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Europe, from its margins, from Postcoloniality

Hegel said it first.

Hegel had it first, the last word: “Europe presents...the center and end of the old world, and is absolutely the West – so Asia is absolutely the East.” The declaration, the first sentence of eurocentrism, produces Europe as west and center, center and end, first and last; last, thereby first.

If I had a choice, I would open this offering, my first public presentation in Germany, by invoking the door-opener, Nietzsche, the pivotal term of this symposium being “weltoffenheit,” literally openness to the world. But Hegel gets there first.

Hegel’s Europe: on the one hand: center, pivot, nucleus, foundation, heading, grounding/commanding principle; and the other: end, mature, conclusion, ultimate, telos. Europe as lasting, settled. To cite Fanon, “absolute beginning...unceasing cause.”

In differance, Asia: Europe takes its bearing by pushing aside the other continent, the only other that matters, that matters only as other. Without Asia, no Europe. They are concatenated, inextricable. Hegel stages the continents as discrete; *The Philosophy of History* suggests they impress each other. Indeed, without Europe no Asia, for the latter gets named after a Greek goddess. Asia is stamped by Europe. Our goods maybe made in Asia; Asia itself, made in Europe.

First and last, too, Asia; but first therefore last, supervened, superseded by the movement of history. A metacanonial figure, Hegel concedes that the sun also rises over that prior continent; but only the minor, merely “physical Sun.”

The mature “Sun of self-consciousness, which diffuses a nobler brilliance,” the sun that matters, peaks exclusively at, peaks exclusively over Europe. And need I remind you that Nietzsche, in *The Genealogy of Morals*, reminds us that nobility, aristocracy coined the concepts morality, good, truth, associating itself metaleptically with them, binding itself to them.

Another son, born of a pure, unsullied – to patriarchy – woman, promised, states the *King James Bible*, that the first shall be last and the last first – in heaven. Hegel effectively declared it so on earth. Of Europe. Indeed, of Germany.

One cannot engage Europe, not at our postcolonial moment, without confronting this authoritative emplotment of history, this determination of a place as place as such, this place that authors, names other places. Though passé, it lingers, demands response. But should that response be a call to greater openness? Could Europe be more open?

Put differently, eurocentrism incites, excites its critique, postcoloniality. Postcoloniality, in turn, dares: without eurocentrism would there, could there be Europe? For Europe is not some indisputable geographic fact; the discipline concedes that Europe and Asia defy its definition of continent. Makes one pose the question of disciplinary reason: does eurocentrism, a structure that systematically inflects another structure, the modern episteme, does the imperative to produce Europe as head, heading compel the concept continent, if not the discipline of geography itself?

Continent divulges the relation between ideology and disciplinary reason, episteme. The georacial line incising, excising Europe from Asia also separates the white from the brown and yellow races.

Let me repeat the question that unsettles me, that I hope would unsettle you, too: without eurocentrism, would there, could there be Europe? If Europe is homonym for eurocentrism, should there be Europe, this tautology, incontinent continent that never fit its descriptor. Brutally put: Europe has always been incontinent, unrestrained, open to the world. Open, in the name of the good, to conquering, settling, exploiting, infecting, inflecting, advising, patronizing, degrading, carpet-bombing, terrorizing every other continent. Europe designed human rights, refined human wrongs. Its goods are bads. In response, could postcoloniality be open to Europe, even a different Europe? Is a different Europe possible, imaginable?

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In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon famously calls upon the third world to “leave Europe,” escape “nauseating mimicry.” He charges Europe, conceived in graphic, not geographic terms, with unrestrained decimation – physical, psychic, epistemic – of that world.

Nevertheless Fanon, writing in French, cannot avoid repeating Europe, (re)citing the Bible, summarizing decolonization, in a sentence, as making the last first and first last. The text divulges that the first lasts: “The argument the native uses has been furnished by the settler.” Redoubling, shuttling between undoing and redoing, decolonization emerges in Fanon’s delineation as restricting, binding the anticipated “new man” to mimesis, imitating the colonizer despite himself.

Enraged, outraged by Europe, the text breaches the roadblocks imposed upon the colonized, who inhabit “a world cut in two”: “a strongly built...brightly

lit [settler] town...[against] a crouching village...a [native] world without spaciousness.” A first world in the third characterized by technology, expanse; its other, by restriction in general. The settler’s sole commandment: thou shalt not.

