



# TROUILLOT RE MIXED

**Michel-Rolph Trouillot**

EDITED BY YARIMAR BONILLA,  
GREG BECKETT, AND  
MAYANTHI L. FERNANDO

**THE  
MICHEL-ROLPH  
TROUILLOT  
READER**

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Duke University Press / Durham and London / 2021

0.1 Michel-Rolph  
Trouillot at his home  
in Chicago.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

How does one acknowledge a formative presence as though it were external to oneself or somehow in the past, when that presence constitutes the very ground of one's scholarship, past, present, and future? When we were graduate students at the University of Chicago, we came into being as the scholars we are first and foremost through the guidance of Michel-Rolph Trouillot. Rolph was, as he might have said, the condition of possibility for our thinking and our work, not just in this volume but, in ways large and small, in everything we write.

The idea for this volume emerged after Rolph's death in July 2012; from the moment of his passing we have been thinking with and through this project in one way or another. The volume began to take concrete form through a conference we organized in anticipation of the twenty-fifth anniversary of *Silencing the Past* at the University of Chicago, Rolph's last institutional home. We imagined the conference as an occasion to use Rolph's most widely known text to think through his oeuvre as a whole and to consider the import of that oeuvre for anthropologists, historians, philosophers, literary critics, novelists, poets, and so on. We would like to express our deepest gratitude to François Richard, our co-organizer, for all his work to make the conference happen. Vital contributions to the conference and to the evolution of our engagement with Rolph's work were made by the conference panelists—Nadia Abu el-Haj, Gil Anidjar, Madison Smartt Bell, Herman Bennett, Vincent Brown, Hazel Carby, Colin Dayan, Marlene Daut, Marisa Fuentes, Saidiya Hartman, Walter Mignolo, Harvey Neptune, Jemima Pierre, Christina Sharpe, Deborah Thomas, and Rinaldo Walcott—and panel chairs—Hussein Agrama, Ryan Jobson, Natacha Nsabimana, and Stephan Palmié—and we thank all of them, as well as the conference audience. This volume owes a debt to the incredibly generative nature of that event. The conference website (<https://silencingthepast25.wordpress.com>) includes video recordings of many of the keynotes and panels. The Department of Anthropology at the University of Chicago generously funded and hosted the event; we would especially like to thank department chairs Joseph Masco and William Mazzarella for their support, as well as Kimberly

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## Prelude

### Remembering the Songwriter: The Life and Legacies of Michel-Rolph Trouillot

As a young graduate student, frustrated with the “Indiana Jones” image evoked by the label “anthropologist,” I once asked my adviser, Michel-Rolph Trouillot, how he defined himself. For example, if he met a stranger on a plane, would he say he was an anthropologist, a historian, a college professor, a writer, or . . . what? The question seemed relevant given Trouillot’s disciplinary promiscuity: he was an anthropologist by training and by professional appointment, but he had written both academic and popular books about Haiti, a book about historiography, and (according to his own claims) kept an unfinished novel stashed away in his desk drawer. When I posed the question, he smirked, took a puff of his cigarette, and replied, “I’d tell them I’m a songwriter.” He then crushed out his cigarette, smiled mischievously, and dashed away before I could say anything else, leaving me to ponder (for over a decade) what exactly he meant.

Knowing Rolph, I was sure that this was no mere joke, but given my other preoccupations at the time, I filed away the unsolved riddle in the recesses of my mind along with the many other cryptic aphorisms he offered as an adviser. It was not until the week of his passing that the memory of this playful exchange came flooding back. It happened as I came upon a Facebook post by the Haitian writer and artist Michelle Voltaire Marcelin describing her reaction to the news of Rolph’s death.<sup>1</sup> She wrote:

My brother Buyu Ambroise called me today to commiserate the passing of Haitian anthropologist, historian, and political scientist Michel-Rolph

Trouillot who died last night in Chicago. We did not know the eminent scholar who is mourned today. However we both knew Roro Trouillot, the artist, quite well. It was the early 70s. We were young with very little money. We lived in a basement and slept on the floor. The only furnishings were a white mirrored piano, a stereo, and a few hundred LP albums. . . . Most of our friends were struggling artists or musicians. . . . There was music aficionado Sansan Etienne, Joe Charles and his electric bass, Demst Emile and his guitar, Buyu Ambroise, who was skinny then with a huge afro and carried his tenor sax wherever he went[,] and there was Michel-Rolph Trouillot[,] who started Tanbou Libete [Drum of Freedom] rehearsals in that basement. Convinced that theater could be used to instigate social change and alter the course of politics, Roro as he was then affectionately called, founded Tanbou Libete with other activists based in New York in 1971. For the next few years, it would perform, often in non-traditional venues, the texts Roro wrote in Kreyòl to promote resistance. Many vocalists interpreted his songs—the most renowned being “Alyenkat” about undocumented immigrants who lived in the constant fear of harassment, detention[,] and deportation that their precarious status imposed on them. The song questioned the ethics of the USA’s immigration policy and the required Alien Registration Card. Popularized by Manno Charlemagne, it became a hymn to the undocumented in Haiti and the diaspora.

Stumbling upon this anecdote about Rolph’s time in Brooklyn (poignantly enough, as I began to make Brooklyn my home) brought a rush of memories of the scattered references Rolph had made about this period in his life—memories that I had never been able to string together into a coherent narrative. Much like Michelle, who said she only knew Roro, the artist, I felt like I only knew Trouillot, the scholar. I could easily call forth the memory of him laughing irreverently as he tormented his students at the University of Chicago or picture him pensively touring the ruins of Sans Souci, as he described in the pages of *Silencing the Past*. It was a bit harder, however, to imagine “Roro” the exile, activist, cab driver, and student at Brooklyn College writing Kreyòl songs and plays in Michelle’s sparsely furnished basement. It seems easy to dismiss this period in his life as simply a youthful era of heady politics—much like the oft-drawn divide between the young and old Marx. Yet Trouillot himself had taught us to question those spurious divides, often arguing that one could not understand the teachings of *Capital* without a close reading of *The Eighteenth Brumaire*.

With these thoughts in mind, I tracked down the song referenced in Michelle's post and began to think about how it might fit within Trouillot's intellectual biography. Comforted by the beauty of its simple melody and charmed by its wry lyrics, I began to see past Trouillot's ruse. I realized that what I felt as I listened to the grainy recording from the 1970s was not a feeling of estrangement but of *familiarity*. For, indeed, Trouillot the scholar and Roro the songwriter were one and the same: they shared a common voice, a common set of concerns, and a driving set of, in Trouillot's words, "burning questions" to which he would return time and again in various forms and genres.<sup>2</sup>

In what follows, I parse various pieces by Trouillot for what they reveal about his intellectual catalog. Although I trace a somewhat chronological path through his career, my focus is on the connective threads that tie together his numerous works. For, although each of his pieces stands alone as a powerful "single," when viewed as a collection, they reveal the unique constellation of themes, approaches, and preoccupations that defined this particular songwriter's life and work.

## COMMUNITIES OF INTEREST

Trouillot's intellectual genealogy is often traced back to his family roots in Haiti. As he states in *Silencing the Past*, for the Trouillot family, "history sat at the dinner table" (Trouillot 1995, xvii). History was both the preferred profession and the favored pastime of many of his relatives. His father, Ernest Trouillot, was a lawyer and professor at a prestigious lycée and also hosted a television show about Haitian history. His uncle, Henock Trouillot, was the director of the Haitian national archives in addition to being a prolific writer and public historian. All his siblings (Evelyne, Jocelyne, and Lyonel) have become important novelists, essayists, scholars, and educators who blur intellectual traditions and genres, suggesting that it was not only history that sat at the family dinner table but also literature, music, art, and politics (Danticat 2005).

This legacy alone might explain Trouillot's academic career. But his life was also profoundly marked by the personal experience of migration and exile. In 1968, Trouillot left Haiti as part of the large wave of student activists fleeing the repression of the Duvalier dictatorship. He joined his aunt in Park Slope, Brooklyn, and completed a bachelor's degree in Caribbean history and culture in 1978 at Brooklyn College, while working as a taxi



P.1 The Trouillot siblings in front of their family home in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, ca. 1958. *From left to right:* Lyonel Trouillot, Evelyne Trouillot, Michel-Rolph Trouillot, and Jocelyne Trouillot. Photograph courtesy of Evelyne Trouillot.

driver and participating in the flourishing political and cultural activism of the Haitian diaspora.

