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‘Doux Commerce, Douce Colonisation’

_Diderot and the Two Indies of the French Enlightenment_

Sunil Agnani

Let us stop here and place ourselves back in the time when America and India were unknown. I address myself to the most cruel of Europeans, and I say to them: there exist many regions which will furnish you with rich metals, with appealing clothing, with delicious dishes. But read this history and see at what price this discovery is promised to you. Do you, or do you not want it to take place? Does one believe that there could be a creature so infernal as to say: I WANT THIS. Well! There will be no single moment in the future where my question would have the same force.—Denis Diderot, 1780

What do these forts which you have armed all the beaches with attest to? Your terror and the profound hatred of those who surround you. You will no longer be fearful, when you are no longer hated. You will no longer be hated, when you are beneficent. The barbarian, just like the civilized man, wants to be happy.—Denis Diderot, 1780

First the traveler, then the philosophe: This couplet is as important to the story of eighteenth-century intellectual history as is the revolutionary and the philosopher, or the soldier and the statesman. As a variation on this, I would also add the administrator and the philosophe as another vital pair of complementarities and antagonisms. This study considers two texts by Denis Diderot with a view to investigating the significance of some of these doubles. The first text is rather well known, although it has of late
sparked or been reilluminated by scholarship with a greater degree of historical specificity. I refer to Diderot’s *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville*, which is set in the South Pacific (though it is a South Pacific of the mind as much as of the seas, and this is part of my consideration). What one finds when looking at the writings of the philosophes is in part a lucid demonstration of the now widely recognized but still debated thesis of Orientalism: the traveler and the administrator undertake to gather and collect information, and this in turn plays a vital role in informing the technologies of management and government. But this is to go straight to the apparently menacing outcome of an initially rather innocent or pure act: I mean the desire, as Diderot remarked in the *Encyclopédie*, to note down and to “collect all the knowledge that now lies scattered over the face of the Earth.” It is here that we may locate many of the secondary reflections, as one could call them, upon the initial reports from the field: the famous considerations of natural man by Rousseau in his *Discourse on Inequality*; the various footnotes throughout the work of Kant, even in his aesthetic works, to the Caribs, to Africans, and so on; and Diderot’s peculiar and parodic remarks upon Tahiti in the *Supplément*. But all along there are interruptions in this smooth continuum, which connects the traveler or administrator to the philosophe, disrupting the apparent imperatives for empire, land acquisition, or trade.

One of the primary flaws of the debate around Orientalism, at least within the discipline of literary studies, may have been to lay too much emphasis solely upon the question of representation. Constrained by the terms of this debate, I too begin by commenting upon the question of representation in Diderot’s work. I hope, however, to attach these observations to a set of keywords in the political lexicon of the period that circulate among the writers of these works. I must first reiterate one link between the question of representation—in this case, of the native or of native society—and political analysis, which pertains more specifically to the concept of hegemony. In order to operate, hegemony requires constant repetition and reiteration; in one formulation, it depends upon coercion and consent (and it is the presence and importance of the latter, consent, which make it amenable to some forms of liberal political thought). I introduce this idea primarily to illustrate what one finds throughout Diderot’s later political writings: unwilling to accept the necessity of coercion as an element of colonization, Diderot both attempts to imagine in many different formulations how this project could be undertaken by means of consent, participating in a set of representations that legitimize dominance of one kind, and frequently fractures this image. In the *Supplément*, this is evident by his undermining of the truth-claims of Antoine de Bougainville’s original text, and in his use of an imagined Tahitian Other to flay the priest and cleric in France.
Composed during the period 1770–73, the *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville* was short and relatively coherent, not widely published in Diderot’s lifetime, and circulated as an underground manuscript (perhaps because of its sexually scandalous nature). By contrast, the second text under consideration is much more scattered, anonymous in its initial editions, and only in the mid-twentieth century was Diderot’s authorship conclusively verified. I refer to his contributions to the immense and fascinating work known as the *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes* (1770, hereafter *Histoire des deux Indes* or *Histoire*). The ten-volume work was edited by the abbé de Raynal, and went through three editions (1770, 1774, and 1780). This much one can learn from the brief selection of material present in a recent edition of Diderot’s *Political Writings* (1992), but there are several other aspects of this massive work that are hardly visible from the excerpts presented there. Diderot’s involvement in the three editions increased with each publication, and he was said to have thoroughly rewritten the third edition by spending as much as fourteen hours a day at the task. His contributions, by many estimations, amount to approximately one-third of the 1780 edition.

The subtitle to this study aims to lay stress upon the notion of the “two Indies,” extending a thought implied by the structure of Raynal’s work, which moves at times from Occident to Orient, from north to south. Indeed, the two are not identical images of each other; not exactly twin Indies, not *les Indes jumelles*. Yet the affinity suggested in such a work between *les Indes occidentales* and *les Indes orientales*, in conjunction with a shift between *l’Amérique septentrionale* and *l’Amérique méridionale*, brings out a quality that is quite striking to the contemporary reader: the link between the old colonies and the newer ones in this colonial encyclopedia, or—to put the matter in other terms—the relation established between the New World and the Old World. One sees the same distinction at work in Edmund Burke’s writings on India, which are fundamentally shaped by events in the New World: by this I mean events both in North America and in the West Indies. In the writings of both Diderot and Burke, there is ample evidence to sustain Anthony Pagden’s helpful distinction in this period between the “new” and the “old” colonies. The old or first colonies refer to those in North and South America, while the new or second colonies refer to the growing importance of Asia to European colonialism in the eighteenth century. We see this axis of comparison everywhere in the *Histoire des deux Indes* (beginning with the organization of the contents of the ten volumes), in travelogues from the period, in administrator’s memoirs, and in the movement of such military figures as Charles Cornwallis, leaving Yorktown in Canada for Bengal. In addition to this
axis of comparison is the second between North and South America within the New World; one could attempt to enumerate the typologies of this discourse in order to understand their various functions.14

This second opposition between North and South America will become increasingly important as comparative reflections of the fate of societies and man in the various regions of the New World proceed in the nineteenth century. This comparison is at work in some of Tocqueville's reflections in Democracy in America when he wonders why "no nations upon the face of the earth are more miserable than those of South America," in spite of it enjoying an isolation from enemies and a geographical richness akin to North America.15 Often this distinction between North and South America becomes a shorthand for several other oppositions having less to do with geography than with religion. One could mention here Voltaire's positive evaluation of the behavior of the Quakers in North America for winning over and persuading the Indians by commerce, in contrast to the methods commonly used, in his view, by the Jesuits in South America.16

There are two foci to my examination. The first concerns Diderot's exploration of the possibility of a colonialism that is consensual; I refer to this as doux colonisation (the phrase is my own, coined on analogy with "doux commerce").17 The second theme is related to this by the transposition of reciprocal consent to the intimate sphere, where it thereby pertains to métissage or breeding. The two elements are also both related to issues of population and settlement. The discussion of procreation, and of population as a form of wealth in the Supplément, derives from the larger consideration of the settlement of colonies (part of doux colonisation or "soft colonization"). The Supplément supplies the occasion to introduce these topics, while the Histoire allows for their elaboration and contextualization.

