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**Historicism and Modernity in the  
Wake of *Provincializing Europe***

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## Saurabh Dube

### Historicism and Modernity in the Wake of *Provincializing Europe*

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Focusing particularly on *Provincializing Europe (PE)*, this essay is cast as a close and critical engagement with the work of Dipesh Chakrabarty over almost three decades. To begin with, I trace how Chakrabarty's provocations have pointed toward post-coloniality and modernity as necessarily contradictory, contended, and contingent procedures and perspectives. Second, the essay tracks pathways that *PE* haltingly intimates and partially illuminate but mostly routes that the work chiefly shies of treading, in order to open up instead the different registers of historicism, the hermeneutical, and the analytical, including their mutual interplay and formidable entanglements, as formative of modern knowledges. Finally, these steps help foreground my own explorations of modernity. Braiding together analytical impulses and hermeneutic sensibilities, theory and narrative, these efforts have distinguished between historically located *subjects of modernity* as bearers of heterogeneous reasons/understandings, on the one hand, and routine representations of *the modern subject* as insinuating a singular rationality, on the other, which together carry wide implications. Keywords: Historicism; modernity; *difference*; analytical/hermeneutical.

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#### Historicismo e Modernidade depois de *Provincializando Europe*

Centrando-se em particular em *Provincializing Europe (PE)*, este ensaio apresenta-se enquanto engajamento próximo e crítico com o trabalho de Dipesh Chakrabarty ao longo de quase duas décadas. Em primeiro lugar, rastreia a forma como as provocações de Chakrabarty inscrevem a pós-colonialidade e a modernidade enquanto procedimentos e perspectivas necessariamente contraditórias, contestadas e contingentes. Em segundo lugar, o ensaio indaga os caminhos que *PE* hesitantemente sugere e parcialmente ilumina, mas sobretudo persegue vias que o trabalho evitar tomar a fim de revelar os diferentes registros do historicismo, do hermenêutico e do analítico, incluindo a sua interação mútua e entrecruzamentos formidáveis, enquanto formador de conhecimentos modernos. Finalmente, estas disposições ajudaram a enquadrar as minhas próprias investigações em torno da modernidade. Entrelaçando impulsos analíticos e sensibilidades hermenêuticas, teoria e narrativa, estes esforços distinguiram entre, por um lado, os *sujeitos da modernidade* historicamente localizados como portadores de razões/entendimento heterogêneos, e, por outro, representações usuais do *sujeito moderno* enquanto insinuando uma racionalidade singular, sendo que ambas, em conjunto, assumem implicações mais vastas. Palavras-chave: historicismo; modernidade; *difference*; analítico/hermenêutico.

# Historicism and Modernity

## in the Wake of *Provincializing Europe*

Saurabh Dube\*

My engagement with *Provincializing Europe* (henceforth, *PE*) began much before its publication two decades ago.<sup>1</sup> This should not be surprising, for it was in his influential essay “Postcoloniality and the artifice of history” of the early 1990s, that Dipesh Chakrabarty first raised probing questions concerning the writing of history as haunted by the spectre of Europe.<sup>2</sup> Here, while he focused on “history” as produced in the institutional academe as stamped by Europe as the sovereign subject of all histories, Dipesh equally underscored how, in “phenomenal” worlds of quotidian imaginaries, Europe routinely appears as the overwhelming means and measures of the modern, the very habitus of history, progress, and modernity.

I initially encountered the essay a year after my return to India in 1992 – from the University of Cambridge, where I had pursued a PhD

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1 Actually, close encounters with Dipesh Chakrabarty’s corpus have been an integral part of my critical concerns since at least the late 1980s. The entanglements should become clear from the arguments and citations that underlie this essay. Now, rather than claiming any novelty (wherever that might rest), the present piece presents the terms, textures, and transformations of my engagements with Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000). See also the dialogue conducted over almost two decades contained in Saurabh Dube, “Histories, dwellings, habitations: A cyber-conversation with Dipesh Chakrabarty,” in *Dipesh Chakrabarty and the Global South: Subaltern Studies, Postcolonial Perspectives, and the Anthropocene*, ed. Saurabh Dube, Sanjay Seth, and Ajay Skaria (London and New York: 2020), 56-72.

