

# Empire of Knowledge

## Culture and Plurality in the Global Economy

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For  
Avni Sunaina  
to whom the future belongs  
and  
Teshome Gabriel  
who has enabled the futures of many young ones

and  
to the memory of  
Elisabeth ("Lilo") Difloe  
who had her future snatched from her

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# Introduction

They make war and call it peace.<sup>1</sup> So wrote Tacitus in the first Christian millennium. When I first entertained some concrete thoughts about this book, in the early summer of 1999, these words appeared to resonate chillingly: the will of a Western empire – call it the United States, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the European Union – was once again asserting itself as the universal history of mankind. Bombs were being rained down on Yugoslavia, or what remained of it after secessionist and liberation movements had shrunk it down to much less than half its former size. As this book was being completed, in the infancy of the third Christian millennium, one might have been forgiven for thinking that the hullabaloo over the millennium was much ado about nothing: now superbombs, some weighing as much as 15,000 lb apiece, were creating firestorms around the strongholds of the Taliban. A little more than two years had elapsed, and the war machine was still at work, the Tomahawks and Stealth Fighters now supplemented by “special ground forces” and a new generation of bombs which apparently can puncture the walls of caves dug deep into the hills. Amidst the promise of commitment of troops from Germany, Italy, Australia, and Canada, NATO remarkably had invoked, for the first time in its history, provisions of its charter to the effect that any assault upon the United States would be considered an attack upon the member nations of NATO.

No reasonable person could have failed to applaud the “peace” of Yugoslavia, when we think of the immense suffering inflicted upon its people, but the manner in which this peace was negotiated made it appear to be another name for coercion and, even, state-sponsored terrorism. Now one awaits with similar foreboding the “peace” of Afghanistan, and again one suspects that the acquiescence of even the harshest critics of the American conduct of the war would have been purchased with the thought that the people of Afghanistan would no longer have to suffer another night of air raids. A peace that imposes a new form of hegemony, and that brings into power an alliance of soldiers, among whom are many whose thuggish behavior previously threw Afghanistan into chaos, may look like an

attractive option after months of bombing have made impossible any other kind of solution.

Exactly 100 years ago, the United States was acquiring an overseas empire, and in southern Africa the Boer War was to introduce new forms of orchestrating death. The British Empire then covered nearly one-fourth of the globe, and scarcely anyone could have imagined that by the middle of the twentieth century all the European powers would have been divested of their empires, retaining possession only of scattered colonies and entrusted with trusteeship responsibilities over small islands. Decolonization, to intellectuals and political activists in the Third World, appeared as the most promising development to overtake colonized people, and for a moment it must have seemed that the true meaning of freedom, namely an awareness of the conditions of oppression under which people labor, was on the verge of being realized. Nationalist resistance movements everywhere contributed to the demise of colonial rule, though geopolitical theorists were doubtless more inclined to view the two world wars as instrumental in the decline of the great European powers. Since many Western political commentators and other intellectuals considered the colonized to be incapable of producing a genuine or “good” nationalist movement, they proposed that the European powers were retreating from sheer exhaustion, the apprehension that their benevolent work in the colonies would elicit no appreciation from ungrateful natives, and the necessity of repairing their own war-torn economies. The colonized could now be put to better use in the metropolises: in retrospect postcolonial theorists may like to describe this phenomenon as “the empire striking back,” but Indians, Pakistanis, and Indonesians, among others, were viewed as furnishing the necessary labor force.

As the era of decolonization receded, and the communist nations fell into disrepair, leading eventually to the dismemberment of the Soviet Union and the transformation of the countries behind what was once the Iron Curtain, the Americans proclaimed the arrival of a “new world order.” But the disparities between the First World and the Third World continue to grow apace, and successive United Nations Human Development Reports have highlighted the seemingly intractable problems – poverty, dwindling resources, unemployment, illiteracy, “brain drain,” environmental devastation, gender inequities, pollution, exponential growth of the urban population, and lack of medical care and facilities, among numerous others – that continue to afflict much of the formerly colonized

