing settings like the cinema and art gallery to the centrality of visual experience in everyday life" (Mirzoeff 7). That is to say, rather than numbering the varieties of visual media at disposal, visual cultures partake in an understanding of how visuality itself is central to modern life experiences. There is also the emphasis on the stability and changes of the visual image in varying moments of modernity because the visual image changes its relationship to "exterior reality at particular moments of modernity" (7). Mirzoeff bases his proposition on these varying and shifting moments of modernity and the ever-changing meanings accorded to the visual medium by invoking Lyotard:

> Modernity, wherever it appears, does not occur without a shattering of belief, without a discovery of the lack of reality in reality- a discovery linked to the invention of other realities. (qtd. in Mirzoeff 7)

The ever-changing relationship of the image to exterior reality makes it fit for modernity, which is about "shattering of belief," a questioning of what already exists. It can be suggested that when one mode of representing reality loses ground, another appears without the first disappearing completely.

In this thesis, literary genres and images as representation of the present as well as of the past, are discovered as well as reinvented in new ways to fit to the demands of

modernity. The use or role of the visual culture can be taken as an index for such reinvention. In situating Du Bois at the start of an intellectual tradition, the image is a platform to articulate the creative pursuits of a growing public of African American readers. Cartoons and sketches become a visual vocabulary to understand an African American present as well as to being tethered to one's own artistic history. In Richard Wright, the documenting aesthetic is brought into play when recording a particular period of African American entrance into western modernity. In Toni Morrison, the image, as in the photograph, becomes an impetus for nostalgia, and one of the many ways in which a population is urged to see their present built upon the foundation of sacrifices by 'little heroes'. In terms of situating 'seeing'/ 'being seen' as a factor that creates 'types' of literature in African American fiction, Baldwin develops his own, critiquing the already prevalent as perpetuating the prejudices associated with African Americans.

Visuality, it would not be wrong to say, democratized experiences and creative pursuits. It made possible, say, the past to be available as a "mass commodity" (71-72). Within these considerations, it is necessary to examine how African American critical discourse ventures into the study of the visual medium. The paucity of it reflects the distorted perspectives as to how such representations are strictly influenced by a white bias. bell hooks problematizes such ideas of representation and appropriation when she examines black artists who have used the visuality as an index to articulate their creative stints.

The consequent absence of such artists from any serious critical discourse highlights race as an operative matrix to consider art and its varied representations. In this sense, while democratizing artistic ventures, the visual has to be supplemented with words and critical intervention in African American writers to illustrate and record the step towards this experience of modernity. The attitude of the reader also varies according to the medium of visual experience: from television to documentary photographs to illustrations. In the tradition under study, this experience is supplemented by the writers' own imaginations as they provide words with it: "The image now illustrates the sentence" (Berger 28). That is to say, in many cases, the visual is used by the writer to reaffirm her/ his position. The contexts and meanings of the visual vary according to how the writer uses it: as illustration, as documenting history, as appropriation towards a fictional narrative, as a reimagining of how 'seeing' defines who one is, or simply as a medium to encourage a people's articulation of artistic abilities.

The photograph in general, and the shutter of the camera to be precise feature prominently in the thesis. That the photograph is not an innocent medium though, has been discussed at length by critics like Ariella Aïsha Azoulay. The shutter presupposes the right to 'gaze' and this gaze is reserved for a certain privileged section which assumes that a certain population can be 'seen' (and photographed) in ways they want and the 'art' products that the camera delivers to be interpreted and presented the way they want. Azoulay says that this is an imperialist tendency, and 'unlearning imperialism' would include an acknowledgement that photography, in its beginnings bestowed the rights to operate it to a certain class, either directly or indirectly and "at the expense of others" (Azoulay 5). Here, 'at the expense' connotes issues like: who decides on the subject to be photographed; the subject's willingness and unwillingness to be subjected to the gaze of the camera shutter in apparently imperialist tendencies; the subject's responses to be represented and preserved in the way she is shot. The belatedness of the subject has larger implications of a conditions that cannot be addressed but only 'seen' in retrospect. This again is contingent on how the subject is captured by the camera: "A woman can be made objectless, undocumented, an irresponsible mother, or a delinquent inhabitant by a shutter" (6). In each case, a 'status' is imposed on the photographed subject and their worlds "depleted and divided into pieces" (6), though not for the first time. This tendency to see visuality—in this case, photography—in terms of "imperial violence" (6) can be attributed to a critical perspective that does not simply accept the photograph as just another medium of visual engagement. Rather, it questions the larger projects of the politics of 'gaze' embedded in institutions and practices of the visual. In this sense, the shutter at once transforms objects, people and worlds, "an individual rooted in her life-world into a refugee, a looted object into a work of art, a whole shared world into a thing of the past and the past itself into a separate time zone, a tense that lies apart from both present and future" (6). Azoulay's call is for a project of "unlearning imperialism". It is clear that the camera is here not a metaphor for imperialism, but a "later materialization of an imperial technology" (7). It legitimizes (and normalizes) imperial loot by granting it visibility in a patronizing note as well as the accompanying destruction and reconstruction of the world on its terms (7). A resistance to it though—in the sense of image-making—predates the advent of camera too. In *Picture Freedom* Jasmine Nichole Cobb sees black visuality in the age of daguerreotype as an attempt to portray "black pride and identity" and "removed from the cultural logics of slavery" (Cobb 3). For well-to-to free black individuals even years before the Civil War, a black daguerreotypist would snap pictures where *they* (the patron and the artist) decided the setting: "These women staged smartness with clothing and jewelry, and, with the books they included

within the frame of the photograph, they staged intelligence and literacy" (2). This definition of the self, divorced from slavery helped establish a counter-narrative to the conventional images of black people in visual representations, almost always associated with slavery.

In this sense, at least African American stints at visualities can be seen as part of an "unlearning imperialism" mechanism. Black figures, in that sense, have had a visual importance as statements of selfhood (in refusing to be defined by the white gaze) and in fact, also as the inspiration behind celebrated works of modern artists. In *Posing Modernity* (2018), Denisse Murrell makes a case for the black woman as the inspiration of modern art through generations and geographies. Starting with Manet's Olympia (1863), the study traces the radical shift of black women as an "exotic" material to common, everyday participants in daily life. This curatory project establishes the impact of Manet's painting on the other side of the Atlantic in twentieth century artists like Matisse who portrayed black women dancers as modern beauty icons. As the subsequent chapters attempt to prove, the writers chosen resist, one, the "stories that the shutter tells," all cast in an imperial eye; and two, reverses the eye/gaze by actively participating in the politics of visuality. They do so by direct and indirect engagements in photography, paintings or art criticism. While a groundswell of opinion circulate from a western point of view on what modernity is, and what it might promise in its interface with representations through the visual, the sense of multiple modernities proposed here by African American writers redefines these interfaces in unique ways.

While the first two writers taken up in this thesis—W. E. B. Du Bois and Richard Wright—experiment with journalism and photography and rely largely on "visual vocabulary," the latter ones—James Baldwin, Toni Morrison and bell hooks—explore visions of modernity when conjoined with issues of 'seeing'/ 'being seen,' gender, the foregrounding of children at critical moments of history, and a consideration of visual politics that does not take black art seriously. In all these, the racial matrix is overwhelmingly present, both in moments of articulation or foregrounding as well as in the conspicuous absences of African American varieties in critical assessment of visualities. Race, gender, and age are some of the indices which mediate these visual modernities. Each writer therefore situates herself/himself as a representative of newer experiments in literary trends. While the unifying perspective is modernity and its visual emphases, each writer articulates it in ways that are critically engaging and yet different.