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The Pursuit of the Past: A Polemical Perspective

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Abstract

This paper takes a skeptical view of the recent academic and political preoccupation with the past. It argues that that preoccupation is a substitute satisfaction that has arisen in response to the collapse of the future-oriented collective political projects of socialism and the nation-state.

"Time is not a single train, moving in one direction at a constant speed," notes the Trieste writer Claudio Magris. "Every so often it meets another train coming in the opposite direction, from the past, and for a short while that past is with us, by our side, in our present."^[1] Magris' metaphor captures nicely the ordinary state of things with regard to our posture vis-a-vis the past. Time may be experienced as "full" or "empty," depending on one's historical and social location, but it usually appears, at least, to move forward at a more or less constant rate, with occasional digressions into previous experiences that may be recalled fondly, wistfully, dismissively, indulgently. Yet the past thus remembered, while perhaps movingly present, does not thereby lose its quality of remoteness. Under normal circumstances, the past remains simply part of the stock of ideas upon which people draw to organize and make sense of their lives, but hardly the predominant part. Most people maintain a balance between past, present, and future that allows them to move forward in their everyday lives, despite the unhappy memories that past experience may hold and possible trepidation about the future.

There is no reason to aspire to the ahistorical rumination of Nietzsche's cow -- which is untroubled by remembrance of things past and can thus live blissfully, vigorously in the present -- yet Nietzsche's fears of a surfeit of history are entirely apposite to our current situation.^[2] The more usual attitude toward the past suggested by Magris' remark throws into sharp relief the peculiarity of our contemporary relationship to former times. In recent years, the distance that normally separates us from the past has been strongly challenged in favor of an insistence that the past - a very particular past, as we shall see -- is constantly, urgently present as part of our everyday experience. Indeed, a rising chorus of memory entrepreneurs asserts that the ordinary relationship between past and present described by Magris does not and indeed should not exist. This outsized pursuit of the past is part of a larger sense that, as George Steiner has put it, "the dishes are

being cleared" on that Western culture that can be understood in terms of a narrative of hope and progress.[3]

We are being buried under an avalanche of history - but a history conceived as far different from the heroic, forward-looking tales that underpinned the idea of progress for two centuries. Instead of the illuminated manuscripts decorated by latter-day monks for the edification of the faithful that had characterized history under the sign of Hegel, we are presented with tawdry chapbooks containing narratives of injustice and crime. These censorious histories, often closer than their mythopoeic predecessors to the real story of how we got where we are now, have helped promote extensive efforts to make whole what has been smashed *en route* to the present.

As a result, many countries -- especially the more developed, and especially the more privileged groups within those countries -- are confronted today with the task of digging themselves out from under the burden of that history. That redoubtable historian Karl Marx once famously said that the past "weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living," and that this is especially so "just when they seem engaged in revolutionizing themselves and things." [4] The sort of "revolutionizing" that is currently taking place may not be what Marx had in mind when he penned those lines. Yet the contemporary intellectual and political preoccupation with the past is, indeed, a response to massive social transformation, as his prescient comment would lead us to expect. I want to argue that this intensive and in many ways vengeful concern with the past is a response to the collapse of the future, along the lines suggested by Steiner.

In what follows, I discuss the contours of this remarkable situation and the factors that account for the current concern with exorcizing the spirits of the past. I argue that the chief and defining aspect of our contemporary historical context is its "post"-ness, its quality of being "after" other, more future-oriented projects - most particularly, socialism and the nation-state - that animated the energies of large constituencies during the preceding two centuries. Deprived of these narratives of *Bildung* (the social equivalent of the *Bildungsroman*), our era is marked by a mood of "enlightened bewilderment," [5] lacking any firm direction adumbrated in a vision of a society better than the "really existing" one. At the moment, the only utopia around is that of a more thoroughly market-based society, a call for the extension of the "great transformation" to those areas of the world that have been shielded from the naked power of markets heretofore.

