

**Articulating Group Differences:  
A Variety of Autocentrism**

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I hope to make a modest start in this paper towards a historical and comparative study of aut centrism, defined as the tendency of social groups to claim superior attributes, racial or cultural, and conversely to denigrate other groups.

In his essay, *Eurocentrism*, Samir Amin (1989: 74-5) draws a sharp distinction between the “banal provincialism” of medieval Europe and the Eurocentric thought of modern Europe. Amin’s distinction hinges on the balance of power between two competing groups. Medieval Europe and Islam were equals, or near equals, in military power, neither able to impose its vision on the other; yet each imagined itself superior to the other. Presumably, such claims of superiority are encountered throughout history; that is what makes them banal. On the other hand, Eurocentrism is not only historically specific to modern, capitalist Europe, it is the product of an asymmetric relationship; it constructs an ideology of racial superiority to support capitalist Europe’s project of global domination. Eurocentrism “implies a theory of world history and, departing from it, a global political project.”

This approach to Eurocentrism contains important insights, but the sharp distinction it draws between “banal provincialism” and Eurocentrism raises questions. Modern capitalism does not offer the first occasion when one group has gained ascendancy over another; in fact, this has been quite common. Once we broaden our study to take in *all* aut centrisms, between symmetric and asymmetric groups, we need to address a variety of questions. Have stronger groups in asymmetric relationships always mobilized ideologies of differences to perpetuate their superiority? And have they always employed the language of race, blood, or lineage? Can there be an aut centrism of weaker groups in asymmetric relationships? Is their aut centrism different from the aut centrism of stronger groups? Should we expect a difference between auto-

centrism which justify existing inequalities, projected inequalities, or imagined inequalities? Is Eurocentrism different from other autocrisms that supported the ascendancy of other groups?

In order to begin to answer these questions, we need to develop a framework—however crude and tentative, at this stage—that looks at ideologies of group differences, where a group may be defined by its ethnicity, class, lineage, race or gender. As a first step, I proceed to identify the variety of markers that might be employed to define group differences. Next, I examine the sources of autocrism; in particular, whether asymmetric relationships tend to deepen autocrism. I then turn to history to examine *how* a variety of groups—the ancient Greeks, Islamic societies, medieval and modern Europeans, and the Chinese—have articulated their differences from other groups that were equal to, or weaker than, them. Finally, I examine whether our *a priori* expectations explain the historical results.

### **Group Differences: The Markers**

One group of humans may be set apart from others by one or more markers, defined as physical, cultural or social characteristics, which are easily discernible.

The most common physical marker is skin color. Historically, descriptions of skin color have ranged from black, brown and white to yellow, red and blue. In addition to skin color, and often correlated with it, are the color of the hair, ranging from black and brown to red and blonde; the texture of the hair, ranging from straight, wavy, curly to kinky; the shape of the nose, straight, aquiline, or flat; or shape of the lips, thin or thick. Finally, there are differences of gender, male and female; and differences of age, children, youth, and the old.

The two most common cultural markers are language and religion. In terms of group articulation, it is tempting to divide the world into those who speak one language and those who do not—this was often the definition of the ‘Other.’ To the Greeks, the *barbaroi* were all those who did not speak Greek; and to the Arabs, those who did not speak Arabic were ‘*ajami*, dumb. Differences of religion too have served as important markers, especially when this leads to visible differences in dress, dietary rules, sexual practices, religious architecture and holidays.

The social markers span differences in the ways people make a living or their class affiliations. In terms of the former, groups may be divided into hunters, pastoralists, agriculturalists, or city-dwellers. In terms of class relations, people are often divided into binary groups, such as masters and slaves, lords and serfs, or capitalists and workers. It would be easy to think of finer social subdivisions.

These differences may be viewed as variants, part of the diversity of the world of humans and their cultures, without any rank-ordering. Alternatively, a group may rank-order these differences, where their own markers are seen to possess, or become associated with, superior values. A group may trace its own markers backwards to a superior climate or genetic endowment, or attribute it to divine favors. Presumably, this ensures that their superior markers have an enduring basis, and are not rooted in historical accidents.

A group may assign greater aesthetic value to its own markers. The members of a group may define standards of beauty in terms of their own physical or cultural markers, so that all departures from these standards become repulsive. Or they may link their own markers to other desirable attributes, such as greater vigor, creativity, rationality, order, morality, or love of freedom. In addition, these superior attributes may be used to explain greater his-

torical achievements, including a more advanced economy, a greater inventiveness, superior political institutions, or greater power.

