Is There History after Eurocentrism?: Globalism, Postcolonialism, and the Disavowal of History
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Ours would seem to be another age of paradoxes. Localization accompanies globalization, cultural homogenization is challenged by insistence on cultural heterogeneity, denationalization is more than matched by ethnicization. Capitalism at its moment of victory over socialism finds itself wondering about different cultures of capitalism at odds with one another. There is a preoccupation with history when history seems to be increasingly irrelevant to understanding the present. Worked over by postmodernism, among other things, the past itself seems to be up for grabs, and will say anything we want it to say.

It is another one of these paradoxes that I take up in this essay: the paradox of Eurocentrism. The repudiation of Eurocentrism in intellectual and cultural life seems to be such an obvious necessity that it may seem odd to speak of it as a paradox. Yet a good case can be made that Eurocentrism, too, has come under scrutiny and criticism at the very moment of its victory globally. Whether we see in the present the ultimate victory or the impending demise of Eurocentrism depends on what we understand by it, and where we locate it. The widespread assumption in our day that Eurocentrism may be spoken or written away, I will suggest, rests on a reductionist culturalist understanding of Eurocentrism. Rendering Eurocentrism into a cultural phenomenon that leaves unquestioned other locations for it distracts attention from crucial ways in which Eurocentrism may be a determinant of a present that claims liberation from the hold on it of the past. What is at issue is modernity, with all its complex constituents, of which Eurocentrism was the formative moment. Just as
modernity is incomprehensible without reference to Eurocentrism, Eurocentrism as a concept is specifiable only within the context of modernity. Rather than define Eurocentrism from the outset, therefore, I seek to contextualize it in order to restore to it—and the many arguments against it—some sense of historicity.

If Eurocentrism is crucial to thinking modernity, we need to raise the question of whether or not it may be repudiated without a simultaneous disavowal of history. The question necessitates confrontation of Eurocentrism as a historical phenomenon against the background of other “centrism”—in other words, the ways in which EuroAmerican production, dissemination, and domination of modernity differ in their values and processes from earlier forms of domination such as, say, “Sinocentrism.” It is also necessary, in assessing Eurocentrism as a historical problem, to take account of earlier critiques of Eurocentrism. This latter is crucial especially to accounting for the historicity of contemporary critiques of Eurocentrism, in terms of both their relationship to the past and their relationship to contemporary configurations of power.

I suggest by way of conclusion that a radical critique of Eurocentrism must rest on a radical critique of the whole project of modernity understood in terms of the life-world that is cultural and material at once. Modernity in our day is not just EuroAmerican, but is dispersed globally, if not equally or uniformly, in transnational structures of various kinds, in ideologies of development, and the practices of everyday life. It does not just emanate from EuroAmerica understood geographically, nor are its agencies necessarily EuroAmerican in origin. A radical critique of Eurocentrism, in other words, must confront contemporary questions of globalism and postcolonialism, and return analysis to the locations of contemporary struggles over the life-world. I should note here that the critique of Eurocentrism is a diffuse characteristic of all kinds of critiques of power in our day: from feminist to racial critiques. On occasion, it seems as if the problems of the world would be solved if somehow we got rid of Eurocentrism. This, of course, is silly. It not only misses much about Eurocentrism; it ignores even more about the rest of the world. Not the least of what it ignores is that although the agencies that are located in EuroAmerica may be the promoters of Eurocentrism, they are by now not the only ones, and possibly not the most important
ones. Eurocentrism may not be global destiny, but it is a problem that needs to be confronted by any serious thinking about global destinies. These problems are too serious to be left in the hands of elites to whom Eurocentrism is an issue of identity in intra-elite struggles for power.

**EUROCENTRISM: WHAT AND WHERE?**

At one level, what Eurocentrism is and where it is located is sufficiently straightforward. Eurocentrism is crucial to understanding the spatialities and temporalities of modernity, not just in EuroAmerica but globally, from at least the late nineteenth century. The spatial conceptualizations around which we have organized history, from nations to areas to continents and oceans to the Third World and beyond, are in a fundamental sense implicated in a Eurocentric modernity. Even more powerful may be the reworking of temporalities by a Eurocentric conceptualization of the world, where the particular historical trajectory of EuroAmerican societies was to end up as a teleology worldwide in marking time. This was enunciated "theoretically" in the social sciences by the discourse of modernization, in its bourgeois as well as its Marxist formulations. History itself, as Nicholas Dirks puts it succinctly, is "a sign of the modern." For the last century, but especially since World War II, Eurocentrism has been the informing principle in our constructions of history—not just in EuroAmerican historiography, but in the spatial and temporal assumptions of dominant historiographies worldwide. EuroAmericans conquered the world, renamed places, rearranged economies, societies, and politics, and erased or drove to the margins premodern ways of knowing space, time, and many other things as well. In the process, they universalized history in their own self-image in an unprecedented manner. Crucial to this self-image was the establishment by the European Enlightenment of a paradigm of the rational humanist subject as the subject of history, armed with reason and science, conquering time and space in the name of universal reason, reorganizing societies to bring them within the realm of rationality, and subjugating alternative historical trajectories to produce a universal history ever moving forward to fulfill the demands of human
progress. The paradigm rendered the EuroAmerican experience of history into the fate of humankind, which then could serve as the rationalization for the pain let loose upon the world by its transformative aspirations.

Let us ignore for the moment an immediate objection to such an account of Eurocentrism: that it recapitulates an ideological Eurocentrism worthy of a most unreconstructed Eurocentrist. There is no recognition in this account of the incoherence of Eurocentrism as a historical phenomenon, because it is oblivious to the historicity of Eurocentrism, as well as to the contradictions that both dynamized its history and limited its claims. I will return to those questions in the next section. The immediate issue here is where to locate Eurocentrism.

Culture and discourse would seem to be the most popular choices of location in contemporary answers to Eurocentrism, represented most prominently by postcolonialism and globalism. Although quite different, and perhaps even antithetical, in their appreciation of the relationship of the present world situation to the past, postcolonialism and globalism would seem to be at one in their attitudes toward the location of Eurocentrism, or a Eurocentric modernity, which may account for their confounding by some cultural critics.

The differences are deeply methodological and historical. Methodologically speaking, postcolonialism in its most popular forms (in the United States, at least) eschews questions of the structurations of the world in terms of “foundational categories,” and stresses local encounters in the formation of identities; it is in many ways driven by a radical methodological individualism, and situationist in its historical explanations. Globalism, on the other hand, draws attention to the structurations of the world by forces that operate at the highest level of abstraction and, in some of its versions, find in such abstraction the reaffirmation of the scientistic promises of social theory. Equally interesting may be their differences in the relationships they posit between the present and the past. Armed with the insights of the present, postcolonialists proceed to reinterpret the past with those very same insights. In this perspective, Eurocentrism, rather than shape history, appears to have been an ideological cover thrown over the past to disguise the complexity of local interactions;
postcolonialism then offers a way to dis-cover the past in its true complexity, more often than not expressed in the idea of “hybridity.” In contrast to this presentist colonization of the past, globalism proclaims a “rupture” between a “present condition of globality and its many possible pasts.” Its is a consciousness of totality that must be distinguished from similar consciousnesses of earlier periods; what it does, however, is to deny to Eurocentrism its claims to the creation of such a totality (“its many pasts”), and opens up the possibility that the Others of EuroAmerica may have been partners in its creation.

