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THE LONG-LASTING 'PROVINCIALIZATION' OF EUROPE. AN INTERVIEW WITH DIPESH CHAKRABARTY[1]

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Abstract

This article and the related interview aim at exploring the intellectual legacy of Dipesh Chakrabarty's book *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Though and Historical Difference* (2000). The long-lasting process of "provincialization" of both Europe and the Western world is analysed in the light of today's most pressing global challenges. A particular attention is dedicated to the process of European integration, the 'colonial origins' of the European Economic Community and the reconfiguration of labour subjectivities within contemporary society in Europe and beyond. In this respect, our aim is to introduce a fruitful postcolonial perspective into such an intriguing topic, that is the transnational history and politics of European integration. This article is conceived

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as a long introduction to an interview with Chakrabarty himself, where we seek to understand how he conceptualizes the far-reaching transformations that both Europe and the entire "globe" experienced over the last twenty years in the realm of transnational social, economic, political, and cultural relations.

Keywords

Europe, European Integration, Globalism, Environment, Labour, Subjectivity.

Resumen

Este artículo y la entrevista relacionada tienen como objetivo explorar el legado intelectual del libro de Dipesh Chakrabarty *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Though and Historical Difference* (2000). El proceso de larga duración de la "provincialización" tanto de Europa como del mundo occidental se analiza a la luz de los desafíos mundiales más apremiantes de la actualidad. Se presta especial atención al proceso de integración europea, a los "orígenes coloniales" de la Comunidad Económica Europea y a la reconfiguración de las subjetividades laborales dentro de la sociedad contemporánea en Europa y más allá. En este sentido, nuestro objetivo es introducir una perspectiva poscolonial fructífera en un tema tan intrigante, es decir, la historia transnacional y la política de la integración europea. Este artículo se concibe como una larga introducción a una entrevista con el propio Chakrabarty, donde buscamos entender cómo conceptualiza las transformaciones de largo alcance que tanto Europa como todo el "globo" experimentaron en los últimos veinte años en el ámbito de las relaciones sociales, económicas, políticas y culturales transnacionales.

Palabras clave

Europa, Integración Europea, Globalismo, Medio ambiente, Trabajo, Subjetividad.

INTERVIEW

Frapporti – Ventresca:

We would like to conduct this conversation by building up a sort of intellectual path where many crucial topics and categories included in your pivotal work, *Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (2000), will be intertwined. As said, the focus of our interview is on the process of European integration as it has been evolving since the early post-WWII period. In this respect, we aim at 'provincializing' our own historiographic gaze, that is to adopt —or at least to deal with— a postcolonial perspective on a process (namely, European integration) which is now celebrating its seventieth anniversary.

Thus, as far as the main topics of our discussion are concerned, we would like to start from a very basic —though central— question: What does Europe mean in your opinion now?

At the very beginning of your book (pp. 3-4) you highlight that "The Europe I seek to provincialize de-center is an imaginary figure that remains deeply embedded in clichéd and shorthand forms in some everyday habits thought". In the following pages, you get back to this point, stressing that Europe (as well as India) is treated as a "hyperreal term" inasmuch it lies on "certain figures of imagination whose geographical referents remain somewhat indeterminate" (p. 27).

In light of what happened over the last twenty years in the European as well as the global political and economic arena (just to mention the 9/11 and its repercussions on transatlantic relations; the defeat of the European constitutional project in 2005; the outburst of the 'Great Recession' and the post-2008 crisis of the Eurozone; the issue of migrant flows), do you think that the 'imagination' of (and even the geographical reference to) the European Political Space has been radically redefined? Putting it differently: when you speak about Europe, what are you now thinking about?

Chakrabarty:

When I wrote *Provincializing Europe* (PE), "Europe" was a term that mediated many questions of "modernity" for me. It was a shorthand for certain ideas that arose among European intellectuals and in their institutions even as European nations expanded to create empires and dominated —and in the case of indigenous societies, destroyed— the lives of other peoples. Empire was a creative force in India. It created

new possibilities for life. Most importantly, the British created a middle class in India. This was true of all regions of India but especially of Bengal where intellectuals from this middle class in turn developed a fascination with the ideas and institutions of Europe even as they protested the injustices (including racism) of the Empire. Certain visions of emancipation —from patriarchy, caste and class-based oppression, inequalities of other kinds, and democratic political structures and so on— came out of this inter-cultural dialogue. PE in many ways was an attempt to understand the nature of this dialogue that took place across differences of history and cultural pasts. This is why questions of translation and displacement remained very important in PE. But the Europe in question was a Europe that had been formed out of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment and one with universal messages (the two most important being liberalism and Marxism). People knew that alongside this Europe, there was also the Europe that produced modern forms of racism, empires, new forms of violence and oppression but they still felt inspired by those universal ideas and tried to make them their own through processes that I treated as translational. To provincialize was to see how the dialectic of the universal and the particular related to that which I, followed Paul Veyne, called the singular.