2 Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Postcoloniality and the artifice of history: Who speaks for ‘Indian’ pasts?” *Representations* 37 (Winter 1992): 1-26.

in South Asian history – in order to teach and research at the University of Delhi. Now, my abiding interests in historical anthropology, subaltern worlds, the “everyday” as a critical perspective, and key conjunctions of archival research and field work were always at odds with much of the Cambridge style of historical scholarship.<sup>3</sup> Yet, as a hang-over of sorts, I had carried from my time there a suspicion of “trendy” theory, especially the excesses and pretensions of the “postcolonial.” It followed that I found Dipesh’s arguments as raising provocative queries but as also affected by a theoretical modishness residing in *au courant* twists, turns, thrusts. I was impressed enough by the essay, yet only ambiguously excited about it.<sup>4</sup>

All this was to change with my move in the mid-1990s to join the faculty of the Centro de Estudios de Asia y África at El Colegio de México in Mexico City. I now found that:

At the Centro...among students and faculty, India – or China or Chad – frequently appeared as essentially different, all too distant, articulated by the oppositions between the Occident and the Orient, the West and the Rest, with Latin America positioned, uneasily yet readily, as part of *el Occidente*. This was true not only of my centre, but it was characteristic of scholarly sentiments, quotidian conceptions, academic apprehensions, and their institutional manifestations in the Latin American world, more generally. On the one hand, Asia and Africa embodied a marvelous difference from the West, the mark of enchantment, *algo bello*, something beautiful. On the other hand, they embodied a contaminated distance from the West, the sign

3 For example, Saurabh Dube, *Untouchable Pasts: Religion, Identity, and Power among a Central Indian Community, 1780-1950* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998).

4 See the discussion ahead of Chakrabarty’s explorations of a Bengali modernity in colonial India, which were anticipated by “Postcoloniality and the artifice of history.” Dipesh Chakrabarty “The difference-deferral of a colonial modernity: Public debates on domesticity in British Bengal,” in *Subaltern Studies VIII: Essays in honor of Ranajit Guha*, ed. David Arnold and David Hardiman (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), 50-88.

of backwardness, *algo feo*, something ugly. At the same time, these twin dispositions rested upon the hierarchies and oppositions of a singular Western modernity and an exclusive universal history, the seductions of enchantment and the ruses of disenchantment, scholarly traces and commonplaces, tracks in the shadow of the nation – in Western contexts, and non-Western theatres.<sup>5</sup>

As I set out to query such grids, particularly in pedagogical endeavours, two loaded terms revealed and insinuated themselves in my attempts at a conversation between South Asian and Latin American worlds: on the one hand, the problems and possibilities of the *postcolonial* as a concept and perspective; on the other, the apprehensions and articulations of *modernity* as historical processes of meaning and power. In each case, I learned much from Dipesh's essay as I read and re-read it, several times, while teaching and writing. Now, more than just its seemingly snazzy coinage of "provincializing Europe" – that had catapulted the essay to enormous importance, and possibly brought Chakrabarty to Chicago from Melbourne – my engagements with the author and his emphases had their own place and provenance.

The essay allowed me to think through ways in which the past and present of India or Mexico come to be cast in "terms of irrevocable principles of failure, lack, and absence, since they are always/already measured against apparent developments in the European/Euro-American arenas."<sup>6</sup> Nor was this the case merely with Mexico and India, but of all space-times that are not quite the West, which is itself a hyper-imaginary construct *and* an entirely-tangible category, an overwrought apparition *and* a palpable entity. Unsurprisingly, this Europe appears as history, modernity, and destiny – realized or failed – for every people and each country across the globe. At stake are procedures

<sup>5</sup> Saurabh Dube, *Stitches on Time: Colonial Textures and Postcolonial Tangles* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004), 5.

