

World History and the Twentieth-Century World

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World history is back, with its own journal and association of historians, a spate of new textbooks and undergraduate courses, and a burgeoning list of scholarly studies (Allardyce, 1982, 1990). Everyone recognizes that the situation we face at the end of the 20th century demands global perspectives, even universal comprehensions. Yet the recent renewal of interest in world history has not solved, nor even addressed, the intellectual problems that defeated world history as an academic discipline earlier in the century. It is not even clear what world history should study. The quite necessary critique of the Eurocentric narrative which once underwrote all world histories still requires a more positive, alternative conception based on something beyond equal treatment or comparative gestures. At the same time, the apparent inclination among western scholars to turn world history into another name for world systems theory, or to appropriate it to the continuing fascination with the early modern (European) period, needs to be challenged, if not resisted outright. This essay offers a case for re-constituting world history on a new basis.

1. The World as It Is

World history at the end of the 20th century must begin with new imaginings. It cannot continue to announce the unification of the world, as if the processes of global integration (call it progress or modernization or westernization or development) have swept all before them and now shape, unilaterally, the trajectory of universal history. For the spread or diffusion of techniques, practices, and concepts from one region to - and over - the rest of the world does not adequately describe what has happened in this century, nor what is presently shaping the course of global development at the end of this century (von Laue, 1987). The circuits of power that now girdle the earth and bind it together in ever more dense interconnections are not only partial and uneven; they are without precise geographical centers and remain difficult to represent, let alone theorize. But their general impact would seem to be, not toward greater homogenization and sameness among the peoples of the world, but toward greater interconnectedness in the midst of a renewal of difference.

Conversely, it is not enough to build world history from a critique of the Eurocentric model. If the processes of global integration cannot be an adequate subject of study, neither can the counterpoint of resistance. The capacity of traditional ways or particularist cultures to hold out against western pressure cannot adequately explain the lapses and shortcomings of an otherwise irresistible tide of change. There are no traditional societies left in the world; and consequently difference cannot be treated as the residuum of some pre-western essentialism left over from a "golden age" now gone by. Difference is being reconstituted in the context of global integration. Notwithstanding the reclamations of localism, the world is unified; notwithstanding the proclamations of modernism, the unified world is a place where difference proliferates and matters. What we have grates against the familiar European narratives and national histories with which scholars have traditionally worked; these do not "add up" to a picture of the world as we have it, nor do they any

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longer account for the patterns of difference that proliferate within an integrated world.

This situation is largely a crisis of the western imagination and of western expectations about the course and destination of global development. The century began with the expectation of achieving a modern and thoroughly homogeneous world that would become one as a result of the expansion of the west and the consolidation of its power at the center of an integrated human experience. It ends with people asserting difference and rejecting sameness around the world in a remarkable synchrony that suggests, in fact, the high degree of integration that has actually been achieved. In many ways, this disjuncture of experience and expectation at the end of the 20th century is a product, both of western efforts to organize a centered world order and of the unraveling of these efforts at their point of farthest extension (Geyer and Bright, 1995). From the mid-19th century, a growing capacity in the west to dominate the world and organize it found expression in efforts to establish and maintain hegemonic regimes of hierarchical order and settled rules. The *pax Britannica* before the First World War and the *pax Americana* after the Second, both expressed and fostered processes of global integration which they also attempted to center in western industrial systems and in a western discourse about the whole. The failure of these centers to cohere as pivots of world order, as well as the parallel intensification of global production and transnational accumulation that they fostered in failing, has brought this epoch of western hegemony within an integrating world to an end. This has enormous implications for the postmodern/postwestern world and for western intellectual constructions about it. But it must also be emphasized that the faltering of a western-centered world order does not mean an end to global integration. Circuits of power, production, and exchange are now truly transnational and arrangements and practices that sustain and further this integration proceed without precise or stable geographical centers, creating genuinely transnational regimes and rules that are enforced (if at all), not by single power centers but by instrumental logic (what works) and segmented practices (corporate routines and negotiable regulations).

Although we know these networks and circuits exist—as tangible, or at least palpable, presences we sense everyday, in watching TV, using credit cards, buying goods—it remains unclear how to map or represent the whole or to narrate the dynamics forging an integrated world. The best scholarship (Appadurai, 1990; Carnoy, et al., 1993; Sassen; 1991, Castells; 1994, Rouse; 1991) coheres around metaphors of movement, flow, and circuitry, following people, goods, and images in motion and seeking to specify the structural practices and imaginary "landscapes" that are created by, and sustain this movement. The difficulty of this enterprise consists, not only in the novelty of things, but in the fact that the world as it is lacks a coherent history. Instead we fumble around with narrative residues from previous epochs—expectations of a unified world, conventions of western power politics and world systems theory, paradigms that divide the world into west and rest, rich and poor, centers and peripheries, and narratives that frame themselves in terms of national histories—all of which are rapidly being "trumped" by something very different.

But this lack of fit is only half of the puzzle of contemporary history. For however we begin to represent the unified world and narrate its history, we must also account for the waves of resistances, rebellions, nationalisms, ethnic renewals and cleansings, fundamentalisms, new social movements, and "special interest" campaigns that "infest" this integrating world. These cannot be treated as mere residues of past ages, clinging to a marginal existence in a world now fully integrated and/or westernized, nor as the reassertion of some essential "otherness," resurfacing in the recession of western power to reject its legacy and reproduce under changed

conditions the customs and beliefs of previous generations. These are "new" constructions which appear everywhere—in the old centers as well as on the peripheries, in the advanced as well as the "underdeveloped" zones of the world—and reconfigure old boundaries. For all their diversity, they have this in common: that they selectively appropriate and rework elements of particularist pasts and of global technique into thoroughly "modern," i.e., contemporary, communities of difference. They are fusions of the global and the local, of disparate "manners," forged in strenuous effort to rearticulate or preserve the conditions of societalization (*Vergesellschaftung*) in a contemporary context. They are expressions, less of some stubborn insistence on local culture than of people, caught up in the powerful forces of global integration, aligning themselves with what they cannot change and appropriating what they find at hand in their continuing efforts to reproduce everyday life, build communities and defend the cultural practices of gender, ethnicity, generation, and race around which social life coheres. As much as people everywhere have become part of an integrated world, they live in specific place(s) which they try to mold into their own world(s).