**DOUX COMMERCE AND BREEDING**

As a word on its own, breeding has many divergent valences, to which the title of this section refers (from manners to animal husbandry to biology). One comes upon the notion frequently when examining the Histoire, which is caught in the whirl of discussions around the possibilities of commerce in the period. Yet tied in with this economic debate is an essential relationship to sexuality, and this occurs via a notion of wealth as it is yoked to the emerging idea of population in the period. To summarize: an empty continent, or empty island—to use the example given by the Tahitian native in Diderot's Supplément—obviously
needs someone to labor upon it (so it was argued, following a logic
stated in its clearest form in Locke’s Second Treatise of Government,
the “agriculturalist argument,” as it is sometimes named). Wealth, both
in the Histoire and in the Supplément, is often explicitly understood as
population—an idea not surprising to scholars of the French eighteenth
century, where one finds many writers concerned with the depopulation
of one continent (North America) in a manner linked with the depopu-
lation of another (Africa). On the one hand was the accidental ethno-
cide of disease alongside the intentional effects of conquest (as popular-
ly reported, whether accurately or not, by De Las Casas in an earlier
period); on the other hand was the concomitant forced migration of
Africans as slave labor. Two continents’ native populations, it was argued,
were thereby jeopardized.18

There are two or three different ways I understand breeding to operate
in Diderot’s work that may hold more generally in related late eighteenth-
century French Enlightenment debates (keeping in mind that this forms a
part of the plural Enlightenments that scholars such as Pocock have sug-
gested as a more accurate way of understanding this period). Consider,
schematically, the following: (1) What role does breeding play in
Diderot’s understanding of consensual colonialism? (2) How does Diderot
understand the figure of the Creole? (3) What is the relation of wealth to
population, and of these two terms to breeding? and finally (4) How does
Diderot understand the idea of a “directed” or “rational breeding”? In
addressing these questions, it is also important to speculate on how the
larger issues of political economy and population are tied into Diderot’s
thoughts on the intimate relations that are possible between colonizer and
colonized.

THE SUPPLÉMENT AU VOYAGE DE BOUGAINVILLE

1. With other eighteenth-century writers and thinkers, it is often easy
to push aside questions of sexuality. Though Edmund Burke’s language
and rhetorical presuppositions are everywhere dependent on sexual dif-
fERENCE, particularly in his Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our
Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful, but even in his Reflections on the
Revolution in France (as Wollstonecraft was quick to point out in her
rather prompt reply, A Vindication of the Rights of Men), it is rare that
one finds more explicit political pronouncements on these matters in his
work. This, however, is impossible to avoid when one turns to Diderot,
who everywhere bears some oblique and at times more direct relationship
to the theme of libertinage in the French Enlightenment. It should not be
surprising that someone whose first novel, *Les bijoux indiscrets*, concerned physical bodies, sexuality, and the exotic in a humorous and bizarre mixture should return to the question later in his writerly life. (Perhaps it was for this reason that Michel Foucault declared in the opening line of the fourth part of his introductory volume on the *History of Sexuality*, “The aim of this series of studies? To transcribe into history the fable of *Les Bijoux Indiscrets*.”)¹⁹

Indeed, what is striking about the *Supplément* is the centrality of sexuality and gender. Any reading that focuses only on the exotic and the anthropological elements without considering in some cursory way their relation to these aspects will miss what is both most distinctive and peculiar about the work. The *Supplément* is sometimes read as protofeminist, or at least as a hymn to the freer sexual ways of Tahitian society in relation to Europe. Other critics have considered it an expression of Diderot’s “anarchic” strain of thought.²⁰ We should, however, be wary of calling it either feminist or anarchic, while recognizing that the text raises important issues pertaining to colonialism and gender.

The sexual liberation that Diderot presents is part of a male fantasy structure, in addition to the reliance upon an underlying heterosexual matrix. Men are still the sexual keepers of women; what is described is a social structure in which women are passed to men for breeding. What might be seen as liberation is actually the use of female labor and procreation for the “wealth” of society, and we can thereby tie together several terms in this work. The emphasis in the text on the circulation of human bodies as commodities²¹ should be linked to the language of French political economy in the period. The focus upon bodies may be a contrast with prevailing physiocratic views of land as a source of wealth, though Diderot’s relationship to that school was changing over the course of his life.²² Is Diderot proposing that labor power in the form of human bodies capable of work is in fact a truer source of labor? If so, this is why such a view should be connected with the colonial fantasy of open land (that is, land to be labored upon), which is quite central to the text. One instance of this is when Orou rhetorically asks the chaplain why we place such an emphasis on population, and answers himself, “if you wish to judge its value [the value of the French male visitors mating with Tahitian women], imagine that you had still two hundred leagues of coastline to navigate, and that every twenty miles the same tribute [of mating] was collected from you. We’ve vast tracts of untilled soil; we lack hands and asked you for them.”²³ The open coastline and vast tracts that must be settled demand a populace to exert labor upon them; that these hands are “asked” of the European visitors is also significant. Thus, in a preliminary way, we can argue that there is some link between population, sexuality,
and colonial fantasy; and all of these fit into Diderot's theory of political economy.24

2. One should take note of the form of the text, namely the role of parody and comedy in undercutting what otherwise would be a too-serious effort at the gathering of knowledge. Here we can recall the subtitle—or rather the full title—of the work: Supplement to the Voyage of Bougainville, or Dialogue Between A and B on the Inappropriateness of Attaching Moral Ideas to Certain Physical Actions That Do Not Accord with Them. The prying apart of the moral idea from the physical action—primarily the negative pall cast upon human sexual activity by Christianity—is the aim of Diderot's critique. There is also a contrast made between the empirical effort of the scientific ethnography and Diderot's parody of it in the form of a pseudo-ethnography. However, if it is over-stating the case to call the original an ethnography, it would be more accurate to say that the object of his parody is Bougainville’s traveler’s tale, with its claim to a truth beyond fiction (though often the genre of the traveler’s tale made use of novelistic techniques).

I would also call attention to the genre of the work—the philosophical dialogue—familiar since Plato's establishment of the form.Thematically, too, the Supplément echoes aspects of the Republic's discussion regarding the design of the kallipolis (the beautiful or ideal city). There Plato argued for the common ownership of women and children, the elimination of notions of “mine and thine”; here, in Diderot's Supplément, these efforts are apparently realized.25 Tahiti as an actual historical referent is bracketed, as it were, by Diderot’s clever and humorous use of the traveler’s account. The dialogue contains within itself the critique of its claims to veracity, as when Diderot cuts from the conversation between Orou and the chaplain back to A and B. After the chaplain discusses his lapses of restraint with several of the Tahitian women, A and B comment to each other:

A: I warm to this polite chaplain.
B: And I much more to the manners of the Tahitians and remarks of Orou.
A: Though they show a rather European influence.
B: I don’t doubt it.26

This appears to be a humorous sign of the self-awareness of the work, a wink to the reader that Diderot knows he is making fast and loose with Tahiti as a place, and Orou as its spokesperson. This is also why there is a great emphasis on the many levels of mediation in the text: Orou is said to translate the old man’s speech from his vernacular to Spanish, which he knows, and this is transcribed into French.27 Thus there are two filters between the text we read and the original speech.
The original recedes, and at times is fully inaccessible, as when one speaker says to another: "The chaplain remarks in a third fragment which I’ve not read to you that the Tahitian doesn’t blush."28 What B has not read to A, but apparently has in his possession, is the absent original text.

