Reading *Provincializing Europe* as a Missed Opportunity

Réal Fillion

Práticas da História, n.º 11 (2020): 181-198

www.praticasdahistoria.pt

Práticas da História, n.º 11 (2020): 181-198

Réal Fillion

Reading *Provincializing Europe* as a Missed Opportunity

This essay explores Chakrabarty's introduction of the expression "provincializing Europe" as a privileged way of understanding history in modern conditions. The theoretical challenge it presents is to make sense of a commitment both to universality and to the particularity of its forms of expression through an appeal to history. While Chakrabarty invokes Marx and Heidegger in order to meet this challenge, developing a distinction between a (universal) History 1 and (particular) History 2s, I argue that Hegel's philosophical history – as recently discussed by Terry Pinkard – provides a better account of how to theorize the way universality particularizes itself in individual efforts to instantiate it (something that Chakrabarty's own case studies seem to illustrate). Hegel's work seems especially relevant when we consider how he can be seen to be explicitly "provincializing Europe" in his jurisdictional concern with the universal claim of justice as freedom.
Keywords: Universality; particularity; modernity; Hegel.

Ler *Provincializing Europe* como uma Oportunidade Perdida

Este ensaio explora a introdução de Chakrabarty da expressão da "Europa provincializante" como um caminho privilegiado para a compreensão da história nas condições modernas. O desafio teórico que articula consiste em dar sentido ao compromisso com a universalidade e à particularidade das suas formas de expressão através de um apelo à história. Enquanto Chakrabarty apela a Marx e Heidegger para enfrentar este desafio, desenvolvendo uma distinção entre uma História (universal) 1 e (particular) História 2, argumento que a história filosófica de Hegel - como recentemente discutido por Terry Pinkard - fornece um melhor relato de como teorizar como universalidade particulariza-se em esforços individuais para instanciar isto (algo que os próprios estudos de caso de Chakrabarty parecem ilustrar). O trabalho de Hegel parece especialmente relevante quando nós consideramos como pode ser visto para ser explicitamente "provincializando Europa" na sua preocupação jurisdicional com a reivindicação universal de justiça como liberdade.
Palavras-chave: Universalidade; particularidade; modernidade; Hegel.

Reading Provincializing Europe as a Missed Opportunity

Réal Fillion*

This reading only gradually took on the shape of contemplating a missed opportunity, as the expectations I had invested in the title gave way to the actual text. Coming to the book via its title, the idea of "provincializing" Europe had particular resonance for me as a "Canadian" settler (twice over, given that my mother tongue is French). To call myself a "settler" rather than a "citizen" is a belated recognition that I inhabit Indigenous lands and not the "New World" of the history I was taught as a child. In the face of surrounding Indigenous mobilization and self-affirmation, it is an invitation to reconsider the givenness of my own sense of place.

The resonance of the notion of a "provincializing Europe" only increases when one considers how, in what is now called "Canada," Indigenous lands were colonized and settled jurisdictionally as confederated "provinces." Add to this the fact that the terms of the particular "province" I was born into and grew up in were originally negotiated by the Métis inhabitants of the land who had set up a provisional government in order to do so, thereby reconfiguring what was otherwise shaping up as a mere transfer by sale of the claimed proprietary rights to a huge swath of lands of a private corporation (the Hudson's Bay Company) to the confederated provinces of a newly constituted "state" calling itself Canada, itself engaged in distinguishing or particularizing itself within

* Réal Fillion (rfillion@usudbury.ca). Department of Philosophy, University of Sudbury, Sudbury, ONP3E 2C6, Canada.

the British empire. From the perspective of the Indigenous and Métis inhabitants, the notion that the land was the Hudson's Bay Company's to sell out from under their feet no doubt appeared ludicrous.