We live, in short, in an age distinguished by the (temporary) abeyance of what *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman has called "big idea politics." That is, we lack a collective dream capable of energizing large numbers of people on behalf of that dream. A galloping individualism replaces the collective visions that animated the "Fordist" class politics of the twentieth century, while a diffuse and

inchoate solidarity with one's "diaspora" or with global "others" supplants identification with political projects associated with nation-states. This all has its positive sides, of course. But there are also serious costs entailed in the fact that wide segments of the intelligentsia, as well as a good deal of the broader public, now deride these collective projects as overweening, illegitimate "grand narratives." When the future collapses, the past rushes in.

The Collapse of the Future I: Socialism

Those of us in the Euro-Atlantic world live in an era whose mental parameters are shaped by the end of Communism and the attendant international rivalries of the Cold War. To be sure, despite its moments of high drama, the Cold War was in many ways a profoundly apolitical era during which ideological conflict came down to endorsing one of two mutually exclusive alternatives - capitalism or communism, anti-Fascism or anti-Communism.^[6] This Manichaeian thinking led to extensive blindness toward the faults of each sides' respective partners in international affairs. Such thinking helped to smother attention to past misdeeds on both sides -- those of Germany and Japan as they were transformed after the war from fascist enemies into allies of the "Free World," on the one side, and those of the Soviet Union, which quickly transmogrified from ally to enemy, on the other. *Realpolitik* argued against airing out these old wounds, and the heroic visions of a prosperous capitalist or an egalitarian communist tomorrow kept eyes turned firmly on the future. The dynamics of the Cold War thus banished much discussion of what meanwhile have come to be known as "the crimes of the past" to the murky twilight of the struggle between Communism and the "Free World."

That struggle paired two countries that embodied divergent but quasi-messianic projects for the future of the world. One was a former colony, born of revolution, that had been a role model for many people struggling for freedom from one or another imperial yoke (including at one time even Ho Chi Minh). The other was a newly influential Eurasian power that increasingly assumed the mantle of progressive humanity after the Second World War. Between them, they had been seen as the avatars of the global future at least since Tocqueville's time. Yet in the world circa 1945, the position of the United States as the leader of the world's colonized and dispossessed masses was called sharply into question. After World War II, the Soviet Union inherited the anti-colonialist banner from the United States, which in turn had stepped in to replace a declining Old World as global hegemon.

From the point of view of the broad masses outside Europe, the Soviets' (enormous) contribution to the defeat of Nazism and their espousal of the anti-colonial cause after World War II were thus of a piece. After all, as Marx had noted in his discussion of "primitive accumulation," the extermination and enslavement of

the indigenous populations of the Americas, the "looting" of the East Indies, and the massive stimulation and expansion of the slave trade in Africa had heralded "the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production."[\[7\]](#) Race and racial domination have been at the heart of the capitalist enterprise since its very inception,[\[8\]](#) and the Soviets' stance on these issues appeared to be considerably more compelling than those of the racially retrograde United States or a Europe hanging on, often brutally, to "a dying colonialism."[\[9\]](#) Accordingly, W. E. B. Dubois, the leading voice of pan-Africanism at mid-century, admonished his readers that if an "ultimate democracy, reaching across the color line and abolishing race discrimination," could be achieved "by means other than Communism, [then] Communism need not be feared"; otherwise, there was no alternative to "the method laid down by Karl Marx."[\[10\]](#)

Much of "the West" was of course tainted among the world's non-white masses for its rapaciousness and savagery in the course of the creation of the white-dominated modern world. (Recall Gandhi's quip in response to the question of what he thought of Western civilization: "I think it would be a good idea.") The Allies' shortcomings in the arena of race relations generated considerable hand-wringing among Western opinion-makers about the political advantages this situation might give to the Soviets after the war. Whether ideologically close to the Soviet Union or not, communists were frequently among the most engaged participants in the freedom struggles of blacks in the United States and South Africa.[\[11\]](#)