The intensity of a group's *autocentrism* depends on the degree to which it places a greater aesthetic value on its own markers, links them to superior capabilities and historical achievements, and finds the basis of its superiority in climate, divine choices, or biology rather than in the processes of history. As autocentrism elevates one group, it may simultaneously downgrade other groups by assigning absolutely lower values to their markers, capabilities and achievements.

### **Sources of Autocentrism**

Although there are many forces, complex, cumulative and subtle, which interact to determine the extent of a group's autocentrism—elevating one's own group and denigrating others—it may be useful to examine how this might be affected by relations of unequal power.

When one group enters into an unequal relationship with another, this creates inducements for the stronger group to construct autocentric ideas. It may be flattering for the stronger group to believe that its dominance is rooted in superior capabilities: that it is *not* accidental—and, therefore, undeserved and temporary. Soon myths will emerge, with or without the encouragement of the state, which endow the stronger group with a history of superior capabilities.

The thesis of unequal capabilities may also serve to rationalize an unequal relationship. It is claimed that the superior capabilities of the stronger group benefit the weaker groups; they help the latter by providing better governance, or teaching them skills and

endowing them with institutions which they could not have acquired on their own. This civilizing mission has two advantages. It binds the stronger group to its roles of dominance, and it may reconcile the weaker group to its subjugation.

The stronger group may also be looking for ways to immunize its morally sensitive members against compassion for the weaker group, especially as members of the subject group are used in ways that violate the norms of humane behavior. This may be done in two ways. It may be shown that the weaker group is sub-human, culturally or biologically. The weaker group engages in behavior that is contemptible, because it violates the norms of the stronger group. Alternatively, they may be excluded from the human species, thereby excluding them from human sympathies.

In the long run, the autocentric myths are not likely to survive if they lack a modicum of plausibility. The greater the advantage actually enjoyed by the stronger group—in living standards, technology, and power—the greater the credibility of these myths; they appear to explain the visible signs of superiority of the stronger group. Conversely, when the weaker group lags visibly, it makes sense to attribute their lag to their inferior capabilities. It follows that if the lags increase over time, this may reinforce the autocentric myths.

In an unequal relationship, the stronger group is likely to dominate, and, in some cases, monopolize the production of knowledge. The weaker group may be unable to rectify or oppose the ‘knowledge’ about them produced by the stronger group. *A fortiori*, they may also lack the means to oppose the autocentric myths of the strong with their own; these myths may, however, be opposed by dissenters within the stronger group. Most likely, this asymmetry has increased in modern times, when weaker groups are more easily excluded from the institutions—universities, pub-

lishing houses, and mass media—which produce social knowledge. In earlier periods, weaker groups could create their own social knowledge through epics, ballads and folktales.

Ideologies are not constructed *de novo*. They are likely to draw upon historical narratives, coded in religious canons, myths, memories, and patterns from the past. Where these narratives glorify a particular group, or denigrate others, they can be mobilized to justify and deepen present inequalities. On the other hand, if the sacred canons reject racist ideas, they will oppose the new-fangled myths of inequalities, diluting their impact and perhaps neutralize them over time.

It should not be supposed, however, that autocrisisms cannot emerge between groups that are equal or nearly equal; though, they are likely to lose some of their force under these conditions. When two equal groups are in competition—and their competition gets intense or is seen to be a zero-sum game—both may engage in autocrisism. Each side may mobilize autocratic myths to reinforce unity in its own ranks, to fire the cupidity and ambition of its own members, or to win allies amongst kindred groups by playing upon their fears of rival groups.

The limits to such autocrisism should also be obvious. Since the two groups are equal or nearly equal, their autocratic constructs cannot deviate too far from the facts, or they risk losing credibility. Unless they are insulated from each other, the autocratic constructs of each group are also open to challenge from the other group; this too will restrain the autocratic constructs. Further, it would be unwise for any group facing a formidable antagonist to seriously underestimate its capabilities; it may represent its rivals as cruel but it would be unwise to paint them as stupid. There is another risk to carrying the autocratic myths too far. Once you have painted your rivals as inhuman monsters, it be-

comes hard to engage in negotiations with them when the competition becomes too costly. This too may restrain the intensity of the autocentric narrative.