I am somewhat haunted by this history of dispossession and colonization of Indigenous lands because as a minority French-speaker growing up in that "province" (my great-grandfather having left the majority French-speaking province of Québec to settle in this newly constituted "bilingual" province), I was constantly reminded of the ghostly presence of its ostensible "founder," the Métis leader Louis Riel. Following the creation of the province of Manitoba and despite being elected three times to the Parliament of Canada, he nevertheless lived in exile because of a bounty placed on his head from within the neighboring province of Ontario for his role in sanctioning the execution of a prisoner of his provisional government as well as the languishing promise of amnesty that formed part of the negotiations establishing the new province.[1] He nevertheless came out of his exile and returned to what was called the Northwest Territories at the request of his fellow Métis when Canada was once again intent on securing Indigenous land for its privileged modes and patterns of settlement. After having their own petitions ignored, the Métis sought him out because of his experience in dealing with "Canada." But Riel's arrival, armed Métis resistance to an invading colonial army, a battle at Batoche, eventually led to Riel surrendering himself to Canadian authorities, after which he was accused of treason, tried and sentenced to hang as per the laws selected to try him[2], and despite the jury recommendation of mercy, was executed on November 16, 1885.

These paragraphs are all too brief but they speak to a way of viewing the consequences of a "provincializing Europe" that continues to inform settler practices.

1 For a recent discussion of Riel's role in shaping early confederated Canada, see M. Max Hamon, *The Audacity of His Enterprise: Louis Riel and the Métis Nation That Canada Never Was, 1840-1875* (Montreal & Kingston : McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019).

2 For a settler colonial reading of the legitimacy of the legal context of the trial, one that uses the notion of "anachronism" in a way that Chakrabatry allows us to question, see Thomas Flanagan, *Riel and the Rebellion: 1885 Reconsidered.* Second Edition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000).

In introducing the expression, Chakrabarty meant something distinctly different, however. Whereas my concern with history has increasingly become "unsettled" in the face of continuing settler colonial practices and attitudes in my part of the world, Chakrabarty's own concern with "provincializing Europe" is professedly *post*-colonial, intent on reshaping an insistent European presence while nevertheless engaging with its ruling ideas and their distinctive appeals to universality. In a word, he is interested in *particularizing* the universality that issues from "Europe," not by reducing it abstractly to its own particularity but by attempting to see how it interacts with ideas issuing from other places. This, of course, is part of the appeal to "difference" referenced in the subtitle of the book. Chakrabarty is interested in probing the "political modernity" issuing from "Europe" as it engages, transforms, and is transformed by its continued presence in places like India. As he puts it in the Preface to his work: "The universal concepts of political modernity encounter pre-existing concepts, categories, institutions, and practices through which they get translated and configured differently."[3]

Thus, for Chakrabarty, to "provincialize Europe" is to particularize its pretension to universality by examining how it is transformed locally. One of the more interesting things about his approach is the way its spatial or geographical sense informs and reconfigures our sense of the temporality of history, refusing the uniformity of historical time presumed by "Europe" which both treats the past as past and treats itself as everyone's future. This is the "developmentalist" picture of Europe that he seeks to "provincialize." He puts it quite succinctly when he writes: "Historicism—and even the modern, European idea of history—one might say, came to non-European peoples in the nineteenth century as somebody's way of saying "not yet" to somebody else."[4] His critique of such a developmentalist historicism certainly applies to nineteenth century "Canada" as a fledgling settler state and its presumption to appropriate the North-West Territories. But of course there is an important difference.

3 Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008), xii.