When I look at Europe today, I see groups and intellectuals fighting for some of those ideals that now also feel somewhat irretrievably lost. This, incidentally, is true not only of Europe but of India as well. The Indian intellectual struggles I highlighted in PE now seem like minority and non-dominant traditions, certainly on the defensive. There is no question that the European political space —and, of course, the space of the EU— is undergoing upheavals marked by the resurgence of populism, authoritarianism, financial crises, and xenophobia. But these are global issues. The global world is post-imperial (if one uses the world "empire" in a formal sense) and is marked today by certain crises of planetary proportions. Certainly, many of the hopes and aspirations that had to do with 1989 have been blighted. But this is the big difference with the analytical frame that I deployed in PE. The whole question of modernity that Habermas once described as an incomplete project and that was at the core of PE now lives a much more precarious life than it did in the 1990s when I was working on PE. 1989 still seemed close. But the world that was created by various democratic upsurges between the 1960s and the 1980s have slowly morphed into a world marked by unbridled expansion of what Sandro Mezzadra and his colleagues call extractive capital, of technology that is threatening the future of labor and replacing labor by work (on this distinction, see below), demographic changes, and environmental crises of

planetary proportions. Today's problems in Europe and elsewhere are not unrelated to these factors. In my current work, I try to develop analytical distinctions between the global and the planetary and argue that we have even moved on from the world-historical phase we used to describe by the word "globalization"; we live on the cusp of the global and the planetary. Known democratic forms of management invented over the last couple of centuries are failing to function, and authoritarian and impatient forms of struggle —social media often reflect and aid this impatient and un-nuanced nature of contemporary information flows— are capturing people's imagination both on the right and the left, blurring the traditional left-right distinctions.

Frapporti – Ventresca:

Your reference to the planetary dimension of today's crises (economic, financial, environmental, and so on) give us the opportunity to reflect on one of the most blatant contradictions that characterize current debates on the seemingly re-emergence of the "State" as the pivotal actor of global —or, to stick with the same theme, international— politics. As you said, the "democratic forms of management" that emerged over the last two centuries fall short of dealing with the global challenges of today's capitalism, basically because the historical conditions within which these "forms" took shape are no longer present. However, the idea that the State, often depicted as a sort of a-historical subject, might defend people from looming "external" menaces —from migrants to cosmopolitan élites of greedy bankers and technocrats— is still acquiring a mobilizing effect "both on the right and the left", as you outlined.

In some (actually circumscribed) European leftist circles, even Karl Polanyi's theory of "double movement" (1944) is now largely seen as a theoretical justification for the need to bring back previous forms of "containment" of capitalist deregulation, such as national welfare state or the restoration of full national sovereignty over monetary issues. However, these positions largely underplay the intrinsic transnational dimension of current capitalist flows and fail in explaining how the State could concretely bridle them. On the contrary, the focus on the global trajectories of capital flows and the role of assets such as logistics, extractions and finance (i.e. the works of Sandro Mezzadra, Brett Neilson, Anna Tsing and Deborah Cowen) are certainly much more persuasive, although a clear thematization of the current role of the State —which of course has not completely disappeared— is still somehow necessary.

In this respect, how do you conceptualize the role of the State in today's global scenario? How can the system of national and supranational institutions —like the EU—

deal with the challenges embodied by the dialectic between the "global" and "planetary" dimensions of contemporary world?