Ultimately, the challenge posed by the very presence of the Soviet Union and of socialist movements to the *soi-disant* "Free World" was critical to the transformation of racist practices in the United States, helping to create a favorable context for the success of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s.[\[12\]](#) With the decline of a vibrant socialist movement and of the USSR since the early 1990s (and for that matter since the end of the "Bretton Woods boom" in the early 1970s), progress in global race relations has stagnated. Africa, in particular, has been largely reduced to a backwater of foreign policy concern. Recent successes in convincing some of the wealthier countries to forgive the debts of and to make available medicines for the treatment of AIDS in some of the world's poorest nations may help. But these measures hardly amount to a major re-distribution of wealth and power to the predominantly non-white Third World.[\[13\]](#)

More broadly, of course, the challenge of socialism was arguably decisive in pushing the capitalist democracies to institute welfare and other policies that blunted the sharpest edges of the market economy. "Welfare states" came to be the norm in the more industrialized countries in the aftermath of the Great Depression. In part this was an indigenous reaction to the devastation that the slump wreaked on the populations of these countries. But it was also a response to the perception that the Soviets, who had notably abolished capitalism, seemed not to endure the same shocks from the global economy during the 1930s. In addition, of course, socialist

and communist parties throughout the West pushed for policies that softened the blows of capitalism's "creative destruction."[\[14\]](#)

The collapse and discrediting of socialism and communism has resulted in widespread befuddlement among the forces that had once been allied with the future, so to speak, about how to understand themselves in the post-Communist age. Some of those who have seen their faith disintegrate along with the Soviet bloc may have retreated into quietude, whereas others have undoubtedly found new ways to express the convictions embodied in what may now have been proven to be misguided hopes. Some of the latter have surely been among the legions of those protesting against "globalization" in Seattle, Prague, Washington, Göteborg, and Genoa, many of whom are of course too young to have had any mature memory of Soviet Communism. As an organized political force, however, socialist or communist movements have become largely irrelevant in the most developed countries, and anti-globalization movements have not yet developed the institutional stability to replace them as a major force for social change. The old is dying, and the new has not yet been born.

Others from the once-socialist fold - particularly those most strongly charmed by Communist promises of a redeemed humanity that were betrayed by the Soviets and their minions - have nonetheless gone to great lengths to denounce *post mortem* the seductions of communist utopianism and the disastrous realities of its Soviet incarnation.[\[15\]](#) Their aim in the battle for control of the past is to nail irretrievably shut both the coffin of Communism and, more broadly, the revolutionary tradition stemming from the French Revolution. This counter-revolutionary thrust, advanced with rapier intellect by François Furet, has gone hand in hand with a strong revival of totalitarianism theory, the approach that sees Communism and Nazism as two species of a larger and unprecedented twentieth-century political genus. As a form of political analysis, totalitarianism theory was inaugurated by Hannah Arendt, who saw the two major movements as both unprecedented and tied together by their use of "ideology and terror" as tools of government.

Yet it is worth noting that, for all their shared commitment to the notion of totalitarianism, Arendt and Furet differed sharply in their attitude toward the revolutionary heritage in modern political culture. The excesses of Communism did not vitiate the idea of revolution for Arendt, who lionized the American version in which she found refuge from Nazism, whereas it did so for Furet, who found lamentable the consequences of its French variant for his own *patrie*. In contrast to Furet, Arendt thus remained committed, in a Jeffersonian vein, to the revolutionary tradition as an affirmation of (Arendt's term) "man's" ability to escape the stagnation of unfreedom, of the human capacity to "start something new."[\[16\]](#)

In a manner more reminiscent of Tocqueville, Furet and his followers hope to put an end to the chronic instability produced by the shimmer of revolution and the

other abstractions promulgated by intellectuals -- in the French tradition, *maitre-penseurs* with a privileged insight into political truth. Herein, according to Furet and his epigones, lies the error of those led astray by the Communist illusion - an error they are loathe to see repeated. The weakness of left-wing politics today suggests that they have done their work successfully, or perhaps that they are simply the owl of Minerva alighting in the dusk of *etatist* socialism.[17]