4 Ibid., 8.

James Tully captures this quite well in his discussion of the persisting imperial roles within modern constitutional democracies.[5] Identifying the major ways of exercising imperial right over non-European societies, the one most relevant to my part of the world is of course "settling," where the focus is on "dispossessing [Indigenous peoples] of their territories and usurping their governments, by force or dishonoured treaties."[6] This contrasts with what he calls "indirect colonial rule" which operates "by establishing a formal infrastructure of imperial law and *lex mercatoria* while also preserving and modifying the existing indigenous customary constitutions and constituent powers so that resources and labour are privatized and opened to trade, labour discipline, and investments and contract law dominated by the European trading companies."[7] It is this "indirect colonial rule" that Chakrabarty wishes to probe by "provincializing" its continued postcolonial presence in order to reconfigure, it would seem, his own commitment to universalism.[8]

The book accomplishes this by dividing itself into a first largely theoretical part and a second part focused on certain case studies, as it were. My focus is on the first theoretical part because it is here that the sense of a "missed opportunity" arose and lingered, given that I had my own "provincial" case study in mind. Because the theoretical challenge is to make sense of a commitment both to universality and to the particularity of its forms of expression through an appeal to history, one would think an important interlocutor would be G.W.F. Hegel whose philosophical efforts were concentrated in just this way. It is true that Hegel's lectures on the philosophy of history are notorious-

5 James Tully, "Modern Constitutional Democracy and Imperialism," *Osgoode Hall Law Journal* 46, n o. 3 (2008), 461-493.

6 Ibid., 481.

7 Ibid., 482.

8 Chakrabarty's commitment to universalism is also given interesting expression in his later attempts to theorize the Anthropocene but already here it is clearly stated (even if, as he immediately points out, it does not define *this* particular project): "As moderns desirous of social justice and its attendant institutions, we, whether decisionist [for whom the past is primarily usable] or historicist [for whom the past is primarily knowable], cannot but have a shared commitment to it [the universal and necessary history posited by the logic of capital] (in spite of all the disagreements between liberalism and Marxism). It is through this commitment that is already built into our lives that our jousting with European thought begins. The project of "provincializing Europe" arises from this commitment." Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 250.

ly Euro-centric, not to say "orientalist," and in that sense perhaps less interesting to Chakrabarty, who instead appeals to a, in my view somewhat problematic, combination of Marx and Heidegger. I would like to first examine this combination as a way of the tackling the challenge of thinking universality through particularity before revisiting the "missed opportunity" of engaging Hegel's work in this context through a discussion of Terry Pinkard's recent re-reading of Hegel's lectures on the philosophy of history.[9]

Chakrabarty's theoretical combination of Marx and Heidegger is most evident in his articulation of the two senses of history he calls History 1 and History 2, both seen as "necessary" but also opposed and pulling away from each other. While the distinction seems important to me, I also find it problematic inasmuch as Chakrabarty insists that we *maintain* the tension between both approaches to history. This is made explicit in his conclusion:

> To provincialize Europe in historical thought is *to struggle to hold in a state of permanent tension* a dialogue between two contradictory points of view. On one side is the indispensable and universal narrative of capital—History 1, as I have called it. This narrative both gives us a critique of capitalist imperialism and affords elusive but necessarily energizing glimpses of the Enlightenment promise of an abstract, universal but never- to-be-realized humanity. Without such elusive glimpses, as I have said before, there is no political modernity. On the other side is thought about diverse ways of being human, the infinite incommensurabilities through which we struggle—perennially, precariously, but unavoidably—to "world the earth" in order to live within our different senses of ontic belonging. These are the struggles that become—when in contact with capital—the

9 Terry Pinkard, *Does History Make Sense? Hegel on the Historical Shapes of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2017).

> History 2s that in practice always modify and interrupt the totalizing thrusts of History 1.[10]

This imperative to *maintain* a dialogue in "a state of permanent tension" seems to be to an overdetermined appreciation of, and concern with, how various struggles shape our sense of history. It also leads to a very selective and questionable use of Marx (though that is not my primary concern here). The appeal to Marx seems to stand in for, as noted in the above paragraph, the "critique of capitalist imperialism," but less *as* a critique than as a way to theorize History 1 as an "indispensable and universal narrative." Chakrabarty's concern with and commitment to universality and universalism enter here, via Marx, to be sure, but mostly it seems as a way to ensure the continuance of the Enlightened, cosmopolitan universalism that undergirds our "political modernity." However, against the abstract, asymptotic, *but* totalizing tendency of History 1, he appeals to Heidegger and the concrete "worlding" of non-totalizable possibilities – History 2s - which he posits "in practice always modify and interrupt the totalizing thrusts of History 1." But do they? I believe Chakrabarty does, in his case studies, show how they do "modify" the ruling narrative of "political modernity" in interesting ways. That they can be seen to be also "interrupting" its "totalizing thrusts" perhaps requires more attention to the concrete struggles at the heart of those particularizing histories.