The complex and increasingly dense dialectic between synchronized and transnational systems of coordination and order (themselves less and less purely western in character) and a multitude of distinct patterns of appropriation and adaptation by peoples engaged in their own social and cultural reproduction defines a struggle, not for or against integration itself, but over the terms of that integration—over who, or what, controls and defines the identity of individuals, social groups, nations and cultures within an integrated world. Contrary to all expectations and conventional wisdom, the creation of difference and the defense of autonomous paths in the context of world-wide social and economic transformation appear as the hallmarks of "development" in the 20th century, and the outcome is not "a" modern world, but the multiplication of alternative modernities. The world is driven apart even as it is drawn together, in a simultaneous deepening of integration and estrangement.

In this, we confront the unique problematique of world history in the late 20th century. Its task is to comprehend and narrate both the processes of global integration—that is, the concrete practices and social formations that drive global systems of communication, investment, production, exchange, and management and set these circuits of power apart—and the processes that renew difference—that is, the concrete practices of appropriation and adaptation by which people, who live the big changes of global integration in particular places and contexts, appropriate global technique to their specific requirements of social reproduction and community-building. A world history of the 20th century must study these as related, not just interactive processes, for they spawn and reinforce one another and in shaping, together, a unique and quite contingent trajectory of global development in our era, they not only tend increasingly to push aside or challenge previous imaginings and conventional paradigms of explanation, but they define a new and distinct problem for historical study. In recognizing that global development in the 20th century has spun out of control of our narrative conventions, world history must attempt to find a representation of the whole as a field of human contestations in which the histories of the world are forced together, but societies and people are not thereby transformed into one, or even made more alike. In doing so, the theory and practice of world history may also recapture the promise of 20th-century history—that in forging one world, in which humanity becomes a material whole with a planetary destiny and discourse, we do not arrive at the end of history. Indeed, world history—as the history of the "actually existing" world that is one, yet many—has just begun.

2. Universalist Imaginings

New imaginings are a regular feature of the history of history. The burning concern of early modern thinkers and savants in Europe was how to respond to the rising tide of accumulating information about the world—how to conceptualize the world they actually confronted. New knowledge about other "presents," as in the Americas or the Pacific, and expanded knowledge about other "ancients," as in India or China, relentlessly undercut the time-honored authorities of western thought derived from the classics and the Bible. New compilations of the politics, manners, customs, cultures and above all religions of "others" stretched existing schemes of knowledge in the west to the breaking point. Established paradigms of thought had to be shattered in order that they might be reconstituted. Western history, in its new magisterial form, emerged from this breach and soared. With the Enlightenment came a sustained effort to encapsulate (and rewrite) the story of mankind as a whole, and to impose continuities across the ruptures of knowledge that had resulted from a growing encounter with the rest of the world.

By the early 19th century, Hegel (in his *Philosophy of History*) could contend that it was impossible to write proper (i.e., philosophical, or western) history unless one knew the end (i.e., the meaning) and the outcome (i.e., the direction) of the global narrative. The charge he set for world history was nothing less than an inquiry into "the essential destiny of Reason" in an effort to grasp the "ultimate design of the world." His own vision was not modest: "Universal History...shows the development of the consciousness of Freedom on the part of the Spirit, and of the consequent realization of that Freedom. This development [or evolution, as it soon became] implies a gradation—a series of increasingly adequate expressions or manifestations of Freedom, which resulted from its Idea. ...[I]t assumes successive forms which it successively transcends." In this discourse of progress or advance, the histories of "other" civilizations where the spirit once resided held only past relevance, pointing on toward the further elaboration of the Idea and its eventual fulfillment in the triumph of "western man," now rendered as "universal man."

These were basic assumptions, shared by the great European systems-builders of the 18th and 19th centuries—all of whom took as their object of study "mankind" or "humanity" as a whole, and sought to uncover the laws or first principles that governed its destiny. Whether they understood this to be the advance of mankind toward moral and scientific enlightenment (Condorcet), or the historical development of the species toward freedom (Hegel), or the universalization of the capitalist mode of production (Marx), or the triumph of the white race over the non-white peoples of the earth (Huxley), they all assumed that the long-term trajectory of humankind was toward a higher, better, more civilized condition and that the destination of all human history—the trajectory of historical development—led toward western civilization now destined to become ever more universal.

The scope of this historical imagination was resolutely all-encompassing. Indeed, universalization served the double function of explaining the past and anticipating the future. Starting with the ancient empires of the east, world history developed over and through historical regions (spaces) and gained its meaning in the temporary articulations of each stage in humanity's "advance," ending with the triumph of reason in the west. This was the final site of universal history. Henceforth, into the future, world history was to be an extension of this grand march of progress, heading forward, upward, onward on the back of western expansion and development toward an ever-more integrated global finale. The direction of this progression was known (in the sense that western history had come to hold the secret of the whole) and it was overwhelmingly upbeat—moving toward a more unified, enlightened,

implicitly or explicitly westernized, humanity. In this eminently desirable and happy outcome lay the meaning of the human past and the promise of the present.