It was during this time that Trouillot, along with other activists, helped found the theater group *Tanbou Libete*, an outgrowth of the *kilti libete* (freedom culture) movement of the 1970s, which sought to build political consciousness among the Haitian diaspora. The *mizik angaje* (politically engaged music) produced by these groups was shuttled across state borders on inexpensive cassette tapes along with news, speeches, and calls for resistance. At the time, Duvalier had successfully co-opted numerous cultural institutions (including vodou temples, rara bands, and peasant secret societies) into his state apparatus; he had also laid claim to the figure of the *Nèg mawon*, erecting the statue of the Unknown Maroon, *Le Marron Inconnu de Saint-Domingue*, in front of the presidential palace. The cultural activists of the 1970s sought to give a new valorization to peasant forms and to the politics of *marronage* in order to demonstrate that, contrary to what anti-Duvalier elites might suspect, peasant traditions were not intrinsically linked to the Duvalierist project and could serve as both a site and a vehicle for political reform.

The song that Michelle Voltaire Marcelin mentioned in her post was one of the best-known pieces created by Tanbou Libete, and it was later recorded by the popular Haitian singer Manno Charlemagne on his 1984 album *Konviksyon*. The lyrics make reference to the Alien Registration Card (*alyenkat*) that Haitians were required to carry in the United States under threat of deportation and posed several provocative questions: When Christopher Columbus arrived in the Americas, did the Indigenous people ask him for his alien card? Did Sonthonax (a French civil commissioner during the Haitian Revolution) have an alien card? Were the US troops who murdered the Haitian nationalist hero Charlemagne Peralte during the US occupation *moun alyen-kat* (alien-card people)? In this text, Trouillot historicized, with his usual audacious wit, the politics of surveillance and exclusion faced by contemporary Haitian migrants by embedding these within a longer history of colonial and imperial intervention.<sup>3</sup>

Trouillot referred to his time among the Haitian diaspora as a kind of “apprenticeship” through which he acquired a new appreciation for the lessons acquired amid his extraordinarily learned family in Haiti:

The Haitian exile community in New York provided a sanctuary where I combined artistic and intellectual pursuits with political activism. That apprenticeship reinforced earlier propensities: a desire to reach an audience not defined by academic membership; a conviction that an intellectual is so much more than a mere academic and the member of multiple overlapping communities. I had absorbed these beliefs growing up within the so-called intellectual elite so closely tied to the state in Haiti. Political activism in New York turned this heredity into conscious choices. (1996; interlude 4, this volume, 341)

Trouillot described this period as both a sanctuary and an apprenticeship: a space in which to develop nascent skills, convictions, and proclivities. In fact, it was from this space that in 1977, as a twenty-eight-year-old activist and undergraduate, he published the first nonfiction book ever written in Haitian Kreyòl, *Ti dife boule sou istwa Ayiti* [A small fire burning on Haitian history] (Trouillot [1977] 2012).<sup>4</sup> The book’s title suggests an attempt at shedding new light on, and igniting new interpretations of, Haitian history.

Trouillot described *Ti dife* as a synthesis of the intellectual traditions he inherited from his family in Haiti and the cultural politics he practiced among the Haitian community in Brooklyn: “This was a natural evolution: my father and my uncle both wrote history. In a deeper sense, it

was going against class origins and attitudes. *Ti dife* questions the ‘great men’ tradition of Haitian historiography. More important, it is also the first non-fiction book written in Haitian” (1996; interlude 4, this volume, 341).

*Ti dife* set the tone for what would become Trouillot’s lifelong tasks: to question dominant sources and paradigms of history and the interests they serve, to produce scholarly work that self-reflectively engages with its own conditions of production, and to write in forms and venues that are accessible and compelling to various publics. The book challenged hero-driven narratives of the Haitian Revolution by exploring lesser-known figures who had been buried under the weight of historical silences. Its narrative form defies the conventions of professional history by using the structure of Haitian storytelling, with a raconteur narrator identified as Grenn Pwo-mennen. The bibliography contains more than fifty references, but none is cited in the text. Instead, the pages are filled with Kreyòl proverbs, wordplay, musical lyrics, and references to vodou cosmology (Past 2004).

Trouillot exhibited, even in this first book, an interest in the distinction between history and historicity, and an awareness of the weak monopoly that professional historians held over the latter. In a later essay on historiography, he wrote that “the field of Haitian historical discourse is not limited to writings explicitly and exclusively deemed historical, nor even to written texts alone. Rather, history enters into any discourse that speaks of and to the society at large. The past is often explicitly present in talk about culture, society or politics. . . . Haitian historical consciousness is also expressed through various activities not specifically constructed as narratives, from religious rituals, to art, to the naming of children” (1999, 452).

The linguistic and stylistic choices that Trouillot made in *Ti dife* evidence the careful attention he paid to questions of form and how he carefully tailored his pieces in relation to his audience. Each of his texts was produced with a particular public in mind, according to which he would carefully calibrate language, style, and “venue.” It is telling that he never sought to translate *Ti dife* for non-Kreyòlophone readers. Some of his later reflections on the politics of translation hint at his concerns in this regard. In the preface to *Haiti: State against Nation*, he explained that the original French version, *Les racines historiques de l’État duvaliérien*, “drew from a common pool of images, of historical, social, and political references easily decoded by Haitian urbanites”; the book therefore required more than a mere

“linguistic transcription” to become intelligible to an international audience (Trouillot 1990, 10).

Trouillot described the process of creating the English version of *Haiti: State against Nation* as an act of “cultural translation for which the shift from French to English was but a metaphor.” He stressed that the original book arose from a particular conversation among a specific “community of interest,” and as such it “said as much about its author as it did about its audience.” In other words, Trouillot was acutely aware that all texts are produced in dialogue with multiple linguistic—but also political and intellectual—communities. Some might gloss this as simple attention to intertextuality, but for Trouillot, these relationships spanned beyond the text—hence his reference to communities of “interest” rather than simply to communities of readers. For Trouillot, the process of translation required not just linguistic skill but also the social grace of “filling in historical and cultural blanks” and creating “multiple points of entry into the discussion” (1990, 10). Only then could newly arrived interlocutors, unfamiliar with the terms, context, and *stakes* of an ongoing conversation, possibly enter the dialogue.<sup>5</sup>

## PEASANTS AND CONCEPTS

In 1978, Trouillot left his apprenticeship in Brooklyn and entered the anthropology doctoral program at Johns Hopkins University. His choice of disciplinary home was not an obvious one. As he once reflected, had he stayed in Haiti or gone on to France, he would have likely studied philosophy or history, given his “penchant—almost esthetic—for theoretical reflection grounded in historical concreteness, regardless of discipline or persuasion” (1996; interlude 4, this volume, 341). However, when Richard Price and Sidney Mintz recruited him for their newly formed program, its “special character”—its close attention to historical process and focus on the Atlantic world as a site of global connection—“tipped the balance towards anthropology.”

His doctoral dissertation, later published as *Peasants and Capital*, reflects the combination of those interests at the particular intellectual moment when Trouillot entered anthropology. *Peasants and Capital* bears the marks of the methodological experimentation of the time: the move toward multi-sited ethnography, the increased interest in global processes, the dismantling

of bounded notions of culture, the concern with the role of the native voice in the text, and the search for disciplinary relevance in a world where the fictions of remote natives and “pure cultures” no longer held sway. The result is a methodologically innovative text that sought to examine the peasant economy in Dominica through the prism of world-systems theory, historical anthropology, and critical ethnography.<sup>6</sup>

*Peasants and Capital* thus not only speaks to a particular problem-space in anthropology but also reflects Trouillot’s distinctive approach to Caribbean studies. Building on the work of his teacher Sidney Mintz, Trouillot consistently foregrounded how Caribbean societies troubled dominant theories of culture, modernity, globalization, and capitalism. Early on he was concerned with the provincial and prescriptive nature of these categories, which he would later describe as “North Atlantic universals” (2002b; see also chapter 5, this volume).

In *Peasants and Capital*, Trouillot deployed this method by decentering the category of “the peasant.” He argued that “within the dominant historical perception of the West, the word peasant evokes a being of another age—indeed, one most typical of the Middle Ages . . . who inexplicably survived the coming of civilization” (1988, 1). He argued that in the Caribbean, however, “tradition” succeeded modernity, and what could be called a “peasant way of life” blossomed on the ruins of industrial sugar production (21). Thus, he concluded, we must question whether the word *peasant* “is anything but a descriptive category within a Euro-American folk view” (2).

For Trouillot, the implications were both analytical and political. He insisted that Caribbean peasants needed to be reimagined not as obstacles to progress but as the richest source of wealth for Caribbean societies: “Not only should we stop thinking of peasants as inherent liabilities, but we should start thinking of them as potential resources. . . . Given their proven resilience, given the fact that they have been able to support the lives and wealth of so many others, local and foreign, for so long, it is time to start developing policies that take that contribution and the potential it reveals into account” (293–94).