Perhaps a way to illustrate the overdetermined relation between History 1 and History 2s is to consider the way Chakrabarty criticizes Fredric Jameson's "Always historicize!" This is the injunction that opens Jameson's preface to his *The Political Unconscious*[11] and Chakrabarty, ignoring its prefatory place[12] takes the occasion of its utterance to say

10 Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 254. My emphasis.

11 Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a socially symbolic act* (London and New York: Routledge, 1983), ix.

12 Arguably a preface is not the "beginning" of a book, that is more properly the role of its Introduction. Prefaces, though placed before the body of the book, in spirit and intent tend to reflect the author's sense of its outcome or result. Jameson's sentence runs as follows: "Always historicize! This slogan—the one absolute and we may even say "transhistorical" imperative of all dialectical thought—will unsurprisingly turn out to be the moral of *The Political Unconscious* as well." I bid.

the following: "historicizing is not the problematic part of the injunction, the troubling term is "always." For the assumption of a continuous, homogeneous, infinitely stretched out time that makes possible the imagination of an "always" is put to question by subaltern pasts that makes the present, as Derrida says, "out of joint.""[13] This seems slightly disingenuous to me. The "always" of Jameson's imperative is far from *assuming* a "continuous, homogeneous, infinitely stretched out time" but rather commits itself to *investigating*, through interpreting the cultural texts of past and present, how the struggles contained in history speak to something like the emancipatory logic that Marx attempted to articulate. Jameson's "indispensable and universal narrative" is neither continuous or homogeneous but to be discerned in its various particularizing texts in what they both reveal and conceal. The "Always historicize!" is an interpretive commitment to "something like an ultimate *semantic* precondition for adequate literary comprehension" where, according to Jameson, "such semantic enrichment and enlargement of the inert givens and materials of a particular text must take place within three concentric frameworks, which mark a widening out of the sense of the social ground of a text through the notions, first, of political history, in the narrow sense of punctual event and a chronicle like sequence of happenings in time; then of society, in the now already less diachronic and time-bound sense of a constitutive tension and struggle between social classes; and, ultimately, of history now conceived in its vastest sense of the sequence of modes of production and the succession and destiny of the various human social formations, from prehistoric life to whatever far future history has in store for us."[14] I think we can readily see in this particular appeal to an "indispensable and universal narrative" all of the needed tension between local struggles and the "totalizing thrusts" of a peremptory "developmentalist" History 1 without feeling the need to *maintain* that tension theoretically by appealing to distinct History 2s as "non-totalizing."

13 Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 111.

14 Ibid., 60. Interestingly, Chakrabatry's later work on the Anthropocene and Climate Change address the challenge of thinking such a "far future." But that will need to be taken up at another time.