That this was a thoroughly Eurocentric history bears restating, but it was also the first attempt by western thought to imagine whole a world that was now known about. It was thus a thoroughly modern project which broke with previous European perceptions of the world, eradicating local memories in order to reconstitute the European past as universal history. As an act of sustained imagining, this proved immensely powerful, not only in canalizing and ordering new information about the "other" but in salvaging from the ruins of past authorities (the Bible and the Greeks) the essential elements of epistemic knowledge. This was a crucial appropriation, because it imparted to western world history a certainty and a dynamism that could grow with European power. A world that could be imagined could also be circumnavigated, described, mapped, and catalogued: a world that could be mentally ordered and arranged could also be physically conquered and organized. Thus western imaginings could be inscribed on the world as acts of power (Blaut, 1993).

Yet for all this, western world history remained an act of the imagination and thereby thoroughly idealist. It was the creation, quite literally, of a *Weltbild*. It was a representation of the world as image, the narration of an imagined totality; this totality did not otherwise exist. The world of universal history was thus "made up." Wilhelm von Humboldt (von Humboldt, 1967; White, 1973, pp. 179-180) put the point succinctly: "What appears of the events that have happened is dispersed, torn, fragmented. [The element] that links these bits and pieces, which puts the particular in its true light, and which gives shape to the whole, this element is removed from first-hand observation." The links that tied the world together were imaginary, not empirical ones. The operation to discern them was inductive, moving from dispersed traces to a representation of an imagined (and essential) whole. What was an "inner truth" or "essential element" for Humboldt became the "invisible hand" of Adam Smith—an unseen construct of the mind that held the multiple appearances of the world together and emplotted them as a meaningful totality. World history always entailed strategies of representation.

The main outline of this universal knowledge is still with us, embedded in the heart of all the social sciences. But in fact, world history as a universal imagining was undercut and disrupted by the very processes of global integration that it heralded. For, as it happened, the actual integration of the world was not an ideal or imaginary construct, but a series of concrete, direct, and discrete interventions and colonial renovations of the "other." Distant civilizations, whose historic significance, so far as universal history was concerned, lay in the past, were re-rendered—no longer objects of imagining, but subjects of imperial rule. It turned out that actually making the world one disturbed "perspective," collapsing both the distance and that ordering gaze which had made the universalizing vision of an idealist world history possible. Paradoxically, the grand Hegelian narration ceased to produce explanations at precisely the moment, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, that an integrated world began to take concrete shape. What arose in its place by the turn of the century was the (now) grand tradition in history and sociology of comparative civilizations which, for all their manifest debt to the universalizing vision of world history, also represented a fundamental reconfiguring of that historical imagination in the face of western imperialism and industrial expansion.

When Ernst Troeltsch dismissed all efforts at writing a history of humanity as "bookbinders' synthesis," mere collages of discrete regional and cultural knowledges that made no coherent sense as a totality, he not only liberated the study of civilizations from the Hegelian structure of an onward-marching "spirit" working itself out in successive articulations; he also set these "other" civilizations loose, as it were, and gave them a "present." The "other" now became "our" "traditional"

contemporaries whose "stagnation" was the standard against which to measure the surging power of the "modern." The new historicism, together with the more robust sociology of Max Weber, sought to chart the divergent historical paths of "world" civilizations (usually four or five in number: China, India, Islam, Latin Christendom, and (sometimes) Byzantium-Russia) in order to account, through a series of juxtapositions and comparisons, for what was happening in and to the West. These were, in effect, meditations upon western exceptionalism. Especially German intellectuals abandoned any presumption of the connectedness of humankind, preferring to treat each civilization as autonomous clusters of authentic(ized) culture. They also abandoned notions of progress by clear historical stages in favor of a new hierarchical ordering of coeval societies, in which progress was measured in terms of small differences becoming, historically, relative advantages, becoming eventually, an absolute superiority. If China and India were no longer "dead" civilizations, they were presently "backward," and their contemporary importance was found almost entirely in the comparative light they cast upon the one history that really mattered—that of the west.

This world historical imagination, in appropriating the universalist vision to a comparative examination of the world as a co-existing whole, became a hegemonic science, following the outward projections of western power in the subordination of the rest. But for all its aesthetic cogency in visualizing past and future, it always had difficulty narrating its own present. For ultimately, studying civilizations comparatively, in order to highlight western difference, posed obstacles in thinking beyond separate civilizations, their distinctiveness and specificity in contrast to one another, to a world of sustained and on-going interactions—that is, to the kind of continuous intermeshing of civilizational trajectories that dissolved, permanently, discrete civilizations and forced separate histories together. In practice, the focus on grand civilizations amounted to a refusal to think about the world actually being made in the course of the 20th century—except to stress its unique, essentially western character before proceeding to study (however skeptically, even pessimistically) the trajectory of that western civilization. Indeed, the most typical narrative strategy derived from the comparative civilizations approach, one widely employed in world history texts, is simply to abandon study of the "rest" once the west moves ahead. Comparison becomes a system of references to stagnant residuals, and we get a sort of flotation model of world history, in which societies elsewhere (now rendered "traditional") get submerged beneath the great western tidal wave, and the cultural contestations of the contemporary world get read either as traces of the "traditional" hanging in there, or as the resurfacing of essentialist cultures in the ebb-tide of western power. Global history thus becomes entirely a history of the west for the west, seen as a cumulative process in which the west becomes "ever more so," realizing, if not its world historical destiny, at least the possibilities inherent in its accumulating advantages. If not ordained by the "spirit," it remains a "miracle" nevertheless.