Although I have no wish to reduce intellectual orientations that claim no coherence for themselves to one or another of their articulations, the differences to which I point above may be illustrated through two statements by those who have gained some reputation as spokespeople of postcolonialism and globalism, respectively. Criticism that has caught the imagination of post-Reagan post-Thatcher scholars in the United States and the United Kingdom may not be very surprising, as it points merely to the importance of context in the reception of ideas. The same may be said of globalism, which also covers a wide range of intellectual and political orientations: from leftists who look to a cosmopolitan world to rational-choice political scientists who would make sure that cosmopolitanism live up to the demands of scientific ways of knowing the world—read EuroAmerican hegemony. The problem is not quite novel. Capital has long sought globalization. So have leftists, but not quite in the same way. What seems to be different about our times is the willingness of leftists to buy into the visions of globalization offered by capital. The editors of several influential volumes on postcolonial criticism write that:

European imperialism took various forms in different times and places and proceeded both through conscious planning and contingent occurrences. As a result of this complex development something occurred for which the plan of imperial expansion had not bargained: the immensely prestigious and powerful imperial culture found itself appropriated in projects of counter-colonial resistance which drew upon the many indigenous and local hybrid processes of self-determination to defy, erode and sometimes supplant the prodigious power of imperial cultural knowledge. Post-colonial literatures are a result of this interaction between imperial culture and the complex of indigenous cultural practices. As a consequence, postcolonial theory has existed for a long time before that particular name was used to describe it.
Postcolonialism, then, is merely the current expression of forms of knowledge that have been around for a long time, except that there was no consciousness of it earlier. That those who are convinced of the discursive construction of knowledge should be oblivious to the positivistic implications of such an assertion is nothing short of remarkable.

By contrast, advocates of globalism leave no doubt about the break they seek to accomplish between the present and the past, including a break between a present condition and the factors that may have brought about such a condition. Roland Robertson, an enthusiastic advocate of globalization of social theory, writes:

I argue that systematic comprehension of the macrostructuration of world order is essential to the viability of any form of contemporary theory and that such comprehension must involve analytical separation of the factors which have facilitated the shift towards a single world—e.g., the spread of capitalism, western imperialism and the development of a global media system—from the general and global agency-structure (and/or culture) theme. While the empirical relationship between the two sets of issues is of great importance (and, of course, complex) conflation of them leads us into all sorts of difficulties and inhibits our ability to come to terms with the basic and shifting terms of the contemporary world order.6

The projects of postcolonialism and globalism are prima facie antithetical: the one repudiating all structurations but the local, the other aiming to uncover global structures; the one situationally historicist, the other seeing in complex empirical relations an obstacle to the formulation of grand theories; the one reenvisioning the past, the other proclaiming a break with it.

And yet they stand to one another in the relationship of the local to the global, and share in common a desire to break down the boundaries (or structures) that may intervene between the two. In the phraseology of one author who seeks to reconcile postcolonialism and globalism,

one essential, underlying truth must be pointed out. Most of these peripheral postmodern effects and claims I have been recording stem
directly from decomposition, under the contemporary phase of globalization, of the two fundamental assumptions of the three worlds theory…. The cultural borders authorized/enforced under that theory yield to perception of cultural interpenetration and transgression as the normal state in both the demystified past and the avant-garde present. And the evolutionary timeline along which the three worlds theory ranks cultures is cut up into discontinuously segmented, free-floating “realities,” with even more transgressive an effect, making the primitive postmodern, and startlingly juxtaposing, not only different cultures and life-styles, but even distinct epochs.

In reading this statement, we need to remember that the “three worlds theory” was embedded in the Eurocentric mapping of the world. For the immediate purposes here, Buell brings together postcolonialism and globalism in such a way as to articulate their common points in spite of the differences that I have stressed above: there is an assumption in both cases that culture is the site on which Eurocentrism needs to be challenged, and a disavowal of history in spite of differences toward the relationship between the present and the past. Whereas postcolonialists make no secret of the prominence they assign to culture in their stress on identity formations and negotiations, someone like Robertson is equally anxious in his discussion of globalization to separate “agency-structure (and/or culture) theme” from the forces that account for the emergence of globalization in the first place. It may be that for globalists no less than for postcolonialists, cultural boundaries are easier to negotiate than the boundaries of economic, social, and political power, which “inhibit” coming “to terms with the basic and shifting terms of the contemporary world order.”

It may not be too surprising, in light of the culturalism implicit in such declarations not just of the autonomy but of the priority of culture, that postcolonialism and globalism also share in a disavowal of history. Anthony Smith observes that there is something “timeless about the concept of a global culture,” which, “widely diffused in space … is cut off from any past.” Timelessness is clearly visible in the statement from Buell, which reorders many pasts into some kind of a postmodern pastiche. It is equally visible in the statement from Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, for whom the past was not in any way
significantly different from the present, but did not know it until the present articulated for it its potential consciousness.

The question at issue here should be obvious by now. Can Eurocentrism be grasped in its significance without reference to the structures of power that it implies? Conversely, can the present, and its many claims against and over the past, be understood in their full historicity, without reference to the past perspectives it seeks to erase, either through colonization or through assertions of rupture with the past? Both questions require consideration of Eurocentrism as historical phenomenon, its formations, and the agencies that have enabled it to serve as a formative moment in not just a EuroAmerican but a global modernity.¹⁰

**EUROCENTRISM IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF HISTORY**

The argument I offer here may be stated simply: Eurocentrism as a historical phenomenon is not to be understood without reference to the structures of power that EuroAmerica produced over the last five centuries, which in turn produced Eurocentrism, globalized its effects, and universalized its historical claims. Those structures of power include the economic (capitalism, capitalist property relations, markets and modes of production, imperialism, etc.), the political (a system of nation-states, and the nation-form, most importantly, new organizations to handle problems presented by such a reordering of the world, new legal forms, etc.), the social (production of classes, genders, races, ethnicities, religious forms as well as the push toward individual-based social forms), and cultural (including new conceptions of space and time, new ideas of the good life, and a new developmentalist conception of the life-world). The list is woefully inadequate, and the categorizations themselves are admittedly problematic; but it suffices to indicate the intractability of the problem of Eurocentrism, which is my major purpose here. A culturalist appreciation of Eurocentrism that proceeds from a quite productive assertion of the autonomy of culture to an obscurantist isolation of culture and discourses from questions of political economy, and even renders culture into a privileged site that has priority over other aspects of life, may end up only with a dehistoricized, desocialized understanding
of Eurocentrism that does not even come close to acknowledging the problems it presents. Does capitalism, regardless of the possibility of “different cultures of capitalism,” nevertheless serve as an agent not just of new economic forms, but also of certain fundamental values emanating from EuroAmerica? Does nationalism, as Partha Chatterjee argues, have embedded in its “thematic” the most fundamental assumptions of a EuroAmerican Orientalism? Does the very existence of certain forms of media, even apart from their content, introduce new values into everyday life globally? What may be said of “material” agencies as the carriers of Eurocentrism may be observed in reverse of the ways in which cultural constructs of Eurocentrism may acquire the power of material forces. Does it matter at some point that the current mapping of the world was a EuroAmerican construct, when that mapping is internalized by others, and shapes the goals and boundaries of life-activity? Especially important in this regard is the ideology of developmentalism, on which I will say more later.