Chakrabarty:

In approaching your question, I find it helpful to distinguish between "the state" and actual governments. The category of "the state" projects a normative entity, hardly what governments are except in some very exceptional moments in their lives. In "The Jewish Question", Marx made a distinction, following Hegel, between "the state" and the "the actual life of people" that is never without prejudice and feelings of self/other differences. The modern state, even in some authoritarian forms, professes to stand above the actual lives of people and claims a capacity to create a "universality" of interests (in Marx's nineteenth-century terms, man's species-being) that hovers above the egoistic sphere of the civil society. In reality, actual governments try to perform this "universal" idea of the state but their success at this depends on the extent to which forces from "the actual life of people" —with all their armnory of power and inequalities— have already invaded and occupied the sphere of the state and converted "the state" into so many specific departments of governments molded by historical particularities. Take, for instance, the Trumpian government in the US or the Modi government in India. The constitution and its various provisions, in both cases, act as scripts for the state but the state machinery has been taken over —in either case— by certain sections of the populace and certain fragments of the capitalist classes in pursuit of wars that belong to the domain of the actual lives of people. These political elements convert the machinery of the government —its various executive, judicial, and legislative organs— into instruments for conducting wars that have historically erupted in society. In India, for instance, the machinery of the government, both at the central/federal and provincial levels, is actively involved in promoting sentiments of Hindu majoritarianism directed at religious minorities and at so-called "illegal Muslim immigrants" from the neighboring country of Bangladesh. Trump, too, uses the federal government machinery to pursue his anti-immigrant policies. One could also find similar instances in Europe and other places (the other country I know reasonably well, Australia, also displays versions of this phenomenon). Here all kinds of justifications are used including those of security (hence Islamophobia) but you know what is going on in reality. Both the leaders mentioned got elected as partisan generals in racist, ethnic, or religious battles that have erupted in society for understandable historical reasons. Once they get elected, however, the state, ideally, requires them to stand above these partisan issues and to translate their electoral promises into policies

compatible with the ideal practices of the state. But instead they see the machinery of the government —its various agencies and institutions— as something to capture in order to foment and further the divisive social battles (against immigrants, against the poor, against those perceived as deviant) they see themselves as part of. Many of these battles may be understood, without defending them, as social or popular responses to certain changes in global capitalism and the planetary environment that have increasingly been with us since the 1980s and have increasingly challenged social management. I know that even some middle-of-the road economists are raising voices for social regulation of technology and of certain kinds of market institutions that are seen as threatening society (the Amazon distribution system is a good example of this, seen as convenient to the consumer but utterly destructive of the local, neighborhood shop or the Uber model for taxis). My colleague, Raghuram Rajan, a celebrated economist in our Business School, has written a book called *The Third Pillar* (2019) that argues for some reigning in of capitalism in order to sustain society as an institution distinct from the government and the marketplace. Yet you only have to look at the unrelenting momentum of digitalization of life and the workplace and the consequent fragmentation and redundancy of labor to know that much of this talk in its current form (I will elaborate on this in a moment) is expressive of a nostalgia for some imagined time of the past. Global capital has created a global consuming class that, in spite of all its internal unevenness and its diaspora of dependents, enjoys a life that is made possible by the combination of the digital revolution and globalization. You only have to see how embedded our own lives are in these circuits to know that there are no clear answers here, while it is also clear that the technosphere that supports our planetary existence is creating planetary problems that only involve us more, and not less, in moving towards the illusion of being able to manage the planet (I am thinking of developments in geoengineering).

If my argument that the state has been reduced to mere governments in most places and that governments so conceived have become weapons to be used by the powerful in battles in the actual life of people, then social regulation can only be advanced by movements that participate in people's lives - in other words, by not wanting to start with normative ideas of the state. At the same time, as we have already discussed, we have to recognize that older forms of mobilization, general strikes, etc. may not be enough. And the most difficult question that I think about is the illusion of "rational" reorganization of society that the left has harbored for a long time. I cannot tell you how many times John Bellamy Foster, Brett Clark, and Richard York's *The Ecological Rift: Capitalism's War on the Earth* (2010), a Marxist-ecological analysis of the currently planetary envi-

ronmental crises, reverts to this theme as integral to solving humanity's problems: some kind of permanent and sustained rational regulation of society and economy. I fully understand where the desire for this comes from, but I do not see what historical evidence allows us to imagine a humanity capable of doing this beyond moments of universal crises and that too only in a fragmentary manner.