world. Yet the brute fact of poverty hides more than it reveals, and social science discourse, which has arrogated to itself the responsibility of defining, articulating, and managing poverty, is largely without the awareness that the affluence of some is the most glaring sign of poverty. If modernizers, liberals, and Marxists had been less mocking of Gandhi's espousal of poverty, which was seen as obscuring his dalliances with the bourgeoisie, they might have recognized his heroic endeavor to reintroduce the notion of voluntary poverty and (to use Majid Rahnema's phrase) convivial poverty while offering a resounding critique of modernized poverty. But scholarship has often had little time for such distinctions, since to embrace any notion of poverty is to invite attention to one's "backwardness." Moreover, the economist's only rejoinder to poverty is a plan to engender "growth," in obvious indifference to the fact that growth generates its own forms of poverty. With respect to all the other principal orthodoxies of the day, the story is a similar one. The critique of development is barely tolerated, since nothing is construed as more heretical than the supposition that underdeveloped countries should not, with some obvious qualifications, emulate the developed countries. These terms point to an evaluative scale, which in substance is no different than the nineteenth-century tale that the colonized nations, by virtue of being colonized, were markedly inferior to the colonizing powers, which had attained superiority in the arenas of material attainment, morality, and intellectual reasoning.

In the new world order, the primitives, the backward, and the rebels are largely being eliminated by kindness, since the conventional pieties of the day generally do not allow for open and racist abuse, or for the unabashed celebration of Western civilization as the greatest good ever bestowed upon humankind. While certain sections of the academy have been buzzing with discussions of hegemony, the great powers have been finding new uses for it, and the apparatus of oppression has taken on more insidious and invisible forms. Though the bombing of Iraq in 1991 decimated the country and pushed it back, in the words of an official UN document, to the medieval period, the casualties on account of sanctions have been immeasurably greater. Yet the then Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, considered that the containment of Hussein was "worth the price" of the lives of the over half a million Iraqi children who have died from starvation and lack of medical care since the sanctions were first imposed upon Iraq. The fatalities

have continued to multiply since then. Sanctions, ironically, are even championed as a non-violent and charitable form of intervention, one designed to teach recalcitrant nations the moral consequences of their actions.

Thus, placed as we are at the threshold of a new epoch, the only thing that might well be “new” is forms of social engineering that obliterate the remnants of knowledge systems and cultural practices which have so far not been assimilated into the worldview of modernity and its numerous practitioners. Nothing is as much global as the knowledge systems that perform the interpretive, political, cultural, and managerial work which characterizes modernity in the era of globalization, and consequently it becomes imperative to provide a cartography of the global framework of knowledge, politics, and culture, as well as of those paths which open up alternative frameworks to a more pluralistic future. If human beings have the uncanny ability to devise the most extraordinary forms of oppression, they are equally endowed with the capacity to find ways of freeing themselves from oppression. Similarly, while many scholars and academics have lent their services to the state or other dominant institutions of civil society, the true function of the intellectual is to be resistant to dominant epistemologies and political practices, and to investigate precisely that element of knowledge which gives it the quality of being taken for granted. To do otherwise is to abdicate the responsibilities of the intellectual. Much academic writing, it remains to be said, has rendered itself opaque, not least of all that writing which claims to speak in the voices of the powerless and the marginalized. The post-colonial scholar has found new modes of self-indulgence.

This book is intended to be an intervention in numerous contemporary debates and offer a dissenting perspective on the politics of knowledge. There is, as I suggest, an empire of knowledge, perhaps far more considerable than the empires we associate with Euro-American imperialism or with the large corporate undertakings that have divided much of the world among themselves, and it has shaped the categories through which we view the world; and since many of these categories are largely invisible, or bathed in the language of kindness, good intentions, and progress, they are more insidious in their operation than the forces and agents through which naked domination is exercised. This book, in keeping with my stance that intellectuals cannot but be forward-looking, is also prospective in outlook, though that should not be understood as

indicating an interest on my part in policy-making, much less any suggestion that readers should expect a blueprint for the future. It is perfectly illustrative of my argument that our futures should have been hijacked by policy-makers and management gurus. Earlier generations, particularly before the advent of Enlightenment discourses, knew of another “specialist” dealing with the future, namely the prophet. This is scarcely to say that I am interested in prophecy, or that the prophetic mode should substitute for the interpretive mode, interesting though prophecy is as one of the numerous ahistoricist forms of knowledge which have been suppressed in our times; rather, it is to suggest that, if the future is not to become hostage to those very ideas that, in the twentieth century, led us to total forms of domination as much as to modern knowledge systems which are global in their reach and appetite, it becomes imperative to work for dissenting futures.