### **A Variety of Autocentrism**

As I review a variety of autocentrism across space and time, there is no pretense that the assessments offered are definitive or always rooted in exhaustive evidence.

Determining the extent of autocentrism in any group can be problematic. A group's autocentrism may change over time, and it may vary across different classes at any point in time. Moreover, too often we rely on literary sources—the writings of philosophers, historians, poets and playwrights—as our primary sources for evaluating autocentrism. This has pitfalls. These literary sources may reflect an elitist viewpoint; they may be harbingers of things to come; or they may never gain wider acceptance. In the event, we need to look out for discriminatory practices, whether sanctioned by laws or custom, that may be rooted in autocentric ideologies. I take these to be more reliable indicators of autocentrism.

*Ancient Greece.* It appears that the Greeks first acquired a consciousness of their distinctiveness—Hellenic, Greek-speaking, separate from the barbarians—in the eighth century BCE. However, this was not accompanied by a sense of superiority, which emerged much later, during the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, in the course of their rivalry with the Persians.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Shlaifer (1936: 166-7) and Reger (2000: 105) argue that the autocentrism of this period—the equation of Persians with barbarians—was a nationalistic response to the Persian wars.

The sense of Greek superiority finds its most rigorous expression in Aristotle's *Politics* (Simpson, 1997: 9-10). He argues that barbarians are deficient in reasoning and lack the ability to govern—and hence, they are “by nature” fit to be slaves, whereas the Greeks are born to be free and to govern others. Aristotle's auto-centrism finds the clearest expression in his claim that the Hellenes occupy an intermediate position between the Europeans and the Asiatics. The Europeans are free-spirited but lack intelligence, while the Asiatics possess intelligence and skills but lack freedom. The Greeks combine the virtues of both, while avoiding their defects. That is why they remain “free and best governed,” and, if they were united, they would be capable of “ruling everyone (Simpson, 1997: 127).”

It appears, however, that Aristotle represented a minority position. He acknowledges that “others” maintain that “it is by law that one person is a slave and another a master, whereas by nature there is no difference at all (Simpson, 1997: 13).”<sup>2</sup> Even Aristotle's arguments should not be equated with modern racism; the barbarians he excluded are not a racial category.<sup>3</sup> Most remarkably, when Alexander conquered the Asiatics, he ignored the counsel of Aristotle, his teacher. He refused to treat the defeated Persians as “natural slaves.” Instead his policies show that he wanted to create a joint Macedonian-Persian world empire (Reger, 2000:

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<sup>2</sup> According to Shlaifer (1997: 168-9), “By the time of Aristotle, there had arisen a large body of opinion, which maintained that popular prejudice against the barbarian was entirely unjustified.”

<sup>3</sup> Snowden (1995: 23) reflects the opinion of most scholars when he writes that while the Greeks and Romans commented on the “obviously different physical characteristics of Ethiopians” they did not develop “an elaborate and rigid system of discrimination based on color of the skin.” Similarly, Reger (2000: 99) writes that “Ancient slavery was color-blind.”

105).

*Medieval Islam.* There are two organizing principles that medieval Islam employed in classifying societies: one based on faith, another on climatic zones.

Islamic society was a community of faith, whose membership depended only on the acceptance of Islam, not on color, class, lineage, or ethnicity. In theory, at least during the early period of Islam, this community of faith, *Dar al-Islam* (the House of Peace), was set apart from *Dar al-Harb* (the House of War). Islamic rulers were required to wage constant war against *Dar al-Harb*, though periods of respite were permitted. The wars could cease only when the *Dar al-Harb* was incorporated into *Dar al-Islam* (Lambton, 1981: 13, 201-5).

Once the non-Muslims entered into *Dar al-Islam* they were granted rights as *dhimmis*, or protected subjects. They did not serve in the military, and enjoyed varying degrees of autonomy over their civil affairs. On the other hand, they paid the *jizya*, a poll tax, but this did not apply to slaves, old or sick men, women, children and monks. At times, Islamic law also subjected non-Muslims to a variety of humiliating social restrictions, though these were not always enforced. At first, the *dhimmi* status was accorded only to Christians and Jews, but over time it was extended to nearly all non-Muslim groups (Lambton, 1981: 203-7).