The lessons that Trouillot drew from *Peasants and Capital* were not confined to the borders of Dominica. He later argued that the fundamental problem of Haitian society was precisely the alienation of the peasantry, the construction of peasants as *moun andeyó* (people outside of the nation), and the expropriation of their wealth by urban elites, government institutions, and foreign interests (Trouillot 1990).

## THE POWER IN THE STORY

As I have argued elsewhere, Trouillot firmly believed that Caribbean studies required a regional perspective and repeatedly advocated placing Haiti within a comparative frame (Bonilla 2013b). Always attentive to the politics of “the guild,” he was also concerned with the construction of minority anthropologists as “native” anthropologists, and frequently encouraged his students to study societies other than their own.<sup>7</sup> He likened the experience of doing comparative research to that of learning a new dance, insisting that acquiring new moves brought greater appreciation for one’s own, more familiar, steps. However, Trouillot’s emphasis on the value of the estranging perspective of ethnographic research should not be seen as an uncritical celebration of disciplinary traditions. For, in fact, his signature move was to turn disciplinary methods against themselves.

In *Global Transformations*, Trouillot called upon anthropologists to turn their gaze inward in order to examine their discipline as both the product and the main purveyor of what he termed “the Savage slot.” He challenged anthropologists to pay greater attention to their folk concepts and carefully unpacked many of the discipline’s master categories, including globalization, culture, the field, and “the native.” Turning an oft-cited dictum by Clifford Geertz on its head, Trouillot described his project as an effort to examine the silences (rather than the stories) in “the history the West tells itself about itself” (2003, 1).

In his most celebrated book, *Silencing the Past*, Trouillot carried out a similar move, arguing for the need to historicize the conditions of possibility and epistemic limits of historical production. *Silencing the Past* dismantles the positivist claim to history as an objective account of “what happened” by demonstrating that the raw materials of history itself—factual evidence—are inherently conditioned by the epistemic constraints of their time. Taking the example of the Haitian Revolution, Trouillot examined how events that are unthinkable at the moment they occur become silenced and trivialized in the historical record. How then, he asked, can these events be rendered into history? In his words, “How does one write a history of the impossible?” (1995, 74; see also chapter 4, this volume).

The problem, as Trouillot saw it, was not empirical but ontological. The fact of slave resistance was widely recognized at the time, for indeed slave rebellions were both a constant threat and a feverish preoccupation for the planter class. However, although slaves were recognized as having the capacity to resist the whip, they were not imagined as having the

ability—or the right—to establish their own forms of governance. Thus, even though the *fact* of the Haitian Revolution was recognized, its political implications could not be entertained because they brought into question the guiding principles of the prevailing social order. To recognize the Haitian Revolution as a modern national revolution would have required acknowledging that enslaved populations had both the capacity and the *right* to self-determination. Accepting such a principle was unthinkable.

Trouillot's argument pushes us to critically examine the narrative frames we impose upon emerging forms of struggle as well as the interpretive frames we cast in hindsight. For example, he decried the fact that scholars continued to inscribe the Haitian Revolution within the framework of the French Revolution rather than examining the novel political forms forged through its internal processes. This, he insisted, speaks to how the Haitian Revolution remains buried under the history of the West: "The silencing of the Haitian Revolution is only a chapter within a narrative of global domination. It is part of the history of the West and it is likely to persist, even in attenuated form, as long as the history of the West is not retold in ways that bring forward the perspective of the world" (1995, 107).

Trouillot (2002a) leaves us with this challenge or, in his words, this "duty." Ever critical of political naïveté, he urges us not to underestimate, or take lightly, the power embedded in the stories we tell. In fact, he presses us to recast our most well-trodden stories—particularly the master narratives that have propelled and sustained our global order. He calls upon us to take seriously our own "double-sided historicity" and become aware of our dual roles as both historical actors and historical narrators. This is what Trouillot means when he asks us to examine the "conditions of possibility" of our own intellectual production. He does not expect us to step out of our time and place (to stand outside of history, so to speak), but he dares us to think critically about how our own biographies inform the questions we ask and the answers we find comfort in. In other words, he encourages us to come to terms with our own "burning questions," to develop our own authorial voice, and to be mindful of the various publics to which we sing and write.

It is for this reason that I have come to terms with Trouillot's playful riddle and have chosen to remember him as a songwriter. Not because it encapsulates everything he was, for indeed nothing can, but rather because in his songwriting we can see how the different elements that defined him came together into a powerful sum. After all, few others could so artfully combine a strident critique of US anti-immigration practices with a



P.2 Michel-Rolph Trouillot at a party with graduate students from the University of Chicago, ca. 2001. *From left to right:* Mayanthi L. Fernando, Michel-Rolph Trouillot, and Yarimar Bonilla.

charming melody, an incisive Haitian proverb, and a well-timed joke about Christopher Columbus. In his song, we can clearly distinguish the guiding principles that defined his life and work: the attention to history, the concern with the political stakes of the present, the commitment to both home and the world, and the belief that scholarship, art, and politics are all best carried out with a touch of humor, an eye for beauty, and a catchy beat.

#### NOTES

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1. Michele Voltaire Marcelin, Facebook, July 6, 2012, <https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10151005937804501&set=a.41634809500>.

2. For more on Trouillot's "voice," see Scott 2012. For more on the importance of Trouillot's "burning questions," see Bonilla 2013a.
3. *Editors' Note*: For full song lyrics and context, see Tanbou Libète 2020.
4. *Editors' Note*: Trouillot's first book was originally published as *Ti difè boulé sou istoua Ayiti* (see Trouillot 1977), before Haitian Kreyòl orthography was standardized. It was republished in 2012 with a title that reflects standard modern Kreyòl orthography. We use the standardized form of the title throughout this volume.
5. It appears that Trouillot's careful attention to translation centered mostly on the languages in which he was fluent, and the communities of interest to which he belonged. He authorized several translations of his works into Spanish and German, entrusting the translators with the burden of properly introducing his texts to their linguistic communities. Translations to and from French and English were, however, more carefully attended to. Indeed, this is one of the reasons why the French translation of *Silencing the Past* is yet to be completed.
6. *Editors' Note*: For more on the methodological contributions of this text, see the overture to this volume.
7. *Editors' Note*: For more on Trouillot's relationship to "native anthropology," see the overture to this volume.

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## Overture

### Trouillot Remixed

If Michel-Rolph Trouillot preferred to identify himself as a musician and songwriter rather than an academic, as Yarimar Bonilla describes in the prelude to this volume, then this volume is a mixtape of sorts, and we its DJs. The three of us have been thinking with Trouillot and his oeuvre for over two decades; he was our teacher and mentor, and his work a touchstone for our own. That work—despite the variety of topics, languages, methods, and fields of engagement through which Trouillot moved—demonstrates a consistency of themes and preoccupations. Although perhaps best known for his attention to the production of history and the historicization of anthropology, Trouillot's contributions spanned far beyond the two disciplines with which he engaged explicitly or was located in institutionally, and his work continues to resonate in fields like postcolonial studies, Black studies, ethnic studies, and literature.

Indeed, while his thinking and writing continually evolved over the course of his life, there are a series of threads that weave across Trouillot's entire scholarly catalog with remarkable consistency of argument and voice.<sup>1</sup> We have therefore chosen to organize this volume not by periods, but by those thematic threads, cutting together early-, mid-, and late-career work in order to make this mixtape. We included a few classic hits—such as “Anthropology and the Savage Slot” and selections from *Silencing the Past*—as well as a number of lesser-read essays, or deep cuts. Some of the latter are from out-of-print publications, such as “The Odd and the Ordinary: Haiti, the Caribbean, and the World,” which has long been passed around as a faded photocopy among colleagues and friends, like a treasured but impossible-to-find B side.

More than a mere compilation, however, this volume is best understood as a *remix*, in the sense that it features new arrangements and pairings that might allow the reader to engage with Trouillot's work in new or unexpected ways. We have chosen to publish some of his best-known pieces in earlier "demo" versions that reveal the progression of his thought. "From Planters' Journals to Academia: The Haitian Revolution as Unthinkable History," for example, is the first published version of the intellectual kernel at the heart of *Silencing the Past*, and "Anthropology and the Savage Slot" is the version from the edited volume *Recapturing Anthropology* (Fox 1991), where it first appeared. We have also sought to demonstrate Trouillot's early academic influences, in order to hear him sample from other scholars' jams, so to speak. In "Caribbean Peasantries and World Capitalism: An Approach to Micro-level Studies," for instance, we see how he was building on—while already beginning to depart from—the intellectual traditions of his mentors, Sidney Mintz and Eric Wolf. Other selections, such as "The Vulgarities of Power," which originally appeared as a response to an article by Achille Mbembe, allows us to see the way in which Trouillot engaged critically with scholars emerging out of other traditions, such as Black and postcolonial studies.