Has this Europe, one that commands, changed?

Incarcerated at home, the native has no choice but to dream, dreams as a matter of choice. He dreams of unrestricted movement, athleticism, exercising masculine muscle. As decolonization, *The Wretched of the Earth* cathects repose, to settle, secure the restless native. Out of place in his place, the native aspires to regurgitate the settler, a “superfluous term.” To put the occupier in his place, “out of the picture.” But fails.

Bound by day, boundless at night, in his dreams the native – by definition without – moves within, charges across the European zone, dazzling even after sunset. Transgressing the private, he wants to have, hold, harm, imagines “all manner of possession: to sit at the settler’s table, to sleep in the settler’s bed, with his wife if possible.” Installs himself in the other’s place, imaginatively but without empathy. However, the usurper remains in the picture, within the frame. To the settler’s purloining, the native responds with loining; reacts to violence with violation, including violence towards women, an object analogous to other inanimate objects, furniture, accessories like bed and table. Divulging the heteropatriarchal frame that takes rape as vengeance, a violation of the man, not woman, Fanon’s native taunts the settler: I will fuck you – and your wife.

The Wretched of the Earth exemplifies to postcoloniality the limits of decolonization as program, the difficulty of leaving Europe. Where decolonization settles, postcoloniality unsettles.

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Yet the text unsettles, too: “The cause is the consequence; you are rich because you are white...white because you are rich.” More Nietzsche than Hegel, the formulation conceptualizes settler success as the effect of dominance, not inherent racial capacity. Upends E. B. Tylor’s claim that, as pigmentation lightens, civilization brightens; history in Tylor’s emplotment progressing as the color line etiolates, from the brown races, through the yellow, to the white, “latest” but first in the race of civilization. (Iterating Hegel, Tylor situates the black outside history, an also ran.)

Counter-intuitively, Fanon accounts for race, whiteness, as such an effect, not an anthropological or otherwise natural, scientific fact; binds concept and force, disciplinary reason to ideology. Race emerges in Fanon as colonialism’s epistemic accomplice, indispensable to the work of interpellation, the production of separate and unequal: white as right; black, lack. For the converse also holds: black as the category, cell of white, of eurocentrism, not signifier of inherent ipseity. Without white, as also Tylor demonstrates, differently, there would, could never have been black. Like Europe and Asia, native is always already fissured by settler; black, extimate to white, not identical to itself.

Composed as it is, the text decomposes, divulges its failure: “every time Western values are mentioned they produce in the native a...stiffening or muscular lockjaw...when the native hears a speech about Western culture he pulls out his knife.” Accomplicing, authorizing conquest, theft, brute force, western values themselves constrain, immobilize the native, induce paralysis of the jaw, the mouth, an organ of speech. Tempting as it maybe to turn to violence, it bears

emphasis that, dumbstruck by western values, the west as value itself, Fanon writes a book, doesn't wright a knife.

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In the rest of this presentation, I address the difficulty, if not impossibility, of leaving Europe, the necessity of unsettling eurocentrism, with reference to texts I'm familiar with, of the modern Anglo-U.S. episteme. So I turn, not to the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen*, invoked by your symposium statement, but another universalist document, the U.S. *Declaration of Independence*. Universalism, as we'll see, never keeps its promise, always hierarchizes the human into subject and other. That, I contend, is the problem postcoloniality confronts: disciplinary reason, the modern episteme itself, which authorizes differantiation.

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Injured, outraged by Britain, the U.S. *Declaration of Independence* naturalizes emigrant as local, interpellates settler as native as it transforms colony, dependent entity, to state, independent. It opens by closing, breaking from Britain, asserting the imperative "for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume...the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them."

The formulation recalls, recites John Locke, and Thomas Hobbes, the intersection of emergence of modernity which, while proclaiming universal masculine equality, differantiated human into two conditions, (state of) nature and (civil) society, the former instantiated by the lazy native, the savage American, the latter the civilized, industrious English.