<sup>6</sup> Saurabh Dube, "Mirrors of modernity: Time-space, the subaltern, and the decolonial," *Postcolonial Studies* 19, no. 1 (2016): 3.

that exorcize the fault-lines of this West – especially the “undemocratic foundations” of modern democracy as resting upon political-economies of slavery, for example – that Dipesh pointed toward in his elaborations of “a politics of despair” that drove the bid to provincialize Europe.<sup>7</sup> Taken together, circulating amidst other prescient perspectives, critical ethnographies, theoretical endeavours, and imaginative histories, Dipesh’s provocations pointed me to post-coloniality and modernity as necessarily contradictory, contended, and contingent procedures and perspectives.

“Postcoloniality and the artifice of history” announced the wider project that went onto become *PE*. Allow me to present a thumbnail account of *PE*’s key claims, a sketch appropriately, appositely drawn jointly with two companions and colleagues, comrades and co-conspirators, who have also long engaged Dipesh’s writings. In *PE* Chakrabarty argues that:

...displacing, or at least challenging, the positioning of Europe as the sovereign theoretical subject of all histories (and thereby “provincializing Europe”) requires making a place for “difference” in historical thought. The difference of the non-Western world is in fact already registered in history writing, as well as in other disciplines and in quotidian forms of thought, but this takes the form of what Chakrabarty calls “historicism” – regarding the non-Western world as “backward” and “behind” the West, and thus destined, one (distant) day, to recapitulate its trajectory.... [Here] Chakrabarty counterpoises two modes of thought for studying the past: an analytic mode, which is indispensable to accounting for the common world we all now inhabit, decisively remade by capital (what he labels “History 1”); and a hermeneutic mode, more attentive to that which has not been remade and homogenized by capital, where “dif-

<sup>7</sup> Chakrabarty, “Postcoloniality and the artifice of history,” 20-23.

ference” inheres without (necessarily) being in opposition to the homogenizing drive of capital (what he labels “History 2”). While the first mode of thought is usually deemed to be sufficient, Chakrabarty insists that both are indispensable, for without the latter, difference is erased and the temporally disjointed nature of human pasts and presents (what he calls “time knots”) is elided and, indeed, illegitimately “smoothed out.”<sup>8</sup>

All of this registered, it is to issues of historicism and history-writing, the analytical and the hermeneutic, and modernity and difference in *PE* that I now turn. My bid is to open up the terms and textures of these formulations, entering precisely their protocols of presentation while tracking their certainties, hesitations, and possibilities, as read in their overlapping yet distinct registers.

Chakrabarty frames “historicism” as persistent developmental regimes of time, temporality, and history. This is to say, a pervasive mode of thinking and manner of knowing, which appears intimately implicated in social-scientific understandings and wider historical practice. Based on the principle of “secular, empty, homogeneous time”, historicism has found acute articulations since the nineteenth century, when it made possible “the European domination of the world.”<sup>9</sup> Here are to be found, then, key questions concerning a singular yet hierarchizing time that splits social worlds into “developed” spaces and “backward” ones. Against such terms of historicism, Chakrabarty posits the plurality of life-worlds, the “necessarily fragmentary histories of human belonging that never constitute a one or a whole”, which straddle an ever living past and a radically heterogeneous now.<sup>10</sup>

8 Saurabh Dube, Sanjay Seth, and Ajay Skaria, “Engaging Dipesh Chakrabarty: An introduction,” in *Dipesh Chakrabarty and the Global South: Subaltern Studies, Postcolonial Perspectives, and the Anthropocene*, eds., Saurabh Dube, Sanjay Seth, and Ajay Skaria (London and New York: 2020), 2-3.

9 Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 7.

10 Ibid., 255; Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

It is possible to suggest that Chakrabarty's rendering of historicism shares attributes with understandings of the concept that not only abound in the present but reach back to the past (recall Karl Popper, for example). But my point concerns the importance of attending to other sets of delineations and debates arounds historicism.<sup>11</sup> To begin with, here are to be found discussions of historicism as entailed in the practice of philosophy and history of, for example, Giambattista Vico, Johann Gottfried von Herder, and Johann Georg Hamann, and acquiring diverse yet acute manifestations across the nineteenth century, the time when the term was first invented. Such expressions of historicism variously entailed: the principle of the individuality (even as they often pursued a universal history); critiques of an abstract and aggrandizing reason as well as of "the prejudice of philosophers that, in some spiritual way concepts preceded words"; reassertions of the centrality of language and historical experience; and acute inclinations toward hermeneutical (as distinct from analytical) understandings.<sup>12</sup> This is to say also distinct formations and discrete intimations of what Isaiah Berlin has notably described as the "Counter-Enlightenment", "the great river of romanticism" running from the eighteenth into the nineteenth centuries, its waters no less overflowing into the times and terrains that have come after.<sup>13</sup> Now, if *PE* admits at all of such formations of historicism in its discussion of the concept-entity, the work does so mainly in implied manners.<sup>14</sup>