Each section of this volume opens with an interlude in which Trouillot speaks to us in a different voice (our nod to Trouillot's own use of different voices in *Silencing the Past*). The second interlude, for instance, is a 1977 radio interview (translated from Kreyòl and annotated by Laura Wagner) between Trouillot, who at the time had just begun his graduate studies in anthropology, and the radio journalist and poet Richard Brisson. In that interview, Trouillot explains how his family history, his activist commitments in the Haitian diaspora, and his graduate training in anthropology all shaped the intellectual project of his first book, *Ti dife boule sou istwa Ayiti*—the first monograph of Haitian history published entirely in Kreyòl (Trouillot [1977] 2012).<sup>2</sup> The other three interludes are various "Director's Word" segments written by Trouillot between 1993 and 1997 for the quarterly newsletter of the Johns Hopkins Institute for Global Studies in Culture, Power, and History, which he directed during that time. These reflections—more akin to blog posts than academic articles—offer insight into how Trouillot imagined the institutional location of his work, particularly the importance he gave to area studies as a site of interdisciplinarity and as one of the few spaces in which disciplines like political science and economics were forced to question their conceptual and methodological arsenals in order to address the experiences of the non-West in ways that might "unsettle" sociocultural theory.

By remixing these essays, chapters, interviews, and reflections from the long arc of Trouillot's career, we hope not only to provide readers with a sense of what he described as "his burning questions" (Bonilla 2013), but also to open new avenues for thinking both about and with Trouillot. Our aim in this introductory essay is thus to offer an opening—an *overture*—onto the key themes around which we have organized the book's tracks: the relationship between what Trouillot called the West's geography of imagination and its geography of management; the ways in which the Caribbean unsettles disciplinary traditions; the need to reimagine and transform the fields in which we work; and how to envision and embrace the new ethical and political duties before us, in scholarship and beyond.

## THE GEOGRAPHY OF IMAGINATION AND THE GEOGRAPHY OF MANAGEMENT

The place we most often call the West is best called the North Atlantic—not only for the sake of geographical precision but also because such usage frees us to emphasize that "the West" is always a fiction, an exercise in global legitimation.

MICHEL-ROLPH TROUILLOT, introduction, *Global Transformations*

This volume begins with what is perhaps Trouillot's most read—and misread—essay, "Anthropology and the Savage Slot: The Poetics and Politics of Otherness" (chapter 1).<sup>3</sup> Simultaneously published under the alternative title "Anthropology as Metaphor: The Savage's Legacy and the Postmodern World" (Trouillot 1991), the text critiques the "crisis of representation" within the discipline (this volume, chapter 1, 57) as it began to reckon with its role as "the handmaiden of colonialism" (Gough 1968). In the postwar era, domestic and international movements for decolonization, the rise of women-of-color feminism, and Black Power movements had begun to force transformations in academic thinking across the humanities and social sciences (e.g., Said 1979; Asad 1973; Deloria 1969; Césaire 1972). As marginalized populations entered the halls of academe, the empire was suddenly "writing back" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 2003), pushing against the foundational Eurocentrism of much disciplinary thinking. This moment of reckoning was perhaps felt most acutely in anthropology, as critics within and outside the discipline began to wonder whether

decolonization would mean that “the science of the savages” would disappear altogether (Macquet 1964).<sup>4</sup>

By the 1970s, then, anthropologists were beginning to grapple with the weight of history in the places in which they worked, unable to ignore the effects of colonialism, imperialism, and globalization on communities around the world. Early attempts at a critical appraisal focused on anthropology’s structural role in the colonial encounter (Asad 1973; Hymes 1974); by the 1980s, American cultural anthropology had turned to a more inward-focused critique. That turn is now often referred to as the *Writing Culture* moment, named after an eponymous essay collection that prompted a new concern for power and representation within the discipline. *Writing Culture*’s editors framed their critique as an investigation into the “poetics and politics of ethnography,” where ethnography meant not research method (i.e., fieldwork) but rather the practice of writing about another culture (Clifford and Marcus 1986). This turn to textuality was intended as a “tectonic shift” in the way anthropologists would represent others (Clifford 1986, 22).

For Trouillot, however, the turn to poetics represented a turn away from the larger field of significance in which anthropology came to study “others” in the first place, and he saw this as both a turn away from structure and (therefore) a turn away from power. Much, of course, depends here on one’s definition of power. Those inspired by *Writing Culture* embraced a long-standing tradition in American cultural anthropology that defined the discipline in terms of its capacity for interpretation and cross-cultural translation, although they also self-consciously saw themselves as critiquing the discursive power inherent in modes of representation and genres of writing. For Trouillot, such critiques inadequately attended to material social processes and were thus unable to fully theorize the conditions of possibility of the discipline itself. He argued that the focus on textuality and the autocritique of ethnography treated anthropology as a closed discourse, analytically separable from the world in which it operates. By contrast, Trouillot insisted that the discipline is historically tied to broader Western modes of thinking about otherness, and that “the primary focus on the textual construction of the Other *in* anthropology may turn our attention away from the construction of Otherness upon which anthropology is premised” (this volume, chapter 1, 65). These foundational modes of thought about the West’s others, he contended, allowed for and were reproduced by Western forms of political and economic expansion and conquest. European colonialism and the transatlantic slave system provided,

then, not only a set of material relationships by which the West and its others were entwined, but also a space of experience in which the concepts and values of all who lived in this world were constituted.

There are two important points to underscore in Trouillot's argument thus far: first, that the self-conception of the West was never *sui generis* but was instead irreducibly tied to alterity—that is, to a specific relation to otherness in and around which the West continues to think of itself (see also Trouillot 2002a, 2002b, 2003);<sup>5</sup> and second, that anthropology “came to fill the Savage slot of a larger thematic field, performing a role” earlier played by travelogues and literature (this volume, chapter 1, 65). If anthropology emerged in the nineteenth century as the specialized study of the West's others, then the West's self-conception and the particular discursive formations and epistemological foundations that ground it constitute the discipline's conditions of possibility. Any critique of anthropology—including its modes of representation—therefore requires adequately theorizing the relationship between anthropology and what Trouillot called the West's *geography of imagination*, or the concepts and symbols used to think about others, and its *geography of management*, the material relations of domination and subjugation of others by the West. As he argued, “to historicize the West is to historicize anthropology and vice versa” (this volume, chapter 1, 70).

For Trouillot, this meant attending to the dialectical relationship between the West as knowing subject and the Other as object of knowledge, a dialectical relationship that produced both the Savage (as metaphor) and Savage slot (as anthropology). In this relationship, the Savage came to serve as evidence, positive or negative, in a Western debate about universal humanity, reason, and the basis of moral and political order. At times noble, at other times barbarous, the Savage operates—and continues to operate—as a metaphor in arguments within the West about what the latter is and what it could be.<sup>6</sup> The emergence of the Savage as metaphor was accompanied by what Trouillot called the Savage slot, that is, the site of knowledge-production about the Savage that served—and continues to serve—as the evidentiary basis for an argument within the West about itself (via its others). Trouillot stressed the particular nature of the Savage slot, which renders all differences in similar terms; that is, otherness is always determined in relation to the unmarked category of the West. It is through the Savage slot and this particular configuration of alterity that the West made itself as a universal subject, a subject that realized itself precisely through its ability to treat non-Western others as objects of knowledge in the pursuit of order, reason, and universal humanity.

Some have read the *Savage* not as metaphor but as referring to a real demographic and have therefore misread Trouillot's critique as a simple call for anthropologists to move away from the study of non-Western peoples (e.g., Robbins 2013).<sup>7</sup> Yet, in later essays, Trouillot argued that even as anthropology started to abandon its traditional object of study and to recalibrate its modes of representation, an untheorized and unmarked West would remain and, indeed, be reinforced through the rise of new universals. For example, in "Abortive Rituals: Historical Apologies in the Global Era" (chapter 15), he demonstrated how the rise of collective apologies and recognition schemes rely on the concept of the "international community," which he diagnosed as an emerging North Atlantic universal.<sup>8</sup>

For Trouillot, then, breaking with the *Savage* slot required not just moving away from the representation of non-Western peoples as savages, but also undertaking what Harvey Neptune describes as "savaging" the West. This entails turning the well-honed methods of the discipline toward the grounds of its own formation. As Neptune argues, Trouillot was riffing on Clifford Geertz's seminal definition of culture by urging scholars to interrogate the tales the West "tells itself about itself" (Neptune 2014, 222). This requires, for starters, interrogating how a particular place with a particular history—the North Atlantic, or even more precisely, the United States and Western Europe—came to constitute itself as a universal and ahistorical subject: the West. Thus, in "Good Day, Columbus: Silences, Power, and Public History (1492–1892)" (chapter 4), Trouillot mapped the historical commemorations—the myths and rituals—through which the North Atlantic came to understand itself as the West, and he underscored the centrality of "The Discovery" to that imagination. He also attended to how the United States—which could have been considered part of the postcolonial world—instead came to refashion itself as part of the West (as a project, not a place).<sup>9</sup>

It is worth noting that for Trouillot, anthropology played a critical role in this historicization of the West for two reasons: first, because the discipline has been key to the emergence, solidification, and reproduction of the *Savage* slot; and second, because anthropology, more than any other discipline in the social sciences, is best equipped to grapple with the question of alterity, to turn its methods against itself and engage in the work of critique. We might say that anthropology was for Trouillot what political economy had been for Marx: a disciplinary location for an immanent critique of his real object of study, namely, the West.