Frapporti – Ventresca:

Now we would like to shift our attention to the issue of (Western) European integration as a political, economic and social process. As far as we've noticed, you don't mention the topic of European integration in *Provincializing Europe*. The process of integration —actually, first cooperation and then integration— of Western Europe is often perceived as a mere technical or even technocratic way of linking European markets within a broader context of economic, administrative and juridical rules —which is in many respects blatantly true! Actually, it is somehow relevant to recall that Western Europe (of course, on the wake of the US push!) experienced after 1945 a process of progressive integration when its old Empires (i.e. Britain, France) were definitely losing their grip on global territories. For sure, European integration has very little to do with the rhetorical claims of the so called 'fathers of Europe' (Jean Monnet, Konrad Adenauer, Alcide De Gasperi, and so on), while the goals of economic, monetary, and infrastructural integration stand out as the main reasons of this historical move. Starting from these general remarks, how would you place the history of European integration within your broader narrative of "provincializing Europe", here interpreted as both a book and a far-reaching intellectual challenge? Does European integration gain its own historiographic specificity according to your post-colonial perspectives on the history of the so called 'Old continent'? Looking at some relatively recent works on the emergence of the global neoliberal turn and its relationship with the making of European Integration (Garavini, 2012; Slobodian, 2018, pp. 182-217), how and to what extent do you think that the processes of post-WWII decolonization, European integration, and capitalist transformations are interrelated? Do you think that the features of European integration, as they evolved from the early post-WWII period to date, could tell us something specific on the global trends of today's capitalism?

Chakrabarty:

Let me pick up on this question of post-war Europe to which you refer by mentioning the very illuminating texts of Slobodian and Garavini. Here I speak as someone

who is an outsider to the post-war project of reconstruction of Europe and yet dwells within a long history of Europeanization of the world. Remember I began my book *Provincializing Europe* by saying that the geopolitical space that refers to itself as Europe was provincialized by history itself, that the Europe I was seeking to provincialize was a hyper-real Europe conjointly produced by European ideas about Europe in the hay days of European empires and anti-colonial visions of modernization and nationalism often working together. So when I look at the world as it was in the decades between c.1950-1980, I see processes, an emerging structure and a set of institutions that fundamentally owed themselves to and were shaped by the expansion of Europe and the subsequent decline of European empires: all the settler-colonial nations of the world including the US, the two great wars of the twentieth century, and as well as nineteenth and twentieth-century circuits of migration; but these also at the same time included the processes of decolonization, the Cold War, and eventually the rise of the Asian economies, mainly of China and India, and the decline and ruin of the Soviet bloc. It is an open question as to when the process of Europeanization of the world ended. Carl Schmitt dated it from the beginning of the Monroe doctrine of 1823, i.e. the rise of a separate sphere of influence for the US. But I think the process continued for well over another hundred years until the end of the process of decolonization, that is to say, into the 1960s. You only have to look at the early years of decolonization or even indigenous peoples' movements in the 1960s to see how much European ideas about freedom and emancipation influenced these movements via the writings of thinkers such as Frantz Fanon. So, basically, you get a multi-themed second half of the twentieth century, and some of the themes don't even necessarily intersect in observers' minds. Firstly, there is the Cold War - much of the science of climate change that we talk about today comes out of Cold-War related interests and competition in the atmosphere and space; there is decolonization and an upswell of democratic urges reflected in struggles for civil liberties and indigenous peoples' rights; then there is the Sino-Soviet split and the rise of Maoism, the Chinese cultural revolution without which student radicalism in India, or even the rise of *Subaltern Studies* cannot be understood; the enormous and global significance of the Vietnam War and the Israel-Palestine conflict; the third-world-ism around oil and the rise of resurgent and extreme Islam. True, there is American technology and Hollywood mesmerizing the world in this period but there are also currents of anti-colonial and anti-imperial thinking that are legatees of Enlightenment and nineteenth-century Europe (Marxism and liberalism of various hues being prominent examples here). We are on the verge of globalization by the end of the 1980s. The Chinese have begun their "four

modernization" programs, while India would begin to liberalize her economy from the early 1990s.

I said these themes did not always present themselves simultaneously to observers and actors in the second half of the twentieth century. My biggest examples are global warming and global/postcolonial thinking. It was in 1988 when the NASA scientist James Hansen spoke to the US government about the dangers of global warming. In the same year or next, Homi Bhabha, Stuart Hall, and Isac Julien came together to curate the first important global and postcolonial conference on Fanon. But the two strands of thinking were unaware of each other. Those celebrating or criticizing globalization did not even know that it was connected to the parallel story of global warming. The connection was not made until the next century.

Where is post-war Europe in all this? Europe looks like an entity struggling to find its place in a post-imperial world. It could not deny its connection to the peoples it had colonized - and this touches on issues of immigration, claims of special economic ties (that are not quite realized except in the field of education), development of forms of racism in the European mainland that can be recognized as post-imperial (Le Pen, for instance), all this made complicated by the rise of the US and the presence of a large part of Eastern Europe in the Soviet bloc. Garavini shows how the rise of the welfare state and post-war prosperity in Europe made even the European working classes or their leaders somewhat inward-directed in their focus. Slobodian documents the persistence of racism among many Vienna liberals of the mid-20th century. At the same time, Europe is at the forefront of the radical student movements of the 1960s and it was a certain European uptake of both Latin American and Chinese radical ideas of the 1960s and 70s that greatly influenced us in India in that period.