That the comparative civilizations approach continues to play a key role in our world historical imagination goes without saying. But in the course of the 20th century, the key assumption embedded in this kind of grand comparison—that the west is the really crucial civilization, whose uniqueness is affirmed in comparative light—has become ever more problematic. A deepening intellectual pessimism, presaged in Weber and expanded in the interwar years to a conviction or fear that bourgeois society and liberal values were cracking, found its most dramatic expression in Oswald Spengler's treatise on the decline of the west and moody echoes of these themes in British meditations on the imperial recession. World history, as European history writ larger than the others, turned completely away from the 20th-century world. Pausing briefly between the wars to explore the origins of World War I,

it moved on, in the English debates over the transition from feudalism to capitalism and the continental debates over the rise of the bourgeoisie, into the early modern (European) past, a move confirmed after World War II (whose origins posed no apparent historical dilemmas) in the French-fostered fascination with the *longue durée* and in the more recent fashion for world systems theory. Scholars and academics, who had lost faith in western progress and stood shocked before the barbarism of the 20th century, saw in "decline," "fall," "failure," and "faltering" questions about "origins," "rise," "beginnings," and "causes." They composed histories in which the outcome that had been anticipated (and was now lacking) was read back into the past, precisely because it could no longer be found in the present or securely foreseen in the future. Early modern Europe, in particular, was made to look like the present ought to have been, but was not—the center of a world economic order, launched upon a unique path toward industrial modernity and reaching out to embrace the world and haul it along the path it had pioneered. Strikingly, French, English, and American scholars have insisted on finding a comprehensive global history and universalizing explanations in earlier ages, rather than in their own; global history makes most sense at the moment that the western imagination first conjured up a universal vision. But in effect, these epigonal studies in the comparative civilization tradition have shifted ground: they have abandoned late 19th-century concerns with the archeology of world cultures or comparative civilizations in favor of a signal preoccupation with the development of a single civilization, the west, assuming its centrality and seeking, as it were, a running start on the conundrums of the global present by studying the expansionist drives in one region's past.

Like all narratives of the *longue durée*, these histories anticipate the next step and insist upon outcomes that are already embedded in the origins. The 20th-century world is understood, implicitly or explicitly, as the culmination of long-term trends, either the (partial) "fulfillment" of westernizing and modernizing forces set loose by European expansion or as a faltering or failure of western nerve just short of "fulfillment," leaving disintegration, even chaos, in its wake. However rendered, the present is treated as the outcome or consequence of western, or European, history. Yet when it comes to the present itself, meditations on the rise (and fall) of the west, or of western world systems, leave the contemporary world dangling as a curious appendage at the end of western history. To get a running start on the present, world systems theory and, more recently, English historical sociology, begin by turning away from the actually-existing world of the 20th century and, in the end, they evidence deep confusion about how to conceptualize or represent the contemporary world (for example, Hall, 1985). This confusion, or narrative wobbling, in the presence of the present registers the continuing crisis of our world historical imagination. By narrating the past as the present ought to have been, meditations upon the western miracle or western world systems elide the present into a sort of "ur"-past and produce a history that, far from clarifying the present, blurs and obscures it. Ultimately, these meta-narratives cannot account for the world that is being made by the very processes which they have made central to their narrations. Building world history around the rise (and fall) of the west leaves us, at the end of the 20th century, with no pivot of analysis and no way of describing the present.

We should not underestimate the continuing power of this urge to escape the intractable present. Contemporary debates in American universities, over the content of the curriculum and the balance between free speech and equal protection, reflect both the contradictory pressures and the deep confusions engendered by a world of multiple (or no) centers and many subaltern voices. Efforts to accommodate the demands of women and ethnic or social minorities have produced, in backlash, an urgent move to reassert the canon and the necessity in the midst of the many to reaffirm "our" traditions. Rather than seeing western values and traditions as

informing, even transforming (without controlling), global discourse, these defenders of normative conformity see this widening, more amorphous and polyglot discussion as threatening the dissolution of the western mind, and they rush to reassert its separateness, distinctiveness and primacy. Once again, the world as it is (or has become) is abandoned in favor of a world that once was—or ought to have been, but never (really) was.

Yet ninety-five years into the 20th century, we cannot assume outcomes with any of the certainty of our predecessors in world history, nor can we impose on a recalcitrant contemporary world the outcomes that ought to have been reached, if western history had only stayed true to its origins. The questions we have now to confront have to do precisely with the nature of the world that has come into existence during the course of the 20th century. It is less and less useful to rethink the origins of western expansion, or reaffirm the "rights" of western exceptionalism, because these do not begin to account for the dynamics of global development that have taken shape in the context of, and now in the wake of, the western era. A post-western or post-modern world (however we choose to label it) is not defined simply by the fact that it comes "after" a western era, for whatever we call it, this world is presently being made into something unprecedented and untoward by historic forces that have little any longer to do with the rise (or decline) of the west. It is thus less and less useful to reiterate the predictions of the past, or to reassert the presumptive claims of the past, because we cannot place these against the realities of the global present and narrate the current conditions as a precondition of the future.

3. Beginnings/Middles/Endings

The object of study for world history takes shape, then, both in a description of the contemporary world and in a critique of past world historical imaginations. But this alone does not produce historical analysis or explanation. A narrative history of our world also needs a specific chronology (periodization frames all historical imaginings) and a specific agenda of study (a *problematique* implies a series of concrete problems to research and analyze).

To start at the beginning: how and where to launch a specifically 20th-century world history that is neither an archeology of comparative civilizations nor the history of one region's past writ large? As long as we assume that the world is moving toward a homogenous or westernized end, in which "traditional" societies take up modernizing paths toward a new global civilization, discrete regional histories remain a kind of "prehistory," interesting only in specifying what went wrong with "others" in the context of explaining why the west won. But once we acknowledge, in the contemporary world, that the processes of integration have not homogenized the whole, but produced continuing and ever renewing contestations over the terms of integration, histories of the "other" become immediately relevant to world history—and not simply for reasons of equity, but as permanent and continuing participants in the processes being narrated.