However, Trouillot did not see this as a task limited to anthropology, since he saw the Savage slot as part of a larger constellation of knowledge-production through which the West understands and projects itself.<sup>10</sup> Disciplines like political science, economics, sociology, philosophy, literature, history, and art continue to take the West as their default subject and object—that is, they continue to operate as sites for knowing “ourselves” and “our” societies in ways that keep the West unmarked as such (while marking the non-West through subcategories like “comparative politics” and “world literature”). This particular-qua-universal ontological order determines who constitutes a people with and without history, what counts as a Great Book, what defines an artistic masterpiece, what is an empire (or a failed state), what represents rational (or aberrant) behavior, what science is and is not, and what constitutes the difference between theory and ideology.

Throughout his career, Trouillot was concerned with how the experiences of the non-West are consistently pathologized, trivialized, or simply silenced when they challenge the ontological order on which academic disciplines were founded. In *Silencing the Past*, he showed how this ontological order rendered the Haitian Revolution “unthinkable.” In “The Odd and the Ordinary” (chapter 2), he examined how claims to Haitian exceptionalism—“the poorest country in the Western hemisphere” and a “chronically failed state”—mask the global processes and historical actors that have produced Haiti’s material conditions. For these reasons, as demonstrated in “The Vulgarly of Power” (chapter 3), he was equally concerned with claims to African exceptionalism even when they were deployed by postcolonial scholars like Achille Mbembe.

For Trouillot, it is precisely through the creation of the aberrant, the undemocratic, the illiberal, the nonsovereign, and the nonmodern that the West constitutes itself. At the same time, his work consistently destabilized these sedimented categories by underscoring how attending to socio-historical processes in both Haiti and the Caribbean as a whole challenged the epistemic structures of European thought. In “The Otherwise Modern: Caribbean Lessons from the Savage Slot” (chapter 5), for instance, he examined both how the North Atlantic took shape through the construction of a nonmodern, nonsovereign Other and how the Caribbean simultaneously unmasked modernity’s conceits. Rather than seeing Haiti and the Caribbean as either odd or exceptional, then, he showed how both were central to the construction of the West, and therefore pivotal to unsettling its geography of imagination.

## THE OTHERWISE MODERN: HISTORY, ANTHROPOLOGY, AND THE CARIBBEAN

The point is not to insist that the Antilles or other regions of the world were as modern as Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—though a legitimate argument can be made along those lines. . . . Rather, if my sketchy narrative about the Caribbean holds true, it suggests much less the need to rewrite Caribbean history than the necessity to question the story that the North Atlantic tells about itself.

MICHEL-ROLPH TROUILLOT, "The Otherwise Modern: Caribbean Lessons from the Savage Slot"

For Trouillot, then, Haiti, but also the broader Caribbean, were central points of departure from which to theorize the West. This was because the Caribbean, more than any other place in the world, has been distinctly shaped by its long relationship with the West. The region is home to the oldest and longest-held overseas colonies of Europe. It is, as Sidney Mintz (2010) put it, "anciently colonial." And, even though the historical importance of the region has often been silenced, we might even say that the West was born in the Caribbean (Trouillot 1992, 2003).<sup>11</sup>

Scholars of the Caribbean have detailed how institutions and social forms there predate their modern European equivalents, and how the transatlantic slave trade and the Caribbean plantation system provided a crucial economic and caloric boost that helped bolster the early phases of industrial capitalism (Mintz 1985; Scott 2004). The relationship between slavery and capitalism, between industrial production and the plantation system, and between European wealth and Atlantic modes of labor extraction all constitute the West's geography of management. Indeed, the relations of production, disciplinary techniques, modes of consumption, and forms of self-fashioning that became central to the definition of Western modernity first emerged in the Caribbean, often before they were evident in Europe itself (see chapters 5, 6, and 7). But, as Trouillot contended in "The Otherwise Modern," the Caribbean reveals something more than a curious chronology in which Europe's so-called savage others embody modern forms of being *avant la lettre* (chapter 5). As he argued over the course of his scholarship, the historical experience of the Caribbean is, above all, an encounter with the first truly planetary project. The geographies of imagination and management through which European contact, conquest, and colonization took shape explicitly framed the region as a *mundus novus*—a

new and unknown world that became the dominion of Latin Christendom as the latter morphed into the West (this volume, chapter 1, 59).

Europeans imagined this New World as an Elsewhere they could control, a place that they could make in their own image. The so-called Columbian Exchange ushered in a global shift in plant and animal species and set the stage for one of the world's largest demographic transitions in the form of the transatlantic slave system (Crosby 1972).<sup>12</sup> As an Elsewhere for Europe, the New World was imagined as both a utopia full of noble savages to be converted and a dangerous place full of barbarians to be conquered. The West's geography of imagination was thus premised on and reproduced a dual structure of Us and Them, Here and Elsewhere, framing Europe's others within the terms of the Savage slot, and this new imaginary gave shape to concrete forms of control and management. But the very structure of the Savage slot produced the conditions of its undoing or, at the very least, a radical interruption of its terms. The symbolic schema of the Savage slot could never fully capture its object, leaving open a gap between *what was happening* throughout the centuries of Western conquest and colonization and *what was said to have happened* by those endowed with the power to write history—and to write others out of history (see chapter 12; see also Trouillot 1995; Wolf 1982).

That gap is perhaps starkest in the historical formation of Caribbean societies, and this fact—the gap between what happened and what was said to have happened—provided the epistemological anchor for much of Trouillot's work, from "Anthropology and the Savage Slot" to *Silencing the Past*. Moreover, that gap and the possibility of attending to the actors actively silenced by power—for instance, to Haitian slaves who created a revolution, a kingdom, and a democracy, and to Dominican peasants who upend the terms of global capitalism—underpinned Trouillot's ultimate commitment to anthropology, since its disciplinary investment in attending to the small and the marginalized peoples of the non-West enabled these stories to come to the fore (see chapters 7, 10, 12, and 16). Thus, in "Culture on the Edges: Creolization in the Plantation Context," Trouillot pushed back against linguists' conventional attitude toward creolization as a "miracle," arguing that the study of creolization in the Caribbean could serve as a site for re-theorizing how we understand cultural change, broadly speaking (chapter 7). This line of argument continued a critique he had begun in some of this earliest work. For example, in "Motion in the System: Coffee, Color, and Slavery in Eighteenth-Century Saint-Domingue,"

an essay in which he was clearly thinking with his mentors Sidney Mintz and Eric Wolf as well as with world-systems theorists like Fernand Braudel and Eric Williams, Trouillot contended that colonial peripheries played a greater *conceptual* role in the constitution of imperial centers than previously imagined (Trouillot 1982; see also chapters 7 and 8).

It took anthropology a long time to recognize the Caribbean as a suitable location for study, and the role of the Caribbean as an “open frontier” for anthropology has always been a curious one (chapter 6).<sup>13</sup> As Trouillot showed repeatedly, the Caribbean was central to the construction of the Savage slot and to the development of European conceptions of alterity. It is no accident, then, that the region should be both historically central to the construction of the West’s geography of imagination and conceptually difficult to interpret using the terms and the symbolic schema of that imagination.

For anthropology, this was largely because Caribbean societies were *too* historical. That is, as Trouillot argued in “The Otherwise Modern,” they could not be understood outside of and apart from the historical processes that produced them, and as such they could not be reconciled with the early mode of ethnographic research and writing in which other societies were encoded in synchronic terms, as if they were isolated wholes with no history (chapter 5; see also Wolf 1982). Concomitantly, in “The Caribbean Region: An Open Frontier in Anthropological Theory,” Trouillot argued that this fiction of synchronicity, integral to both American and European anthropology, could never be fully supported in Caribbean societies, which were populated by non-European others whose difference was known to be due to a specific history of European colonization and slavery (chapter 6). In other words, Caribbean societies were not only “anciently colonial” (Mintz 2010) but also “*inherently* colonial,” since their basic characteristics and features “cannot be accounted for, or even described, without reference to colonialism,” and therefore to the West (this volume, chapter 6, 163–64). And this, in turn, meant that, by the very fact of their existence, Caribbean societies “questioned the West/non-West dichotomy and the category of the native, upon both of which anthropology was premised” (this volume, chapter 6, 162).