I could perhaps use the Robert Redfield's ideas of "great" and "little" traditions to express my thoughts here. There are the great traditions of European thought of which all modern humans are inheritors, and there are the little traditions of European thought that delineate concerns that are specifically European. Sometimes, within Europe, you find people using elements of the Great Tradition to contest and fight the "little" imaginations of Europe especially when it comes to issues of race and immigration. But, clearly, once the empires go, European intellectuals are no longer in a position to speak in the name of all humans while the lives and histories of all humans have been inevitably touched by the way European powers shaped and brought into being "the globe" that connects us all. This is why the conversation with the Great Traditions of Europe never ends.

Frapporti – Ventresca:

Our last question deals with the issues of labour, subalternity, and subjectivity in today's Europe. As you aptly noticed in *Provincializing Europe* —and as the history of the past three or four decades have largely demonstrated—, the modern relationship between (waged) labour and citizenship as one of the main pivots of 'modern' subjectivity (at least in Western capitalist countries, and namely in Western Europe) has faded away. The transformations occurred in the material shape of both *labour* and *citizenship* led to the displacement of these categories as the modern pillars through which people could conceive themselves as 'subjects' endowed with rights —bourgeois rights, at least. If this is not something new, nevertheless a question arises: according to a post-colonial perspective on today's Europe and the broader transformations of global capitalism, which are the new sources of political and social *subjectivity*? Which are the engines of the present-day construction of political subjectivity within our current capitalist system? And, if we take into account the category of 'subaltern', what still makes *subaltern* today's *subalterns?* Could you spell out which are, in your opinion, the main sources of both 'subjectivity' and 'subordination' that characterize our lives as Europeans (no matter how large Europe can be considered) within global capitalism?

Chakrabarty:

I make a distinction, conceptually, between the categories *labor* and *work*. Let me explain the difference with some a quick and superficial gesture at philology. The word "labor," in most European languages that I know anything about, references toil, actual physical, unpleasant toil by humans or animals (and exclusively to human toil when humans replace animals). The word "work," on the other hand, refers to the Greek word for energy (if I am not mistaken) and is thus quite compatible with seventeenth-century Physics's definition of work as "expenditure of energy." The source of energy does not have to be human or animal. Work can be done by anything —a waterfall can perform work, a river can do work, a machine can work, artificial intelligence can do work for us, and so on. At the beginning of the history of capitalism —or what we loosely call capitalism, it is always a loose word, not tightly defined— human labor or toil was critical to its organization and success. Marx's theories of surplus value could not be thought without positing the category of "living labor." But it seems to me that in the late twentieth century, capitalists discovered that labor in the sense of direct human toil to be a constraint on the expansion of capital. Labor is increasingly less critical to the production process than ensuring that the necessary work gets done, irrespective of

whose energy is being spent and in what form. Another way to say this would be to say that domain of nonhuman (AI, machines) work has vastly expanded while that of labor —in the production of profits— has shrunk. Thus you have this paradox of what Indian economist often call "jobless growth," - an overall increase in GDP and "wealth" but not of employment. This is the kind of capitalism that the Pope denounced as un-Christian in his 2015 encyclical on climate change (but who listens?). Think of the history of coal mining. Once, miners were critical to the industry. Today, a lot of the extracting work is done by computerized machinery while prospecting itself would involve work by satellites and other high-tech instruments.

These developments have fundamentally changed the nature and significance of "work" for humans and have created the category of the precariat, underlining the insecure and fragmented place of human-labor in capitalism today. If this is right, then we are way beyond the days of old, labor-centered subjectivity. Many economists talk these days of "guaranteed universal basic income" for everybody to ensure a living for humans in an age when "work" comes to dominate and supplant "labor" in very large measures. But, surely, a society where a majority of human beings do not "labor" in the traditional, industrial or bureaucratic sense will call for a reordering of subjectivity. More on that in a minute.