Though the special provenance of this book might be characterized as an excursion into the politics of knowledge, besides furnishing a broad and, I daresay, somewhat different canvas for the understanding of politics, extending beyond party politics, electoral struggles, and even identity politics and multiculturalism, my work also seeks to understand the intersections between politics and knowledge. In Chapter 1, I consider what it means to have moved into the twenty-first century, and to have heralded the arrival of a new millennium. Though there are many histories of clocks and calendars, and the philosophical consideration of time has an honorable trajectory in Western thought, from Augustine to Heidegger and Ricoeur, few commentators have paused to consider the cultural politics of time itself, and the ubiquitousness of certain of its categories. To read accounts of the underdevelopment of the Third World is to be reminded of the snide observation that “natives” in the southern hemisphere have insufficient respect for the clock and do not make good use of their time, though they have almost uniformly submitted to the norms of the Western calendar.

At a different macro level of interpretation, it becomes necessary to inquire about our deployment of the categories “century” and “millennium,” and the politics that is disguised by the apparently neutral meanings attached to these categories of time. If, as is frequently encountered in common parlance, considerable parts of India, Africa, and especially the Muslim world – the “especially” apparently underscored by the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> – are said to be living in medieval times or in the nineteenth century, then it is

transparent that categories of time have also been spatialized, just as categories of space have, by the act of displacement, temporal effect. Consider, too, that as we were poised to enter into a new millennium, we scarcely stopped to ask for whom it is that the millennium struck, and by what sleight of hand the Christian millennium became the benchmark for all peoples. For (say) Muslims, it may serve as an unpleasant reminder of the overwhelming hegemony of the West. As one reflects upon the unease and anxiety among the Muslim leadership in the last decade of the twentieth century, whether in Algeria (where civil war has left 80,000 people dead), Malaysia (where the Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad, squashed the reform movement and had its most promising figure, Anwar Ibrahim, arrested and convicted on what are widely believed to be false charges), Indonesia (where the crash of the economy and the overthrow of Suharto was accompanied as well by violence targeted at the Chinese community), Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sudan, or elsewhere, one wonders whether the imminence of the new millennium generated within Islam a certain melancholia.

The history of millenarian movements is inextricably tied to prophecies of doom, and the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> must have appeared to the doomsayers as having vindicated their prognostications. The internet furnishes a generously accommodating home for rumors of global scope and conspiratorial theories of the widest import; and here the millenarians, while not sufficiently attentive to the expansive conception of space entailed by *new* technologies ("newness" itself being a predicate of time), were espousing their own ideas about the end of time. But millenarianism's other self, so to speak, speaks in a different voice and with the expectation of renewal. There may well be other ways of renewing and renegotiating our sense of time, and not allowing it to be compromised by millenarian time, clock time, the time of the Gregorian calendar, and the time of schedules. Being busy, not having the time for others, is itself an evasion of our obligation to treat everyone as an end in himself and herself, and we have not been reflective enough about how busy-ness creates its own forms of oppression. I ruminate, for instance, on the relationship between time and our eating habits, and the conviviality and richness of those meals which stretch time to pleasant albeit temporary extinction. Similarly, the disciplinary notion of time which rules over modern lives is not easily reconciled with the various modes of what might be called BodyTime. The hegemonic conceptions of time are an aspect of the oppressiveness

of modern knowledge systems, and to this extent the burden of the discussion is to democratize and pluralize our notion of time.