3. Nature, the term really under investigation, is what Diderot self-consciously makes the center of his philosophical dialogue. For Diderot, the layers of civilization that have accreted in civilized societies over natural man may fall away when he reaches the colonies. The savage and the monk, the natural man and the artificial, Tahiti and Europe—all these are used to lead to the idea of relativism. Or so it seems. It may be that the question—as to which of these oppositions may be better—is itself being thematized in order to interrogate the basis for such a cultural critique. In contrast to later writers on exotic locales, although Diderot emphasizes the heightened physicality of the Tahitians, he does not seem to argue that this comes at the expense of rationality. The dialogue opens with the Tahitian seeming to be fully other-directed, altruistic, sexually free, and uninhibited; to be working basically within a gift economy. But then there is a moment in the dialogue where Orou says, "however savage we are, we know just how to scheme."29 This follows his explanation for their apparent generosity: "While more robust and healthy than you, we saw at once that you surpassed us in intelligence, and we immediately marked out for you some of our most beautiful women and girls to receive the seed of a race superior to ours. We tried an experiment which may still bring us success" [emphasis mine].30

This passage depicts a kind of self-improving native who works by directed "breeding." Though eugenic in its etymological sense, it is a self-willed or collectively undertaken decision, and not imposed externally from above (the role of the state is certainly much more central to the twentieth-century understanding of the term). This is Diderot’s fantasy of a controlled experiment in interbreeding, in a directed métissage—a theme that recurs in the Histoire des deux Indes. The idea of a calculating native may be part of a standard stereotype, inasmuch as with the Oriental or savage there was always the possibility of an inversion: the passive Oriental suddenly is represented as wily and conniving; the lazy savage as menacing. Nevertheless, in these passages from Diderot, the native—while healthy and vigorous—is also represented as fully rational. Orou is rather the very picture of a philosophe himself.31

With regard to the masculine domination of Tahitian society as portrayed by Diderot, the idea of women as the property of men is addressed directly in the dialogue by A and B: it is in consequence, they remark, of the early introduction of the idea of property that many ill effects follow.
The end of the dialogue, where Diderot initiates a characteristic “call to arms,” is a key passage in part because it illustrates a style of expression that appears often in the *Histoire des deux Indes*. Diderot presents a lengthy list of the wrongs of European society in the mouth of B: “Orou explained it ten times over to the chaplain. . . . It’s the tyranny of man which converted the possession of woman into property.”32 This critique of woman as property allows Diderot to declaim against the unnecessary practices of modesty and constancy; his genealogy shows these to have been formed as virtues and vices only as a consequence of this flawed beginning. All of this is due, once again, to the falling away from nature: “How brief would be the codes of nations, if only they conformed rigorously to that of nature.”33

As noted earlier, Diderot, perhaps unsurprisingly, does not question the heterosexual relation between man and woman. This obvious remark yields more insight when we relate it to the political economy that he envisions, wherein sexual activity must be productive, like any other labor. In order to be a man, it is implied, one must procreate. Thus the chaplain, in Orou’s eyes, is emasculated because he refuses to mate. When he does succumb, Orou tells him, “My first thought was that Nature . . . had deprived you of the ability to reproduce your kind. . . . But, monk, my daughter told me that you are indeed a man, and robust as any Tahitian.”34

**THE HISTOIRE DES DEUX INDES**

In shifting from the *Supplément* to the *Histoire des deux Indes*, we move from a literary conte to a work that does not operate by these conventions but itself makes some of the same claims to truth as the text that Diderot parodied and drew upon, namely Bougainville’s original *Voyage autour du monde*. Nonetheless, many of the themes and questions that animate the *Supplément* appear in this work; questions merely latent in that work regarding the relation of the economy to sexuality and population are explicitly discussed in the *Histoire*. One of these would be the question of interbreeding with an indigenous population. We therefore find in the *Histoire* several examples that attempt to conceive of an alternative to the outcome of depopulation (of the New World by the activities of the Spanish, and of Africa by the slave trade) and yet carry on the imperative to colonize. Suggesting that European colonizers arrive and intermarry with local populations thus seemed a more “humane” way to civilize and settle a territory. In the *Supplément*, as we have seen, the solution imagined is one in which this activity would be undertaken with the consent of the colonized. The Tahitians realize the superiority of their visitors in certain
domains, and hope to benefit from this (as we learn in the surprise revelation of their crafty calculations, turning the economy of the gift into the self-interest of the exchange).  

The motif of population within Diderot’s thought is rather widespread, and brings together many disparate areas of his thinking. Although I focus on its relation to his views upon the ideal form colonialism could take, we see it even in relation to Diderot’s views on the church. Writing in the *Histoire* about reforms that should be undertaken to ensure the church’s subservience to the state, Diderot writes, “The vow of chastity is repugnant to nature and diminishes the population; the vow of poverty is only that of an inept or lazy person. The vow of obedience to some other power than to the dominant one and to the law is that of a slave or an outlaw.” Diderot decries the vows that the clergy must undertake; his argument against the vow of chastity is based both on the naturalist idea of sexuality already discussed and its effect on diminishing population. The core of Diderot’s views on the matter of population are, however, most clearly expressed in a passage added to the 1780 edition within a discussion of national character (*esprit national*). Diderot presents a theory of national character as deriving from both variable and constant causes, and further distinguishes the national character from the code of behavior that determines the actions of individuals, who generally will not hesitate to build their “own prosperity through public ruin.” Diderot correlates, on the one hand, national character with the nation’s capital city in particular; on the other hand, he takes as his figure of the quintessential individualist the person who has traveled farthest from this metropolitan capital. This is the colonist, who loses any trace of national character when he passes “beyond the equator.” Instead he is capable of “whatever crime will lead him most quickly to his goal.” Diderot concludes that “this is how all the Europeans, every one of them, indistinctly, have appeared in the new world.” The opposite, therefore, of the *esprit national* is manifested on an almost mathematical inverse ratio of distance from the capital; in fact, it is this theory that enables Diderot, unlike most other thinkers of this period, to account for the contradiction of the fine phrases regarding liberty at home and the despotic practices undertaken abroad.

But what solution to this contradiction does Diderot propose? We are brought back to the recurring fantasy: “Would it not have been more useful and humane, and less costly, to have taken to these distant regions a few hundred young men and women? The men would have married the women of the country, and the women the native men. Ties of blood, the strongest and most immediate of bonds, would soon have formed a single family out of the natives and the foreigners.” The argument operates by
an appeal to self-interest alongside a claim to greater moral good (for example, "more useful and humane, and less costly"), which is characteristic of the political language of the period (compare Burke’s notion of "graft[ing] benevolence even upon avarice"). Here this idea is joined to Diderot’s idea of rational breeding, undertaken by the colonizer with the colonized. But rather than posing the opposition of the parties to this encounter in dichotomous terms, “the foreigners and natives of the country,” Diderot imagines that “a single and uniform family” will be produced by consanguinity. The consequence of this encounter is described in terms demonstrated by the narrative of the *Supplément*. The intimate relationship (*liaison intime*) would lead the primitive inhabitant (*l’habitant sauvage*) to realize that the arts and knowledges that are brought to him (*qu’on lui portait*—the original brings out the form of address more strongly) are superior and would lift him from his state. The manner used by these soft colonizers, or imploring and moderate teachers (*instituteurs suppliants et modérés*), would lead the natives to submit themselves to them “sans réserve.” This absence of reserve can serve as an index of the degree of dominance with hegemony that Diderot imagines is possible.

What is the outcome of this “douce colonisation”? Out of the “heureuse confiance” peace would emerge, impossible with the “ton impérieux” normally employed by masters and conquerors. Diderot had no doubts that this event would be fully compatible with the mercantile aims of empire: “Commerce establishes itself without trouble between men who have reciprocal needs, and soon they become accustomed to seeing as friends and as brothers those whom interest or another motive leads to their country.” (Note the importance of introducing the language of kinship in order to legitimate such an order.) Though the different editions of the *Histoire* express conflicting degrees of optimism on the role of commerce in the development of *les mœurs*, overall it is striking how pervasive this sentiment is.