In their climatic ethnology, the Islamic societies clearly followed Greek and Roman precedents. They divided the northern hemisphere—the inhabitable world—into seven latitudinal zones. It is the central zones—the third and fourth zones, neither too hot nor too cold—that possessed the greatest potential for supporting civilized societies. These zones contained the central Arab lands, North Africa, Iran, the northern Mediterranean, and parts of China. The first and second zones, because of their extreme heat, and the

sixth and seventh zones, because of their extreme cold, did not support advanced civilizations (Al-Azmeh, 1992 and Hillenbrand, 2000: 268-74). This climatic principle was not applied too rigidly. Although much of India and Arabia fell within the first and second zones, both were peninsulas, which allowed for cooling and brought them closer to the temperate climate of the central zones. This explains the high level of civilization attained by these two regions (Al-Azmeh, 1992: 8).

It should be noted that the essential thrust of this climatic ethnology—that civilizational achievements were correlated with climatic zones—had some basis in facts at the time. Nearly every one of the advanced civilizations and the great empires, both ancient and medieval, were located in the central zones. On the other hand, the achievements of the peoples inhabiting the cold and hot zones—the Slavs, Turks, Bulgars, Franks, Sudanese and Ethiopians—were not comparable to those of the central zones.

There are other reasons for thinking that ideology may not have been the principal motivation behind this climatic construct. First, the cold and hot zones were far removed from the Islamic heartlands, allowing a freer play to the imagination in the description of these remote regions. Second, the denigration of peoples in the north and south was never complete. Thus, while the Franks are seen as coarse, filthy, sexually lax, and lacking in the sciences, they are also described as courageous, enterprising, disciplined and well-governed (Hillenbrand, 2000: 270-74). Third, these regions did not constitute serious threats to the Islamic empire, at least during the early phase of Islamic conquests, when these constructs were developed. Finally, the central zones were not wholly Arab or Islamic; they included, both in medieval and ancient times, a variety of non-Islamic societies. The Muslim sources were

nearly always very generous in recognizing the achievements of Egyptian, Greek, Babylonian, Indian and Chinese civilizations.<sup>4</sup>

*The West, Medieval and Early Modern.* In defining their self-image, the West—collectively or its several components—has not only drawn upon differences in religion, culture and climate, but from an early date we encounter claims to superiority rooted in biological metaphors—blood, stock, color, lineage and race—which gained greater salience over time. We also observe a tendency, again quite early on, to translate the ideologies of differences into systems of legal discrimination and worse.

Although Christianity was initially a Mediterranean religion—spanning three continents—it would acquire a European identity starting in the seventh century. This was the result of two parallel processes. While they destroyed the Roman empire, the Germanic invaders soon embraced Latin Christianity and carried it—through wars, colonization and missionary work—to the northern regions of Europe. This replaced the political unity of the defunct Roman Empire with a deeper cultural unity based in Christianity, a common language (Latin), and a hierarchy of priests centered in Rome. At the same time, as the Islamic empire incorporated Christian domains in the Levant, North Africa, Spain and much of the Mediterranean, a politically fragmented Europe increasingly emphasized its Christian identity. This identity found early expression in the wars against heretics, persecution of Jews, and the demonization of Islam.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See Al-Andalusi's (11<sup>th</sup> century/1991) description of scientifically productive nations, including Indians, Persians, Chaldeans, Greeks, Romans, Egyptians and Israelites.

<sup>5</sup> In 1215, the Fourth Lateran Council threatened to excommunicate Christian rulers who refused to exterminate heretics (Muldoon, 2000: 84). On medieval Europe's demonization of Islam, see Southern (1962).

The three remaining components of Western autocentrism—a superior geography, race and divine preferment—were derived from ancient Greece and Israel. Although the Greeks had two systems of ordering the world—the division into three continents and the division into seven latitudinal climes—it is perhaps not too difficult to understand why medieval Europe opted for the former. The climatic scheme placed northern Europe in the less desirable fifth and sixth zones, whose cold and frigid temperatures, so the Greeks argued, did not support intellectual vigor or high civilization. On the other hand, the continental system allowed Europeans to appropriate one of three equal continents and endow it with a temperate climate.

The continental system had another advantage in constructing a European autocentrism: it allocated one continent to each of the sons of Noah. Hay (1957: 1-15) has shown that a racial and continental construction of the Noachian legend began with Josephus, a Jewish scholar of the first century BCE, and was firmly established by fifth century ACE. The biblical prophecy, which granted the progeny of Japheth dominion over the children of Shem and Ham, was converted into an ideology of racial domination by identifying Japheth with Europe, Shem with Asia, and Ham with Africa. By the same prophecy, the Hamites, identified with Africans, would serve both Europe and Asia.