11 For an early statement of these issues see Saurabh Dube, *After Conversion: Cultural Histories of Modern India* (New Delhi: Yoda Press, 2010); see also, Dube, "Histories, dwellings, habitations."

12 Donald R. Kelley, *Faces of History: Historical Inquiry from Herodotus to Herder* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 247.

13 Isaiah Berlin, *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 1-24; Isaiah Berlin, *Three Critics of the Enlightenment: Vico, Hamann, Herder* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

14 Five clarifications warrant emphasis, keeping in view the concerns of this journal symposium on *PE*. First, I view the various counter-Enlightenments as constitutive of the Enlightenment. Second, rather than an exclusive Enlightenment I am speaking here of rather more plural Enlightenments, not merely on empirical registers but in critical ways. At stake were distinct expressions of universal and natural history alongside contending strains of rationalism in France, of empiricism-scepticism in Britain, and of their particular conjunctions in Germany. Third, in my reading, procedures of the secularization of Judeo-Christian time that accompanied the Enlightenment were at once an emergent and consequential idea yet a circumscribed and



In terms of textual traditions, then, does Chakrabarty's reference to historicism involve mainly the writing of history that began in the second half of the nineteenth century? Here were to be found the disciplinary elaborations of *historismus* in Germany, which bore a double-sided relationship with the ideas and imaginaries of universal human progress.<sup>15</sup> Avowing hermeneutic and counter-Enlightenment impulses, such historicist accounts acutely articulated notions of culture, tradition, and the *Volk*, principally of the nation. In doing so, they queried the conceits of an aggrandizing reason as well as of developmental schemes of philosophical history that they saw as leitmotifs of the Enlightenment. The point is that all this could allow for relatively pluralistic understandings of cultures and nations. At the same time, following the influence of Leopold von Ranke's endorsements of "source criticism", the official archive, and historical narration (as "telling it the way it really was") such historicism principally reinforced the exclusive designs of singular histories, turning on a parochial, often divisive, nation-state and its power-politics. The documentary dispositions and the philological methods underlying the historicist principle of "continuity" meant also that most non-European "others" were banished from the pages of history. In sum, going back to the compelling influence of Herder, these traditions reveal the possibility of pluralist and relativist imaginaries *and* the presence of nationalist and racialist presumptions – providing a distinct twist to hermeneutic dispositions, analytical orientations, and their conjunctions.<sup>16</sup>

limited process. Fourth, the Enlightenment entailed not only the reordering of philosophy but the remapping of history, not just the reworking of human reason but the replotting of human nature. Fifth and finally, taken together, at stake was the rethinking – at once philosophical, historical, and anthropological – of "man", "civilization", and "nature", in terrains where biblical assumption continued to cast its light and shadow. Saurabh Dube, "History, anthropology, and rethinking modern disciplines," in *Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of Anthropology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press [web resource], forthcoming); Saurabh Dube, *Subjects of Modernity: Time-Space, Disciplines, Margins* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017).

<sup>15</sup> Here I am bringing together the emphases of works such as Kelley, *Faces of History*, 244-72; Georg Iggers, "Historicism: The history and meaning of the term," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 56 (1995): 129-52; Georg Iggers, *The German Conception of History: The National Tradition of Historical Thought from Herder to the Present*. Revised edition. (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2012); George Stocking Jr., *Victorian Anthropology* (New York: Free Press, 1987), particularly 20-5; and John Zammito, *Kant, Herder, and the Birth of Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

<sup>16</sup> Alongside, the elaboration of the discipline elsewhere in Euro-American arenas meant that history-writing not only bore the flag of the nation but carried the impress of empire. Here, the