This history, we would argue, begins much later than early modern specialists and world systems theorists would have us believe. For until the last third of the 19th century, global development rested on a series of overlapping, interacting, and basically autonomous regions, each engaged in processes of self-organization and reproduction. This is a reality that can be represented quite well within the narrative conventions of comparative civilizations. There is no need here to discount the deepening connections and interactions between regions, or the growing role of European merchants, mariners, missionaries, and soldiers in these interactions. But it is important to stress that contacts among regional centers of power, down into the mid-19th century, had more to do with keeping distance than with establishing

relations; they extended relationally across space from one center to its margins, and through physical (oceans and deserts) or social (nomadic and paratical) zones of transitions to reach adjacent or distant "other" worlds. Distance, hence space, remained crucial in governing the conduct of commerce and the exercise of power, and it shaped global imaginings on all sides. Politically, economically, intellectually, and militarily, these patterns of regional autonomy, maintained by spatial distantiation and linked by specialized mediators and interlopers, organized the world until at least the middle of the 19th century (Wills, 1993; Chaudhuri, 1990).

A dramatic and quite rapid alteration took place during the course of that century, however. We cannot understand this transition if we focus exclusively upon Europe or the surge of European industrial and military power after the mid-century, undoubtedly important though these may be. The crucial watershed that, in our view, inaugurates the world history of the 20th century was a series of parallel, simultaneous crises in the organization of power, production, and reproduction in almost every region of the world. A simple recitation—the great agricultural crisis and the Taiping, Nian, and Moslem rebellions in China, the mutiny in India that nearly wrecked the East India Company's control and provoked a thorough renovation of British imperial policy in Asia, the ongoing struggle in the Ottoman Empire between a central bureaucracy and provincial elites, and the difficulties of controlling regional governors, most vividly evidenced in the breakaway of Mehmet Ali; the crisis of Tsarist power following its defeat in the Crimean War and the subsequent reform efforts of the regime, including the emancipation of serfs in 1862; the Civil War crisis in the United States and the destruction of slave-based agriculture; the collapse of the post-Napoleonic concert in Europe and the decade of regional wars that followed—may seem a random, wholly self-serving selection. These were, above all, specific crises of regional power and stability, reflecting autonomous trajectories of development and internal modes of coping. They were all, in one way or another, crises in the reproduction of power relations and modes of societalization and, studied comparatively, they offer insight into long-standing historical cycles in agrarian, land-based empires. We should not overinterpret them. There was no single cause or prime mover at work, as world systems analysis might suggest. Nor must we look for a neat synchronization in the timing of these crises, since they arose and developed from indigenous causes and followed their own, autonomous chronologies.

What made these separate, regional crises transitional for world history was that, in every case, they were played out in the context of deeper more competitive interactions among regions, driven largely (but not exclusively) by more vigorous European interventions. The result was—everywhere—that solutions to regional crisis came to involve not simply efforts at restoration or conservation, but also strategies of self-renewal and self-improvement, adopting, in the Chinese phrase, "the ways of the barbarian in order to defeat the barbarian." There is little question that the Qing dynasty in China, as it built copies of British warships during the Opium War and adopted western bureaucratic techniques in the suppression of rebellions in the interior, was seeking, not only to fend off (restore distance with) the barbarians, but also to restore the authority of the Celestial throne over its subjects; it is equally clear that the Ottoman regime, from the time of Mahmud II and the Tanzimat reforms, was seeking to build a new model army and efficient bureaucracy, both to cope with rebellious provincials and to fend off European interference; and Tsar Alexander II was engaged in a dual project of keeping up, competitively, with other European powers and in restoring the foundations of the autocracy. These empire-salvaging strategies, developed in the context of intensified competitive interactions among regions (themselves each in crisis), also produced interesting breakaways: within the ambit of the Ottoman crisis, Egypt made a bold, ultimately unsuccessful, bid to forge a separate, national strategy of rapid development; within the Chinese

tributary sphere, the Japanese, guided by a highly self-conscious samurai elite, were much more successful in charting a deliberate, national path of industrial self-improvement and military security; the crisis of Russian power and the collapse of the regional balance in Europe produced, first, the Polish revolts in 1863 and then the more successful German break toward national unification and rapid industrialization; and if one reverses the usual view of who seceded from whom in the run-up to the American Civil War, one might see the northern industrial enclave breaking clear of the hemispheric dependency zone of agriculture and primary production within a British Atlantic imperium and forging a more self-consciously national strategy of industrial growth and autonomy in North America (Geyer and Bright, forthcoming, 1997).

These patterns of regional crisis and the competitive strategies for self-renewal and improvement that emerged within and between regions around the world in the middle decades of the 19th century constitute, in our view, the break or rupture that demarcates the beginning of world history—that is the history of an integrating world—in the 20th century. Whether these efforts at self-improvement succeeded or not—whether they led to industrial power or to colonial dependency or to revolutionary transformations—they began as proactive responses to specific regional situations and their synchronicity had the effect of lifting regional interactions to a new global level—to a plane of sustained, continuous, and competitive contact. Processes of global integration were thus inaugurated, not simply by an expansionist Europe unilaterally superimposing itself upon a passive world ripe for victimization, but in a scramble of autonomous power centers, each struggling to mobilize their resources in the face of internal crisis and intensified interactions with other regions. This cut into the problem of "beginnings" underscores the futility of trying to get a "running start" on European expansion, as if the problem were to understand how Europe built up speed and turned a corner from expansionism to domination. In the 1840s-50s-60s, everyone was running, as fast as they could.