As it constitutes a discrete political entity, the text concedes the partiality of such dissolution. Shuttling between undoing and redoing, it fails to push Britain out of the picture. These “good people” occupying a continent, and not, these uncontinental continentals maybe distinct from those across the Atlantic, but the two remain one. Other bands, binds stay solid, indissoluble by declaration. Nature overdetermines politics. “Our British brethren...[maybe] deaf to the voice of consanguinity” but, even if they never mend, lend the U.S. their ears, learn to empathize, respond to the call of the brother, the two remain fraternal, bound by a common father, a lasting relation. The U.S. self redoubles, is always already marked by its British (br)other. Named after a European, the U.S. cannot turn its back on that continent. Without Europe, no United States.

The Declaration's pivotal formulation “holds these truths...self-evident, that all men are created equal...[and] endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights...life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” This engenders the subject, man, as the self-evident artifice, mimicry of god, masculine rights natural and theological, natural because theological, a divine endowment, thus beyond alienation, demonstration or discussion. *The Declaration* opens by closing debate.

Taking its bearing from, binding truth to the ultimate, transcendental power, the text is not secular. The Father of the Son, of all sons, frames, radiates it. As it pronounces the equality of all men, the text renounces, stages some as more injured by the tyrannical George III than others. The “long train of abuses and usurpations” it lists, as facts, to a “candid world” accuses Hanover of hurting the good people of America by, among other things, “imposing taxes without

consent...[and] depriving us...of the benefits of trial by jury.” But such actions could only injure an elite: those qualified to pay taxes, serve on juries. We may receive *The Declaration* as asserting universal human equality, the U.S. as founded, uniquely amongst nations, upon an idea/l, rather than a social group; the rights bearing subject, the center emerges in the text as European, Christian, upper class and male. Capitalism and patriarchy inflect the subject who, the text affirms, will resist the British with “manly firmness,” a formulation that equates masculinity with constancy, integrity, settledness.

Making cause consequence, the list of “injuries and usurpations” usurps in turn, accuses George III of unrestrained decimation, of having “plundered our seas, ravaged our Coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people.” Such acts, “scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages and totally unworthy the Head of a civilized nation,” situate Hanover on a world historical scale. His deeds degrade him, not individually but metonymically, from civilization to a lower, prior condition, barbarousness. The passing of colony as state compels the naturalization of occupation, achieved by the possessive pronoun: by insistently declaring Native American land ours, *The Declaration* transforms settler, usurper to native, possessor and pushes aside the Native. The ultimate injury (dis)locates the Native American spatially, temporally, describes the group as “inhabitants of our frontiers, the merciless Indian Savages, whose known rule of warfare is an undistinguished destruction of all ages, sexes and conditions.”

Hobbes/Locke nominate the Native as American, of the continent; *The Declaration* denaturalizes them, as foreign, Indian, dispossesses, repossesses their territory, consigns them to “our” frontier, the border not of two political

entities but unequal conditions, savagery and civilization. Metaleptically producing its subject as object, victim – abused, threatened by both Britain and, incredulously, the Native American – the text promises the Native a specific fate. Like our terrorist, the savage transgresses the rules of war, indiscriminately slaughters the elderly, children, women. Unmans himself by murdering the infirm. A practitioner, weapon of mass destruction, other to the civilized, Christian, rule-governed, good American man, uncivilizable, the savage loses title to the rights of man, paramountly life.

We may receive *The Declaration* as grounded upon a claim to universal human equality. It others. These goods are bads, pharmakonic. The text divulges the relation between civilization and genocide, human rights and wrongs. It is a declaration of war, a death sentence – authorized by nature and nature’s God – to the Native.

Is today’s refugee conceptualized, treated structurally different?

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At its intersection of emergence, the humanities, the disciplines that format the human, charge it by differentiating: as subject, civilized English man in society and, amongst others, savage American in nature. The Native American returns in relativist anthropology, now side-graded to primitive. Before exile from the disciplinary stage, the figure of the savage abets the emergence of two disciplines cortical to the transformation of the human: Anglo-U.S. anthropology, at the intersection of Tylor, and English literature, at Shelley/Macaulay. Today’s global hierarchies have a long itinerary in disciplinary reason.

Tylor concatenates a pair of concepts superfluous at Hobbes/Locke: race, understood in the plural, as a graded possession, immutable, and culture, in the singular, as a graded condition, mutable, in the least developed level of which, nature, he locates the savage, racialized as black, geographized as African, though his *Anthropology* opens by imagining an encounter with an African sailor not in the jungle but the London docks.