I might put this otherwise. I certainly endorse the fundamental idea of "provincializing Europe," especially in the following formulation: "European thought is at once both indispensable and inadequate in helping us to think through the experiences of political modernity in non-Western nations, and provincializing Europe becomes the task of exploring how this thought—which is now everybody's heritage and which affect us all— may be renewed from and for the margins."[15] Indeed, from my part of the world, beyond the division between "Western" and "non-Western " nations, there are nations "*within*" so-called "Western" nations challenging and resetting the terms of such renewal.[16] And, in considering the relation between History 1 and History 2s, I was reminded of Raymond Williams' distinction between dominant, residual and emerging cultures: the dominant culture does not exhaust all cultural possibilities even as it incorporates what it can from those alternative and oppositional cultures that contest its dominance. Furthermore, those alternative and oppositional cultures can have, according to Williams' categorisation, either *residual* or *emergent* features. By the former, he means "some experiences, meanings and values which cannot be verified and cannot be expressed in the terms of the dominant culture, are nevertheless lived and practised on the basis of the residue – cultural as well as social – of some previous social formation."[17] And by emergent, he means to point to the fact that "new meanings and values, new practices, new significations and experiences, are continually being created."[18] Surely, Chakrabarty's own particular studies of History 2s resonate with Williams' approach, right down to its basic point, which is to affirm that "no mode of production, and therefore no dominant society or order of society, and therefore no dominant culture, in reality exhausts human practice, human energy, human intention."[19]

15 Ibid., 17.

16 For example, as James Tully has put it with reference to Indigenous peoples, theirs is an effort "to live creatively in accord with their own ever-changing customary constitutional forms and constituent powers within the interstices of imperial constitutional formations." Tully, "Modern Constitutional Democracy", 491.

17 "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory," in *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (London: Verso, 1980), 39.

18 Ibid., 40.

19 Ibid., 43.

Of course, part of the significance of Chakrabarty's conceptualization of History 2s is the manner in which he appreciates how the diversity of "human practice, human energy, human intention" *includes* the more-and-other-than human and rejects the assumption that would reduce them to "social facts." Much of the originality of his approach resides here when he says: "I take gods and spirits to be existentially coeval with the human, and think from the assumption that the question of being human involves the question of being with gods and spirits."[20] I would agree that here there is a *creative* tension to maintain between History 1 and History 2s inasmuch as and where the former presses upon the latter or, in Williams' terms, where the dominant culture tries to incorporate residual and emergent alternative and oppositional cultural practices.[21] Maintaining that creative tension does indeed involve the work of "provincializing Europe" in the sense of no longer ceding to it as the seat of imperial (intellectual) power while recognizing *de facto* its global reach.

And thus we come back once again to the notion that "European" thought is at once "indispensable and inadequate" in thinking through our (all of us) "political *modernity*." Here is where engagement with Hegel's thought seems appropriate. That Hegel is an important figure for thinking modernity is fairly well accepted (at least amongst philosophers), especially from within the tradition of critical theory.[22] His philosophy of history has been less well accepted, though we should remind ourselves that the text we read are notes from lectures and

20 Chakrabarty, *Provincializing* Europe, 15.

21 I am reminded here of the words of my one-time colleague Indigenous Elder Jim Dumont when, speaking for and from a distinctive Indigenous (Anishinaabe) spirituality, talks of Indigenous *intelligence* and comments: "Choosing to see and accept as reality only that which can be validated by the five senses, is not an *intelligent* way of seeing. Adopting and forwarding a way of living that is destructive of the environment and upsets the balance of life itself, is not an *intelligent* way of being. Opting for a worldview that closes the avenues to the counsel of wisdom of the heart and the spirit is to choose a paradigm that deliberately retards the total capacity of human *intelligence*." Jim Dumont, *Indigenous Intelligence* (Sudbury: University of Sudbury Press, 2006), 22.

22 For example, Hegel's thought sets up Jürgen Habermas' discussion in his *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1987). See also Axel Honneth's recent engagement with Hegel's political philosophy in his *Freedom's Right: The Social Foundations of Democratic Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

they are not so much about an independently conceived philosophy *of* history (taking history as an independent object of concern, as it were) than an extension of his philosophical concern with what he calls "objective spirit" which articulates a realm of *right*, understood as an ordered system of justice. If such an "objective spirit" calls for a philosophical *history*, it is because "spirit" (*Geist*), i n Hegel's account, is its own distinct natural manifestation, one that understands and accounts for *itself* in that very manifestation. A *philosophical* history is one that assesses the forms or shapes of such self-accounting in the ordering of the justice of self-conscious interactions.