The political interregnum created by the shriveling of the socialist challenge has been filled to a considerable extent with identity politics and the so-called "politics of recognition," a shift that has led to seismic disputes over the extent to which culture is relevant to progressive politics.[18] These debates have yielded many important insights, but the point here is that much of the discussion of identity and recognition has taken place in and through the idiom of coming to terms with past injustices. The upwelling of attention to the past has had important elective affinities with the preoccupation with "identity." [19] This is perhaps unavoidable. Any reasonable understanding of the inequalities facing non-whites in the world today must involve some attention to the racist practices and policies that underpinned five centuries of white supremacy, not to mention the fact that women have had to face an even longer period of "masculine domination." [20]

Still, the outpouring of concern with culture, identity, and memory bespeak a retreat from an unjust, but also refractory, social reality. These preoccupations thus resonate with the impulse underlying the current obsession with the "socially constructed" nature of just about everything.[21] The repeated incantation that the social world is "socially constructed," and hence apparently infinitely malleable, reflects an abandonment of the idea of social structure that was essential to any collective vision of politics. It is a kind of sociological libertarianism, a refusal at the level of ideas of the hard realities imposed by wealth and power.

Similarly, we have witnessed the emergence of a "memory industry" which, emancipated from the evidentiary requirements of a pedestrian positivism, opens the door to all manner of unanchored conjecture regarding the supposed contents of people's recollections. Memory emerges with such force on the academic and public agenda today, according to one critic, "precisely because it figures as a therapeutic alternative to historical discourse." [22] Such discourse is constrained by the unpleasant facts that bestrew the canvas of the past, whereas memory talk allows for a subjective re-working of those events combined with the bland prospect of "healing." The excavation of memory and its mysteries salves buried yearnings for a presently unreachable future. Taken together, the interconnected concerns with memory, identity, and "social construction" amount to individualistic responses to the bewilderment induced by the collapse of an edifying, invigorating conception of a common destiny. This is a reflection of the contemporary forward march of the invisible hand, not a critique of it as many of the practitioners of these pursuits seem to think.

The problem is that, for fairly obvious reasons, the pursuit of the past has generally been the terrain of conservatives; Burke is perhaps the leading example of the sensibility in question. The past has always been full of disasters for those on the bottom of the social ladder; until recently, moreover, their role in that past was met chiefly with the "enormous condescension of posterity."[\[23\]](#) Conversely, the past always seemed more glorious to those whose power and privilege are now being challenged. Because the present always remains one of unnecessary suffering and inequality, to be superseded in a coming better day, the future is of necessity the temporal horizon of earthly (or any other) redemption. "The meek shall inherit the earth"; "the workers have nothing to lose but their chains, and a world to win." But they need the future to realize those hopes, which is the best they have in the still-unjust present. It is no coincidence that Steiner's concern about the "problematic" status of hope in our day stems from a view that the twin progeny of prophetic Judaism -- Christianity and its secular sibling, Marxism -- have atrophied.[\[24\]](#)

The Collapse of the Future II: The Nation-State

Yet it is not only Communism that has proven to be an illusion. The idea of the nation-state, too, has been widely discredited, reduced to its historical role - not to be gainsaid -- as the platform for delusions of grandeur leading to tragedy. As the paradigmatic case of nationalism gone disastrously wrong, the Holocaust and its "reception" in opinion-making circles have done much to undermine confidence in the nation-state as a political form. In the Euro-Atlantic world, at least, the Holocaust has become the touchstone of contemporary historical consciousness, undermining the very idea of nationalism among the ranks of "respectable" opinion.[\[25\]](#) The human rights agenda that received so important a boost from the international responses to World War II has further promoted a skepticism about the nation-state as a force for good in the world. This is an enormous change of sensibility since the heyday of the nation-state in the early 20th century.