If Chapter 1 is partly prospective, Chapters 2 and 3 are largely retrospective. We have to begin with the chilling fact that the twentieth century was soaked in blood. Varying estimates have been furnished of how many people may have been killed in wars and other armed conflicts, but the conservative estimate of 110 million is at least indisputable; not less significantly, as a proportion of the total population, the number of casualties for the twentieth century seems to be higher than for any other point in recorded human history.<sup>2</sup> Having left the twentieth century behind us, a century dedicated to the principle of total war and brutalized by exterminationist mentalities, it also becomes necessary to inquire into some of the other principal political developments that shaped the previous 100 years. The preceding century witnessed as well the final enthronement of the nation-state idea, the emergence of the idea of international governance in economic and political spheres, the expansion of human rights – or at least the deployment of the notion in a wide public arena, decolonization and resistance movements, and what I have called the democratic totalitarianism of the United States. It was with the desire of eliminating the scourge of war that the short-lived League of Nations, and subsequently the United Nations, was set up, and it is increasingly under the putative jurisdiction of the United Nations, particularly of its Security Council, that the novel, but by no means incorruptible, idea of *international governance* is taking shape. As I have already suggested, decolonization and resistance movements were to leave their impressions upon large parts of the world, but formerly colonized people could not resist the attraction of the nation-state system, which continues to play havoc with the lives of people in the Middle East, South Asia, and virtually all of Africa.

The UN Charter, numerous international covenants, and movements predicated on the enunciation of ethnic, linguistic, sexual, racial, and religious differences, to which were subsequently added other considerations such as the mode of lifestyle that one might choose to adopt, were together to create a new-found awareness of human rights. Nationalist movements, driven by the notion of cultural difference, and squarely grounded in the rhetoric of human dignity, were equally critical in the emergence of the notion of human rights, which never before has had the salience that it does in our times. The notion of human rights has generated

much debate. Some commentators describe it as a new front for Western imperialism, while others are inclined to view it as the indispensable and non-negotiable condition for the flourishing of human societies. As the conflict in Kosovo indubitably established, human rights will, for the foreseeable future, furnish grounds for intervention, but in this respect as in all others, the power of chastisement lies only with some agents. The idea of human rights is particularly appropriable, as I shall suggest, to the democratic totalitarianism represented by the United States. Though one might be inclined to view the Pax Americana as the logical continuum of the Pax Britannica, or be seduced by cyclical theories of history and by narratives derived from political science about shifting balances between great powers, the concentrated power represented by the United States has no comparison with any previous point in history, and it behooves us to understand what “divine dispensation” has driven the US to the helm of world affairs, and what this portends for humanity in the twenty-first century.

If the United States, which has developed a new grammar of conduct and a new lexicon of power, extending from “rogue states” to the international community, has its counterpart in the United Nations, under the auspices of which peacekeeping operations and sanctions have brought ruin to some countries, the third part of the tripartite system of contemporary global governance is occupied by the institutions – the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Trade Organization (WTO), among others – charged with the responsibility of managing the global economy. Not unlike the United Nations, these institutions purport to be independent, but they are severely constrained by the actions and will of the United States.<sup>3</sup> Much ink has been expended on such matters as the consequences of the expanding free trade regimes, the unevenness of the rewards reaped under globalization, the price of patents for the poor, the threat to indigenous knowledge under the pretext of international property rights, and the commodification of lifestyles that are scarcely affordable in developing countries. The literature is immense, and many minds have been trained on the question of globalization, but my own modest endeavor is to cast a critical glance at the settlement dispute provisions in the WTO. What is presumed by these provisions, and how substantively do we assess the presumed parity between nations who come to the tribunal either with a grievance or to defend themselves against charges of the violation of WTO rules?



Alongside the political developments encapsulated in the previous two chapters, the ideology of development was to acquire, following the Marshall Plan and decolonization, near sacrosanct status. This discussion, which takes us directly to the politics of knowledge, initiates Chapter 4. To question the logic of development was to place oneself among primitives and traditionalists, and to be viewed as an obdurate native who refused to be reformed. Though the millions who perished in the Holocaust, or in the killing fields of Cambodia and Rwanda, are recognized as victims of political violence and genocidal impulses, the more numerous victims of development have rarely been accorded the dignity of even being considered visible. The true “unknown soldier” of the twentieth century, invariably lying in an unmarked grave, is the victim of development. At least the unknown soldier at whose altar politicians pay their veneration to the idea of sacrifice had another name – hero, martyr, patriot; the victim of development has no name, and was asked to march to the tune of development, laying aside his and her lands, honor, traditions, and culture in the name of the nation. The victim of development is not even a victim; he or she is a statistic.