There are critical overlaps as well as key distinctions between Chakrabarty's sensibilities and those of these other, modern historicisms. The overlaps especially concern Chakrabarty's avowal of hermeneutic propensities and protocols and his interrogation of a purely analytical reason and its overwrought procedures. He finds in "analytical" social science the tendency to "evacuate the local in favour of some abstract universal" and to demystify "ideology" in the pursuit of a just social order. Against this is contrasted the "hermeneutical" tradition that "produces a loving grasp of detail in search of an understanding of the diversity of human life-worlds", based on the intimate connection of thought with particular places and forms of life and resulting in "affective histories." Chakrabarty admits that the distinction between these traditions is somewhat "artificial" in as much as "most important thinkers" belong to both at once. At the same time, he equally casts the division as "a fault line central to modern European social thought". Thus, the claims of *PE* "turn around" and "take advantage" of the "fault line" by sustaining a separation between the "analytical" and the "hermeneutical" as critically opposed traditions.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, Chakrabarty's effort is to retain a tension between the two, where the "analytical" is seen as indispensable to thinking about issues of social justice and the "hermeneutic" is understood as leading toward recognition of the innate heterogeneity and the not-oneness of social worlds. These entwined procedures – themselves containing Chakrabarty's rethinking of developmental thought – intimate Chakrabarty's uses and ruses of modern historicism.

Where am I going with this discussion? Much more than terminological quibbles about the word and category of historicism are at

recent pasts of dark and distant, chiefly colonial, territories and terrains frequently appeared as footnotes and appendices to the master-history of Europe, and the extending frontiers of the historical imagination in settler spaces orchestrated their primitive subjects through civilizational allegories. And what of the modern histories construed in colonized countries and emergent nations? These accounts were not merely replications of blueprints out of Europe, instead imbuing their accounts with particular protocols of proof and method, truth and philosophy. At the same time, such renderings of the past were also often envisioned in the image of a progressive European civilization, albeit using unto their own purposes the hierarchies and oppositions of Western modernity. These and other issues of historicism are discussed in Dube, "History, anthropology, and rethinking modern disciplines."

17 Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 18.

stake here. Nor are mine mere empirical exceptions to Chakrabarty's theoretical claims. It is not only that Chakrabarty's apprehensions and critique of historicism can be understood as being internally consistent, also bearing into account the lack of consensus that has characterized this contended notion from the beginning. It is also that his definition of historicism has the potential of registering that its other usages could be marked by developmental assumptions and epistemic violations regarding the past and the present, even if Chakrabarty's understanding appears to ignore the hermeneutic propensities of historicism in its distinct avatars.

To bring matters home, my suggestion concerns the importance of traversing pathways that *PE* might point toward and even partially illuminate but also routes that the work chiefly shies away from treading – on account of its emphases and procedures. Specifically, it is important to open up the different registers of historicism, the hermeneutical, and the analytical, including their mutual interplay and formidable entanglements, as a crucial part of modern knowledges and their articulations. Here, it is crucial to stay with the distinction between analytical and hermeneutical traditions, one that Chakrabarty foregrounds. At the same time, it is equally imperative to take leave of those of Chakrabarty's procedures that treat these traditions as rather pure heuristic principles and render them as functioning at a remove from each other, only to then bring the two together by retaining a tension between them.

These simultaneous steps lead us to encounter the analytical and the hermeneutical in their precise concreteness and murkiness, their mutual admixtures and interpenetrations. And this means tracking, too, the wider contours and shifting configurations of the hermeneutical and the analytical – as at once on conceptual and narrative registers. Here, as indicated, it is crucial to acknowledge that writings and traditions profoundly veering toward hermeneutic ways of understanding have often shared crucial attributes of historicism's developmentalism that is the object of Chakrabarty's critique. At the same, it is critical to underscore that varieties of history writing and social theory – of a

hermeneutic provenance as well as an analytical bent – have not only accessed projections of secular, empty, homogeneous time, but in their routine practice have also exceeded such construal of temporality. It is in these ways that they have intimated (especially when they are read with an eye for the under-thought and the under-said) concrete, heterogeneous, even eschatological times and temporalities. Moreover, this is entirely in tune with the experience and construal of time and space within constellations of everyday activities. Finally, tracing the interleaving and admixture of analytical and hermeneutical traditions can reveal the formative ambivalences and constitutive contentions at the core of modern knowledges.