This is the continuing interest of Hegel's lectures, according to Terry Pinkard, who has recently revisited them. In his *Does History Make Sense?* he argues:

> Hegel's social and historical view of the nature of subjectivity, when properly articulated, shows (according to Hegel) that there is indeed an "infinite" end at work in history—that of securing justice—which in modern times has transformed itself into a concern with justice as freedom. Freedom was not the original goal of history, but it has become the principle of modern life.[23]

Chakrabarty's concern with the inevitability of political modernity as a concern with justice is arguably addressed by Hegel's work. All the more so when we consider how, like Chakrabarty, Hegel was concerned with comprehending the universal through the particular. But perhaps even more significantly for our purposes here, Hegel's concern with explicating historical development in terms of justice can be said to be *explicitly* engaged in the project of "provincializing Europe", where "Europe" has come to stand in for the notion that "all are free," captured for example by the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of

23 Pinkard, *Does History Make Sense?*, 3.

the Citizen in the initial stages of the French Revolution. This notion, for Hegel, was not merely an abstract ideal, to be asymptotically held up as something to strive for, but needed to be connected to the Idea of "spirit" that particularized itself precisely in the work of reshaping (most immediately for him, the German) "provinces," as it were, those *places* where freedom "realizes" itself, that is, understands itself to be doing so (this is Hegel's "subjective" conception of reason). "Provinces" might be said to be (particular) jurisdictional spaces for the realization of justice as freedom (universality) under "modern" (historical) conditions. Within this manner of interpreting the notion of "provincializing Europe" justice, then, is not an abstract ideal but, as Pinkard puts it, an "infinite" end, something that perpetually needs to be realized in actual conditions.[24] It is in this sense that one should understand the "end" of history that is associated with Hegel's thought.

> The infinite "end" of history is more like health than it is like learning a determinate skill. One may achieve various levels of health (one may get sick and recover, or one can get sick and never recover), but health is not something you achieve and then cross it off the list as you move on to other things. Nor is health something that is always there at the front of one's mind when one acts. All those who argue for an "end in the sense of completion" to history confuse infinite with finite ends, including all those who think or thought history ended in either 1806 or 1989.[25]

24 Pinkard describes the difference between "finite" and "infinite" ends in this useful way: "Finite ends may simply add up, but infinite ends are never exhausted by the actions that manifest them. Finite ends—such as drinking the water—expire, but infinite ends have no intrinsic limit. They require a continual sustaining activity for them to be effective. Justice, for example, is not something that a collective enterprise can establish and then tick off the list of things still needing to be done. It must be realized over and over again. An infinite end has no limit at which it has finally been accomplished. One comprehends such an infinite end not when one has added up all the actions that manifest it but when one has comprehended the principle that is at work in the way those actions manifest it." Ibid., 42.

25 Ibid., 43.

To see history as the concrete pursuit of the "infinite end" of justice in the particular and concrete conditions of a "modernity" that claims that "all are free" does, it seems to me, offer a description of the "tension" that Chakrabarty insists should be maintained. His insistence, I have suggested, is "theoretical" in the sense that he sees a reigning European "historicism" as effacing the "difference" otherwise evident in the plural modes of "worlding" across the planet. Hegel shares this concern with "worlding" the otherwise abstract universals of the Enlightenment, though his "worlding" is distinctly more "provincializing" in the sense that it sees in history distinct realizations of forms (jurisdictionally-speaking) of justice and in that sense, perhaps, more fully captures the connotations of Chakrabatry's evocative expression.

But, of course, the expression is also meant to capture a challenge to strictly Euro-centric conceptions of the universality at the heart of "modernity." And Hegel's philosophical history is decidedly Euro-centric (even as it "provincializes" itself, as it were). Negatively put, this means that its treatment of what is not Europe misses what is distinctive about it. And surely this is the case in his treatment of China, India, and Africa. Somewhat more positively, his understanding and treatment of "Europe" itself, though, remains a striking and compelling account of its "spirit" and the spirit of modernity itself, whose inevitable relevance Chakrabarty also argues for.