It may seem unusual in hindsight to see commerce as unambivalently furthering the progress of *lumière*, especially after the nineteenth century, the Industrial Revolution, and Marx’s language used to describe the extraction and drain that characterize (in some analyses) the colony-metropole relationship. However, it is a familiar echo of Montesquieu’s language of *doux commerce*, and the Scottish Enlightenment’s discussion of commercial society in the four-stage theory. Moreover, it should be understood within the context of the burdensome structure of French absolutism in the 1770s; in relation to this, commerce is equated with a kind of liberty. It also may owe something to Diderot’s response following a visit to Holland in 1773, when he initially expressed the widespread admiration held by many philosophes in the period for the small merchants of that country—an enthusiasm tempered in his later reflections.
Let us return to the passage cited earlier to examine a second consequence that Diderot imagines follows from *douce colonisation*, one that is perhaps surprising given the tenor of Diderot's other writings on the subject of religion: "The Indians would adopt the religion of Europe, for the reason that one religion becomes common to all the citizens of an empire when the government abandons it to them, and when intolerance and the madness of preachers does not become an instrument for discord." The view presented here does not seem as relativistic as that presented in the *Supplément*, since both the civilization and the religion of Europe are assumed to be self-evidently superior but *tainted by their mingling with force*. Civilization, as he says in the next line, will be adopted by inclination so long as one does not demand this be adopted "*par la force*." Though this passage does not present us by any means with a consistently anticolonial position, I would still argue against the views taken by many scholars of Diderot's political evolution that this greater pessimism about the claims of alterity represents Diderot's abandonment of "primitivism" for a more "realist" view. Laurent Versini, editor of an important recent edition of Diderot's works, neglects the elements of a genuinely radical critique that appear throughout his corpus of writings. It is for this reason—the internal contradictions—that Duchet, influenced by French structuralism of the 1960s and 1970s, introduced the term "*écriture fragmentaire*" to describe the *Histoire des deux Indes*. Further, and more to the point for my argument here, she notes that it is precisely these inconsistencies of the work that should interest us as much as the statement of a consistent political position. By dismissing the philosophes' evident curiosity about the primitive and concern for various colonies, others have argued that

[b]ly the final edition the colonies had become something of a pretext; any Frenchman reading the *Histoire* [*des deux Indes*] in the tense political atmosphere of the 1780s could not fail to realize that he was being called upon to recognize the fact that a radical turning point had been reached in the destinies of France and Europe, and that this active participation was required to usher in a new order.

This argument unnecessarily reduces the implications of the *Histoire* by reading it within an exclusively European context. To assert that all ten volumes are merely coded ciphers for a critique actually directed against French absolutism is unpersuasive. This would presume precisely what should be examined, namely a political perspective that makes a claim to liberty within the European context but does not see it as necessary that this critique should be extended or applied in a more genuinely universal manner—that is, in Europe's colonies as well. What is, after all, striking about such a work as the *Histoire* (with its numerous contributors) is that
so many figures in the 1780s and 1790s were beginning to conceive of the globe, of the movements of commodities and populaces in this larger frame of analysis, and with their movement the concomitant movement of ideas and cultural practices. And this reflection was undertaken not in a peripheral work of the period, but in fact, as Robert Darnton notes, in one of the period’s veritable best sellers.50

Certainly the implications of such an écriture fragmentaire are everywhere apparent, even—or rather particularly—in the modern edited collections and translations of the Histoire that have been made. There is, for example, a final paragraph to the section I have been discussing that is left out of the recent English selection of Diderot’s Political Writings.51 After the claim that the Indians would accept the religion and ways of the Europeans provided they were not tainted by force, Diderot writes, “Such would be the happy effects which the most imperious attraction of the senses would produce in a colony which is being born. Absolutely no armaments, no soldiers, but plenty of young women for the men, and plenty of young men for the women” [emphasis mine].52 In an incipient colony, the imperious tone (le ton impéreux) of the masters (Diderot’s phrase in the earlier passage) is here turned into the most imperious attraction: an overwhelming reciprocal sensual attraction. Arms and soldiers replaced by an abundance of young women for men, and vice versa. Note that here Diderot does not imagine a shipload of male conquerors arriving on this primal scene who would mate with native women (closer to what occasionally did happen), but rather both European men and women pairing off with native men and women. It is as if Diderot wishes to mitigate the force associated with conquest by replacing the antagonism between colonizer and colonized with physical, sexual attraction between male and female on both sides. By recourse to this libidinal economy, he is able to elaborate a more consensual model of colonization. Thus, even Diderot’s “principles of colonization”—as the English title for this excerpt would have it—are tied to his idea of rational breeding.

Why Diderot felt compelled to answer this question concerning the legitimate basis for colonization is clear to anyone who has read Raynal’s general introduction to the ten-volume edition. Raynal writes: “Europe has everywhere founded colonies; but does it know the principles upon which one ought to found them? Can one not discover by what means and in which circumstances [one ought to]?”53 Once Diderot felt he had come upon a consistent principle (and perhaps here one could make a link between Diderot’s earlier novels on sexual themes and his straightforward proposed “solution” to the dominance involved in the colonial encounter), he was not hesitant to apply it in many contexts. Diderot’s dealings with Russia and with Catherine II were quite extensive (including his visit of
1773 to Saint Petersburg), but some remark should be made on the amusing scheme he devised to spread the spirit of freedom among the Russian people, who were at present too accustomed to the despotism under which they labored. In fact, this may be one source of the views he expressed in the 1780 edition of the *Histoire des deux Indes*. In the opening pages of his *Observation sur le Nakaz*, Diderot writes, “The Russian empire occupies an area of 32 degrees in latitude and 165 degrees in longitude. To civilize such an enormous country, all at once, seems to me a project beyond human capacity, especially when I travel along the border and find here desert, there ice, and elsewhere all kinds of barbarian.”

The scale of Russia leads Diderot to make several proposals: first, to move the capital to the center of this land mass; second, to appoint someone to civilize one district within it. The third proposal, of particular interest to my argument here, is related to the second:

The third thing would be to introduce a colony of Swiss people, and situate it in a suitable region. Guarantee it privileges and freedom, and grant the same privileges and freedoms to all subjects who entered this colony. The Swiss are farmers and soldiers; they are loyal. I know by heart all the objections that can be raised against these methods; they are so frivolous that I shall not take the trouble to reply to them.

This passage fits more clearly with Diderot’s general principle of a noncoercive persuasion of the native, which one finds dispersed throughout his writings on the primitive. This facet of the passage just cited is clearer if we read it alongside section XXXVIII of *Mélanges pour Catherine II*, which is entitled “A Systematic Idea for the Manner of Leading a People to the Sentiment of Liberty and to a Civilized State.”* There Diderot writes,

> If I had to civilize savages, what would I do? I would do useful things in their presence, without saying or prescribing anything to them. I would maintain an air of working for my family alone and for myself.

> If I had to build up a nation to [the sentiment of] liberty. What would I do? I would plant a colony of free men in their midst, very free ones, such as (for example) the Swiss, whose privileges I would protect very securely. And I would leave the remainder to time and to the force of example.

Here I will only point toward a more complex question on the general problem of freedom in Diderot’s late political thought, which he feels relies upon the principle of imitation, as here with the imitation of the Swiss. Can the former primitive ever be original, or is he or she condemned to only the *imitation of the free*?

Yet in order to return to the question of breeding in relation to an envisioned noncoercive colonial encounter, I should here cite one of Diderot’s
most explicit considerations of the racial implications of such a policy, found in his discussion “sur les Créoles” (in the 1770, 1774, and 1780 editions). The arguments that Diderot gives in favor of this practice explain the striking analogy with the family noted earlier when he remarks that “consanguinity” produces one “large family.”60 Regarding the Créoles, he writes that “[t]he physical advantage of crossing races between men as between animals, in order to retard the bastardization of the species, is the fruit of a secondary experience, one which comes after the utility recognized in uniting families in order to cement the peace of societies.”61 Indeed, earlier his argument that the European male and female settlers should mate with their counterparts had been made from the point of view of utility. That argument provided a sociopolitical reason for interbreeding, which is here supplemented by a biological argument in favor of it. “The Creoles are in general well made. Hardly does one see a single one afflicted with the deformities so common in other climates. History does not reproach them with any of the cowardices, betrayals or baseness which soil the annals of all peoples. Hardly could one cite a single shameful crime which a Creole has committed.”62 Thus, in the improvement of the race is also produced a docile colonial subject, one unlikely to rebel. What better harmonization of interests could one hope for?