To be sure, Europe played a unique role in this passage to world history. The sudden, quite dramatic acceleration of western power under industrialization profoundly disrupted empire-salvaging and self-improving strategies in other regions of the world. This is not because industrialization had a particular logic, but because the European region—undergoing its own destabilizing crisis with the collapse of the post-Napoleonic concert—sought to resolve its regional crisis by globalizing it—reaching outward rather than turning inward, pursuing external expansion rather than internal renovation. The distinct path of European development in the early modern period matters here, of course, and many themes of western exceptionalism are relevant. Europe was not an empire; it had no political center or single hegemon to articulate a coherent strategy of self-renewal. Regional fragmentation and the strains of competition had been contained by a balance or "concert" of conservative powers in the early 19th century, but this came unraveled after 1848. The resulting crisis of stabilization coincided with (and was to some extent brought on by) the first industrialization of the European continent, which intensified competitive pressures among "sub-imperial" centers of power in the region. Ultimately, what characterized the European region at mid-century was not its industrial prowess (which was just beginning to show), nor its superior power (which was not, in a world of distances, especially overpowering), but its extreme instability. The peculiar nature of political rivalry and market competition in Europe, the competitive, crisis-prone nature of early industrial capitalism, the highly ritualized rivalry of the "great" powers, and the deep social and ideological divisions that regularly replenished the springs of civil war and revolution, launched Europe upon a unique course at mid-century. Instead of seeking stabilization and integration through internal means of institution building, pacification, and renewal, it launched upon a volatile course of expansion.

This reading of Europe's mid-century departure distinguishes this expansionist episode from the earlier empires the Europeans established in the 16th and 17th centuries. To narrate 19th-century imperialism as a projection of European economic and military power, and to imagine this as a spatial process of diffusion and dissemination from a presumed, European center, is to proffer the classic hydraulic model, long a staple of historical explanations of the voyages of discovery and of trade and colonial empires in the early modern period. In this model, Europe accumulated internal energies and contradictions until these exploded and overflowed upon the world. Typically, the counter-narration, lately told by world systems theories, has inverted the model and argued that Europe gained its surplus energies by draining the outside world; capitalism was thus not generated internally, to spill outward, but sustained by pumping mechanisms that drew vital surpluses from the outside into the European economy. Both narratives presume a world already centered around Europe. While this convention may be adequate for a European, regional history, it cannot do double duty as a narrative foundation of world history in an era when there were still multiple, regional centers of power interacting at great distances and capable of sustaining autonomous histories. Indeed, it was the process of global integration itself that created the possibility of Europe as the narrative center in a world with a common history, and this process only commenced in the 19th century. Global integration, as it took shape in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, was not primarily a projection of power from Europe nor simply an acceleration along a continuum of European expansion, but an entirely new ordering of relations of domination and subordination made possible precisely because, during the 19th century, the dynamics of regional relations were transformed into globalizing interactions. European imperialism in the late 19th century was able to latch onto and exploit the self-improving strategies of all other regions, and riding the dynamics of competitive interaction, to move beyond extensions of power over "others" to the direct, sustained organization of "others," simultaneously, in many parts of the world. In this way, the west gained its status as the centering axis of global processes of integration.

These processes cut two ways, promoting simultaneously a global mobilization of labor and production and the concentration of their surpluses in one region. As the dynamics of regional crisis and industrialization in Europe drove it outward along externalizing paths, these collided, overlapped, and interacted with the dynamics of parallel crises in other regions and with the strategies of competitive self-improvement and renewal that were devised elsewhere to shore up regional power and to fend off or contain external pressures. As Asians and Africans moved to defend autonomy, Europeans found in these self-improving efforts the pathways and allies for further and deeper interventions. This was a profoundly disruptive, often violent, process, but it was never simply the plunder of compradors. Instead, western expansion picked up and amplified regional and local processes of self-mobilization, permeating and transforming them in the process. The projections of western power and practices were thus locally articulated as self-improvement and self-mobilization, and absorbed into the very fabric of local affairs, setting off ever wider ramifications of change, much of it beyond the view, let alone the control of Europeans.

Global integration was thus not a set of ready-made procedures, devised in the west and superimposed upon the rest—as if a passive and compliant world waited patiently for its own subordination; but for this very reason, neither was global integration flatly or consistently resisted. Rather, integration was carried forward on a global scale. India and Egypt, as well as Argentina, China, and Persia, were undoubtedly victims of western imperialism, but imperialism was also able to exist because Egyptians, Indians, Argentines, Chinese, and Iranians helped to make it happen. Already running at full tilt themselves, they engaged western power in

complex patterns of collaboration and resistance, accommodation and co-optation, as they tried (often against great odds, but also, we may add, with remarkable success) to reproduce local worlds—using imperialists to create or shore up local positions of power, using positions of indigenous power to make deals with Europeans and to produce the resources for global integration. In all of this, they helped make a more integrated world, albeit not as western imperialists intended. Subordination, then, consisted in an externally guided, indigenously pursued reconstitution of local and regional power relations to fuel global integration. Conversely, domination consisted in the ability to bend forces of local and regional self-improvement to global ends.

4. The West and the Rest

The surplus of this global process forged an ever tighter (if always competitive) concentration of power within the west. What was experienced and imagined as expansion was, also, more powerfully a process of concentration. European military power was projected everywhere, but nowhere was it more concentrated and more lethal than in Europe itself; state power was extended as colonial rule throughout Asia and Africa, even as state power became more concentrated and coordinated in Europe; western communications and transportation systems reached into every corner of the world, yet nowhere were the linkages denser, or their impact more far-reaching than in Europe itself; industrial goods were available and traded everywhere, yet both trade and production were most heavily concentrated and grew most rapidly in the core-region. The intensification of capitalist production went hand in hand with its global extension, binding the world together in a tighter, if always uneven, global organization of production and destruction.