It was the insanity of development which fed Stalin’s gulags, and created the starving millions in Mao’s China – at least 25 million people perished in the paeon to progress styled as the Great Leap Forward – and which has since claimed the lives of tribal, aboriginal, and other powerless people throughout the world. This is the intractable problem of modernity, namely that oppression now comes to us in indecipherable guises, often posited as developments for our own good or as acts of humanity and kindness, and few people have considered whether oppression will not increasingly be inflicted upon us through categories of knowledge. Nor is this tantamount to an admission that the military-industrial complex is entirely a thing of the past, or that brute force will not continue to be exercised as the most evident display of domination. The violence in our midst permits no such conclusion. Nevertheless, dominant states can no longer justify their domination predominantly with the rhetoric of the “civilizing mission” so effortlessly employed by colonial states, and it is remarkable that though the conflict with the Taliban has been represented by the US as a war between the “civilized world” and those who hate freedom and democracy, there has been virtually no talk of civilizing the Afghans: the war aims are represented as bringing terrorists and their sponsors to justice and placing a new administration in Afghanistan. The “new world order”

is itself framed, not by an explicit contrast between the colonizers and the colonized, superior and inferior races, but rather in the language of laws, the injunction to be moral, the apparent concern for lives (there must be no American casualties, in any case), and the ethic of caring. The imperative to punish and kill is now derived by designating entire states as rogue or outlaw formations, who invite retribution by having stepped outside the pale of the law or what American politicians call the international community.

If development is only one of the more insidious categories that predominates in modern knowledge systems, alongside that cluster of ideas – nation-state, modernity, big science, history and others – which have gained adherents in the farthest reaches of the globe, the persistence of these categories in the face of the onslaught against conventional ideas that has been witnessed in the academy, whether in the US, France, Britain, and even some Third World countries (notably India), is all the more remarkable. Some years after decolonization had been achieved nearly everywhere, the intellectual counterpart of that movement, initiated by French poststructuralism and the critique of Orientalism, was to take apart the assumptions of Enlightenment and colonial discourses. While earlier discourses had taken the subject – the white patriarchal male – for granted, the entire question of how subjects are constituted, while processes of exclusion work to remove certain classes of people from the purview of reason, history, and the nation-state, was now thrown open for investigation. However, notwithstanding the thoroughgoing anti-foundationalism of much of poststructuralism, not to mention postcolonial theory, deconstructionism, and postmodernism, the intellectual ferment of the academy has had little if any relation to the public sphere, and certainly has exercised no tangible influence on the conduct of foreign policy, whether in the US or elsewhere. While I can do little more than gesture at purportedly radical critiques encapsulated under cultural studies, the place of the university in modern life, and the relations between the academy and society, the disciplinary structure of modern knowledge, especially of the social sciences, is subjected in Chapter 4, and in portions of the following chapters, to more rigorous scrutiny. History has become the most widely accepted public voice of the social sciences: consider that there isn't a group of people, whether constituted in racial, ethnic, or linguistic terms, that wishes to be viewed as lacking a history. The practitioners of "radical" histories, which are attentive to the voices of the marginalized and the invisible, and

partake of more recent analytical and investigative methods to deconstruct dominant historical narratives, have not paused to consider whether their own triumph does not signify the rather totalizing ascendancy of history. Is history the only language that remains to those forgotten and living at the margins?

A fundamental concern of this book, following on the earlier discussions of political developments and modern knowledge systems, is the future of dissent; and Gandhi, as Chapters 5 and 6 suggest, is supremely iconic of what I would view as an emancipatory politics of the future. There are a great many truisms about how the dissenters of yesterday are the stockbrokers of today, but none of the prevalent formulations should be allowed to obfuscate the centrality of dissent in the imagination of any society. Regrettably, the possibilities of dissent in our times have dangerously narrowed, and we are all compelled to be dissenters in similar ways. Though identity politics, for example, was born in the cauldron of cultural difference, it is extraordinary to what degree advocates of identity politics, whether moved by considerations of race, gender, sexual preference, or (seldom) class, advance claims on similar epistemological grounds. On a different plane, when a civilization like that of India, whose principal architect of independence from British rule was an exponent of non-violence, reduces itself to the lesser status of a nation-state, in the expectation that the explosion of nuclear devices, most tragically on a day celebrated as the birthday of the Buddha, will catapult it on to the world stage, then clearly even less can be expected from nations without those cultural resources that an ancient civilization can husband.