This gentle colonialism coexists in the Histoire des deux Indes (often on the very same page) with passages that excoriate the crimes of Europe and rail against slavery. Diderot’s voice seems to find its most forceful expression from within the security of anonymous authorship, which allows him to adopt a strong, hortatory tone. The countless passages where he switches to the second person, addressing the reader as “tu” or “vous,” enable him to accuse and to speak in a prophetic mode. If we keep these in mind alongside the arguments proposed in favor of douce colonisation, then we can attend to the contradictory nature of this work (as Duchet urges). But I do not make this remark simply to indicate a formal, epiphenomenal aspect of the Histoire des deux Indes. It also seems to me that we can thereby examine this work within the complex field of texts and authors that has been addressed by such important studies as Uday Mehta’s Liberalism and Empire.63 In the French context, Duchet, for example, writes about “humanitarianism and anti-slavery,” and, considering the policy of interbreeding, she argues that wherever there was a crisis in labor—a labor shortage because of the impossibility or impracticality of slavery—interbreeding with the natives was suggested.64 Interbreeding, in this sense, is one answer to the crisis caused by the growing antislavery movement. Humanitarianism in France is akin to liberalism in Britain; slavery akin to the coercive aspects of empire. Just as arguments against slavery are shown to have a more practical basis in political economy, so
too the arguments against empire (for example, Adam Smith’s anticolonialism moved between a moral argument and an argument concerning efficiency). Both humanitarianism and political liberalism served as alibis for empire by providing a degree of moral legitimacy.

Of course, within the period, the arguments put forth for the abolition of slavery often took on a moral or even religious character. However, Raynal himself had something to say about this effort at explanation, arguing against those who would “give honor to the Christian religion for the abolition of slavery. We will dare not to be of his opinion. It is when there is industry and wealth in the people that the princes value them as something significant. It is when the wealth of people can be useful to kings against the barons that the laws improve the condition of the people.”

And so we begin to close the unusual circle connecting the terms we have traced in the Supplément and the Histoire des deux Indes; it is commerce that should be extolled for spreading wealth among people and for bringing about the abolition of slavery. This view of commerce, in turn, should be connected with the critique of absolutism implicit in Raynal’s observation. It provokes Diderot to bring together this argument regarding commerce with the primary subject of the Histoire—namely colonialism: “In these mercantile societies, the discovery of an island, the importation of a new commodity, the invention of a machine, the establishment of a trading post... the construction of a port become the most important transactions, and as a result the annals of peoples will demand to be written by commercial philosophers, just as they were formerly written by speaking historians” [emphasis mine].

These future commercial philosophes who take the place of “speaking historians” indicate Diderot’s search for a kind of writing and insight that would match the radical transformations wrought by these discoveries and innovations. From the language of this passage, one might be tempted to think that Diderot had Adam Smith’s Wealth of Nations in mind; the paragraph opens with the words “A spirit of trucking and exchanging is being established in Europe,” which recall the famous lines about man’s proclivity to truck and barter. However, this passage dates from 1774, before the publication of Smith’s work—in fact, Smith frequently cites the Histoire as his source in his chapter “Of Colonies.” It seems, therefore, that what we have here is an example of the prophetic voice in operation.

The Histoire des deux Indes itself, I would suggest, attempts to fulfill the very desire that Diderot expresses in the work. Faced with the scale of the discoveries for European science, Diderot dreams of a method that some would later identify with the modern discipline of anthropology:
The discovery of a new world can alone furnish the food for our curiosity. A vast land lying fallow, humanity reduced to the animal condition, open country without harvests, treasures without possessors, societies without civilization [police], men without mores: How could such a spectacle not be full of interest and instruction for a Locke, a Buffon or a Montesquieu! What reading could be as surprising, as moving, as the narrative of their voyage! But the image of raw and wild nature is already disfigured. One must make haste in gathering the half-erased traces, after having described and delivered over to contempt the greedy and ferocious Christians which an unfortunate chance led first to this other hemisphere.69

In retrospect, one can see in this statement many of the notable achievements, as well as the constitutive flaws of modern anthropology. The *Histoire des deux Indes* is at times an attempt to be this reflection of John Locke, had he actually visited North America and seen the Indians of the Carolinas, or of Montesquieu had he actually visited Persia and China. And like the later *tristesse* that would strike Claude Lévi-Strauss, there is also an urgency and a haste to undertake this project before the traces of the primitive fade away, only to become objects of nostalgia for European society. This temporal relation to the future is apparent throughout the work; it is that of the future anterior, the will-have-been—in this case, the will-have-been-destroyed, and accounts for the haste. Hence, in posing the question to the European (cited in the first epigraph), whether you still wish that the Americas had been discovered, Diderot writes that “there will be no single moment in the future where my question would have the same force.” Natural man was discovered, and in his discovery was lost. The “philosophical fiction” for a moment entered indicative prose, only to vanish back into the imagination.

**“THESE NEW HERCULES”: TOWARD A TRAVELING PHILOSOPHY**

That the dream was not Diderot’s alone is clear from another passage to which, it strikes me, the philosophe was responding—perhaps directly. In 1754, tucked away in a lengthy ten-page footnote to an essay that made an effort to answer a question posed by the Academy of Letters at Dijon (the very same academy through which Raynal would later pose his question on the settlement of the New World), a citizen of Geneva complained that:

For the three or four hundred years since the inhabitants of Europe have inundated the other parts of the world, and continually published new collections of voyages and reports, I am convinced that we know no other men except the Europeans; furthermore, it appears, from the ridiculous prejudices which have not
died out even among men of letters, that under the pompous name of the study of man everyone does hardly anything except study the men of his country. In vain do individuals come and go; it seems that philosophy does not travel.  

So wrote Jean-Jacques Rousseau in the *Discourse on Inequality* as he reviewed the achievements of European travelers, which he asserted were limited mainly to the study of natural sciences. Rousseau wishes that two men, one of great wealth and the other a scientist, would undertake a voyage to study “not always stones and plants, but for once men and morals,”71 which rather directly corresponds to Diderot’s call for a “philosophe commerçant” or commercial philosopher. That the primary discovery of such travels thus far was also circumscribed by the vision of the one who sees, as Rousseau here asserts, perhaps also informed the witty aside by one of the speakers in the *Supplément* concerning Orou’s remarks that “they show a rather European influence.” Yet, to my mind, more interesting than any play of mirrors (between self and self-as-other) is Rousseau’s criticism that philosophy did not travel, which Diderot’s “traveling philosophy”—described in the passage cited above from the *Histoire*—was meant to supply. Rousseau notes that virtually all the information one has on the two Indies derives from unreliable sources, since “there are scarcely more than four sorts of men who make voyages of long duration: sailors, merchants, soldiers, and missionaries.”72 The first three, according to Rousseau, cannot be relied upon as good observers, while the fourth (missionaries) are more concerned with their “sublime vocation.”73

For all of these reasons, Rousseau wishes that those who voyaged were of another disposition; in fact, he wishes that Diderot himself (among others) might undertake to travel “as Plato did”:

The academics who have traveled through the northern parts of Europe and the southern parts of America intended to visit them as geometers rather than as philosophers . . . we know nothing of the peoples of the East Indies [*des Indes Orientales*] who have been frequented solely by Europeans more desirous to fill their purses than their heads . . . Let us suppose a Montesquieu, Buffon, Diderot, Duclos, d’Alembert, Condillac, or men of that stamp traveling in order to inform their compatriots, observing and describing, as they know how, Turkey, Egypt, Barbary . . . the Malabars, the Mughals, the banks of the Ganges . . . then, in the other hemisphere, Mexico, Peru . . . Let us suppose that these new Hercules, back from their memorable expeditions, then at leisure wrote the natural, moral, and political history [*L’histoire naturelle morale et politique*] of what they had seen; we ourselves would see a new world [*un monde nouveau*] come from their pens, and we would thus learn to know our own.74

I have not been able to ascertain whether this passage had any direct effect upon Raynal as he formulated the *Histoire philosophique et politique* . . .
des deux Indes (note the similarity and variation from the title Rousseau proposes above), or Diderot in his capacity as editor and contributor; more striking to me is the sentiment. In its desire to mix philosophy and travel, to produce a more comprehensive and encyclopedic account of “the new worlds” to be seen, these citations attest to the global vision of much eighteenth-century prose, and the desire of many to undertake this “Herculean labor.” But, one might ask, to what end?