Shelley's *Defense of Poetry* theorizes literature as the work of imagination, enabling empathy, an attribute exclusive to the modern, social subject. Extending, critiquing Hobbes/Locke, Shelleyan empathy/imagination, not reason, excites the institution of civil society. Lacking in its difference, the savage, who cannot author, only imitate, sentencing it to life without literature in an immutable state of nature. Indeed, Shelley – while analogizing child and savage – nevertheless distinguishes the figure from both child and man, sentencing it concurrently to life in an unaging, indeterminate condition outside minority and majority, the possibility of biological reproduction.

These texts deconstitute themselves, raise – again – the question of knowledge. If the emergence of the modern episteme hinges on the savage, what does that divulge about its center, the subject, man, of the disciplines that charge man, the humanities, and of the reticulated web of concepts encrusted to man: not just reason, rights, society, civilization – quite apart from the indubitably eurocentric savage, barbarian, primitive – but seemingly innocuous ones like author, imagination, empathy, that also differentiate? Could postcoloniality cleave them from man?

Macaulay's *Minute on Indian Education* (dis)regards the savage as uncivilizable, beyond reform, targets the third term in that hierarchy, the barbarian, a higher state of development, another Indian. Postcoloniality is nauseatingly familiar with the sentence, which mobilizes, excites English literature, understood as in Shelley as "works of imagination," to "form a class...[of persons] Indian in blood and color...English in taste...opinions...morals and...intellect." Literature enables this Indian to imagine himself English, upgrade himself to civilization, while remaining, in our terms, racially different. Not white, not quite.

Is Belgium's recent call for immigrants to accept Belgian values structurally different? Do I have to recall here Belgium's record in the Congo?

Since English was initially taught, as literature, not in Britain but colonial India, in the wake of the *Minute*, postcoloniality charges English literature as emerging to interpellate the barbarian Indian to the superiority of English civilization. This lingers even at our moment in which English literature offers itself as the agent of moral improvement. No mendicant, postcoloniality, rather than beseech inclusion in the canon, besieges: calls the discipline of literature itself to question.

As culture dissociates itself from race, mutates from singular to plural, universalist to relativist, condition – which allows improvement, grading – to possession – which does not – at the intersection of Alice Fletcher/Franz Boas, it (re)turns to the figure of the Native American, named Indian, which it pushes to the U.S. frontier. In so doing it addresses, resolves a U.S. problem, constitutes that space as a modern, urban, cultural whole. The Native American must be

denaturalized yet placed in nature for the production of the relativist take of culture, the U.S. as one. Cultural relativism – the conceptualization of culture as a discrete entity – may congratulate itself in contemporary anthropology for democratizing the hierarchical, eurocentric, Tylorian notion. Like race, it others, makes separate and unequal. Rather than describing self-evident difference, relativism orders its recognition, capture, incarceration.

The humanities may stage themselves as offering disinterested knowledge. Its texts divulge their complicity with ideology, the transformation of subjectivity, hierarchization of human to subject and other. A hierarchization that, as you know, persists to this day. As postcoloniality serves its charge, excites the critique of eurocentrism, its brief confronts the disciplines, the modern episteme itself, an ordering of concepts in the Derridean sense, including those regulating the names of continents. And I am not finished with nomination.

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Take my own, not quite my own, Mohamed Qadri Ismail. At first glance an impeccably Sri Lankan Muslim male moniker: that of the prophet heads my “given” name, Qadri, tailed by the sur-, family, some male ancestor’s name. Since nobody calls me Mohamed, this grants me two first names. To complicate matters further, after we were taught the rule in school that every word with a q is followed by a u, my classmates insisted Qadri – though not an English word – was misspelled, infiltrated the letter. Dumbstruck by eurocentrism, I let myself be called Quadri at school and Qadri everywhere else, a boy with three first names.

But eurocentrism impresses my name, and that of others in this room, more commandingly, less conspicuously. Sri Lankan Muslims did not take family

names before British colonialism, such structure of nomination being a colonial, patriarchal imposition, interpellation. My great-grandparents survived without surname. When eurocentrism inflects something as personal, intimate as one's name, when one reinforces eurocentrism in doing something as banal, quotidian as saying, spelling or signing one's name, one confronts the impossibility of leaving Europe. Eurocentrism lasts, cements my name.

I could traverse the third world. I could go here, there, everywhere. I would never leave Europe.