Within this integrating world, Europeans set the rules and increasingly drew the lines of demarcation that defined a global center over against the "rest." Global integration entailed a spatial organization of human and capital mobility. It was only toward the end of the 19th century that rigid barriers were erected to control the movement of non-European peoples and a more rigid racial segregation was devised in colonial and semi-colonial regions to define white privilege and insure their control over racial "others."¹ Generally speaking, non-whites remained poor and stuck in place, mainly in primary and agricultural production, while whites migrated out of agriculture into industry and were free to travel the earth and colonize it. This division of people underwrote a new global division of labor that separated, world wide, capital intensive industrial production from handicrafts and extraction, agriculture from industry, and it was further reinforced by new procedures for allocating and controlling the movement of wealth, grounded in the international acceptance of the gold standard and of financial rules enforced primarily by the Bank of England. Across the integrating world, new lines of demarcation and distinction were drawn, setting the western-European region apart and insuring its privilege.

The deepening chasms that divided an increasingly integrated world, together with the proliferating distinctions between "we" and "they" (modern/traditional, advanced/backward), which constituted western discourse about the rest, swallowed up the universalist imagination of "humanity" that had informed world history narratives heretofore. As difference and distinction grew within an integrating world, a new field of study in comparative civilizations appropriated the universalizing vision of world history to a more segmented study of human progress, now securely centered in the west. While these imaginings were immediately read back in time, centering the human story around an essentialist Europe and the history of white men, they were, in fact, part and parcel of a process of uneven, increasingly segregated global integration in which Europe gained its existential identity as a discrete region. Europe

(the west) was constituted in the context of forging a unified narrative for an integrating world at the end of the 19th century.

The two main coordinates for the study of world history in the 20th century emerge here. They run along two axes: on the one hand, lateral competition in the emerging (western) center for control over the processes of integration—i.e., struggles over who set the terms and rules by which all others must play; on the other hand, vertical contestation over the rules and terms thus established—i.e., struggles over how a regional (western) capacity for world domination was to be realized in concrete regimes of order, in the social contracts for governing and the routines of labor control and surplus extraction. Both of these axes of conflict in 20th-century history have assumed the other, and together they pose complex narrative problems for world history.

What typically serves as the focus of western 20th-century history—imperialism, world war, depression, and cold war—is in fact study along one axis, the struggle at the center for control over the processes of global integration. This lateral competition among would-be hegemonies was sustained and intense, often violent, and it fed upon the capacity of the center to mobilize global resources. Indeed, struggles at the center hinged upon a continuing capacity to center processes of global integration. Briefly, Great Britain and later the United States managed to balance and contain lateral rivalries well enough to establish global regimes of order centered upon themselves. Much empirical work still needs to be done on British imperial world order—and how it combined colonial positions of power (most particularly over India) with the pivotal role of the Bank of England in world finance—and on the American essay in world order after the Second World War, in which a world wide deployment of military power in the context of the cold war combined with the singular strength of the U.S. dollar in the postwar recovery, to underwrite an unprecedented global boom. But these were always temporary and embattled efforts, contested by subject populations from below and by rival powers at the center. Indeed, it was precisely the ambiguous position of the Soviet Union, as a rival superpower and a revolutionary challenger from below, that made the cold war a global confrontation. Certainly conflicts at the center conditioned the capacity of the west to control the rest, and some have lamented the fratricidal, self-destructive tendencies of Europe that clobbered and terminally compromised its momentary opportunity to organize the world.

Yet for all its violent and suicidal aspects, 20th-century western history is also the story of an ever deeper integration. Indeed at the height of the cold war, regional conflict in the west was virtually mummified in ever denser and more elaborate regulations and ever thicker and more lethal layers of military threat. The general rise in levels of output and in creature comforts certainly suggest that a "moment in the sun" carried benefits as well as penalties for the region. Yet the deepening of integration and the containment of the more violent forms of lateral competition over the course of the century also suggest an abatement or easing of internal struggles for control over the processes of integration—a tendency which may, perhaps, suggest growing maturity, but more surely indicates the waning capacity of the west actually to control and organize the world, or (what amounts to the same thing) the deepening integration of the west into a global process that it no longer controls or, standing apart, can center upon itself.

It is traditional in western commentaries to follow one of two general themes here: to stress the west's failure of nerve and fratricidal tendencies, or alternatively, to emphasize the increasingly successful resistance of subaltern peoples to the admittedly fractious and contradictory—hence vulnerable—western efforts to dominate them. But unilateral narratives, built around a western essay in global control and its failure, or interactive narratives built around binary combinations of

domination/resistance or subordination/revival, are inadequate solutions to the problem of linking the histories of the west and the rest. For global integration in the 20th century was never simply a western project extended over the rest of the world, but a process of coopting, bending, and riding global movements for self-improvement, in which "others" mobilized themselves in strenuous efforts to defend or reclaim their autonomy and, in the process, became implicated in ever denser, more integrative global interactions, even as they were subordinated (briefly) to western power. This is never "merely" a program of suppression or expropriation, although wholesale plunder and even genocidal annihilation of peoples did occur in colonial settings. Rather, reorganizing the terms of domination and subordination in the 20th century involved, specifically and continuously, the destruction of the capacity for autonomous histories in the context of global integration. It is this that marked subaltern status throughout the world: subalternity entailed the dissolution of the integral, regional organization of production, political authority, and societalization, the integration of which had been the basis of autonomy in a world of multiple centers.