In his discussion of "The Nation," Max Weber noted that that phenomenon was usually related to the notion of the superiority or irreplaceability of the cultural achievements of a peculiar group.[\[26\]](#) This view of the nation is now routinely condemned in enlightened circles as a grotesque form of hubris likely to have been at the root of, or to issue in, one or another form of self-aggrandizing violence. The principal exception to this proposition involves those cases of national strivings tied to efforts to escape from some sort of imperialist or quasi-imperialist overlord. In other words, nationalists seeking to achieve the norm of self-determination that underlay the French Revolution, and that was re-affirmed by Woodrow Wilson after World War I, still have a legitimate cause. National feeling among the already powerful, however, is to be looked at askance.

As a result, it is difficult at this point to conjure into memory Hannah Arendt's view that "the decline of the nation-state" - that is, "the conquest of the state by the nation" -- had led to "the end of the rights of man."[\[27\]](#) Likewise forgotten is the fact that a sense of common membership was crucial to the extension of the social rights that fostered equality in the face of capitalism's systemic inequities.[\[28\]](#) The "nations" associated with powerful countries are widely regarded today as illegitimate entities, mere brute victors in a process of "internal colonialism." Such nation-states are seen as having been brought into being on the strength of injustices against others including expropriation, murder, rape, and the destruction of once-vibrant cultures. The rights of minorities to "their" cultures have thus been one of the most widely discussed extensions of the norm of self-determination in recent years.[\[29\]](#) Under these circumstances, the authority of the nation-state to mold its populace in the image of elite defenders of the national mythology has largely evaporated.

Among the enlightened strata of the Euro-Atlantic world, national(ist) histories, once the essential bedrock of imagined national communities, have fallen under the suspicion of celebrating the narcissism of small differences. Such histories are seen as responsible for the *ex post facto* glorification of those crimes today regarded as the most heinous, and as such unacceptable. This sensibility has also made the leap to other parts of the world, although there it may get more readily caught up in the vicissitudes of international power politics. An excellent example of this transformation in thinking about the history of the nation is the ongoing controversy over the content of school history textbooks in Japan, where the textbooks have been condemned by neighboring countries such as China and South Korea as giving insufficient accounts of Japanese atrocities during the Pacific War.[\[30\]](#) In short, historical consciousness in the Euro-Atlantic world and its fragments around the globe,[\[31\]](#) and in would-be democracies elsewhere, is now more likely to be bound up with a search for perpetrators and with the posthumous recognition of victims than it is to be rooted in the foundation myth of a *Volk*.

The identity-promoting authority of the nation-state has been replaced among substantial numbers of people in the developed world by a growing identification with the notion that they are members of a diaspora of some sort. Two leading analysts of world migration processes have recently defined a diaspora as "a persistent sense of community between people who have left their homeland (usually involuntarily) and who may be scattered all over the world."[\[32\]](#) Forced migration may be an important aspect of membership in a diaspora for some groups, but this element need not be significant in a group's experience for the notion of a diaspora to be relevant to their self-understanding today. Identification with a putative diaspora is likely to depend as much on the porousness of national identity in the "host" states and the political and economic situation in the homeland as it is on the causes underlying the groups' departure from their ancestral domains. In the

Euro-Atlantic world today, the growth of diasporic consciousness reflects the fading of a cohesive, overarching sense of national belonging. This fragmentation is mirrored in the explosion of academic attention to transnational communities and to "postnational" phenomena generally.[33]