In my thinking, the labor/work distinction is related to another distinction I have been engaged in developing: that between the globe and the planet. The globe is what human labor, capital, and the work of technology created over a few hundred years. But as the domain of "work" expands and supplants labor, that is to say, as we work the Earth harder in all our endeavor to extract more and more from the biosphere —requiring all natural processes to seed up: fish to reproduce faster, land to grow more food— we encounter the "planet," a geobiological entity whose processes often take place on scales of time that are simply humongous in human terms. Climate Change, the Anthropocene, the rising seas, the increased frequency of cyclones and wild fires —these are the results of that encounter between the globe and the planet. An intensification of the global reveals the planetary to us. And frankly, whatever the champions of geoengineering might say and actually do, the planet is not engineerable, it seems to me. There is a real and planet-wide environmental crisis unfolding before our very eyes. What it will do for our economic, political, and social institutions is still too early to tell, but there is no doubt that global capitalism, its extractive relations to the biosphere, and the nation-state based global governance that the UN represents, are all faced with

unprecedented challenges. I also feel that it is highly likely that humans, going forward, will not be able to avoid what scientists call "dangerous" climate change.

We are thus looking at an Earth many parts of which may become increasingly inhospitable for both human and many nonhuman forms of life. Humans, animals, plants will therefore want to move, both within and across nations. The official number of refugees in the world today is somewhere around 65 million. Sea level rise could make that figure soar to a few hundred million. Which means that problems of so-called illegal immigration will only increase and become acute. The ideas of national citizenship and inviolable national borders will not serve us very well, unless we want to see the world slide into some kind of barbarism, with the privileged exercising extreme selfishness in fighting to defend their narrow interests (they possibly can, to a certain extent, against other humans —but against fires, sea-levels, bacteria and viruses? What will they do?). The alternative is to think of humans differently. I think we have to rethink citizenship and sovereignty as Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson once suggested, and develop what may be called a planetary consciousness that actually involves learning to think from the position of being a migrant or a minority (this is a variation on Mezzadra and Neilson's "border-as-method"). We have to think of humans as constituting a diaspora of a biological species, the Homo sapiens. And we also have to remember our place in bio-diversity, that while we may be the most dominant species, we are a minority form of life. The coming politics of subjectivity will entail these tasks of learning to think from diasporic and minority positions (though *without* —as in the Jewish conceptions of the diaspora— having a particular place to which to return).

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This interview with Dipesh Chakrabarty has a specific purpose. Over the last few months, we have been editing a special issue for the journal *Zapruder. Rivista di storia della conflittualità sociale* (*Zapruder. A Journal for the History of Social Conflict*), which focused on both the history and politics of the European integration process[2]. In addition to offering a historical exploration of the main economic, social and intellectual actors that contributed to the unfolding of the so-called "European project", we also wanted to introduce a fruitful postcolonial perspective in our investigation of such an intriguing —though complex and somehow elusive— topic. Seventy years after the *Schuman Declaration* of 9 May 1950, which led to the creation of the European Coal and Steal Community (1952), we have sought to "provincialize" both the mainstream scholarly narratives on European integration and the most popular clichés that currently characterize public debates about the European Union (EU), as well as the manifold crises that affect the "European project" as a whole. Thus, the desire to connect Chakrabarty's work to our own research stems from this broader intellectual commitment; the variety of issues Chakrabarty deals with in this interview —such as European integration and Europe's ongoing "displacement" in contemporary politics, new forms of labour subjectivities, and the impact of capitalism on the transforming relationship between humankind and the planet— tellingly demonstrates how crucial his reflection can be for a better understanding of the very features of our "global present".

The establishment of the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1957, and the very start of European integration, spurred heated debates among political theorists and historians of international relations. This progressively led to the birth of new and autonomous fields of study (i.e., European law, European politics and European integration history, to mention only some), which are entirely dedicated to the specific factors that characterize the setting up of the so-called "European construction" (Varsori & Kaiser, 2010).

Beyond European Integration scholarly reception over the last seven decades, the building up of an ever more integrated (Western) Europe put into question the very issue of sovereignty and its relationship with the State (Balibar 2020), thus contributing to the global process of reconfiguring the traditional "Leviathan" into its "2.0" version (Maier, 2014). Furthermore, European integration gained a pivotal position in the con-

2. Mattia Frapporti and Roberto Ventresca (2020). We published a shorter version of this interview: "L'Europa tra il "globale" e il "planetario". A vent'anni da Provincializing Europe" (pp. 151-162) (translated in italian by Margherita Di Cicco).

text of the Cold War (Gilbert, 2015; Westad, 2017), during the process of decolonization (Garavini, 2012), and at the start of the so-called 1970s–1980s globalization (Warlouzet, 2018; Slobodian, 2018). In this respect, European integration has long ceased to be studied exclusively by diplomatic historians or political scientists; new theoretical approaches —from political theory to gender studies (Schulz-Forberg & Stråt, 2010; Abels, Mushaben 2012)— have contributed to reveal its multi-layered dimensions.