There seems to be some anxiety in contemporary thinking that to raise anew the question of these structures is to open the way to some kind of “functionalism” that once again reduces social phenomena to a few of its elements. Let us leave aside the question that culturalist functionalism may be as much a functionalism as any other. To recognize a multiplicity of phenomena that coincide historically and appear in structural and structuring relationships of one kind or another requires neither a reduction of those phenomena to one or more of their numbers nor that we ignore the relationships of contradiction between them, that in effect serve to undermine efforts to functionalize the structure. In fact, it is these relationships, in their totality and particularity as well as their functionality and contradictoriness, that enable a coherent grasp of differences in history—not self-referential localized differences that “result in an utter particularism in which history becomes a meaningless jumble of stories with no connection to each other,” as in much of the postcolonial alternative, or deterritorialized totalities that have no clear spatial and temporal referents, as in the globalist alternatives.

The complexity of Eurocentrism becomes even more daunting if we note that Eurocentrism, as we have it now, is hardly a EuroAmerican phenomenon. Much of what we associate with Eurocentrism is
now internal to societies worldwide, so that to speak of "Europe and Its Others" itself appears as an oxymoronic distraction. Legacies of EuroAmerica are everywhere, from global structures to daily economic practices, from state formations to household practices, from ideologies of development to cultures of consumption, from feminism to the centering in politics of race and ethnicity. Ashis Nandy, like Frantz Fanon in an earlier day, locates them in the psyches of "Europe's Others." They are also in the ways we think the world, from theorizations about society to thinking about history. Even where claims are made these days to premodern and, therefore, pre-"historical" ways of knowing, they fail to convince because their own efforts to refute a modernist historicism are conditioned by a self-consciousness about their own historicity. And how would we write the world without the legacies of Eurocentric mappings? Writing the world, no less than anti-Eurocentrism itself, may be incomprehensible without reference to those same legacies. If today we may find it impossible to think the world without reference to classes, genders, and so on, premoderns (and maybe even pre-postmoderns) would have been surprised that identities are negotiable, as one negotiates commodities in the marketplace.

The recognition of the pervasiveness of Eurocentrism in its various dimensions in many ways reveals the limitations of a preoccupation with "Europe and Its Others." That juxtaposition may still make sense with reference to the past, when a separation could be assumed between Europeans and others, which would play an important part both in the construction of others and in the construction of Eurocentrism. At the present, when more than ever the Others are most visible in their relocations to older colonial centers, they have, so to speak, come home. As a EuroAmerican modernity long has been internalized in the rest of the world, the rest of the world has now entered the interior of EuroAmerica physically and intellectually—which, not surprisingly, is also the prime location for the concern with Eurocentrism. Preoccupation with "Europe and Its Others" seems under the circumstances to be a distraction from the confrontation of the victory of Eurocentrism, which is evident above all in the rendering of EuroAmerica and its many products into objects of desire globally. The contemporary concern with Eurocentric constructions of the Other, interestingly (and with some irony), seems to
provide endless occasion for speaking about EuroAmerica, perpetuating the Eurocentrism it would formally repudiate—which may be the form this desire takes among intellectuals. At the risk of simple-minded psychologizing, anti-Eurocentrism strikes me above all as the mirror image of this desire; not so much as a negative compensation for it but rather as a demand for admission of non-EuroAmerican cultural elements into the interior of a world that has been shaped already by its historical legacy in a Eurocentric modernity. What, after all, is multiculturalism that calls for the recognition of cultural relics or heritages without challenging the structures of power that are the products of EuroAmerican domination of the world, and imbued through and through with its values? These same circumstances may have something to tell us about why globalism and postcolonialism, in their very contradictoriness, have caught the imagination of many as ways to deal with such a contemporary situation—even though in their different ways they may evade the most fundamental and pressing question: whether or not there is an Outside to Eurocentrism in a world that has been worked over by the forces of modernity.

If Eurocentrism understood as a cultural phenomenon is insufficient as a critique of EuroAmerican domination of the world, which was hardly just a "discursive" domination but has been embedded in structures of power, the power of Eurocentrism itself is not to be grasped without reference to these same structures. This is not to say that culture and discourses are insignificant, but only to reiterate that they are insufficient as explanations of the world; the separation of culture and discourse into realms apart from the material is itself very modern. For the same reason, to argue for a reconnection of culture and discourse to the materiality of everyday life is not to argue for a return to an earlier privileging of political economy, but rather to open up new ways of thinking the connection under contemporary circumstances—which implies also rethinking the connections that were repudiated under the regime of modernity. Eurocentric modernity then appears as one way of connecting modes of living and cultures, rather than as establishing a "scientific" and, therefore, forever valid, causal relationship between the two. The problem, as a historical problem, then, is to inquire why Eurocentric ways of representing this relationship have acquired such power. Eurocentrists
may suggest that it is the power of EuroAmerican cultures. I would like to suggest here that it is power that dynamizes the claims of culture; contrary to some versions of cultural studies that conflate power and culture until they become indistinguishable, it is important, I think, to distinguish the two so as to enable a more historical treatment of the relationship. The issue here is not one of ethical judgment or choice. The issue rather is ethical domination. And cultural domination is hardly its own justification. Neither Eurocentrism nor the contemporary challenges to it can be understood without reference to elements outside of the strictly cultural—which, needless to say, raises significant questions about what we mean by the cultural.

To recognize Eurocentrism as a historical phenomenon it is necessary to view it within the context of other instances of domination, of which Eurocentrism was neither the first instance nor is likely to be the last. Such a historical perspective may also provide clues for a more thoroughgoing critique of power and domination than is currently available.

Eurocentrism is a complex term that disguises all manner of struggles within EuroAmerica over the meanings of “Europe” and “modernity,” but most important, Eurocentrism was the product of a historical process, if not itself a historical process, that is inextricable from the invention of Europe’s “Others.” Although at the level of power there may be little question that by the end of the nineteenth century EuroAmericans had more or less conquered the whole world, and proceeded to produce ideological legitimations for the conquest, as a cultural orientation Eurocentrism itself is a hindsight invention of the Europe/Other binary, not the other way around.15 Clichés about Enlightenment rationalism, unilinear histories, and so on, that are quite common these days in the critiques of Eurocentrism overlook the ways in which historical processes mediated the understanding of such ideological products within a EuroAmerican context. EuroAmerica itself is still within this historical process of invention. Globalism, explicitly, and postcolonialism, inadvertently, may well be constituents of this process in its contemporary phase.

Without the power of capitalism, and all the structural innovations that accompanied it in political, social, and cultural organization, Eurocentrism might have been just another ethnocentrism. It is rather remarkable in an age of proliferating ethnocentrisms such as
ours that so little attention should be paid to ethnocentrism as a legacy not just of Eurocentrism (although that may have contributed to it in significant ways), but as a condition of the world at the origins of modernity, more often than not expressing the centrality in a variety of “world-systems” of the cultural assumptions of those who dominated those world-systems. This may be stating the obvious, but it needs to be stated nevertheless because considerations of political correctness have led to a shyness about criticism of ethnocentrism other than the EuroAmerican (or blatantly murderous expressions of it in places such as Bosnia, Rwanda, Turkey, or Kosovo). Spheres of cultural hegemony that more or less coincided with economic and political domination have been present all along, defining a “Chinese” world, an “Islamic” world, “Arabic” and “Indic” worlds, and so on. In spite of real or imagined hegemonies over vast territories, however, none of these worlds were in the end able to match Eurocentrism in reach or transformative power. The statement may seem foolhardy when the end of history is not yet in sight; what seems safe to say is that if these other cultural hegemonies are ever globalized and universalized in the same manner as Eurocentrism, it will be on the basis of a world globalized and universalized through Eurocentrism, and in their articulations to this new world. There are presently efforts to discover an early “modernity” in East and Southeast Asia; but it did not occur to anyone in those regions to even raise the question of modernity until modernity had been established as a principle of history. Similarly, East Asian societies may claim a “Confucian” heritage that explains their recent success in capitalism, but this Confucian heritage is one that has been reinterpreted by the very requirements of capitalism.

