

words, there is no literature for the sake of literature that would get by this group of writers.

In following sections, authors such as Alamin Mazrui, Barbara Marshall, Regina Jennings, Lonnell Johnson, Geta LeSeur, and Abu Abarry turn their critical sights on the issues of analysis. They extend the general concerns with the problems of gender, class, and culture to include a critical perspective on orientation to data.

Blackshire-Belay has dared to take on the given constructs of literature analysis and to invest her book with Afrocentric approaches to African American literature.

She is a Princeton- and Munich-trained scholar who has written or edited seven books. She brings a great deal of judicious good sense, intellect, practical experience, and her own Afrocentric imagination to the organization, development, and presentation of this group of original essays. I believe that all students of African American literature should read this book.

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Eurocentrism. By Samir Amin. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1989.

The past decade or so has witnessed the publication of a great number of critiques of what is commonly referred to today as "Eurocentrism," although there is no general agreement as to what precisely Eurocentrism is. The book under review is one such critique, written from a Marxist standpoint. The author is, indeed, a world-known and respected Marxist economist, who belongs to the "dependency" school of thought. The latter argues that capitalism can no longer be regarded as a phenomenon occurring within particular national boundaries, but as a worldwide and tightly integrated system within which countries at the "center" (the West) exploit countries at the "periphery" (the so-called Third World), thus preventing them from "developing." In *Eurocentrism*, Amin seeks to explore one of the means through which this global capitalist system has been able to reproduce itself. The book comprises two parts. Part One is devoted to the analysis of central and peripheral cultures (Chapter 1: "The Formation of Tributary Ideology in the Mediterranean Region"; Chapter 2: "Tributary Culture in Other Regions of the Precapitalist World"), and Part Two deals with the culture of capitalism and is subdivided in five chapters (Chapter 1: "The Decline of Metaphysics and the Reinterpreta-

tion of Religion"; Chapter 2: "The Construction of Eurocentric Culture"; Chapter 3: "Marxism and the Challenge of Actually Existing Capitalism"; Chapter 4: "The Culturalist Evasion: Provincialism and Fundamentalism"; Chapter 5: "For a Truly Universal Culture").

Social reality, Amin explains, "has three dimensions: economic, political and cultural" (p. 14). Although the author states that the structural relationship between those three dimensions is still to be understood, it is nonetheless clear that, in Amin's mind, the economic dimension takes precedence over all else, including culture. This comes as no real surprise given Amin's Marxist inclinations. The implications of such a position are nonetheless far reaching and certainly questionable, as I shall argue.

For instance, Amin finds it possible to talk meaningfully of culture only in the context and as a result of "stages of economic development." Indeed, after arguing that it is dubious to assume the existence of a "European culture" in the absence of linguistic unity (a weak argument!), he suggests that "on the other hand, it is possible to emphasize the common characteristics shared by different societies at the same general stage of development and, from this base, define a communal and tributary culture" (p. 7). In other words, what determines culture is ultimately the economic mode of organization of the society in question. However, this treatment of culture simply as social superstructure leaves unanswered the question of the source of the economic dimension itself. As aptly noted by Latouche (1993), "Supposing that culture is an autonomous force separate from the economic dimension of life, the question may be posed, where does the economic dimension originate? From human nature?" (p. 25). In fact, as Latouche continues, "The economic, this domain or dimension of calculating rationality, is not a natural reality. On the contrary, it is an historical and cultural invention, which in the modern West, has been given an unprecedented pre-eminence" (p. 25).

Furthermore, Amin's subordination of culture to the economic also leads him to define Eurocentrism as a "purely" ideological construct, that is, with no specific cultural basis *per se*. Eurocentrism is analyzed as a distortion, a by-product of capitalism, which it justifies. In fact, if one is to follow Amin's line of reasoning to its logical conclusion, Eurocentrism is not even European. Rather, it is "capitalocentric."

Such a frame of analysis precludes any understanding and appreciation of the primacy of culture and of its subsequent ever-presence in all matters of life. This is particularly evident when Amin writes that he has "only the ambition of contributing to the construction of a paradigm freed from cultural distortion" (p. 6), a ludicrous task indeed. What the author argues

for is the possibility of some no-man's-cultural-land from where to speak. However, his own discourse testifies to the very impossibility of such a position, for it is deeply embedded within the Western intellectual tradition.

