Since its first publication 20 years ago, Eurocentrism has become a classic of radical thought. Written by one of the world’s foremost political economists, this original and provocative essay takes on one of the great ‘ideological deformations’ of our time: Eurocentrism. Rejecting the dominant Eurocentric view of world history, which narrowly and incorrectly posits a progression from the Greek and Roman classical world to Christian feudalism and the European capitalist system, Amin presents a sweeping reinterpretation that emphasises the crucial historical role played by the Arab Islamic world. Through the work, Amin addresses a broad set of concerns, ranging from the ideological nature of scholastic metaphysics to the meanings and shortcomings of contemporary Islamic fundamentalism.

Consistently subversive of the established pieties of the West, this book breaks new theoretical and historiographical ground by outlining a compelling non-Eurocentric vision of world history. This second edition contains a new introduction and concluding chapter, both of which make the author’s arguments even more compelling.

Preface

In this work, I propose a critique of what can be called “culturalism.” I define culturalism as an apparently coherent and holistic theory based on the hypothesis that there are cultural invariants able to persist through and beyond possible transformations in economic, social, and political systems. Cultural specificity, then, becomes the main driving force of inevitably quite different historical trajectories.
Modernity is the product of nascent capitalism and develops in close association with the worldwide expansion of the latter. The specific logic of the fundamental laws that govern the expansion of capitalism leads to a growing inequality and asymmetry on global level. The societies at the peripheries are trapped in the impossibility of catching up with and becoming like the societies of the centers, today the triad of the United States, Europe, and Japan. In turn, this distortion affects modernity, as it exists in the capitalist world, so that it assumes a truncated form in the periphery. The culture of capitalism is formed and developed by internalizing the requirements of this asymmetric reality. Universalist claims are systematically combined with the culturalist arguments, in this case Eurocentric ones, which invalidate the possible significance of the former.

Inevitably, modernity compelled a reinterpretation of religious beliefs, making them compatible with its main principle, that human beings can and must make their own history. Eurocentric culturalism maintained that it was the religious revisions, and particularly the Protestant Reformation, that were the prime cause of the social transformation that led to modernity. [...] Religious reinterpretations were, on the contrary, more the product of the necessities of the social transformation than their cause. They were not any less important, whether they facilitated or retarded change on one particular evolutionary path or another.

Today, modernity is in crisis because the contradictions of globalized capitalism, unfolding in real societies, have become such that capitalism puts human civilization itself in danger. Capitalism has had its day. The destructive dimensions that its development always included now prevails by far over the constructive one that characterized the progressive role it fulfilled in history.

The crisis of modernity is itself the sign of the obsolescence of the system. Bourgeois ideology, which originally had a universalist ambition, has renounced that ambition and substituted the post-modernist discourse of irreducible “cultural specificities” (in its crude form, the inevitable clash of cultures). As opposed to this discourse, I suggest that we begin with a view of modernity as a still incomplete process, which will only be able to go beyond the mortal crisis it is now undergoing through the reinvention of universal values. This implies the economic, social, and political reconstruction of all societies in the world.

In The Liberal Virus: Permanent War and the Americanization of the World, I emphasized the extreme form taken by the ideology of contemporary capitalism, what I called the “liberal virus”\(^1\). The latter reduces the content of social organization to two and only two principles: liberty (mainly viewed as freedom of private enterprise) and property. This reduction, which I analyze as being the product of the involution to which the ideology of modernity was subject in the historical formation of the culture in the United States, is at the heart of the tragic impasse that threatens the imprison civilization. Will European societies, whose more subtle political culture allows for dialectical conflict between the economic and the political, and the societies of the South, major victims of the pauperization associated with the accumulation of capital, be able to take these challenges? Or will they rather submit passively to the Americanization of the world with its trail of permanent wars and genocides?

[...]

\(^1\)

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