There is some disagreement about whether ethnicity in early medieval Europe was a social or racial construct. It is clear that the discourse about ethnicity, even in this early period, was framed in terms of racial concepts, including blood, stock, gens, natio; but Bartlett (1993: 197) believes that “its medieval reality was almost entirely cultural.” Hoffman (1983: 3) disagrees. He maintains that the use of such terms by medieval writers show “a fundamentally biological explanation of how the groups came into being.” In any

case, even Bartlett (1993: 237) speaks of an “intensification of racial feeling in the later Middle Ages” that was accompanied by a “new biological racism.”

The later middle ages are also marked by legal discrimination against native populations in Europe’s periphery: including Ireland, Wales, and the Slavic areas conquered, colonized, or recently converted to Christianity by the Germans and Franks (Bartlett (1993: chapters 8 and 9, and Canny, 1998). Starting in the fourteenth century, the towns and guilds in these areas began to restrict membership by race, residential areas were segregated by race, languages and cultural practices belonging to native populations were banned, and marriages between conquering and native populations were prohibited. According to Bartlett (1993: 239), “Ghettoization and discrimination marked the later centuries of the Middle Ages.”

The class conflict, between lords and serfs, during the Middle Ages is also framed in the language of racism, lineage in this case. The medieval writers—including the church fathers, nobles, and artists—commonly describe the serfs as stupid, malformed, grotesque, dwelling in filth and excrement, and closer to beasts than humans. In addition, this degradation of serfs is attributed to their lineage, their connection to the accursed line of Cain, Ham or both. In short, the serfs are savages who are fitted by nature, or their inherited sins, to the hard and humiliating conditions to which they are born (Freedman, 1999: chs. 4 and 6).

The idiom of race enters into Europe’s autocentric discourse in a variety of contexts during the early modern period. While the persecution, expulsion and forced conversion of Jews and Muslims in Spain may have been motivated primarily by Christian bigotry, conversion did not win the Conversos and Moriscos, as the converted Jews and Muslims were called, acceptance into

Spanish society. Careers in the church and state were restricted to those who could prove a Christian lineage before the Inquisition; and the Moriscos were eventually expelled in the early seventeenth century. Lewis (1995: 48) concludes that what had begun as a “general religious prejudice soon became primarily one about lineage, and blood became a pronounced idiom of socioracial difference.”

In the Americas, the Spaniards quickly constructed a system of racial discrimination to justify their exploitation of the indigenous Indians. According to Liss (1975: 43), they lost no time in imposing a “rudimentary apartheid policy” under which a white Spanish elite extracted labor and goods from the dark Indians. In 1550, Juan Sepúlveda, the royal chaplain and philosopher, produced an elaborate defense of these policies. He argued that the Indians practiced cannibalism, human sacrifices, and were sexual deviants; in other words, they were less than human. Drawing upon Aristotle, he maintained that the Indians were deficient in reason. They were like children compared to adults and, hence, they were naturally fitted to be slaves (Lewis, 1995: 50-2).

Although some medieval writers identified Africans as descendants of Ham, according to Drake (1990: 2, 192), their systematic denigration as an inferior, savage race began only after the mid-fifteenth century when their blackness became a “master symbol” of all negative racial characteristics. In Spanish Americas, the ban on enslavement of Indians, introduced in 1542, would not be extended to Africans. Vaughan and Vaughan (1997: 42, 43) attest to the “sheer accumulation of derogatory references [to blacks] in narratives, plays, poems, and other printed and visual material in the second half of the sixteenth century” in Elizabethan England, and these denigrative images “transcended class, gender, age and levels of literacy.” During the last years of her reign, Queen Eliza-

both was already calling “repeatedly, though unsuccessfully, for the expulsion from her realm of “negars” and “Blackamoorers.” A hundred years later, according to Wood (1995: 37), the English colonists in North America “who had traditionally identified themselves as Christians began for the first time to distinguish themselves as Whites.”