That Europe has found it useful and necessary to establish its own experience as superior, and has presented it to the rest of the world as a model to follow as some universal and obligatory path, is now well understood. Evolutionary thinking and claims to universalism have permeated most European social theories, and Marxism is no exception. In reality, it is generally admitted that, in the 19th century and later, Marxism contributed greatly to the propagation of the ideology of progress, the "spiritual foundation" of the West at least since the European Enlightenment. According to that particular ideology, humankind is supposed, thanks to reason, science, and technology, to move forward and improve constantly. And, of course, the White man is kindly showing us the way. Europeans experiencing capitalism before anybody else, but already moving toward the next and better stage, socialism, is quite consistent with such a teleological and universalist interpretation of "human" history. Although Amin is very much aware of the ethnocentrism, if not racism, present in Marxism (p. 77), he, however, fails to effectively distance himself and eventually repeats some of the same nonsensical and now debunked arguments presented by Europeans to explain the so-called European miracle (cf. Blaut, 1992). Thus, according to Amin, in the so-called communal and tributary civilizations (among them the civilizations of the Nile and of Mesopotamia), there is "hardly any scientific thinking" and no awareness of society as an object of reflexion. Also, "any idea of progress is excluded." The metaphysical prevails over the physical and the rational, a trend that is reversed in capitalist societies, as a result of the capitalist mode of production. How it is possible to claim that so-called precapitalist societies were void of "scientific thinking" or "rationality" in the face of the still-astonishing accomplishments of African and Asian civilizations (as well as others), remains a mystery. Nor is it easier to understand why metaphysics is claimed to have disappeared from the European world. In reality, as Alvares (1992) indicates, it has been

mistakenly believed that science destroyed metaphysics. In fact, the scientist has merely replaced one set of metaphysics with another. There is a specific and recognizable metaphysics that enables scientists to detonate an atomic bomb over a human population purely as an experiment; or to vivisect animals for mere curiosity in the laboratory; or to endorse the

planting of a monoculture forest under the garb of scientific forestry, thereby causing permanent harm to the environment. (p. 65)

Let us also note that the notion of progress is not "universal" and natural, but grew out of the European cultural and historical experience (Ani, 1994; Sbert, 1992). There is, therefore, no particular reason to expect its presence in other civilizations and certainly no excuse for using it as some standard against which to measure other civilizations' "advancement."

Amin's failure to perceive the all-encompassing nature of culture ultimately prevents him from understanding colonialism and neocolonialism as, foremost, a process of cultural domination and intellectual indoctrination through the imposition of the European worldview. He has only harsh words for what he calls "cultural provincialism and fundamentalism," especially but not solely in the Islamic world. In fact, it is clear that Afrocentrism would not be better received by Amin, because Afrocentrism claims that cultural (including intellectual and perceptual) relocation of African people throughout the world is a must (Asante 1988, 1990). In Amin's view, the "cultural fundamentalism" espoused by oppressed people at the "periphery" is not different from Eurocentric fundamentalism, but "only its reflexion, its negative complement." The truth, however, is that Afrocentrism, to take one example, does not seek to impose itself onto the rest of the world as universal, and this is a *major* difference. Afrocentrism, rather, reflects the will of African people to collective agency, a quite reasonable and healthy project after many centuries of European conceptual tyranny and subjugation.

But what, then, is Amin's alternative to recentering through a conscious reappropriation of, and reinvestment in, one's culture? According to him,

Just as in the area of material activity the Third World has access to modern technologies, without having had to pass through all the stages necessary to develop them, in the domain of thought, we are already acquainted not only with Western bourgeois thought but also with the germ of its fundamental critique, whose universal potential it is our task to develop. The real affirmation of the identity of the Arab people, like that of the other people of the Third World, lies on this road. (p. 135)

In other words, we must stay within Western paradigms in order to critique the West, a dangerous and ultimately futile exercise. In addition, it seems that, in Amin's view, all we are capable of is regurgitating Western thought, a very distressful idea reminiscent of White superiority. Finally, the notion that Africans, Asians, Arabs, and others have any special relationship with,

or obligation toward, the West—especially that of making it truly “universal”—is, in my view, simply unacceptable. Our primary obligation is toward putting an end to European hegemony under all its forms. What is necessary is a way out of our mental subordination to Europe, and this, as it should have been clear by now, would be simply impossible to achieve were one to follow Amin’s recommendations.

What all of this points to is Amin’s ultimate and personal inability to disentangle himself from the mental grips of the West. This becomes painfully obvious when one reads that *Eurocentrism* was addressed “to the intellectuals of the Western Left, in the hope of opening a genuine dialogue, because the role of Europe can be more decisive than is often realized” (p. 150). Amin’s call for a “truly universal culture” goes in the same direction. Although he does not elaborate much on the form that this truly universal culture would take, except that it would be brought about by the socialist mode of economic organization, we have every reason, after reading *Eurocentrism*, to fear a new trick to impose Eurocentrism on us, under the cover of some hypothetical but impossible dislocated universalism.

In the end, although Amin’s book contains many good points, it shows, more than anything else, how tragic it is when one does not trust one’s people’s ability to forge the means of their own liberation, but rather keeps looking up to one’s enemy for solutions.

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