**CONSENSUAL COLONIALISM AS A CONCEPTUAL LIMIT: THE HISTOIRE DES DEUX INDES AND THE CONTRADICTIONS OF LIBERAL THOUGHT**

The line cited in the first epigraph, “there will be no single moment in the future where my question would have the same force,” is an example of the *production* of nostalgia, an affect that necessarily contains within it a temporal element. It is linked to the operation of a future anterior: not simply the will-have-been, but rather (morosely) the will-have-been-destroyed. In this case, the will-have-been-destroyed refers to the tribal cultures of the primitive that Diderot foresees disappearing completely from the earth with the expansion of Europe.

Diderot’s views on the possibilities and limits of colonialism as “*douce colonisation*” can be more keenly imagined and hoped for by Diderot precisely because it precedes the classical period of imperialism in the nineteenth century. More on his mind is the reform of the methods employed by Spanish colonists in the New World. Thus arises a turn to breeding, by means of the concept of population—itself derived from debates on political economy in the period. Not only is breeding, or interbreeding, a kind of libidinal sublation of the political conflict presented between colonizer and colonized, but it is also presented as a rational decision on biological grounds, whose end result is imagined to be a docile colonial subject—a docility inscribed in biology. In this earlier period, mixture of this sort can be solely considered from a biological viewpoint (at the exclusion of a focus on the psychology of colonialism, more clearly a legacy of modern movements of decolonization). If we are not, however, presented with a glimpse of the interior experience of the colonized, we are given an exterior vision that perceives fragility, a vulnerability of the societies that Europe is encountering.

It is the vulnerability that is expressed as nostalgia in the future anterior. The newness of this sentiment, of the vulnerability of societies and ways of life—many of which have indeed ceased to exist—should be seen
as the impetus behind the call for the new genre of prose for which Diderot had no name. In seeking this worldly prose, was Diderot dreaming of anthropology in the modern sense? In any case, one finds here the same paradox noted by Walter Benjamin in his essay on the “oral” tales of Nikolai Leskov: The very possibility of the appreciation of their oral quality was already a sign of the demise of orality itself. Only in its passing away did the shimmer of a fading aura become visible. And so it is here, the birth of an anthropological imagination was only possible when the complete obsolescence of these manifold societies was imagined (glimpsed so early—in 1780); it was also underwritten by a vision of the globe constructed from the geography of many European empires, whose contours are traced in the very form of the *Histoire des deux Indes*: the Dutch, the Portuguese, the Spanish, the French and English colonies. The *Histoire* is therefore a testament to and key document in the prehistory of the modern concept of globalization, in that it envisions both a global form of hegemony and gives inklings of global forms of counterdominance that were to emerge—such as the famous prophetic lines on an imminent rebellion led by a black slave incarnating the figure of Spartacus. Toussaint Louverture was, in fact, rumored to be one such reader of the *Histoire*.

This should be connected with a primary thesis concerning the relationship between liberalism and empire: empire was the *historical space* within which liberalism as a *political practice* and coherent set of political beliefs emerged. What does one do with this apparent contradiction? Is this a contingent historical overlap, or is there some more immanent constitutive flaw to political liberalism? This reading of Diderot aims to trace one set of linkages among consent, hegemony, and dominance—particularly the fantasy of a dominance with hegemony, a submission “without reserve.” Consensual colonialism, the expression of this fantasy and also of a conceptual limit, is thus a political formulation that can exist *within* liberalism, and we may thereby have a better sense of the evolution of that other peculiar institution of the nineteenth century, liberal imperialism.
42. Voltaire, Essai sur les moeurs, I, 231.
44. Les ruines ou méditation sur les révolutions des empires, 232.
47. Les ruines ou méditation sur les révolutions des empires, 179.

CHAPTER FOUR

A version of this chapter was presented in April 2002, at the Center for European Studies, Harvard University, where I received very helpful comments from Emma Rothschild and Talal Asad. A grant from the John Carter Brown Library was indispensable for consultation with many sources cited in this paper. I would also like to thank Gauri Viswanathan and Gayatri Spivak for their support and comments. Ninon Vinsonneau ensured that the French passages were not nonsensical. The late Yves Benot provided stimulating conversation around these ideas. Remaining errors are my own.

1. “Arrêtons-nous ici et plaçons-nous au temps où l’Amérique et l’Inde étaient inconnues. Je m’adresse au plus cruel des Européens et je lui dis: Il existe des régions qui te fourniront de riches métaux, des vêtements agréables, des mets délicieux. Mais lis cette histoire et vois à quel prix la découverte t’en est promise. Veux-tu, ne veux-tu pas qu’elle se fasse? Croit-on qu’il y eût un être assez infernal pour dire: JE LE VEUX. Eh bien! il n’y aura pas dans l’avenir un seul instant où ma question n’ait la même force.” From a chapter entitled “Réflexion sur le bien et le mal que la découverte du nouveau-monde a fait à l’Europe” (Reflections on the good and evil which the discovery of the New World has done to Europe). Guillaume Thomas Raynal, Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes (Geneva: Jean-Léonard Pellet, 1782), bk. 19, chap. 15, p. 298. (I have used the octavo edition, hereafter: Histoire, 19:15, 298.) Translations of passages and chapter headings from this work are mine throughout.


8. A literal translation of the title: *Philosophical and Political History of the Settlements and of the Commerce of Europeans in the Two Indies*. (Note that “établissements” in French can mean both a settlement and a commercial enterprise or “comptoir.”)


16. More specifically, Voltaire praises the Quakers for winning over *land* from the Indians by means of trade. By this and other inducements they were able to procure territory in a less-violent manner than the Jesuits. Duchet, *Anthropologie et histoire au siècle des lumières*, 211.

17. For a discussion of *doux commerce*, see “Money Making and Commerce as Innocent and *Doux*,” in Albert O Hirschman, *The Passions and the


19. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), vol. 1, 77. Foucault does not, however, comment on the role of the Levant in Diderot’s novel. Nonetheless, appreciating the significance of Diderot’s later participation in the *Histoire des deux Indes* can allow for a reading of his work that does more than simply note that he made use of an exotic locale.

20. Anthony Strugnell, *Diderot’s Politics: A Study of the Evolution of Diderot’s Political Thought After the Encyclopédie*, International Archives of the History of Ideas (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1973), 115. In discussing Diderot’s response to Dom Deschamps’s *Lettres sur l’esprit du siècle*, Strugnell writes: “Dom Deschamps had succeeded in striking a hidden chord in Diderot. He had aroused in him an anarchic trait which three years later would find its full expression in the *Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville*.” However, Strugnell is presently involved in the project to issue a critical edition of the *Histoire*, and is likely to have modified his thoughts since the writing of this study. For more recent work, see Anthony Strugnell, “La voix du sage dans l’histoire des deux Indes,” in *Diderot, les dernières années, 1770–84: colloque du bicentenaire, 2–5 septembre 1984 à Edimbourg*, ed. Peter France and Anthony Strugnell (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1985).

21. “Oro... We have a circulation of men, women, and children... which is of far greater importance than the circulation of commodities, which are no more than the product of people’s work.” Diderot, *Political Writings*, 60.