*China.* The Chinese have always cultivated a sense of superiority; they were the Central Kingdom, surrounded on all sides by barbarians. But this superiority was based on cultural rather than biological distinctions, barring one aberrant flirtation with racism starting in late nineteenth century (Jenner, 2001: 58 and Hsiao, 1979: 137). This cultural ordering, with the Chinese at the center, was already central to the Zhou order (1122 BCE to 256 BCE) which distinguished between “states whose rulers belonged to the Zhou political and cultural order, and others who did not.” The Chinese texts rarely make any references to the physical appearance of barbarians. It is striking that a biological racism did not enter into the Chinese discourse even during the three centuries of “endemic ethnic conflict” that began in the late third century CE (Jenner, 2001: 58, 61).

The centrality of culture—rather than race—in the Chinese worldview had an important corollary. Nearly always, this translated into a civilizing mission rooted in the premise that “the barbarians could be culturally assimilated; *laihua*, ‘come and be transformed,’ or *hanhua*, ‘become Chinese’ (Dikötter, 1990: 421). In the Confucian cannon, the chief instrument of this civilizing mission was always education. This policy produced not only an expansion of the boundaries of the Chinese state but the eventual absorption of the conquered peoples into the Chinese cultural sphere.

The exception to this occurs towards the end of the nineteenth

century. Once China's self-image as the Central Kingdom had been dismantled by the Opium wars, China's reformers adapted to the reality of Western dominance by giving a racial content to their sense of superiority. They sought to reconstitute Chinese nationalism on a racial basis; the Han Chinese were seen as one big family descended from the Yellow Emperor. Unable to support their cultural superiority, they imitated the racist ideology of the West, inserting the Han Chinese nearly at the top, just below the dominant Whites. Sun Yatsen, the leader of the Chinese nationalist movement, spoke of Chineseness "running in the blood." In time, this became a central part of the ideology of the Guomindang dictatorship in Taiwan.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The review of aut centrism across four civilizations—Greek, Islamic, European and Sinic—has yielded results which are more often at variance with *a priori* expectations.

Our theoretical analysis suggested that stronger groups in asymmetric relationships are likely to adopt aut centric constructs towards weaker groups. In two of the four cases surveyed in this paper, this was not generally true. The ancient Greeks adopted an attitude of superiority towards the Asiatics only briefly, during the fourth century BCE, when the Persians threatened them with wars. In fact, the most active centers of Hellenic civilization moved east after Alexander's conquest, and it was there, in partnership with the Asiatics that it continued to flourish for several more centuries. Similarly, the power of Islamic societies was rarely founded, in theory or practice, on a racial stratification. The Islamic elites claimed cultural superiority not for particular races, but for peoples living in central climatic zones, which included several peo-

ples other than themselves.

In a third case, where the Chinese were for more than three thousand years the dominant party in contacts with a variety of non-Chinese ethnic groups, their autocentric constructs did not generally employ the language of race or lineage. While the Chinese empires claimed centrality, this was based on cultural distinctions between themselves and the weaker groups. More importantly, the Chinese fully assimilated nearly all the barbarians they subjugated.

It would appear that the Europeans—or the West, more generally—are the exceptions to this. The evidence suggests that stronger groups in Europe, starting as early as the twelfth century, rather quickly moved towards the language of superiority, denigrating the weaker groups as culturally and, just as often, racially inferior. This may be observed in their relations with subjugated populations—the Irish, Slavs, Conversos, Moriscos, American Indians and Africans—both inside and outside Europe. More to the point, the autocentric myths were translated into discriminatory policies—sometimes, genocidal policies—against the weaker groups.

This means that Samir Amin's construction of Eurocentrism as a capitalist ideology, though fundamentally correct, needs to be modified in one important respect. It appears that the racist conceptions that underpin this ideology are not unique to the capitalist epoch; they represent habits of thought going back to medieval Europe. The Franks, Germans, English and Spaniards used race to justify their dominance over subject populations well before global capitalism, and global inequalities, had been firmly established. The roots of European racism are older than capitalism.

What then are the sources of European racism—the recurrent tendency of dominant European groups, both medieval and mod-

ern, to employ metaphors of race, blood, pedigree and lineage—in defining their autocentric constructs? It would be futile to speculate without further enquiry whether the sources of this propensity lie in the material conditions of life—some aspect of feudal organization, or perhaps a more intense struggle for survival amongst ethnic groups in Western Europe which required greater group solidarity—the excessive concern with genealogy and the ranking of families, tribes and ethnicities in biblical narratives; or some legacy of Germanic tribal past, which may perhaps be yet preserved in Germanic languages. This question can only be explored in another essay.

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