Diasporas have played a crucial role in foregrounding experiences of historical injustices in the Euro-Atlantic world in recent years. The activism of Jews in the United States with respect to reparations for Nazi crimes is too well-known to require elaboration here. Iris Chang, author of *The Rape of Nanking*, is the daughter of Chinese immigrants to the United States, and she became involved in publicizing the atrocities committed by the Japanese during World War II as a result of her involvement with Chinese-American activists devoted to cultivating the memory of those events.[34] The Armenian communities in France and the United States, similarly, have played a decisive role in promoting the legislative recognition of the 1915 massacres as a "genocide." Also important has been the African diaspora, which is of course of long standing in the Americas. Those who call attention to the connections between colonialism, the slave trade, slavery itself, and the continuing discrimination against those of African descent in the United States and elsewhere have done so in part by insisting on the community of identity and interests among the inhabitants of Africa and African-descended peoples elsewhere.[35]

Pervasive talk of a "globalizing" world entailing the heightened geographic mobility of far-flung populations suggest that the developed world has become a melting pot absorbing hitherto unfamiliar peoples from around the globe. A mere glance at the faces of those walking the streets of Paris, London, Berlin, Sydney, New York, and Toronto indicates that there is much to this view. Yet the images of multi-colored, multiethnic populations have also helped stimulate a concern about identity and "roots" among both those in motion and those receiving them. This sense of transformation and drift could scarcely fail to promote a concern about who one "really" is, especially as politics in the world's powerful countries since Reagan and Thatcher seems increasingly oriented to scaling back the scope and range of government activities. If "the nation-state" offers its citizens less, and demands less of them (e.g., the shift away from conscript armies), it is hardly surprising that they would look elsewhere for the sources of their self-understanding.

This tendency has been especially prominent in a context in which the culturally savvy view the nation-state principally as a force for deracination and cultural decimation. This intensified search for the moorings of the self is precisely the response one might expect on the basis of Marx's previously quoted remark; the presence of the past *is* enhanced when people are in the process of "revolutionizing themselves and things," as they appear to be doing today. An essential element of that "revolutionizing" is the declining authority of nation-states vis-a-vis other claimants on people's loyalties and, in the Euro-Atlantic world, the increasing individualization of people's ideas about who and what they are.

The Past After the Future

The discrediting of the twin forces that dominated twentieth-century history - namely, nationalism and socialism/communism -- has promoted a pervasive "consciousness of catastrophe" among the educated sections of Euro-Atlantic society. Against this background, Europe -- once thought of as the homeland of the Enlightenment -- replaces Africa as the *Dark Continent*, while Henry Louis Gates celebrates "the wonders of the African world" in a multi-installment PBS series and accompanying coffee-table book.[36] The reversal of images, however appropriate in righting traditionally triumphalist and "orientalist" histories, is strikingly symptomatic of the transformed sensibilities of our age. Fortified by post-modernist critiques of "grand narratives" and the celebration of "difference" over a Universalism alleged to harbor intrinsically totalitarian impulses, the end-of-the-century meets *The End of Utopia*. [37]

We thus find ourselves in a "post-socialist" and "post-national" condition [38] which, skeptical of new blueprints for a heaven on earth, instead fixes its gaze firmly on the horrors and injustices of the past. In the conclusion of his magisterial *Passing of an Illusion* (502), Furet writes: "The idea of *another* society has become almost impossible to conceive of, and no one in the world today is offering any advice on the subject or even trying to formulate a new concept. Here we are, condemned to live in the world as it is." [39] This assessment underestimates the unfamiliarity of market capitalism to many of the societies that have been exposed to it since the Communist collapse - not to mention the amount of advice promoting that new kind of society that has been dispensed by the Harvard Economics Department. Not surprisingly, however, given the object of his ire, Furet sees only socialism as "another" society. But even the creation of capitalism in societies that have not previously encountered it is a novel experience, if not a new idea. [40]

In the absence of any plausible overarching vision of a more humane future society, the past and what people think about it become magnified; righting past wrongs supplants and replaces the search for a vision of a better tomorrow. The reckoning with abominable pasts becomes, in fact, the idiom in which the future is sought. We might call this the *involution* of the progressive impulse that has animated much of modern history -- the deflection of what was once regarded as the forward march of progress and its turning inward upon itself. Where can one now find analogues of those venerable early twentieth-century expressions of optimism in the socialist future conveyed in the Italian socialists' *Avanti!* or the German Social Democrats' *Vorwärts*? Not since the Romantics has so much energy been spent on digging up the past, sifting through the broken shards, and pondering what people think about them.