In so doing, we deemed it crucial to develop a postcolonial perspective on European integration, in order to gauge the long-lasting effects that the EEC's establishment in the late 1950s has had on the —at least formal— dismissal of old European empires and on the changing relationship between "colonies" and "colonizers" in the Cold War era (Garavini, 2012). The birth of the EEC envisaged the creation of a Common Market, whose "preferential access" was also provided to French, Dutch and Belgian colonies, in the guise of "associated states". Thus, the EEC's institutional architecture implied that a very significant part of the "Common Market's territorial area was beyond the borders of Europe itself" (Hansen & Jonsson, 2011, p. 1038). Symptomatically, the establishment of the EEC evoked both praise and harsh criticism not only from European diplomats, governmental officials or policymakers, but also from some of the most representative circles of the neoliberal school of thought (Mirowski & Plehwe, 2009). On the one side, the representatives of the so-called Geneva neoliberal school (i.e. neoliberal "universalists") blamed the *regional* stance that the EEC embodied, and the potential drawbacks against their efforts to set up a truly global market; rather, the latter could be achieved thanks to the role played by an international organization like the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). On the other side, those who belonged to the German ordoliberal school (i.e. neoliberal "constitutionalists") considered the EEC a strategic framework through which to enhance the driving forces of market economy, under the pressure of binding institutional agreements and rules (Slobodian, 2018, p. 182-217). In this respect, the reflection on the often neglected "colonial origins" of the European Economic Community has forced us to widen our perspective to include methodological approaches that could take into account the contradictions between European colonial history, the counter-reactions of colonial subjects, and the broader effects of these dynamics, as far as the remaking of the post-WWII global order was concerned.

A look at the so-called "global present" can reveal the multiple perspectives from which to study the long-lasting unfolding of European (and Western) historical "decentralization". From a geo-economical point of view, the decentralization of Europe consists not only in the mere acknowledgment that "the network society" (Castells, 1996)

no longer has a clear core. Furthermore, a "space of flows" is now investing a "space of places" (Castelles 1999), setting out new political maps. "[N]ew state spaces' are emerging, and the 'planetary urbanization" (Brenner, 2004, 2014) is a new, pervading paradigm in the study of present-day politicization of global territories. The world's "non-scalability" (Tsing, 2012; Farinelli, 2003, 2008, 2009) is forcing us to use different analytical tools to understand our global times. Logistics, together with extraction and finance (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2013a, 2013b, 2015, 2019), is largely considered a new "form of power" (Neilson, 2012; Cowen, 2014; Grappi, 2016), which deeply influences political geography —with China at the forefront of such a global move, for example through the Belt and Road Initiative— thanks to the production of new "logistical territories" (IntotheBlackBox, 2019). Thirty years after the collapse of the Cold War system and the end of the bipolar confrontation, the steep decentralization (or rather, the very deconstruction) of the global primacy of the old, Western world —in economic, political and even cultural terms— is clearly underway. According to some scholars (Pieranni, 2020), even the management of the global Covid-19 pandemic may have important consequences for the assessment of the (seeming) efficacy of the Chinese socio-economic model as opposed to the models adopted in the US and in other Western countries.

Starting from these theoretical perspectives, it becomes clear to what extent the "provincialization of Europe" is all but a new phenomenon: it has been more than a century now that Europe is not the "world centre" (Arrighi, 1994). From the point of view of scholarly political theory, instead, twenty years ago one could still maintain that "the so-called European intellectual tradition is the only one alive in the social science departments of most, if not all, modern universities" (Chakrabarty, 2000, p. 5). Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe* therefore aimed at overcoming this trend by setting up a complex intellectual project, which is "difficult to overestimate" in terms of both "importance" and "influence on several diverse disciplines as well as on cross-disciplinary research and theoretical practices" (Mezzadra, 2011, p. 151; Seth, 2011, p. 129).