What accounts for Hegel's failed attempts to comprehend the world outside of Europe? The question, of course, answers itself, inasmuch as the "world" is hardly graspable by an individual mind. Having said that, as Pinkard notes, his philosophical history demands it; that is, "Hegel realized that, by his own principles, he had to make his full case in light of world history and not just the story of how the Eurasian peninsula developed from Hellenic Athens to nineteenth-century Europe."[26] Those principles, as they were tied to his conception of a developing spirit (understood as a self-conscious appreciation of the manner in which the "world" was in effect shaped by the effort to "know" it; that

26 Ibid., 51.

it was not merely a given to self-conscious beings), were also shaped by what Hegel took to be *logical* considerations. The complexities posed by Hegel's *Science of Logic*[27] cannot be addressed here but we can examine briefly how the key categories of universality and particularity are worked out within what Hegel calls the Doctrine of the Concept, that is, that part of logic that explicitly takes up thought's own conceptual self-determinations. The first thing to note is that the two terms actually call out for a third if we are to work them out fully. Richard Dien Winfield captures the point most succinctly:

> The concept is the universal and universality relates itself to its particulars, whose own plurality depends upon the individuality that enables particulars to be differentiated. Without relation to particulars, the universal forfeits its identity as one over many, whereas without relation to individuality, particulars lose their distinction from one another, collapsing into one, and depriving the universal of any instantiation to encompass. Accordingly, if mind is to grasp the universal, it must equally be aware of its particularization.[28]

Hegel's *philosophical* history is one that deploys the concept and, as we have seen, the universal in modern conditions affirms that "all are free." This is not an abstract, asymptotic universal but one that necessarily particularizes itself jurisdictionally, as it were, and finds itself challenged individually in our concrete efforts to be free within those particularizing terms. Hegel's decision to frame his lectures on world history narratively as a movement from "one" being free in a despotic "China" or "India" to "some" being free in Ancient Greece to "all" being free in modern Europe in many ways seems to be a caricature of the

27 Hegel, G. W. F. *Science of Logic*, trans. A.V. Miller (New York: Humanities Press, 1976).

28 Richard Dien Winfield, *Hegel and Mind: Rethinking philosophical psychology* (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 83.

logical point articulated above, an overly hasty approach to grasp the world historical reality of *Geist*.[29]

But the logical point remains and Chakrabarty, building on Marx's insights into the form of the struggles involved, renews it in his conception of the idea of *provincializing Europe*. If theoretically Chakrabarty limits himself to a posited tension between the universal and the particular, it might be because his conception and critique of historicism leads him to (mis)place the logical space of individuality as a distinct kind of singularity. He writes: "To critique historicism in all its varieties is to unlearn to think of history as a developmental process in which that which is possible becomes actual by tending to a future that is singular."[30] As against this, he makes use of Heidegger's discussion of possibility in order to theorize a non-totalizable present that interrupts such a developmental process. This non-totalizability is evident in the plural ways of "worlding" that nevertheless do not deny the commitment to modernity. He cites as examples those he developed in his case studies, where

> Kenyatta's relationship to his grandfather's magic, Appiah's relationship to his father's habit of offering scotch to ancestors, and Kosambi's relationship to the saddle-quern all point to the same problem. They refer us to the plurality that inheres in the "now," the lack of totality, the constant fragmentariness, that constitutes one's present.[31]

Alternatively, one might theorize these examples not as forms of resistance to a totalizing historical process governed by a singular fu-

29 For a good discussion of the assumptions and limitations of Hegel's approach to "Oriental despotism," see Pinkard, *Does History Make Sense?*, 51-66. As Pinkard argues, however, "on his own terms, Hegel's mistake is not per se with his conception of subjectivity nor with his conception of freedom, but rather with his idea that entire civilizations in effect never move on to the right type of reflective subjectivity." (i bid., 67).