22. His relationship to Abbé Galiani needs to be addressed in order to develop an answer to this question.

23. Diderot, *Political Writings*, 64.

24. Diderot’s early translation of Shaftesbury introduced him to the ideas of sensualism, which influenced his early novel, *Les bijoux indiscrets*. We see echoes of that view here; namely, that the body and sensual experience are the basis for knowledge. Here the impediments to the progress of European society have to be overcome by transforming the sexual and social relationships that encompass the human body.

25. For the reference to “mine and thine,” see Diderot, *Political Writings*, 42.


29. Diderot, *Political Writings*, 64.

30. Diderot, *Political Writings*, 64.

31. Wilson, *Diderot*, 590.

32. Diderot, *Political Writings*, 70.


34. Diderot, *Political Writings*, 65.

36. Raynal, *Histoire*, 1780, 10:134; “Le vœu de chasteté répugne à la nature et nuit à la population; le vœu de pauvreté n’est que d’un inepte ou d’un paresseux; le vœu d’obéissance à quelqu’autre puissance qu’à la dominante et à la loi, est d’un esclave ou d’un rebelle.” Cited by Strugnell, *Diderot’s Politics*, 2:25, in relation to Diderot’s views on the church.


38. Diderot, *Political Writings*, 178; “N’aurait-il pas été plus humain, plus utile et moins dispideaux, de faire passer dans chacune de ces régions lointaines quelques centaines de jeunes homes, quelques centaines de jeune femmes? Les hommes auraient épousé les femmes, les femmes auraient épousé les hommes de la contrée. La consanguinité, le plus prompt et le plus fort des liens, aurait bientôt fait des étrangers et des naturels du pays une seule et même famille.” *Oeuvres*, 3:693.


41. “Le commerce s’établit sans trouble entre des hommes qui ont des besoins réciproques, et bientôt ils s’accoutoment à regarder comme des amis, comme des frères, ceux que l’intérêt ou d’autres motifs conduisent dans leur contrée.” *Oeuvres*, 693.

42. “In dealing with subjects that are important for human happiness, your first concern and duty must be to rid your soul of all hope and fear. There, lifted up above all human considerations, you float above the atmosphere and look at the earth beneath you. . . . There, finally, as I see at my feet these beautiful lands where the arts and sciences are flourishing, and which lay for so long under the darkness of barbarism, I have wondered: who is it who dug these canals, drained these plains, founded these towns, brought together, clothed and civilized these people? And the voices of all enlightened men among them have answered: ‘It is commerce; it is commerce.’ ” Diderot, *Political Writings*, 170.

43. The movement of goods is presented in the *Histoire* as reciprocal, rather than in one direction. “Les productions des climats placés sous l’équateur, se consomment dans les climats voisins du pole; l’industrie du Nord est transportée au Sud; les étoffes de l’Orient sont devenue le luxe des Occidentaux.” Raynal, *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes*, 1:2. Marx’s distinction between commercial capitalism and industrial capitalism is obviously absent from the *Histoire*; the absence enables the
paean to commerce. But even within the decades of the 1780s and 1790s, one finds a darker and more brooding view of colonial commerce in such a figure as Edmund Burke, whose familiarity (initially through his relation William Burke, as well as through parliament) with the East India Company would lead to the famous trial of Warren Hastings. Diderot’s view of commerce remains more optimistic, provided one was able to rein in the destructiveness of missionaries evidenced in the South American example.

44. Strugnell, Diderot’s Politics, 223 and passim.

45. Diderot, Oeuvres, 693; “Les Indiens auraient adopté le culte de l’Europe, par la raison qu’une religion devient commune à tous les citoyens d’un empire, lorsque le gouvernement l’abandonne à elle-même, et que l’intolérance et la folie des prêtres n’en font pas un instrument de discorde.”

46. In trying to relate these fascinating writings from Diderot to contemporary scholarly discussions on colonialism, we should at least take note of his awareness that modernity arrives with colonialism, and is thereby tainted in a manner that is quite different than within Europe itself. The douce colonisation, or the fantasy of a noncoercive colonial encounter, is a response to this awareness.

47. “Le dernier mot de Diderot dans le dialogue permanent entre l’homme sauvage et l’homme civilisé dont le XVIIIe siècle n’arrive pas à se tirer? On notera d’abord que Diderot compare les ‘nations sauvages’ et ‘les nation civilisées’ pour donner l’avantage aux premières en 1770, aux secondes en 1780.” Diderot, Oeuvres, 3:585–586. Versini argues that in the later editions of the Histoire, Diderot became more and more convinced by Hobbes over Rousseau. He cites several lines from the Réfutation d’Helvétius in support of this, and concludes, “Diderot est profondément, résolument et religieusement l’homme de la sociabilité et du progrès.” This seems too strongly to negate the ferocity and irony of the early Diderot regarding clerics, the destruction of primitives as a result of their encounter with Europeans, etc. (cf. the first epigraph to this article). Moreover, it overlooks the fact that Diderot, perhaps unlike Rousseau, already mocked the idea of a wholly innocent natural man, which some might accuse Rousseau of vaunting. Diderot was never fully persuaded by this illusion, and revealed this awareness in other discursive forms, such as the philosophical dialogue of the Supplément. In this sense, it is crucial that Diderot turned to these other genres. In a philosophical or political treatise, he might not have been as flippant, humorous, or incautious. In literature, that form of writing in which anything can be said (to paraphrase Jacques Derrida’s definition), he is willing to take a thought to its extreme, even when it negates his initial impulse.

48. Strugnell, Diderot’s Politics, 216.

49. It may have been this excessive focus upon internal European debates that contributed to a lack of interest in the Histoire. I would have to disagree with the judgment that Diderot, when asked by Raynal in 1765 to contribute to the Histoire, “[a]t first . . . seems to have taken no great interest in it and his contributions to the first edition . . . are generally unremarkable; they are mostly concerned with the bad effects of colonization and religion, the injustice of slavery and reflections about sauvages.” John Hope Mason, The Irresistible Diderot (London: Quartet Books, 1982), 343.
50. Robert Darnton, *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995). Darnton discusses the *Histoire des deux Indes* as a crucial text in reconsidering the Enlightenment, based on the disparity between texts currently considered canonical and those that in reality were the most widely read and circulated.

51. The omitted paragraph would be the final one to a section given the title “National Character at Home and Overseas,” Diderot, *Political Writings*, 177–79.

52. Diderot, *Oeuvres*, 693; “Tels seraient les heureux effets que produirait, dans une colonie naissante, l’attrait du plus impérieux des sens. Point d’armes, point de soldats: mais beaucoup de jeunes femmes pour les hommes, beaucoup de jeunes hommes pour les femmes.”


55. “If in the whole reign, the Empress were to civilize only this district, she would have achieved a great deal,” Diderot, *Political Writings*, 96.

56. Diderot, *Political Writings*, 86; “La troisième, ce serait d’accepter une colonie de Suisses; de la placer convenablement; de lui assurer ses privilèges et la liberté; d’accorder les mêmes privilèges et la même liberté à tous ceux de ses sujets qui entreraient dans la même colonie. Les Suisses sont agriculteurs et soldats; ils sont fidèles. Je sais par cœur toutes les objections qu’on peut opposer à ces moyens; elles sont si frivoles que je ne me donne pas la peine d’y répondre.” Diderot, *Oeuvres*, 3:512.

57. “Idée systématique sur la manière d’amener un peuple au sentiment de la liberté et à l’état policé.”