As we have mentioned, *Provincializing Europe* represented the starting point of our discussion about the issue of Europe and its location within present-day "globality". While *Provincializing Europe* "is not a book about the region of the world we call "Europe" (Chakrabarty, 2000, p. 3), the author considers both Europe and India as "hyperreal terms […] in that they refer to certain figures of imagination whose geographical referents remain somewhat indeterminate" (p. 27). In fact, Chakrabarty argues that "the dominance of "Europe" as the subject of all histories is a part of a much more profound theoretical condition under which historical knowledge is produced

in the third world" (p. 29); it is precisely this irresistible, European theoretical "attractiveness" that he seeks to challenge and then subvert. Thus, the aim of *Provincializing Europe* cannot be compared to a "project of cultural relativism" (p. 43); rather, "the idea is to write into the history of modernity the ambivalences, contradictions, the use of force, and the tragedies and ironies that attend it" (p. 43).

By designing a historical reconstruction that spans from the Eurocentric historicism as described by Marx —"what is indispensable remains inadequate" (Chakrabarty, 2000, p. 88)— to the criticism of the bourgeois idea of the nation-state's universalization, Chakrabarty's main postulation seems to be that there is neither a linear, homogeneous and ongoing time in history, nor a common "code" to interpret it: "I begin with the assumption that, to the contrary, this time, the basic code of history, does not belong to nature, that is, it is not completely independent of human systems of representation" (p. 74). This assumption has led several academics to tackle the issue of modernity's multiple dimensions. According to Mezzadra (2011), "*Provincializing Europe* can be read indeed as a powerful intervention in the debates on "modernity"" (p. 152). Further to this, Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar edited a book called *Alternative Modernities* (where he included a chapter by Chakrabarty titled "Adda, Calcutta: Dwelling in Modernity", which is actually chapter 7 of *Provincializing Europe*). In his book, Gaonkar (2004) adopts a precise grammar: "One can provincialize Western modernity – he claims – only by thinking through and against its self-understandings, which are frequently cast in universalist idioms" (p. 15). Gaonkar concludes his chapter "On Alternative Modernities" with this assumption: "everywhere, at every national/cultural site, modernity is not one but many; modernity is not new but old and familiar; modernity is incomplete and necessarily so" (p. 23).

As we have mentioned, in *Provincializing Europe* the issue of modernity and its irreducible plurality is abundantly analysed, in close connection with the topic of capitalism. In the chapter "Two Histories of Capital", Chakrabarty sketches an illuminating picture where he underscores the difference between the "past posited by capital itself as its precondition" (Chakrabarty, 2000, p. 63) and "another kind of past" that "inhere[s] in capital and yet interrupt[s] and punctuate[s] the run of capital's own logic" (p. 64). His analysis of the Indian social practice named "*adda*" (pp. 180 - 213), or his investigation of the "*chakri*" —or, better, the "aversion to *chakri* (salaried work) and the simultaneous glorification of housework" (p. 214)—, still constitutes an invaluable source of inspiration for those who wish to explore the high complexity of a subject —namely the history of capitalism as a global phenomenon— that is often conceptualized in a quite linear way: "No historical form of capital, however global its reach, can ever be a universal.

No global (or even local, for that matter) capital can ever represent the universal logic of capital" (p. 70).

Twenty years after the publication of this book, we thought that Dipesh Chakrabarty would be the best-suited scholar with whom to discuss (and perhaps rethink) a truly postcolonial perspective on Europe and on the European integration process as a whole. This is not only because of his past research, but also in light of his most recent works. Indeed, in his latest study, on the relationship between humankind, environment and the capitalist system (*The Climate of History in a Planetary Age*, forthcoming), Chakrabarty attempts to further expand the analytical tools he employed in *Provincializing Europe*. More importantly, he seeks to reflect on the progressive overcoming of the age of globalization, while also describing the very features of contemporary politics as marked by the endless tension between the "globe" —the world as it has been shaped by the intervention of the humankind— and the "planet", that is, "a geobiological entity whose processes often take place on scales of time that are simply humongous in human terms", as Chakrabarty himself sustains in the following interview.

When we concluded this interview, the global pandemic was yet to begin. The insightful thoughts Chakrabarty ends the conversation with are somehow revelatory of both the intrinsic contradictions and the disruptive effects that the conflict between capitalism and the environment has historically brought about, inasmuch as the latter is considered an endless exploitable source for the sake of value extraction (Mezzadra & Nielson, 2015). We do not know when, how and at what price this crisis can be overcome. What we do know is that without a thorough rethinking of what Chakrabarty defines the mutual relationship between the "globe" and the "planet", the very condition of our biological existence (as a species among other species) will be put under growing and perhaps irreversible pressure. The challenge to subvert the "present state of things" still remains the most pressing task to be pursued.

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