Eurocentrism is the one centrism that historically has encompassed the globe, and reached levels of life that were not even of much concern to its competitors; it revolutionized lives around the globe, relocated societies in new spaces, and transformed their historical trajectories—to the point where it makes no sense to speak of history without reference to Eurocentrism. There may have been no shortage of “cultural hybridities” earlier; what is interesting and compelling about Eurocentrism is that by the time its globalizing aspirations neared (for they could never be reached) their geographical boundaries, Eurocentrism was to become a constituent of most
people's hybridities—which is not to be said of any of the other centrisms, which were regionally limited and historically unstable.

The question is, then, what accounts for this power? The Eurocentric answer is clear enough: the superiority of EuroAmerican values. It is an answer that is convincing only to Eurocentrists themselves. It is also the cultural level at which most critiques of Eurocentrism proceed, and run into dead ends. The problem with the culturalist critique of Eurocentrism is not only that it provides no explanation for the hegemony of Eurocentrism, in contrast to other centrisms, but that it is also for the same reason incapable of addressing normative questions of value. The values of the dominant (such as human rights) are not prima facie undesirable because of the fact of domination, just as the values of the dominated are not to be legitimated simply by recourse to arguments of cultural difference. If capitalism is as much an agent of Eurocentrism as the advocacy of human rights, it does not make much sense to laud the entry into capitalism of other societies while also collaborating in their abuse of human rights on the grounds of cultural difference. The conflict between history and value is nowhere better illustrated than in the historicist (culturalist) affirmations of difference, which then proceed nevertheless to discover in these different societies civil societies, and so on, without any awareness that the latter might be products of Eurocentric teleologies, embedded in the very terms themselves, that contradict the notions of difference.

I suggest that such contradictions are products of the isolation of cultural questions from those of political economy. Eurocentrism was globalized not because of any inherent virtue of EuroAmerican values, but because those values were stamped on activities of various kinds that insinuated themselves into existing practices (such as trade), proved to be welcome to certain groups in non-EuroAmerican societies, or, when there was resistance to them, were enforced on the world by the power of arms. In other words, the globalization and universalization of Eurocentrism would have been inconceivable without the dynamism it acquired through capitalism, imperialism, and cultural domination.

It is remarkable, then, that there should be a tendency in various realms of intellectual activity in recent years to erase the role of capitalism in history on the grounds that it is a perpetuation of Eurocentrism to speak of capitalism as the formative moment of modern
history. We may suggest, to the contrary, that without an account of the relationship between Eurocentrism, and the enormous power of capitalism that enabled EuroAmerican expansion, the criticism of Eurocentrism may not only perpetuate Eurocentrism in new guises, but also disguise the ways in which globalism itself is imbued with a Eurocentric worldview. The preoccupation with Eurocentrism pervades not just cultural studies but the rewriting of history, most visibly in efforts to produce a new “world history” that is immune to the Eurocentrism of past histories, which overlooks the possibility that the urge to world history may itself be a EuroAmerican preoccupation that perpetuates earlier hegemonies in a new guise. I am quite sympathetic to the epistemological concerns of world history proponents, namely, to overcome the restrictions of nation-based histories. There is nothing objectionable either about “putting Europe in its place” historically. On the other hand, the representation as Eurocentrism of emphasis on the historical role of modern capitalism promises not only to erase the distinctiveness of modern history, but also to eliminate the capitalist mode of production as a distinct mode with its own forms of production and consumption, oppression and exploitation, and ideology. This is the case with Andre Gunder Frank’s “5,000 year world-system,” which, in the name of erasing Eurocentrism, universalizes and naturalizes capitalist development in much the same fashion as classical economics—that is, by making it into the fate of humankind rather than the conjunctural product of a particular history. Gunder Frank does not explain either why a China- or Asia-centered history constitutes more of a world history than a EuroAmerican centered one. Most seriously, the naturalization of capitalism historically also undermines the possibility of perceiving other alternatives in history, as the only alternatives it allows are alternative capitalisms.  

Even more revealing of the hegemonic implications of a globalized world history is a recent report on the status of world-history writing in China that observes ironically (and to the astonishment of its author) that contrary to what one might expect (we are not told who shares in the expectation—presumably all “Westerners”), Chinese historians continue to write modern world history around the history of capitalism, and, it follows for the author, a Eurocentric paradigm. This to the author is, of course, a product of the continued
domination of Chinese historical thinking by the "ideological framework" of "a European-centered, Marxist-imbued world history." The irony that Chinese should perpetuate Eurocentrism when EuroAmericans have already liberated their thinking from it escapes the author. So does the patronizing conclusion that this is the result of the domination of Chinese thinking by ideology (in contrast, presumably, to our scientific approaches), which perpetuates the hegemonic attitudes of an earlier day. No wonder that the author can also state that the large place given to Chinese history (autonomously of world history) in school curricula issues from "an ethnocentric view not unfamiliar to Western historians. China's self-perception as Zhongguo, or the 'Central Kingdom,' is well-known." Not only does the author erase Chinese historians as contemporaries, instead of questioning her own version of world history, but she also proceeds to erase Chinese history by falling back on the authority of long-standing clichés in the "Western" historiography of China. Aside from the fact that this Chinese "self-perception" has its own history, other societies, too, teach their national histories separately from world history, and give it a large place, which has more to do with nationalist education in the modern world than some Chinese "ethnocentrism." "Whose ethnocentrism" and "whose ideology" are questions that jump to mind immediately, but those questions may not be as important as the underlying hegemonic assumptions in much of the discussion on globalization, including the globalization of history. World history as an undertaking is not to be held responsible for this kind of obscurantism, but its possible hegemonic implications are a reminder nevertheless of the need for intellectual vigilance in an undertaking that is highly vulnerable to producing the opposite of what it intends. One necessary caution is to distinguish Eurocentrism from recognition of the historical role that EuroAmerica, empowered by capitalism, played in the shaping of the modern world.

One of the most remarkable pieties of our times is that to speak of oppression is to erase the subjectivities of the oppressed, which does not seem to realize that not to speak of oppression, but still operate within the teleologies of modernist categories, is to return the responsibility for oppression to its victims. Alternatively, it is to make a mockery of any notion of resistance to oppression, by identifying resistance with any kind of deviation from "normalcy." The result, in
either case, is the evasion of any significant, and historically determined, notion of politics by turning all such encounters into instances of cultural politics. What is also remarkable is the resonance between the political conclusions of contemporary culturalism with the culturalism of an earlier modernizationism: that what is at issue is not politics or political economy but culture.