Anthropology from a Caribbean point of view was thus, for Trouillot, always something more than an anthropology of the Caribbean; any anthropological account of Caribbean peoples would also have to become an anthropology of the West, because there was simply no way to adequately

understand the Caribbean without acknowledging the historical facts of colonialism, slavery, and racism, all of which were foundational to Western projects of conquest and control. Yet, as Trouillot emphasized repeatedly, the converse was also true: there is no way to understand the West without fully engaging with its foundational others, foremost among them, the peoples of the Caribbean.

The region held another important lesson for anthropology. As we just noted, the Caribbean was fundamental to the production of the Savage slot yet resistant to assimilation within its symbolic schema given the region's "inescapable historicity" (this volume, chapter 6).<sup>14</sup> Reckoning with this fact required anthropologists to rethink their discipline-defining concept of culture. The history of the Caribbean showed that culture, like history, is *made* and, importantly, made by sociomaterial processes, by people acting in the world. Indeed, for Trouillot, Caribbean societies offered the best examples of humans making their own history, although not under circumstances of their choosing. Out of some of the harshest conditions ever conceived, these humans created new cultural forms and new social relations, from creole languages to new religions, from peasant horticultural practices to modes of warfare (chapters 6 and 7, this volume; see also Mintz and Price 1992). Caribbean societies have thereby consistently challenged the dominant Euro-American model of history imagined as a more or less predictable, linear progression, as well as the dominant model of difference imagined in terms of race. In *Global Transformations*, Trouillot put it this way:

Modern historicity hinges upon both a fundamental rupture between past, present, and future—as distinct temporal planes—and their relinking along a singular line that allows for continuity. I have argued that this regime of historicity in turn implies a heterology, a necessary reading of alterity. Striking then is the fact that Caribbean history as we know it starts with an abrupt rupture between past and present—for Europeans, for Native Americans, and for enslaved Africans. In no way could the enforced modernization imposed by colonization be perceived by any of these actors as a mere continuation of an immediate past. This was a New World for all involved, even for those who had lived within it before it became new to others. (2003, 44)

This relationship between historicity and alterity does not define only Caribbean societies, of course, but that is not Trouillot's point. Nor is his point a claim to the chronological primacy of modernity in the Caribbean.

To insist that features of modernization or globalization emerge first in the Caribbean is to remain trapped within the terms of a discourse about the West. From that perspective, the Caribbean is little more than a footnote to a story about the West, a story in which the West remains the subject in whose terms and against whose likeness the Caribbean—and other societies—are to be known and judged. Rather, for Trouillot, the view from the Caribbean provides important lessons not about who was modern first, but rather about the conditions of possibility of such a statement. For what the Caribbean perspective reveals is the dialectical relationship between domination and creolization and between the West and its imagined others (see chapters 1, 2, 5, 6, and 7, this volume). The Savage slot conceals this double dialectic by both silencing the history of Western power and naturalizing Western ideas of difference. How, then, might we undo that concealment?

#### **THE FIELDS IN WHICH WE WORK: CONCEPTS, CATEGORIES, AND METHOD**

There is no stateness to states, no essence to culture, not even a fixed content to specific cultures, let alone a fixed content to the West. We gain greater knowledge of the nation, the state, the tribe, modernity, or globalization itself when we approach them as sets of relations and processes rather than ahistorical essences.

MICHEL-ROLPH TROUILLOT, introduction, *Global Transformations*

The relationships between historicity and alterity and between the geography of imagination and the geography of management are themselves historical. For Trouillot, then, the question of culture—that is, of the culture concept and also of the cultural processes of making worlds—was necessarily historical, and always in a double sense. This is so because, as Trouillot argued in *Silencing the Past*, history is both a social and material process of making the world and a narrative account that people give, retrospectively, to explain what happened.

Trouillot insisted that the production of history was conditioned not only by what was “thinkable” in the past but also by what is meaningful in the present. “The Presence in the Past” (chapter 14) begins by narrating his visit to Chichén Itzá, a Mayan city in the Yucatán (now classified as a UNESCO World Heritage site). Trouillot wrote that during his visit there, he felt no connection to the past because he did not meet anyone to whom

that past mattered. As he explained: “History did not need to be mine in order to engage me. It just needed to relate to someone, anyone. It could not just be The Past. It had to be someone’s past” (this volume, chapter 14, 375). Trouillot argued that what endowed something with retrospective significance had less to do with the magnitude of the event at the time than with the context of its recollection: “The crux of the matter is the here and now, the relations between the events described and their public representation in a specific historical context” (this volume, chapter 14, 379).

Thus, in “Good Day, Columbus” (chapter 4), he examined how “The Discovery” of the Americas becomes a historical “fact” and “Columbus Day” a historical artifact through the efforts of actors ranging from politicians to travel agents, who endow the event with meaning for various ends. By contrast, in “The Presence in the Past,” Trouillot examined how plans for a Disney theme park devoted to the history of slavery was destined for failure, not because Disney engineers would have lacked the resources to produce historical accuracy, but because the project would have been inherently inauthentic in its attempt to create a detached distance between the slave past and the present of contemporary park-goers. As he argued, “historical authenticity resides not in the fidelity to an alleged past but in an honesty vis-à-vis the present as it re-presents that past” (this volume, chapter 14, 379). He suggested that historical representations succeed or fail based not solely on their fidelity to the historical record, but on their fidelity to the present, that is, on their ability to show the connective tissue between then and now.

These lessons about history and its telling were ones Trouillot came to through direct experience. He repeatedly observed the way Haitian elites and politicians laid claim to public history to legitimize their rule (see Trouillot 1995, 1999). Trouillot demonstrated how the production of history exceeds the purview of professional historians, dwelling as much in government propaganda as in folk art, religious rites, and naming practices (Trouillot 1999). History is not the sole property of historians, but neither is it the sole property of the state. This is why Trouillot’s anthropological work was always historical: it was always infused with an attention to the ways contemporary actors narrate and make use of their past. But, in turn, his historical work was always anthropological, in that he historicized not just events or narratives but also the cultural categories through which they were thought and understood.

This process was the subject of his most famous book, *Silencing the Past*, but the method by which his critique proceeded is perhaps easier to see in his

earlier work, especially *Peasants and Capital*, a dense and complex monograph whose argument unfolds over several sections and across multiple “scales” or units of analysis. Rather than pulling a chapter from *Peasants and Capital* for this volume, then, we have included “Caribbean Peasantries and World Capitalism” (chapter 10), a standalone article that condenses and encapsulates the overall project of the book.

*Peasants and Capital* remains an underappreciated part of Trouillot’s oeuvre. It is easy to read as an early and therefore still underdeveloped work, a revised dissertation, or the product of its time and of the debates within anthropology during the 1980s. It may even seem too indebted to Trouillot’s graduate adviser, Sidney Mintz. The book is certainly situated within two broad fields that Mintz helped found, namely peasant studies and Marxian anthropology, and it shares with Mintz’s work a commitment to a distinctively Caribbean approach to anthropology and history that foregrounds how Caribbean societies unsettle dominant theories about capitalism, culture, globalization, and modernity. In his analysis, Trouillot used historical and ethnographic research in Dominica to map out a story of global reach, showing how Caribbean cultivators are tied to markets that span several continents, and how the work of growing bananas on a small Caribbean island is implicated in the story of global capital accumulation and the rise of transnational corporations. He began by noting that the term *peasant* began to be applied to rural cultivators in the Caribbean in the nineteenth century and was used to name a type of agricultural labor over which local farmers held some measure of control (see also Trouillot 1989; chapters 12 and 13, this volume). He then showed how the historicity of the term *peasant* as used in a place like Dominica disrupts European assumptions that the term designates a distinct type of work understood to be, historically and theoretically, *precapitalist*. As Trouillot put it, the problem with the category of “peasant” is that “within the dominant historical perception of the West, the word peasant evokes a being of another age—indeed, one most typical of the Middle Ages . . . who inexplicably survived the coming of civilization” (1988, 1). In the Caribbean, however, so-called tradition came *after* modernity, and what could be called a “peasant way of life” emerged in the wake of industrial sugar production (1988, 21).<sup>15</sup> Rather than accepting the word *peasant* as a general category thoroughly informed by a singular history—meaning European farmers before European industrialization—Trouillot wryly concluded that such a concept of the peasant is really nothing more than “a descriptive category within a Euro-American folk view,” though one with a tremendous amount of

power (1988, 2). In later work, he would go on to theorize these powerful particular-qua-universal categories through which non-Western or otherwise modern societies are interpellated as “North Atlantic universals” or “North Atlantic fictions” (see chapter 5; see also 2002a and 2003).