59. In this sense, the colonized are in a state not much different than one Jean-Jacques Rousseau observes among animals. Though the context is quite different, developing this thought requires consideration of an episode where Rousseau presumes that pongos, an “anthropomorphic animal” seen in the Congo, push wood into a fire more to imitate the action of a man rather than from any deeper knowledge. “I remember seeing a monkey perform the same maneuver that it is denied [by a traveler’s account] a pongo can do. It is true that my ideas not then being directed to this problem, I myself committed the error for which I reproach our
travelers, and I neglected to examine whether the monkey’s intention was in fact to sustain the fire, or simply, as I believe, to imitate the action of a man. Whatever the case, it is well demonstrated that the monkey is not a variety of man” [emphasis mine]. *Discourse on Inequality*, n. J, collected in Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The First and Second Discourses* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1964), 208. For the original French passage, see Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Oeuvres complètes*, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, vol. III (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 211.


61. Diderot, *Oeuvres*, 3:705; “L’avantage physique de croiser les races entre les homes comme entre les animaux, pour empêcher l’espèce de s’abâtardir, est le fruit d’une expérience tardive, postérieure à l’utilité reconnue d’unir les familles pour cimenter la paix des sociétés.”

62. Diderot, *Oeuvres*, 3:706; “Les Créoles sont en général bien fait. À peine en voit-on un seul affligé des difformités si communes dans les autres climats... L’histoire ne leur reproche aucune de ces lâchetés, de ces trahisons, des ces bassesses, qui souillent les annales de tous les peuples. À peine citerait-on un crime honteux qu’ait commis un créole.”


66. Diderot, *Oeuvres*, 3:689; “Dans ces sociétés mercantiles, la découverte d’une île, l’importation d’une nouvelle denrée, l’invention d’une machine, l’établissement d’un comptoir... la construction d’un port, deviendront les transactions les plus importantes; et les annales des peuples demanderont à être écrites par des commerçants philosophes, comme elles l’étaient autrefois par des historiens orateurs.”


sans possesseurs, des sociétés sans police, des hommes sans mœurs: combien un pareil spectacle n’eût-il pas été plein d’intérêt et d’instruction pour un Locke, un Buffon, un Montesquieu! Quelle lecture eût été aussi surprenante, aussi pathétique que le récit de leur voyage! Mais l’image de la nature brute et sauvage est déjà défigurée. Il faut se hâter d’en ressembler les traits à demi effacée, après avoir peint et livré à l’exécration les avides et féroces chrétiens qu’un malheureux hasard conduisit d’abord dans cet autre hémisphère.”

70. Rousseau, The First and Second Discourses, 210. “Depuis trois ou quatre cents ans que les habitans de l’Europe inondent les autres parties du monde et publient sans cesse de nouveaux recueils de voyages et de relations, je suis persuadé que nous ne connoissons d’hommes que les seuls Européens; encore paraît-il aux préjugés ridicules qui ne sont pas éteints, même parmi les Gens de Lettres, que chacun ne fait guère sous le nom pompeux d’étude de l’homme, que celle des hommes de son pays. Les particuliers ont beau aller et venir, il semble que la Philosophie ne voyage point.” Rousseau, Oeuvres complètes, 212. This footnote from Rousseau also contains a prolonged consideration of the orangutan in the Congo, whose place in the later history of evolutionary arguments and scientific racism requires more consideration than I can give it here. Rousseau refers to several observers who point to similar social characteristics shared by Blacks (les Nègres) and the orangutan. His remark also serves to qualify the assertion that much eighteenth-century thought is free from the racial views more prevalent in the nineteenth-century. And yet it is not clear from note X whether Rousseau agrees with this observation; in effect, he cites it primarily to note that its reliability cannot be verified given the current impoverished state of knowledge on these places. See pp. 208–11, and the conclusion on 214.

71. Rousseau, The First and Second Discourses, 212; “non toujours des pierres et des plantes, mais une fois les hommes et les mœurs.” Rousseau, Oeuvres complètes, 213.


73. “Il n’y a guère que quatre sortes d’hommes qui fassent des voyages de long cours; les Marins, les Marchands, les Soldats, et les Missionnaires; or on ne doit guère s’attendre que les trois premières classes fournissent de bons observateurs... et quant à ceux de la quatrième, occupés de la vocation sublime qui les appelle... on doit croire qu’ils ne se livreroient pas volontiers à des recherches qui paroissent de pure curiosité.” Rousseau, Oeuvres complètes, 212.

74. Translation modified. Rousseau, The First and Second Discourses, 212. “Les Académiciens qui ont parcouru les parties Septentrionales de l’Europe et Méridionales de l’Amérique avoient plus pour objet de les visiter en Géometres qu’en Philosophes... nous ne connoissons point les Peuples des Indes Orientales, fréquentées uniquement par des Européens plus curieux de remplir leurs bourses que leurs têtes. ... Supposons un Montesquieu, un Buffon, un Diderot, un Duclos, un d’Alembert, un Condillac, ou des hommes de cette trempe voyageant pour instruire leurs compatriotes, observant et décrivant comme ils savent faire, La Turquie, l’Égipte, la Barbarie... les Malabares, le Mogol, les rives du Gange... puis dans l’autre Hémisphère, le Mexique, le Pérou... Supposons que ces nouveaux Hercules, de retour de ces courses mémorable, fissent ensuite à loisir...
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l’Histoire naturelle Morale et Politique de ce qu’ils auroient vu, nous verrions
nous mêmes sortir un monde nouveau de dessous leur plume, et nous appréhendi-
ons ainsi à connoître le nôtre.” Rousseau, Oeuvres complètes, 213–14.

83–110.

76. “Où est-il, ce grand homme, que la nature doit peut-être à l’honneur de
l’espèce humaine? Où est-il, ce Spartacus nouveau, qui ne trouvera point de Cras-
sus? Alors disparaîtra le Code Noir.” Guillaume Thomas Raynal, Histoire
philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans
les deux Indes (Maestricht: chez Jean-Edme Dufour imprimeur & libraire, 1774),
vol. III, 204. The passage is altered in the later edition, cf. Raynal, Histoire
philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans
les deux Indes, 11:24, 139. The passage calling for an “avenger of the New
World” is itself a reworking of an episode from the 1771 novel by Louis Sébastian
Mercier, L’an deux mille quatre cent quarante (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1979),
chap. 22, p. 178.

77. The notion that Toussaint had read Raynal’s Histoire—suggested by
C. L. R. James, The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L’Ouverture and the San Domingo
Revolution, 2nd ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 24–25; and by Aimé Cé-
saire, Toussaint Louverture: la révolution française et le problème colonial (Paris:
Présence Africaine, 1981), 197—is vividly conveyed in the painting of the Haitian
captain Jean-Baptiste Belley, painted by Anne-Louis Girodet in 1797, which por-
trays him leaning against a bust of Raynal. Belley had fought alongside Toussaint
before joining the French revolutionary army. For a discussion of this painting,
see Viktoria Schmidt-Linsenhoff, “Male Alterity in the French Revolution—Two
Paintings by Anne-Louis Girodet at the Salon of 1798,” in Ida Blom, Karen Hage-
mann, and Catherine Hall, Gendered Nations: Nationalisms and Gender Order
in the Long Nineteenth Century (New York: Berg, 2000); and Darcy Grimaldo
Grigsby, Extremities: Painting Empire in Post-Revolutionary France (London:
Yale University Press, 2002).

78. See Jennifer Pitts, A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Liberal Imperialism in
Britain and France (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), and the chapter
on “The Crisis of Liberal Imperialism,” in Karuna Mantena, Alibis of Empire:
Social Theory and the Ideologies of Late Imperial Rule (Princeton: Princeton
University Press, forthcoming).

Chapter Five

1. Meek’s own summary of the theory in his introduction is the following: “In
its most specific form, the theory was that society ‘naturally’ or ‘normally’ pro-
gressed over time through four more or less distinct and consecutive stages, each
corresponding to a different mode of subsistence, these stages being defined as
hunting, pasturage, agriculture, and commerce.” Ronald Meek, Social Science

2. Adam Smith, An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Na-