A blatant example of the dangers implicit in the new culturalism is provided by Samuel Huntington’s vision of “the clash of civilizations.”20 Huntington’s views on “civilizations,” his approach to the question of culture, and the conclusions he draws are diametrically opposed to those of postcolonialism and globalism. He reifies civilizations into culturally homogeneous and spatially mappable entities, insists on drawing impassable boundaries between them, and proposes a fortress EuroAmerica to defend Western civilization against the intrusion of unmodernizable and unassimilable Others. What is remarkable about his views is his disavowal of the involvement of the “West” in other civilization areas. His is a conception of the contemporary world that divides the world into several “civilization” areas, where each hegemonic power should be responsible for the achievement of order in its area. Huntington sustains this remarkable view of the world by refraining from serious analysis of the structures of political economy (does not even say if fortress EuroAmerica is to withdraw its transnational corporations from the rest of the world), by taking out of the definition of culture any element of material culture, by confounding ethnicity, culture, race, and civilization, by questioning the significance of the nation, by an erasure of the legacies of colonialism, and an insistence that whatever has happened in other societies has happened as a consequence of their indigenous values and cultures, and, at the most general level, by a disavowal of history. His divisions of the world are a far cry from the insistence in globalism and postcolonial criticism on the abolition of boundaries, rejections of cultural reification, and negotiations of cultural identity. On the other hand, his reinstatement of the power of indigenous “cultures,” understood in terms not of nations but of “civilizations,” his erasure of colonialism and the reinstatement of persistent native subjectivities, his obliviousness to questions of political economy, and his disavowal of modernity’s history resonate with globalist and postcolonial arguments. This is not to suggest that
they are identical, therefore, or even operate out of the same paradigm (Huntington’s is a paradigm of top-down order), but that they are contemporaneous. There may be a world of difference between the bounded ethnocentrism of Huntington’s vision of the world and the multiculturalist pluralisms of globalism and postcolonialism, but they are at one in foregrounding ethnicity to mystify the transnational structures of unequal power that are their context.

Recognition of Eurocentrism as a historical phenomenon that differs from other centrisms in terms of the totalizing structures that served as its agencies returns us to the question that I raised earlier. If Eurocentrism globalized a certain ethnocentrism, and rendered it into a universal paradigm, is there then an outside to Eurocentrism? An outside to Eurocentrism may be found in places untouched and marginalized by it, which are fewer by the day, or it may be found in its contradictions, which proliferate daily. The universalization of Eurocentrism must itself be understood in terms of the ways in which EuroAmerican values were interpellated into the structures of societies worldwide, transforming their political, social, and economic relations, but not homogenizing them, or assimilating them to the structures and values of Eurocentrism. Questions of homogenization versus heterogenization, sameness and difference, assimilation and differentiation, are in many ways misleading questions, for they confound what are historical processes with the apportionments of identity into ahistorical, static categories. As I understand it here, the universalization of Eurocentric practices and values through the EuroAmerican conquest of the world implies merely the dislodging of societies from their historical trajectories before Europe onto new trajectories, without any implication of uniformity, for the very universalization of Eurocentrism has bred new kinds of struggles over history, which continue in the present. It also implies, however, at least in my understanding, that these struggles took place increasingly on terrains that, however different from one another, now included EuroAmerican power of one kind or another as their dynamic constituents. That, I believe, distinguishes what we might want to describe as a modernity defined by EuroAmerica from earlier forms of domination, which were regionally, politically, and socially limited by the technological, organizational, and ideological limits of
domination. Sinocentrism, however effective in East and Southeast Asia, was nevertheless limited to those regions.

Eurocentrism as compared to earlier "centrism" is universal in three senses. First is the omnipresence globally of the institutions and cultures of EuroAmerican modernity. Although the effects of this modernity may not be uniformly or equally visible on all the surface implied by global, it is nevertheless everywhere forcing widely different peoples into parallel historical trajectories (which, I stress, does not imply identity). Second, it is universal in the sense that Eurocentrism may be diffused through the agencies of non-EuroAmericans, which underlines the importance of a structural appreciation of Eurocentrism. Finally, although Eurocentrism may not be universal in the sense that it permits no outside, it is nevertheless the case that it has become increasingly impossible to imagine outsides to it, if by outside we understand places outside of the reach of EuroAmerican practices. It is not that there are no outsides, but that those outsides must of necessity be conceived of as post-Eurocentric, as products of contradictions generated by the dialectic between a globalizing EuroAmerica and places that struggle against such globalization. What this implies is a common history that of necessity provides the point of departure even for imagining outsides or alternatives to Eurocentrism. Eurocentrism, in other words, is not to be challenged by questioning the values that emanate from EuroAmerica. It requires challenging values and structures that are already part of a global legacy.

In a world that does not operate according to the norms of functionalism, but rather of contradictions, the globalization of Eurocentrism inevitably brings multifaceted contradictions into the very interior of a Eurocentric world, undermining at every moment the integrity of that world, beginning with the notion of Eurocentrism itself. The contemporary critique of Eurocentrism is driven not by victimization by Eurocentrism, but by empowerment within it. Foremost among the critics of Eurocentrism in our day are not those who are marginalized by Eurocentrism, or left out of its structures of power, but those who claim "hybridities" that give access to both Eurocentrism and to its Others, probably more of the former than the latter. If Orientalism was a product of EuroAmericans located in
“contact zones” outside of EuroAmerica, on the margins of non-EuroAmerican societies, anti-Eurocentrism is a product of contact zones located at the hearts of EuroAmerica, or in transnational structures and circuits of power. As contact zones earlier presented EuroAmericans with a choice between civilizing mission and dissolution into “barbarism,” the new contact zones present intellectuals of Third World origin with a choice between “bridging” cultures that, given the persistent inequalities between societies, may mean further invasion of the rest of the world by the structures of power over which EuroAmerica continues to preside, or burning the bridges, so that alternatives might be thinkable to a Eurocentric vision of human futures.

The contrast between building bridges and burning bridges offers a convenient way of identifying differences between contemporary and past radicalisms in their attitudes toward Eurocentrism. As late as the sixties and the seventies, radical evaluations of Eurocentrism insisted on intimate ties between questions of cultural domination and political economy, more often than not encompassed by the term imperialism. Third World national liberation struggles, synthesizing in locally particular ways goals of national independence and socialized economies, sought to “delink” national economies from the global markets of capitalism, to reorganize those economies in accordance with local needs, and to achieve “cultural revolutions” against EuroAmerican cultures of capitalism that would create citizenries responsive to national needs. In First World social sciences, insistence on considerations of political economy became the means to challenge the culturalism of modernization discourses that blamed “backwardness” on the native traditions and cultures of Third World societies.

From a contemporary perspective, both these earlier radical movements and their articulations in new social-science theorizations (such as “world-system analysis”) appear, contrary to their claims, to have been dominated by the master narratives and “foundational” assumptions of Eurocentrism. And to a large extent, this is plausible. In spite of the revolt against capitalism, national liberation movements for the most part remained wedded to the developmentalism of EuroAmerican modernity. They also remained within the spatial webs of Eurocentrism in taking for granted the spatial
arrangements of modernity; most prominently the idea of a Third World itself. The nation-form was taken for granted, with the consequence that the nation was rendered into the location for culture, ignoring that the idea of a national culture could be realized only through the colonization of diverse local cultures.  