These building blocks of autonomy were not actually destroyed by the engines of western domination, but they were pulled apart and reconfigured. Regional mediations of power, along with the integrative role of regional politics, were shattered. The organization of production and coercion was moved "upward" into European hands, linked to global circuits and, reflecting or transmitting these circuits, selectively reimposed as western technique—whether applied through local elites or colonial authorities. The organization of economy and state grew stronger, but was depoliticized; between colonial regimes and subaltern peoples there was never a social contract. Instead, community building and social reproduction tended to become more localized, relying on the marginalized and disorganized circuits of "native culture" which colonial authorities largely ignored and rarely tried to understand. This process of dis-association, of pulling the integrated elements of autonomy apart and recombining them in selective and partial ways, tended to reconfigure power at its global and local poles. But outside the centered world of the west, the main social consequence of global integration was a radical fracturing of social cohesion and a deepening of sectarian and ethnic tensions—processes of unraveling that themselves became part and parcel of constituting the "west" as distinct from the rest. As much as this process set free "new energies," it inserted elements of discord, conflict, and tension in the articulation of social relations throughout the world. Indeed, dis-association in the context of global integration makes it extremely difficult to maintain the notion of "a" periphery set against a single center. For as the center became more integrated, other worlds were sundered and set into free fall, producing a multiplication of segments and particles. Indeed "a" periphery masks precisely the condition that marked the subaltern.

The fragmentation of autonomy in the context of global integration, a process in which the west centered and unified itself over against the rest, insured a steady proliferation of difference. Global integration, far from soothing and pacifying the world, continuously extended the scope of, and multiplied the sites for, insubordination, as the ramified fissuring of subaltern society unleashed all kinds of contestation and resistance, ranging from passive "Brechtian" forms of back talk and footdragging to outright defiance or direct action. Implicitly, if not explicitly, subaltern resistance was always a struggle to reassemble the sundered elements whose cohesion had once made autonomous histories possible. Over the course of the 20th century, however, "autonomy" came to be defined in new ways. Outright resistance rarely worked against colonizing power, and more subtle attempts to fend off or deflect western incursions, through selective appropriations to regional programs of self-improvement, often opened additional paths for western intervention and cooptation. The capacity of the west to suborn others soon produced sustained efforts

to break into (Japan) or to break out of (the Soviet Union and China under communism) the process of integration—all pursued as variants of the quest for autonomy. But in time, the struggle to (re)establish or defend autonomy over against the western project of integration faltered; as the process continued to pull subaltern worlds apart struggles for autonomy got pushed into more localized, fragmentary, and embattled arenas.

Under colonial regimes, the conditions of autonomy—the integration of production, political authority, and societalization—became something to be remembered or (re)imagined in new ways. Facing an imperial state uninterested in such mediations, the struggle often took the form of a politics of imagination, in which subaltern peoples sought to visualize their world whole and to reinvent the elements of mediation that might hold (or may once have held) this world together. Anti-colonial politics often took the form of cultural struggles, the reinvention of "traditional" solidarities in mobilizations aimed at recapturing state power as the key ingredient in mediating a recombination of the social, political, and productive elements that made autonomous histories possible. While such mobilizations were eventually effective against western imperialism, the colonial state that was recaptured in the process of liberation was not designed as a mediating agent, and all too often, the semblance of unity built up against the imperial "outsider" rapidly imploded after independence, with the post-colonial state becoming, not a site of mediation and integration, but a system of clientage. The relentless implosion of state-imposed order produced a rapid proliferation of ethnic, class, and sectarian violence which both intensified processes of social segmentation and created new sites of contestation over how to build social solidarities and identities. Thus contemporary efforts to create or defend the integrity of communities should not be seen as some traditional left-over, or as the evocation of a romantic *Gemeinschaft*, but as the latest manifestation of a continuing struggle to maintain control over autonomous destinies in an integrating, but continuously fragmenting world.

The material integration of the world has always been, and necessarily must be, organized locally and socially, on the ground, in one place after another, according to the particular circumstances and conditions that happen to obtain. No matter how global the circuits of power become, nor how systemic in reach, control over these processes must be grounded in concrete social organization that renders labor productive, moves subaltern people to purposive ends, and reproduces the condition of subalterneity itself. No matter how peaceful or abstract the networks of global exchange and their controlling mechanisms may become, each transaction needs articulation in some particular place, in some meaningful idiom, under very specific circumstances. Not only does this entail the selective "incorporation" of local conditions to global operations, but it offers infinite opportunities for the subaltern to appropriate global technique and the material objects and imaginary worlds that rain down upon them to the service of local agendas and specific struggles over cultural identity. The image of women in veils, sitting at computer terminals to dispatch oil tankers to world markets to pay for holy war, if rather too neat, captures the (provisional) outcome of a global process, initiated by westerners, intent upon centering the rest into their universalizing project, and taken up by subaltern "others," engaged in local and partial struggles to reconstitute the elements of autonomous existence.

In the course of the 20th century, neither has been entirely successful. Just as the processes of global integration have promoted social fragmentation and disassociation, so the struggles to define community and defend it in the context of social dissolution have necessitated coming to terms with global processes. Increasingly over the course of the 20th century, struggles for autonomy have turned into contestations over the terms of global integration—not only whether the world

should be integrated, but by whom, to whom, and under what terms the identities of individuals, social groups, and entire societies are to be defined in the context of global integration. As this point is reached and passed again and again in the course of the 20th century, the center loses particularity; the more integration has proceeded, the less any region or society can control the struggle over the terms of that integration. Thus as we arrive at the end of the 20th century, we lose the capacity for narrating our history in conventional ways, for increasingly there is only local politics and global practices. It is by locating world history in this historically specific and continuing contestation between integration and the proliferation of difference that we can begin to account for phenomena in our world that are not adequately theorized or accommodated in narratives of the rise and fall of the west, or the renewal of the rest, and, in the same move, we can hope to restore contingency to the present and see, again, the future as historically open. On this basis, a history of our actually-existing world can begin.

Notes

¹ Stoler (1992) analyzes the process of separation and distinction so marvelously described by E.M. Forster in *A Passage to India*.

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