This seemingly insignificant story of Dominican peasants and capital reverberates beyond the island’s history and beyond the study of the Caribbean. In broad terms, Trouillot was insisting that our categories and concepts cannot come a priori and cannot be generalized from the historically particular experience of Europe (or elsewhere). This was a move not only to provincialize the North Atlantic (Chakrabarty 2000) but also to place marginalized parts of the world like the Caribbean back at the center of our understanding of world history. Trouillot was arguing that our categories and concepts shape our thinking and experience, and our experience in turn shapes the categories and concepts with which we think. Any adequate social analysis must therefore begin by exploring the historicity of the concepts and categories it uses; it must equally attend to the concepts and categories that operate on the ground. Such a back-and-forth mattered for more than just theoretical reasons, however. Trouillot urged us to reimagine Caribbean peasants as agents of their own history, even if they lived under harsh conditions that they certainly did not choose. By reframing the very terms of analysis, he demonstrated that peasantization was an active decision made by cultivators, a decision that came with risks and rewards, with new forms of freedom and with new constraints. He urged us to see peasantization not as “a naive response to market incentives” but instead more akin to a “strategic barrier against other forms of forced integration in a world dominated by trade and profit” (1988, 22). In essence, Dominican peasants were agents of history. Above all, the kind of analysis that he called for in *Peasants and Capital* was one in which Dominican peasants would still “be able to surprise us within the boundaries of [their] own history” (1988, 20).

On the face of it, *Peasants and Capital*, immersed as it is in the details of political economy, seems a far cry from Trouillot’s later and better-known works like *Silencing the Past* and *Global Transformations*. Yet, the story it tells—of marginalized subjects who are written out of dominant Western narratives and the West’s particular-qua-universal categories and concepts, but who are, nonetheless, decision-making agents of history whose stories must be told in order to understand that history—and the conceptual reversals it practices through attention to those details, and to those subjects’ actions, became the bedrock to Trouillot’s analytical method, to

the relationship he imagined and operationalized between empirical facts and their theoretical elaboration. Indeed, it was in *Peasants and Capital*—where he was ostensibly doing a “village study”—that Trouillot initially formulated the conceptual and methodological problems with what he called the “ethnographic trilogy” that assumes “one observer, one time, one place” as “a methodological necessity, with careers hanging upon the proper performance of this ritual” (1988, 183). That critique of fieldwork, and Trouillot’s broader consideration of the relationship between the empirical and the theoretical, was developed in his later work, and particularly in essays like “Making Sense: The Fields in Which We Work,” the final chapter of *Global Transformations* (chapter 9, this volume).

Trouillot’s early critique of the Savage slot was partly aimed at the culture concept, but it was equally concerned with the issue of the spatial and temporal relations assumed by the West’s understanding of itself (as a space and place of modernity, living in historical time) and of its others (as places of tradition, living in mythic time). In *Global Transformations*, his final work, he returned to this critical anthropological project—of anthropology as the locus of an immanent critique—with a new focus not only on culture but also on the idea of “the field.”

When anthropology originally emerged as a new social scientific discipline, it did so by taking up the concept of culture. As Trouillot pithily put it in “Anthropology and the Savage Slot,” “anthropology inherited a disciplinary monopoly over an object that it never bothered to theorize” (2003, 19). “Making Sense,” written later in his career, returns to this question of anthropology’s object, arguing that the discipline also conflated its object of observation and its object of study. In the essay, Trouillot cited Margaret Mead, perhaps the best-known American anthropologist, as most clearly articulating this collapse: “The ethnologist has defined his scientific position in terms of a field of study, rather than a type of problem, or a delimitation of theoretical inquiry. The cultures of primitive peoples are that field” (this volume, chapter 9, 249).

Even though contemporary anthropologists no longer use the language of “primitive peoples,” Trouillot held that Mead’s conflation of the field as object of study, object of observation, and place in which observation occurs nonetheless persists as a result of anthropology’s structural claim over the Savage slot and the concomitant restriction of its disciplinary competence to non-Western and nonwhite peoples and cultures. Moreover, fieldwork and the monograph form maintain “the treatment of places as localities, isolated containers of distinct cultures, beliefs, and practices” that can

be captured between the table of contents and the index of a book (this volume, chapter 9, 247). By *localities*, Trouillot meant “site[s] defined by human content, most likely a discrete population.” He argued that anthropology tends to conceive of places as localities, or, only slightly better, as *locales*, venues “defined primarily by what happens there: a temple as the locale for a ritual, a stadium as the venue for a game” (this volume, chapter 9, 246). Within this schema, anthropology’s anchoring concept—culture—comes to function as a closed unit, outside power, outside history, outside a global web of political and economic connections. In lieu of *locality* and *locale*, Trouillot proposed the notion of *location*, which, he argued, is always situated, always intersectional, always in process: “One needs a map to get there, and that map necessarily points to other places without which localization is impossible” (this volume, chapter 9, 246).

Anthropology’s overinvestment in the empirical can often blind us to the amorphous processes of localization—the historical and global flows, the conceptual and political conditions of possibility—that produce our objects of observation in the first place. This results in a seamless collapse of object of observation and object of study, and a lack of attention to broader configurations of power. The critique of this conflation of the object of observation and the object of study was, for example, at the center of his analysis of the way that anthropologists—not to mention political scientists or even political actors—have theorized the state (chapter 11).

What might a project that distinguished object of observation from object of study look like, then? *Silencing the Past* offers what is perhaps the clearest example of Trouillot’s analytical method, the kind of theoretical reversal via the empirical that he advocated and practiced.<sup>16</sup> There, he pursued parallel tracks: on the one hand, he uncovered the revolutionary praxis of African slaves in colonial Haiti, like that of the Colonel Jean-Baptiste Sans Souci, who first fought French troops and then refused to submit to King Henry Christophe’s new Haitian government. On the other hand, he asked why figures like Sans Souci are missing from the historical record, why the political and military actions of African slaves are usually portrayed as influenced by whites or creoles (whether at the time of the Revolution, soon afterward, or by historians now), and why the Haitian Revolution itself remains unacknowledged in various academic compendia of world revolutions. Significantly, these two parallel tracks are intertwined: by inquiring into the revolutionary praxis of African slaves, attending to their voices, and taking them seriously as revolutionaries in their own right, Trouillot was able to turn around and interrogate the historical silences about them.

Whereas the empirical facts of the Haitian Revolution are his object of observation, his object of study turns out to be the conditions of possibility of the revolution's silencing in Western historiography. "For the silencing of that revolution," Trouillot wrote, "has less to do with Haiti or slavery than it has to do with the West" (1995, 106; see also chapter 12, this volume).

Trouillot made similar moves in much of his work, shifting the focus from the problem of the Other in anthropology (can the Other be represented? how and by whom?) to the problem of the asker of such questions: the West. The question of otherness, of alterity, as posed by the West, takes for granted the very alterity it seeks to interrogate, positing otherness as a foil against which the West can speak endlessly about itself. This narcissistic "dialogue"—more aptly a monologue—goes back to anthropology's relationship to the Savage slot: "It is a stricture of the Savage slot that the native never faces the observer. In the rhetoric of the Savage slot, the Savage is never an interlocutor, but evidence in an argument between two Western interlocutors about the possible futures of humankind" (this volume, chapter 9, 260). At the same time, anthropology (and certain modes of historiography) offers the possibility of interrupting this conversation by attending to the empirical, to the Savage not as metaphor but as historical actor. As we noted earlier, there is always a gap between what has been happening over the centuries of Western conquest and colonization and what is said to have happened by those with the power to write that history. Much of Trouillot's work emerges from that gap, and from the possibilities of analytical-methodological reversal it can produce, whether that concerns Dominican peasants who are integral to global capitalism ("Caribbean Peasantries and World Capitalism," chapter 10), the modern state ("The Anthropology of the State in the Age of Globalization: Close Encounters of the Deceptive Kind," chapter 11), or the Haitian Revolution as a world-historical event enacted by African slaves, an unthinkable possibility at the time ("From Planters' Journals to Academia," chapter 12).