Other aspects of contemporary critiques of the radical assumptions of an earlier day seem a great deal more problematic, and may have more to say about the present than the past. The charge of essentialism is a favorite weapon in the arsenal of postcolonialism. It has been brought to bear on ideas of the Third World, Third World nationalism, and so on, which says less about the historical unfolding of these ideas than about efforts to create straw targets against which to validate postcolonialism. Although Third World may have carried essentialist connotations in modernization discourse, this was hardly the way it was understood by the “Third Worlders,” to whom Third World connoted anything but the identity of the societies so described; rather, Third Worldness was a condition of national situations, contingent on relationships between capitalist and noncapitalist societies. In revolutionary nationalisms, national cultures were not the givens of some tradition or other but were conceived of as cultures yet to be created through national struggles for liberation. Foundational categories were anything but foundational; I have described elsewhere how, in the context of a guerrilla revolution in China, for instance, there was considerable attention to the overdetermined and locally contingent nature of social categories, especially of class. That these revolutions worked from a EuroAmerican spatiality means only that present realities provided the point of departure for thinking alternatives to them. Most bizarre is the idea, rather common these days, that to speak of oppression and imperialism as determinants of these revolutions is to ignore or suppress the subjectivities of the oppressed, when these movements themselves represented nothing short of the reassertion of native subjectivities, and sought to create new revolutionary subjectivities. What this silly charge elides are questions of whose subjectivities are at issue, and what kinds of subjectivities we are talking about.

Questions of this nature imply that there is much to be gained from viewing the present in the perspective of the past. The world has changed, indeed, and the radicalism represented by immediate
postcolonial struggles in the Third World truly appears in the present to belong to a distant past, no longer relevant to a contemporary politics. The question is how the world has changed—whether what we witness in the present is a rupture with the past or a reconfiguration of the relationships of power that have facilitated the globalization of earlier forms of power, while eliminating earlier forms of resistance to it. New economic, political, social, and cultural spaces are now in the process of production. Do these new spaces mean that the earlier spatializations of the globe are no longer relevant, or are they superimposed on those earlier spaces to provide more complicated arrangements of domination? There are now assertions of temporalities (including reassertions of traditions). Does that mean that the temporalities of Eurocentrism have disappeared? Consumerism, culture industries, and the production of signs seem to have moved to the forefront of economies, replacing political by discursive economies—at least for those situated in postmodernist First Worlds. Does that mean that production and political economy are no longer relevant? The diffusion of markets and market mentalities has rendered the production of cultures and identities a matter of negotiation. Does that mean that there are no longer inequalities in the marketplace? The list could go on, but it will suffice.

That these questions are missing from much of the contemporary discussion of globalism and postcolonialism may not be too surprising, because for all their claims to radicalism, and significant differences between them, both globalism and postcolonialism represent accommodations to contemporary configurations of power in which they are complicit. This is quite evident in the case of globalism, which is promoted by capital and its institutions, for whom globalization is anything but a matter of culture. In this perspective, globalism is little more than a recognition that capital is no longer just EuroAmerican, that there are successful participants in it who hail from other locations, and that other than EuroAmerican cultures must be incorporated into the structures and operations of capital because transnationalism itself implies the interiorization of difference—so long as they recognize the primacy of those structures in the first place.25 In social-science theory—or history, for that matter—these Others must be recognized in the fullness of their “traditions” and indigenous subjectivities, which are denied in discourses of imperialism.
and oppression. Never mind that social-science theory, into which differences are interpellated, itself represents a kind of thinking about the world grounded in Eurocentric structures of power. Hence it becomes possible to speak of different "civil societies," grounded in different social configurations, as if the term civil society were innocent in its political implications. And, of course, "rational choice theory" represents a transcending of cultural differences in its "scientificity," as if science as a mode of comprehending the world had nothing to do with "culture." One foundation representative remarks in support of globalization that "Western theories" are not "for the rest of the world to adopt." There is no indication in the statement that "Western" itself might be redundant, as it may be implicit already in the term theory.

Unlike globalization, which is founded in the developmentalist assumptions of capitalism, postcolonialism seems to me to be more of an accommodation with a current structure of power than an apology for it. The present situation is better described as postrevolutionary rather than postcolonial, because while the immediate response to postcoloniality as a historical phenomenon was revolution, contemporary postcolonialism eschews revolutionary options for accommodation to the capitalist world-system. The postcolonial rush to culture is an escape not only from the structures of political economy, but more importantly from revolutionary radicalisms of the past, which are now denied not only contemporary relevance, but even past significance.

Postcolonialism's complicity with contemporary configurations of power rests in its explicit repudiation of structures and "foundational" categories, which obviate the need to address the question of structured power in considerations of change, but also in its culturalism. Localized encounters and identity politics seem to serve in postcolonialism not as a refinement of, but as a substitute for, structured inequalities and struggles against it. More significant may be the rereading of the past with such a "methodology," which also serves to erase the memory of more radical struggles for culture and identity, and renders localism into a metanarrative that postcolonialism supposedly repudiates. What is remarkable about postcolonialism methodologically and conceptually is that for all its objections to "essentialism," it is based on presumptions of essentialized identities,
which is implicit in notions of “hybridity,” “third space,” and so on. Repudiation of foundational categories also relieves it of the obligation to confront “differences” along the fault lines of classes, genders, races, and so on, which all become subject to negotiations of one kind or another. Postcolonialism, repudiating Eurocentric spatializations, ironically also returns us to pre–World War II spaces, where spaces established by colonial empires are acknowledged on unguarded occasions to provide spaces for theorizing about culture and identities.27 Most important, however, may be that in its repudiation of the structures of political economy in the name of discourses and culture, postcolonialism returns us past an earlier concern with political economy to the culturalism of modernization discourse. Its own discourse on culture is quite different, needless to say, than the spaceless and timeless cultures presumed by modernization discourse, but it is at one with the latter in elevating culture to primacy in social and cultural theory.

The parallel has interesting implications. Culturalism in modernization discourse served to conceal inequalities in the realms of economy and politics, and to shift the blame for problems in development from the dominant to the dominated—all the time assuming a certain teleology of development. Postcolonialism eschews teleology, and it eschews fixed, essentialized notions of culture. But what are we to make of its isolation of questions of culture from those of political economy? Does it also serve as some kind of cover for inequalities and oppressions that are no less a characteristic of the present than they were of the past? Postcolonialism itself does not provide an answer to these questions, because it refuses to address them in the first place. Clearly, the present represents not a rupture with the past but its reconfiguration. If the transnationalization, and transnational domination, of capital are one prominent feature of the contemporary world situation, another is the transnationalization of the class structures associated with capitalist domination. Postcolonialism, as Aijaz Ahmad observes, may be a “matter of class.”28 But it is not just a matter of class. It is also a matter of a class relocated to the centers of capital, in the new contact zones to which I referred earlier, which serve as sites of negotiation—“in the belly of the beast,” as Gayatri Spivak once put it. Spivak knows better than to say that this is the
whole story, but for most postcolonialists who do not share her radicalism, that does seem to be the whole story. The “contact zones” at the heart of EuroAmerica provide locations where cultural difference may be asserted while sharing in the powers of the center, in which culture serves as a means to evade questions of inequality and oppression in interclass relations but is a useful means to identity in intraclass negotiations for power. Contact zones located on the boundaries of societies of the “Other” produced earlier Orientalisms; contact zones at the core produce “self-Orientalizations.” Unlike the former, which distanced societies from one another, the latter produces multiculturalist redefinitions of global power—as is indicated in the idea of “ethnoscapes,” or the stipulation of diasporic identities, regardless of place, class, gender, and so on. Interestingly, it is a new generation of Third Worlders, firmly established in the structures of Eurocentric power, who now speak for the societies from which they hail, while those back at home are condemned to inaudibility—or parochialism.