Taken together, it is exactly these issues that I have elaborated in my explorations of history and anthropology as modern disciplines; of the construal of space and time in everyday activities and their epistemic avatars; and of the worlds of modernity and their knowledges at large.<sup>18</sup> Here are to be found discussions of the common grounds and routine excesses of formations of modernity as bearing the impress of enduring oppositions between static, traditional groups (that is, “savage” peoples or “native” communities), on the one hand, and dynamic, modern societies (that is, “civilized” states or “progressive” orders), on the other.<sup>19</sup> These have wide implications. For at stake are ongoing and critical matters of difference and power as turning on: constative assertions upholding temporal hierarchies, spatial segregations, and their mutual productions; and contending alterities shaped by historical progress, modernity’s guarantees, and their constitutive contradictions. If the questions have been acutely yet uncertainly articulated in the key corpus of anthropologists such as Franz Boas and Evans-Pritchard, thinkers such as Pierre Bourdieu and Jürgen Habermas, and critics such as Ranajit Guha and Partha Chatterjee, their terms and textures have no less animated the meanings and practices of diverse modern subjects and distinct subjects of modernity.<sup>20</sup>

18 See especially, Dube, *Subjects of Modernity*.

19 Ibid.; Dube, “History, anthropology, and rethinking modern disciplines.”

20 Consider together, for example, Dube, *Stitches on Time*; Dube, *Subjects of Modernity*; and Dube, *After Conversion*.

In the end, therefore, it is worth staying with and thinking through Chakrabarty's orientations to modernity, their openings and closures. A few years before *PE*, Dipesh imaginatively attempted to "write difference into the history of our [Bengali/Indian] modernity in a mode [or manner] that resists the assimilation of this history to the political imaginary of European-derived institutions ... which dominate our lives".<sup>21</sup> The details need not detain us, but his analyses lead to a series of questions, which I now signal somewhat telegraphically as critical provocations.

Is it the case perhaps that Chakrabarty analytically replicates as *a priori* some of the exact attributes of the "epistemic violence" that he queries? Is this because Dipesh derives from a master scheme of modern history the gendered domains of the "public" and the "domestic", the concepts of "personhood" and the "civil-political", and the antinomy of "state" and "community"? Is this the reason why in his analyses these categories and entities appear as always there, already in place, under every modernity? Are we in the face of the rendering of difference against, into, and ahead of discipline? Do such readings arguably inform also Chakrabarty's endeavour to recuperate the difference of "subaltern pasts" ahead of the discipline of "minority histories", such that alterities exist alongside yet ever exceed the authority of historicism? Are these measures not connected to questions of time and space, their everyday and epistemic productions? Do Dipesh's measures in reading difference against, into, and ahead of discipline – that brackets their mutual fabrications and productions – result in analytically segregated spaces? Does Chakrabarty query the aggrandizing terms of homogeneous time while accepting the ruptures of modernity on which they are founded?<sup>22</sup>

Such questions follow from as well as impel my own explorations of modernity. Braiding together analytical impulses with hermeneutic sensibilities, theory and narrative, my efforts have distinguished be-

21 Chakrabarty, "The difference-deferral of a colonial modernity," 84.

22 Chakrabarty, *Habitations of Modernity*; Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*; Dube, "Mirrors of modernity"; Dube, "Histories, dwellings, habitations".

tween historically located *subjects of modernity* as bearers of heterogeneous reasons/understandings, on the one hand, and routine representations of *the modern subject* as insinuating a singular rationality, on the other.<sup>23</sup> This distinction indeed lies at the core of my understanding of modernity, which I approach not merely as an idea, an ideal, an ideology but as historical processes of meaning and power that stretch back over the past five centuries. In my reading, then, modernity is not the irrevocable product of Cartesian dualities and a singular Enlightenment predicated upon aggrandizing analytics; or of the ravages of the British, French, and Dutch empires after the eighteenth century; or, indeed, of the admixtures of the above. Rather, the modernity of the Enlightenment (with its acute interplay between race and reason) came only after the modernity of the Renaissance (with its interleaving of metaphysical instrumentalism and mercantile capitalism), quite as the violence of modernity of later colonialisms was preceded by modern genocides of the anterior empires of Spain and Portugal. The point is that the processes of modernity since the sixteenth century need to be approached as being constitutively contradictory – not unlike the innate heterogeneity and formative contentions of the Enlightenment of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>24</sup>