In many ways, then, although they are distinct disciplines in the Euro-American academy, history and anthropology were deeply intertwined for Trouillot. He worked each dialectically to interrogate the other in order to produce an account of the West as a powerful geography of imagination and management. Trouillot's historical work was always anthropological, attending empirically to those written out of the archive and out of history, so as to provincialize the narratives, concepts, and categories through which the West-as-universal has been constituted. At the same time, his anthropological work was always historical in that it took diachrony

seriously, inquiring into the historical conditions of possibility for the sociocultural and political economic present. But, more than that, Trouillot also continually undertook an anthropology *of* anthropology and a history *of* historiography, though in a way that refused to understand these two projects as separate. Thus, Trouillot's version of anthropology was always both an anthropology from a Caribbean point of view—attendant to the inescapability of historicity—and an anthropology of anthropology; and, as such, it was always a critical project about the West, about its norms and forms. Looking back over the arc of his career, we can see Trouillot's oeuvre as a series of interventions not simply concerned with the discipline of anthropology, but also fundamentally directed toward an anthropology of the West, an inquiry into the conditions of possibility for the discipline's emergence and "the discursive order within which anthropology operates and makes sense" (this volume, chapter 1, 73–74). If anthropology and historiography were his objects of observation, Trouillot's ultimate object of study was the West as a political, ontological, and epistemological formation.

#### **A NEW DUTY ARISES: UNSETTLING ANTHROPOLOGY**

While many academics agree that cross-disciplinary explorations are the path to the future, few would deny that each discipline has accumulated a huge methodological arsenal, and that it would be imprudent to reject in bloc these resources. Yet there is no widespread agreement on the specific resources to preserve or on the directions to explore.

MICHEL-ROLPH TROUILLOT, "Discipline and Perish"

In a short reflection that takes up his own positionality as a Haitian intellectual in the halls of academe, Trouillot pointed out that "part of the problem with diversity is that most academics . . . do not really believe in its *intellectual* value" and that the academy remains "less diversified than the insurance industry or the top brass of the US Marine Corps" (this volume, interlude 4, 344). As we noted above, Trouillot's arguments about anthropology and/as the Savage slot were part of broader critiques of academe that began in the 1960s and continued through much of the 1990s. Jafari Allen and Ryan Jobson (2016) argue that his work can be understood as part of a (to some extent silenced) "decolonizing generation" of Afrodiasporic intellectuals who challenged the internal logics and the conceptual and methodological tools of various disciplines in ways that foreshadowed the

more recent “decolonial turn” in academia at large.<sup>17</sup> Yet, Trouillot never articulated his project as an attempt to “decolonize.”

Trouillot also held complex views on interdisciplinarity, which he laid out most systematically in “The Perspective of the World: Globalization Then and Now” (chapter 8). Even as he refused to restrict himself to disciplinary conventions, he remained attached to the methodological “arsenal” that particular disciplines offered (this volume, chapter 1, 76) and believed that rejecting them wholesale would be “imprudent” (this volume, interlude 3, 238). The problem, he argued, was determining what to keep and what to let go. It is telling that in “Adieu, Culture: A New Duty Arises” (chapter 13), he called for abandoning the word *culture*, unmoored as it has become from considerations of race and power, but not the conceptual kernel that lies behind it, namely, that human behavior is patterned and that those patterns are socially (not biologically) transmitted (this volume, chapter 13, 350). Thus, although he urged us to critically examine, and perhaps also give up, key aspects of anthropology, he refused to give up on disciplinarity as a whole. Why might that be? Why did he think anthropology remained a useful place from which to carry out his critique? And why did he not invoke the language of decolonization in that critical project, even as he aligned himself with figures like Faye Harrison, whose foundational edited volume *Decolonizing Anthropology* was published the same year as “Anthropology and the Savage Slot”?<sup>18</sup>

Trouillot was fairly explicit about his commitments to disciplinarity, as evidenced throughout this volume, and we take up below his reasoning in seeing the potential for anthropology as a critical endeavor. We can only speculate, however, about his reasons for never articulating his critique through the language of decolonization since he also never explained why. We suspect his aversion may have been due partly to the fact that early calls for decolonizing the discipline were largely focused on a critique of Eurocentrism and appeals for greater integration and valorization of so-called native anthropologists (Harrison 1997). As Harrison writes in the introduction to *Decolonizing Anthropology*, native anthropologists had long been seen as little more than “overqualified fieldwork assistants” who might provide interesting ethnographic details, but never theoretical authority (1997, 7–8). Although Trouillot certainly agreed with Harrison’s diagnosis, he was less confident that incorporating native intellectuals would necessarily take the disciplines in politically progressive directions. In “The Caribbean Region,” for instance, he wrote of how certain contributions by Caribbean scholars, such as “the plural society” model, were suspiciously reflective of local

middle-class and elite ideologies that also underpinned the public policies these elites enacted (chapter 6). As he reminded us ominously, François Duvalier was a self-trained ethnologist and often rallied ethnographic research to political ends. Moreover, as he went on to explain, what constitutes “native” scholarship is particularly muddy in the Caribbean, where there exists little non-Western “nativeness” to speak of, and where resident intellectuals have long participated in Eurocentric debates about the region (chapter 6, this volume).

Trouillot was also deeply critical of the idea that disciplines like anthropology could deal with the enduring epistemological legacies of colonialism by simply incorporating “native” scholars. As he wrote in a footnote to “Anthropology and the Savage Slot,” “I am profoundly opposed to the formulas of the type ‘add native, stir, and proceed as usual’ that are so successful in electoral politics inside and outside academe. Anthropology needs something more fundamental than reconstitutive surgery, and halfies, women, people of color, etc., deserve something better than a new slot” (this volume, chapter 1, 80).<sup>19</sup> In other words, he remained wary of how tokenism—“one skirt here, one dark skin there” (this volume, interlude 4, 344)—might serve as a mask for unaltered structures of power, and of how strategic inclusion might lead scholars of color to think of themselves as somehow outside those structures or impervious to their constraints. Trouillot would thus likely view the current “decolonial turn” as a self-congratulatory “abortive ritual” (chapter 15) that belies the particular structure of the West and the inescapable position of scholars—including nonwhite scholars in the Euro-American academy—within it.<sup>20</sup>

Perhaps the most logical reason, then, why Trouillot did not embrace the language of decolonizing anthropology is that he simply did not believe the discipline *could* be decolonized, given the co-constitutive relationship between the West’s geography of imagination and its geography of management. Simply put, for Trouillot, there was no real way to distance anthropology from its European and colonial roots because the discipline’s foundational categories, concepts, and methods are inextricably tied to the very formation of the West. (Just as important, there is no way to disembed anthropology as a system of representation from the West as a system of management and control.) As he argued in “Anthropology and the Savage Slot,” the real crisis of representation is not in an academic discipline like anthropology but in the world that anthropology presumes and within which it exists (this volume, chapter 1, 73). No amount of decolonizing *within* the discipline will ever be able to do away with the broader

field of power relations in which it operates. As he concomitantly argued in “Making Sense,” a truly critical project must first accept that anthropology is, fundamentally, “a discourse to the West, for the West, and ultimately, about the West as project” (this volume, chapter 9, 264).

We want to suggest that what Trouillot proposed was therefore not a project of decolonization but of an epistemological *unsettling* of the disciplines, including anthropology. We use the term *unsettle* purposefully, to signal not so much an undoing as a destabilization, a shaking of foundations. To unsettle is to expose the seams, the tensions and contradictions of what appears to be an unassailable formation (Fernando 2014b). And, while not necessarily removed or toppled, what is unsettled is still fundamentally brought into question in ways that loosen its hold so that perhaps, one day, it will, in fact, fall (Bonilla 2017). Trouillot saw this mode of intellectual work as “adamantly anti-voluntarist” and insisted that individual intentions were irrelevant to structural effects. He also saw this work as a kind of war of attrition. “We do not change the world by pretending that it is different,” he wrote in “Adieu, Culture.” “In correctly assessing the balance of forces, I fall back on Gandhi’s notion of a protracted struggle and on Gramsci’s war of position” (Trouillot 2003, 153n44).

One tactic in this war of attrition involves the question of diversity—but in ways that fundamentally destabilize the epistemological conventions of anthropological knowledge. For Trouillot, the problem was less about diversifying access to an authoritative anthropological voice than about questioning “the epistemological status of the native voice” in anthropological discourse and practice, a position he most clearly articulated in “Making Sense” (chapter 9, this volume). There, he argued that the underlying schema of the Savage slot “ensures that the voice of the native is completely dominated by the voice of the anthropologist. . . . Anthropologists indeed stand behind the natives [as Clifford Geertz contended]. But we are not so much reading over their shoulders as we are writing on their backs” (this volume, chapter 9, 259). He therefore suggested that the discipline could only challenge this structural asymmetry by living up to its principle of “taking seriously” its “native” interlocutors. This means reassessing the epistemological status of the native voice and treating it not as evidence but as *theory*. It means fully recognizing native competency and making “the native a potential—if not a full—interlocutor” (this volume, chapter 9, 263). Concomitantly, it means allowing interlocutors in the non-West to “return the Western gaze,” thereby unsettling the conventional relationship between author, native, and reader (this volume, chapter 9, 260).