The refusal to situate theory with respect to the structures of power also has significant political implications. Culturalism of the contemporary variety also makes it impossible to evaluate cultures in terms of their political implications. It is a commonplace these days that there is no longer a “right” or a “left,” or conservatives or radicals. This may be an improvement over an earlier modernization discourse, which classified people outside of Europe according to where they stood vis-à-vis the values of Europe and the United States, so that any defense of native culture, for example, immediately led to the label “conservative,” while liberals and radicals derived their standing similarly from their willingness to assimilate Eurocentric conceptualizations of culture and politics. On the other hand, acquiescence in a contemporary cultural relativism—such as in “multiculturalism”—rules out political judgment except on the most contingent basis, which is one reason for the call by Slavoj Zizek for a renewal of Eurocentrism. Zizek credits Eurocentrism as a source of universalisms that are crucial to radical politics. Although there is much to be said for his argument, the plea nevertheless begs the question of what the agency and content of a contemporary universalism might be.
Much of what I have observed above may seem to have little to do with history as a discipline, for historians have been notably absent from recent discussions over history as epistemology. It is probably not too much of an exaggeration to suggest that a crisis of historical consciousness is one of the markers of life at the end of the twentieth century. The crisis refers to both the ways in which we think the relationship between the present and the past and, therefore, the relevance and validity of anything we may have to say about the past. A sense of a break not just with the immediate past but with the whole history of modernity calls into question anything history might offer to an understanding of the present. Historians might have a significant part to play in reasserting the significance of past perspectives in a critical appreciation of the present; but they seem to have adjusted with remarkable speed to the contemporary rewriting of the past. It is a professional disease of historians, especially of positivist historians, and a limitation on their imagination, that they may blame everything on the limitations of archives. A conviction that the only obstacle to truth lies in the limitations of archives helps historians avoid the challenges of historical crises by falling back on archival limitations. If things did not go the way a previous generation of historians had indicated, or if the problems of a previous generation no longer seem relevant, the historian can always claim that it was not in the archives.

In my own field of modern Chinese history, changes in China call for an urgent consideration of historical paradigms, and an evaluation of competing paradigms. Two generations of historians of China (in China and abroad) have taken revolution to be the paradigm around which to write modern Chinese history. That paradigm now lies in ruins, not because the paradigm itself was wrong necessarily, but because the revolution is a thing of the past in a China where leaders may pay lip service to the revolution in their very unrevolutionary and unsocialist turn to incorporation into capitalism. Rather than observe the turn critically, historians have been quick to deny that there was a revolution, that what had been considered a revolution was really nothing more than the perpetuation of backwardness, and that it was the archives that were responsible for their failure to
foresee the fate of the revolution. The denial of revolution, not surprisingly, is accompanied by a shift of attention to pasts that may be more consonant with the self-images of the present. The question here is not just a question of ideology in history, it is also a question of bad history that refuses to acknowledge the ways in which the revolutionary past, having failed to achieve its putative goals, nevertheless served to shape the present.31

A reasonable alternative to this rapid adjustment to the present that also requires a disavowal of the past (both the past in actuality and the past in historiography) might be to acknowledge the crisis, and turn to a revaluation of the past, not by an abandonment of the paradigm of revolution, but by inquiring into the meaning of revolution.32 Radical historiography does not consist of the abandonment, or rewriting, of the past every time a new historical situation presents itself—in which case it cannot overcome a continuing adjustment to the present, which is hardly a claim to radicalism, as it makes it impossible to differentiate what is radical from what is mimicry of the demands of power. Rather, it is informed by a principled defense of autonomous political positions that question ever-shifting claims to reality, not by denying reality, but by critically evaluating its claims on the past and the present. If the past has no relevance to understanding the present, but is merely a plaything in the hands of the latter, there would seem to be little meaning to even claim validity for history as epistemology—or, for that matter, to any truth embedded in the archives of the past—which is the conclusion indicated by a radical postmodernism.

The proposition that “history is a sign of the modern” would suggest only to the most naive that the moment we have gone “postmodern,” we may therefore abandon history. The posts of our age, to those who would read them with some sense of reality, should suggest that what comes after bears upon it the imprint of what went on before, and that we are not as free as we might think of the legacies we have consigned to the past—which, for all his obscurantism, is the point that Huntington makes forcefully. The same goes for postrevolutionary, and for what has been my primary concern in this discussion, post-Eurocentric. Our conceptions of the world face the predicament of turning into ideologies the moment that they forget their own historicities. And awareness of historicity requires
attention both to transformations and to the presence of the past in such transformations.

To clarify further what I am suggesting here, it may be useful to contrast my critique of Eurocentrism with that of the historian of India, Dipesh Chakrabarty. At least in his more theoretical writings, Chakrabarty shares many of the arguments advanced here, most fundamentally that Eurocentrism is everywhere, including the very writing of history (and, I might add, geography). He is also unwilling, unlike in some more atavistic versions of anti-Eurocentrism, to repudiate either the legacy of the Enlightenment or that of the nation in the writing of history (indeed, he sees the nation as the location for historical consciousness, which is threatened by the consumerism of capital). Finally, he is quite willing to speak of history in relationship to the cultures of capitalism. Against this seemingly invincible hegemony of history (read, Eurocentrism), Chakrabarty, in a stance very similar to the one here, finds in “fragmentary and episodic ... knowledge-forms” a promise of a more democratic knowledge.

On the other hand, it is not clear from Chakrabarty's arguments whether or not his own project includes anything beyond challenging Eurocentric “knowledge-forms” or “provincializing Europe.” Judging by his argument, the “fragmentary and episodic ... knowledge-forms” he speaks of are intended mainly to undermine Eurocentric claims to universality, and not to privilege the lives, or modes of living, that produce those knowledge-forms. In the same vein, Chakrabarty has little to say on questions of development, capitalism, and so on, except as they relate to colonialism’s knowledge. It is not very surprising, therefore, that, under his editorship, the journal Subaltern Studies has abandoned and shifted its priorities from its originary concern to give a voice to the “subalterns” to “deconstructing” colonial representations of India and the Third World. By contrast, my argument here is intended to redirect attention from “culture” to “structures,” or at the least culture in relationship to the structures of political economy. The difference, I think, is a crucial one: if Eurocentrism resides ultimately in the structures of everyday life as they are shaped by capital, it is those structures that must be transformed in order also to challenge Eurocentrism. “Knowledge-forms” are crucial, but not as an end in themselves; they are most important for showing the way to different kinds of living. The
project implied here is quite different from the postcolonial, multiculturalist thrust of Chakrabarty’s culturalist critique.

To affirm the historical role that Eurocentrism has played in shaping the contemporary world is not to endow it with some normative power, but to recognize the ways in which it continues to be an intimate part of the shaping of the world, which is not going to disappear with willful acts of its cultural negation. One aspect of Eurocentrism that infused both earlier revolutionary ideologies and the accommodationist alternatives of the present seems to me to be especially important, perhaps more important for the historian than for others because it is complicit in our imagination of temporalities: developmentalism. The notion that development is as natural to humanity as air and water is deeply embedded in our consciousness, and yet development as an idea is a relatively recent one in human history. As Arturo Escobar has argued forcefully in a number of writings, development as a discourse is embedded not just in the realm of ideology, but in institutional structures that are fundamental to the globalization of capital.36