Singular narratives of modernity – as the secular redemption of humanity, or as its fundamental fall – are all too tendentious, seeking to remake the world in their own image. Here, it would be churlish to overlook formations of modernity as drawing in procedures of commerce and consumption, rationality and science, industry and technology, nations-states and citizens-subjects, public spheres and private spaces, and secularized religion(s) and disenchanting knowledge(s). At the same time, far removed from inexorable heroic histories of these developments to be found instead are formidably chequered narratives of their unfolding. This is bound also to the ways in which the core of

23 Dube, *Subjects of Modernity*.

24 Ibid.; Dube, *Stitches on Time*; Saurabh Dube, ed., *Enchantments of Modernity: Empire, Nation, Globalization* (London and New Delhi: Routledge, 2009); Saurabh Dube and Ishita Bannerjee-Dube, eds., *Unbecoming Modern: Colonialism, Modernity, Colonial Modernities*, Second Edition (London and New York: Routledge 2019).

modernity contains the interplay between the Renaissance and colony, the Enlightenment and empire, reason and race, liberty and slavery, democracy and subjectivation, sovereign and subaltern, progress and loss, seductions of the state and enchantments of the modern – all shot through with the work of gender and the labour of sexuality, the cultivation of culture and the control of nature, and the triumph of the human and the tragedy of the species. Needless to say, each of these scenes and subjections of modernity, such sites and sides of the modern, are intimately enmeshed with one other. Put simply, procedures of modernity have been contradictory, contingent, and contested – protocols that are incessantly articulated yet also critically out of joint with themselves.

It is precisely these procedures that emerge expressed by subjects of modernity. I am pointing to historical *subjects* that have distinctly participated in formations of modernity: different actors who have been at once *subject to* its procedures while also *subjects shaping* its processes. (That is, the twin implications of the being/becoming and the becoming/being of *subjects*.) Expressed concretely, over the past few centuries, subjects of modernity have included indigenous communities under imperial and national dispensations; the subordinate peoples of African descent not only on the original continent but in different Diasporas across the world; and peasants and artisans, workers and laborers, the poor and the subaltern, the indigent and the marginal that have diversely articulated the colony and the post-colony in non-Western and Western theatres. These subjects have registered within their measures and meanings the constitutive contradictions, contentions, and contingencies of modernity.<sup>25</sup>

At the widest level, the distinction between *the* modern subject and *subjects* of modernity is especially important for thinking through a pervasive meaning-legislative, adjudicatory reason that abounds in

<sup>25</sup> Dube, *Subjects of Modernity*, which discusses also the dangers of envisioning subjects of modernity in the image of *the* modern subject; the fact that there are different ways of being modern – and non- and extra-modern – for subjects of modernity and for modern subjects; and that modern subjects are of course also subjects of modernity.

various reaches of the academy while also of course extending far beyond its dispersed terrains. This is to emphasize the requirements of constant vigilance against the seductions of the privileged rationality (and rationale) that frames the objects it considers in the image of the commentator-analysts' singular, self-same reason rather than avowing and articulating subjects of/with other reasons, equally entailing issues of affect, embodiment, and immanence.<sup>26</sup>

Clearly, there is much that I have learned from engaging with Dipesh Chakrabarty – afore, about, around, and after *PE*.

26 Ibid.; Dube, *Stitches on Time*; Dube, *After Conversion*; and Saurabh Dube, "Figures of immanence", in *Dipesh Chakrabarty and the Global South: Subaltern Studies, Postcolonial Perspectives, and the Anthropocene*, eds. Saurabh Dube, Sanjay Seth, and Ajay Skaria (London and New York: 2020), 232-47.



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