The pursuit of the future has thus been replaced by a veritable tidal wave of "memory," "historical consciousness," "coming to terms with the past." Perhaps never has so much intellectual and political firepower been trained on history as a battleground of struggle and a field of scholarly exploration. Who today, ensnared in the riddles of the past or crushed under its bulk, could imagine the exhortation of those seekers after new worlds, the Futurists, to "burn down all libraries so as to emancipate the senile spirit from the dead weight of the past"?[41] Nietzsche's acerbic remark that "man would rather have the void for his purpose than be void of purpose" captures the remarkable intensity with which we have in recent years made a purpose of the past. As we pursue the past in this manner, however, we should be aware that this preoccupation is in substantial part a replacement for paradises lost.

NOTES

[1] Claudio Magris, *Danube: A Sentimental Journey from the Source to the Black Sea*, translated by Patrick Creagh (London: The Harvill Press, 1999), p. 39.

[2] Friedrich Nietzsche, "Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben," in idem., *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen* (Frankfurt: Insel, 1981 [1874]); translated as "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life," in Daniel Breazeale, ed., *Untimely Meditations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

[3] George Steiner, *Grammars of Creation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 3.

[4] Karl Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," in Robert Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader* 2nd ed. (New York: Norton, 1978 [1852]), p. 595.

[5] Jürgen Habermas, "Foreword," *The Postnational Constellation: Political Essays* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), xviii. My translation.

[6] Ken Jowitt, "A World Without Leninism," in idem., *New World Disorder: The Leninist Extinction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p. 306.

[7] Karl Marx, *Das Kapital*, vol. 1 in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Werke* Bd. 23 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1979), p. 779.

[8] For a valuable discussion of the vicissitudes of race in the capitalist "world-system," see Howard Winant, *The World is a Ghetto: Race and Democracy Since World War II* (New York: Basic Books, 2001).

[9] The reference is to Frantz Fanon's *A Dying Colonialism*, trans. Haakon Chevalier (New York: Grove Press, 1967 [1959]).

[10] W. E. Burghardt Dubois, *The World and Africa: An Inquiry into the Part Which Africa has Played in World History* (New York: Viking, 1946), p. 258.

[11] See George Fredrickson, *Black Liberation: A Comparative History of Black Ideologies in the United States and South Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), esp. Ch. 5.

[12] See Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton, 2000) and George Fredrickson, *A Short History of Racism*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, forthcoming), Chapter 3.

[13] On the relative stagnation of progress in race relations since the early 1990s, see Winant, *The World is a Ghetto*.

[14] See Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: A History of the World, 1914-1991* (New York: Vintage, 1996 [1994]), p. 96 and *passim*. The term "creative destruction" is Joseph Schumpeter's; see his *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1942).

[15] See Furet, *The Passing of an Illusion: The Idea of Communism in the Twentieth Century* trans. Deborah Furet (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999 [1995]) and Stephane Courtois, et. al., eds., *The Black Book of Communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression*, trans. by Jonathan Murphy and Mark Kramer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

[16] See Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Viking, 1963).

[17] For a more extensive discussion of the *Black Book of Communism*, see my "What Future for the Future? Reflections on the *Black Book of Communism*," *Human Rights Review* 2:2 (Jan.-March 2001): 135-143.

[18] For a critical view, see Todd Gitlin, *The Twilight of Common Dreams: Why America is Wracked by Culture Wars* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1995). For a recent iteration of the debate, see the exchange between Richard Rorty and Nancy Fraser in *Critical Horizons* 1:1 (February 2000).

[19] For a devastating critique of the use of the notion of "identity" in recent social science writing, see Rogers Brubaker and Fred Cooper, "Beyond 'Identity'," *Theory and Society* 29:1 (February 2000): 1-47.