If globalism is a way of promoting these structures by rendering their claims into scientific truths, postcolonialism serves as their alibi by not acknowledging their presence. Historians, meanwhile, continue to write history as if attaining the goals of development were the measure against which the past can be evaluated. That, I think, is the most eloquent testimonial to the implication of our times in the continuing hegemony of capital, for which the disavowal of an earlier past serves as disguise. It also indicates where the tasks may be located for a radical agenda appropriate to the present: in questioning contemporary dehistoricizations of the present and the past, and returning inquiry to the search for alternatives to developmentalism. However we may conceive such alternatives, they are likely to be post-Eurocentric, recognizing that any radical alternatives to modernity’s forms of domination must confront not just the cultures, but also the structures of modernity. At any rate, it seems to me that we need a reaffirmation of history and historicity at this moment of crisis in historical consciousness, especially because history seems to be irrelevant—either because of its renunciation at the centers of power where a postmodernism declares a rupture with the past, unable to decide whether such a rupture constitutes a celebration or
a denunciation of capitalism, or, contradictorily, because of an affirmation of premodernity among those who were the objects of modernity, who proclaim in order to recover their own subjectivities that modernity made no difference after all. A historical epistemology will not resolve the contradiction, or provide a guide to the future, but it might serve at least to clarify the ways in which the present uses and abuses the past, and serve as a reminder of our own historicity—why we say and do things differently than they were said or done in the past. Ours is an age when there is once again an inflation of claims to critical consciousness. These claims are often based on an expanded consciousness of space. We need to remind ourselves, every time we speak of the constructedness of some space or other, that it may be impossible, for that very reason, to think of spaces without at the same time thinking of the times that produced those spaces.

Notes
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2. This is not to say that culture and discourse are the popular choices only for postcolonialism and globalism. What I describe here as a new culturalism is characteristic of contemporary critical thought in general, and has its origins in the turn from the seventies to culture and discourse in varieties of poststructuralism, postmodernism, cultural studies, feminism, and so on.
4. Postcolonial criticism covers a wide political (and, therefore, intellectual) range: from the Marxist feminism of Gayatri Spivak to the near libertarianism of Homi Bhabha and, more recently, Stuart Hall.
5. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, eds., *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 1; emphasis in the original. I have offered more sustained critiques of the problems of postcolonialism elsewhere, and draw on those earlier critiques in much of the discussion that follows. These critiques may be found in Arif Dirlik, *The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1997). Of special interest from the perspective of questions of history may be the Introduction ("Postcoloniality and the Perspective of History"), "Three Worlds or One, or Many: The Reconfiguration of Global Relations under Contemporary Capitalism," and "Postcolonial or Postrevolutionary: The Problem of History in Postcolonial Criticism."


8. For an even more uncompromising argument for the priority of culture, see Rob Boyne, "Culture and the World-System," in Featherstone, *Global Culture*, pp. 57–62, where Boyne attacks Immanuel Wallerstein for speaking of culture in conjunction with economic and political analysis.


10. That we should be more attentive to modernity rather than Eurocentrism is a view that I share with John Tomlinson, *Cultural Imperialism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991). I do not, however, share Tomlinson's conclusion, therefore, that EuroAmerican agency may be taken out of the picture by such a shift of attention.


12. In a rather ill-conceived essay, Stuart Hall brings a charge of ("primitive" as well as "primeval") "functionalism" against this author (along with Robert Young). See Stuart Hall, "When Was 'the Postcolonial'? Thinking at the Limit," in Iain Chambers and Lidia Curti, eds., *The Postcolonial Question: Common Skies, Divided Horizons* (New York: Routledge, 1996). The charge does not call for comment, except to note that it is rather below the potential of such a distinguished cultural critic, to whose formulations I would myself acknowledge a debt. Rather than methodological problems of culturalism and functionalism, Hall's attack may have something to do with the post-Thatcherite turn in British Marxism. For this turn, see Chantal Mouffe, "The End of Politics and the Rise of the Radical Right" *Dissent* 42 (fall 1995): 498–502.


15. This is analyzed with brilliant pithiness by Samir Amin in Eurocentrism (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1989). Historians of Europe have also demonstrated that Europe, and "nations" within Europe, were products of an internal colonization that paralleled the "European" colonization of the world. For Europe, see Fernand Braudel, Civilization and Capitalism, 15th to 18th Century, 3 vols., trans. Sian Reynolds (New York: Harper and Row, 1984), especially vol. 3, The Perspective of the World. For an outstanding study of internal colonization in the creation of nations, see Eugen Weber, Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914 (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1976). Societies such as the United States, Canada, and Australia, themselves colonial creations, interestingly provide the most explicit examples of such colonization in the creation of modern nation-states.

16. Andre Gunder Frank, ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), especially chapter 1. My analogy with "classical economics" pertains only to the conclusions to be drawn with regard to economic development. Otherwise, Frank's analysis is informed by both Marxism and world-system analysis, of which he has long been a practitioner.


18. Ibid., p. 8.

19. I am referring here to certain kinds of writing that assume categorical teleologies, that then proceed to judge other peoples for having failed to live up to them. An example of this kind of teleology, on the issue of class, is Dipesh Chakrabarty, Rethinking Working-Class History (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989). Equally prominent are writings on feminism. There has been an almost concerted writing attacking the condition of women in China that not only ignores what Chinese women might or might not want, but that has encouraged attacks on the socialist program for women, which has certainly accomplished a great deal more for women than any time earlier. It is interesting that feminists who attack the socialist program for what it has failed to achieve are often oblivious to what socialism has achieved, because it has not achieved what they think ought to have been achieved. This is not to say that women's questions should be reduced to what is of concern to women under socialism, but that women under socialism or under precapitalism may have a great deal to teach women who have discovered their "womanness" under capitalism and, regardless of what they may claim, are conditioned in their feminism by the mode of production that is their context.

21. There is plenty of evidence of this, including in the “civilizing mission” of the nation-state. One such piece of evidence is almost irresistible in the ironies it presents. A BBC report on Tibet, broadcast on October 18, 1998, had Tibetans complaining that in addition to the usual practices of religious suppression, the Chinese were now introducing capitalism to Tibet, introducing new hardships into the lives of the people. The “socialist” government of China has always assumed the burden of “civilizing” minority groups supposedly at an earlier stage of historical development; but now it is capitalism that provides the medium.

22. It needs to be emphasized here that while contemporary theory has problematized the nation-form, contemporary political reality points in an opposite direction. The nation persists, minus its earlier revolutionary vision. If anything, nationalism in our day has taken the form of virulent nativism.


24. Buell, National Culture and the New Global System, provides an egregious example of this tendency. The volume opens up with an attack on Herbert Schiller for his views on cultural imperialism.

25. It is necessary to point out that the idea of “different cultures of capitalism,” which acquired currency with the globalization of capital, is a rather tentative one. The recent crisis in Asian capitalisms, and the measures imposed for its solution, suggest the persistence of a struggle over the form of capitalism. The core capitalist state, the United States, unquestionably exerts hegemonic pressures to reorganize other capitalisms around its own model. For a discussion that calls into question Asian capitalism, see Wang Ruisheng, “Yazhou jiazhi yu jinyong weiji” (Asian values and the financial crisis), Zhexue yanjiu (Philosophical Research), no. 4 (1998): 23–30.


29. I am referring here to the reification of cultures at the level of diasporas, an egregious example being the idea of a “cultural China.” For an extended discussion, see Arif Dirlik, “Confucius on the Borderlands: Global Capitalism and the Reinvention of Confucianism,” boundary 2 22:3 (fall 1995): 229–73. Attention to
diasporas points to a second aspect of the part that culture may play in intra-elite struggles. Preoccupation with Eurocentrism occludes the struggles among “native” elites over the definition of cultural identity. As diasporic populations may be denied their cultural “authenticity” by those in the societies of departure, the repudiation of “authenticity,” and the reaffirmation of “hybridity,” provide obvious strategies in countering such denial.