30 Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 249.

31 Ibid., 243.

ture but see in them individual efforts to be true to the particularized universal of being free in modern conditions.[32] Here Hegel's understanding of history theorizes our individual efforts (understood as our combination of passion and principle as self-conscious natural beings) as connected to the "infinite" end of making sense of our lives, initially within the terms through which the world is opened to us, and then through the struggles we find ourselves thrown in to, as those very terms betray the universality they particularize. To quote Pinkard one final time:

> Hegel's philosophy of history is with what various things mean to subjects, individually and collectively, in the historical configurations into which they are thrown. Subjects may indeed be caught in the wake of forces that they cannot control or only vaguely understand, and they may be operating in terms whose implications they do not fully grasp or comprehend at all. However, the Hegelian concern is with what it means for those subjects to be caught in that vortex yet still be acting self-consciously, and not with determining the causal conditions of the vortex into which they might be thrown.[33]

As I mentioned in the beginning of this essay, I was drawn to Chakrabarty's work by the suggestiveness of its title. As a settler Canadian, I am implicitly, in the languages I speak, a conduit of "provincializing Europe," an individual instantiating of the particularizing of its universal appeal. However, as an "unsettled settler," I remain

32 Another one of his examples comes to mind: "Interestingly, practicing Indian scientists—and I suppose scientists else- where as well—often have not felt any intellectual or social obligation to find one single overarching framework within which to contain the diversity of their own life practices (as distinct from their practices as scientists). In other words, the practice of "science" does not necessarily call on the researcher to develop a "scientific temper" beyond the practice of science itself." Ibid., 253.

33 Pinkard, *Does History Make Sense?*, 166.

dissatisfied with a theoretical approach intent of merely maintaining the tension between the particular and the universal when it comes to grasping the significance of that history.

Again, perhaps because of the place I grew up in, and perhaps because of the individual efforts of the Métis leader Louis Riel to "provincialize Europe," combining "Catholic and Métis spirituality, French traditions, English culture, British legal understanding, and American political rhetoric"[34] to address the universality of justice as freedom against the vortex of settler colonial patterns of movement, it seems to me that Hegel's philosophical history recommends itself in attempting to understand those efforts and that overlooking it might count as a missed opportunity to explore Chakrabarty's suggestive phrase more fully.

34 Hamon, *The Audacity*, 22.

Bibliography

Chakrabarty, Dipesh. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference.* Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008.

Dumont, Jim. *Indigenous Intelligence.* Sudbury: University of Sudbury Press, 2006.

Flanagan, Thomas. *Riel and the Rebellion: 1885 Reconsidered.* Second Edition. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000.

Habermas, Jürgen. *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures.* T ranslated Frederick G. Lawrence. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1987.

Hamon, M. Max, *The Audacity of His Enterprise: Louis Riel and the Métis Nation That Canada Never Was, 1840-1875.*_Montreal & Kingston : McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019.

Hegel, G. W. F. *Science of Logic.* Translated by A.V. Miller. New York: Humanities Press, 1976.

Honneth, Axel. *Freedom's Right: The Social Foundations of Democratic Life.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2014.

Jameson, Fredric. *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a socially symbolic act.* London and New York: Routledge, 1983.

Pinkard, Terry. *Does History Make Sense? Hegel on the Historical Shapes of Justice.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017.

Tully, James. "Modern Constitutional Democracy and Imperialism," *Osgoode Hall Law Journal*, 46, n o. 3 (2008): 461-493.

Williams, Raymond. *Problems in Materialism and Culture.* London: Verso, 1980.

Winfield, Richard Dien. *Hegel and Mind: Rethinking philosophical psychology.* Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

Referência para citação:

Fillion, Réal. "Reading *Provincializing Europe* as a Missed Opportunity." *Práticas da História, Journal on Theory, Historiography and Uses of the Past*, n.º 11 (2020): 181-198.