[20] See Pierre Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

[21] See Ian Hacking, *The Social Construction of What?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

[22] Kerwin Lee Klein, "On the Emergence of *Memory* in Historical Discourse," *Representations* 69 (Winter 2000), p. 145. Klein's article does for "memory" what Brubaker and Cooper do for "identity."

[23] The phrase is E. P. Thompson's; see his *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Penguin, 1968 [1963]), p. 12.

[24] Steiner, *Grammars of Creation*, p. 7.

[25] Charles Maier has noted that, outside the Euro-Atlantic world, where the problems have been of a different nature, the Holocaust narrative is seen as a "parochial" preoccupation. See his essay "Consigning the Twentieth Century to History: Alternative Narratives for the Modern Era," *American Historical Review* 105: 3 (June 2000), 826. Accurate though it undoubtedly is at the level of popular historical consciousness, I suggest certain limitations to this view in my essay "'Making Whole What Has Been Smashed': Reflections on Reparations," *Journal of Modern History* 73:2 (June 2001): 333-358. For an outstanding study of how the Holocaust came to assume its paradigmatic status and the implications of this fact for our ways of thinking, focusing on the US, Germany, and Israel, see Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, *Erinnerung im globalen Zeitalter: Der Holocaust* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, forthcoming).

[26] Max Weber, "The Nation," in Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills, eds., *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), p. 176.

[27] See Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, ch. 9.

[28] See T. H. Marshall, "Citizenship and Social Class," in his *Class, Citizenship, and Social Development*, ed. Seymour Martin Lipset (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964 [1949]), pp. 71-134. It is telling that nowhere in Marshall's seminal discussion of the nature of citizenship does he pay any attention to the question of *who* is to receive its benefits; Marshall took for granted that these were advantages that all citizens could and should enjoy.

[29] See especially Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

[30] For updates on the controversy, see the home page of the Center for Research and Documentation on Japan's War Responsibility at:
<http://www.jca.apc.org./JWRC/center/english/index-english.htm>.

[31] By this I mean to refer to settler societies such as Australia and South Africa. The idea of European "fragment" societies was first developed in Louis Hartz, *The Founding of New Societies: Studies in the History of the United States, Latin America, South Africa, Canada, and Australia* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1964), Part One.

[32] Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World* 2nd ed. (New York: Guilford, 1998), p. 201. For an in-depth discussion, see Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997).

[33] For representative examples, see Peggy Levitt, *The Transnational Villagers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); and Yasemin Soysal, *Limits of Citizenship: Migrants and Postnational Membership in Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); and Habermas, *The Postnational Constellation*.

[34] Chang notes that her involvement in the cause of commemorating and seeking reparations for the Rape of Nanking was galvanized by her attendance at a 1994 conference of the Global Alliance for Preserving the History of World War II in Asia in Cupertino, CA; see Iris Chang, *The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II* (New York: Basic Books, 1997). The website of the Alliance for Preserving the Truth of Sino-Japanese War, a member of the Global Alliance, can be found at <<http://www.sjwar.org>>.

[35] Randall Robinson, *The Debt: What America Owes to Blacks* (New York: Dutton, 2000).

[36] Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century* (New York: Knopf, 1998).

[37] See Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984); Russell Jacoby, *The End of Utopia: Politics and Culture in an Age of Apathy* (New York: Basic, 1999); Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000).

[38] Nancy Fraser, *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the "Postsocialist" Condition* (New York: Routledge, 1997) and Soysal, *Limits of Citizenship*.

[39] Furet, *The Passing of an Illusion*, p. 502.

[40] For one analysis of the nature of the "transition from socialism to capitalism," see Gil Eyal, Ivan Szelenyi and Eleanor Townsley, *Making Capitalism Without Capitalists: The New Ruling Elites in Eastern Europe* (New York: Verso, 1998).

[41] Steiner, *Grammars of Creation*, p. 329.