Unless dissent is couched in the rational, civilized, constitutional, and adult-like language recognized by Western parliamentarians and social commentators, it is condemned to oblivion. Gandhi recognized this, when he abandoned the placard, petition, and parliamentary speech in favor of another apparatus of dialogue and resistance, and sought to persuade the British, as well as his antagonistic Indian interlocutors, that fasting, spinning, non-cooperation, and even walking could be construed as forms of dissent. Modernity insists that even the dissenters from modernity should speak in the language of modernity, just as practitioners of women's studies, environmental studies, and gay studies found that they had to stitch themselves into the institutional fabric of the academy, with its attendant paraphernalia, in order to obtain a hearing and not be viewed with more than just a tinge of mockery. It is perfectly

possible, and more than likely, that exponents of “queer theory” are also card-carrying members of the National Rifle Association: so much for the dissenters in America. Similarly, though the nation-state is increasingly under assault as a mechanical form of political existence which bears little relation to the cultural histories of many of the peoples upon whom it has been imposed, all its obituaries are premature, as the aspirations of those people without a nation-state, whether Palestinians, Sikhs, Kurds, or the Basque, so starkly suggest. Even these dissenters have been reduced to agitating in the language of a political science which recognizes the nation-state, and its numerous variations (such as associations of nation-states), as the only authentic expressions of political intent or cultural longing. To speak of dissenting futures, then, is to explore, lest our options should be decisively foreclosed, the conditions for radical and emancipatory dissent. As is implicit in my arguments, we shall have to be more attentive to critiques of modernity, more nuanced in our deliberations on the much celebrated ideas of tolerance, democracy, and freedom, and more engaged with what one philosopher, James Carse, has described as “infinite games.”<sup>4</sup> In the life and teachings of Gandhi, the consummate player of infinite games, lie some clues about the conditions for dissent.

To speak of dissenting futures, as I do, is to speak of the politics of the future. The days of MAD (mutually assured destruction) seem to lie in the distant past when the “evil empire” was still a force in world politics, but the genocidal mentality behind the thinking of nuclear hawks is equally incarnated in the philosophy of non-nuclear nuclearism. Since nuclear warfare carries with it such immense sanctions, the perpetrators of genocide have embraced new forms of warfare, embodied for the first time in the aerial pulverization of Yugoslavia by US-led NATO forces, that are also predicated on the elimination of all casualties except those on the side of the enemy, the complete avoidance of face-to-face combat, the thorough extinction of civil society, and the elimination of all possibilities of retaliation. Never before in history, except during the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, has there been a conjuncture of all these circumstances, and Kosovo points the gruesome way to the Great Power Mode of Warfare and Governance in the future. This is only the partial meaning of the “peace of Kosovo”; in the Kosovo agreement one can see the seeds of the reinvention of Europe, the center of the world to which, in Hegelian fashion, all history is fated to return.

I have previously adverted to the growing importance of sanctions, which are illustrative of the fact that international governance will surely continue to evolve new forms. Sanctions are a characteristic feature of the governance of late modernity, since they are created in the kiln of grave inequity. Like most other exchanges in our times, sanctions work unilaterally and unidirectionally. They are imposed against states that are deemed to be outside the pale of humanity, but it is inconceivable that they could be exercised, as perhaps they ought to be, against the United States, which has a prison population of 2 million, more homicides by gun in one day than Japan has in an entire year (a bad year at that), and a proven track record of supporting dictatorships, death squads, and brutal military regimes in nearly every part of the world. Sanctions have this characteristic feature of modernity too: like development, which often takes its toll of humans in piecemeal fashion, and allows them to be chalked up as the victims of food shortages, anomie, displacement, homelessness, joblessness, and landlessness, so sanctions kill slowly but surely, and the dead can be enumerated as victims of malnourishment, starvation, infectious diseases, and invented underdevelopment.

Sanctions, then, compel us into a consideration of the grounds for a truly emancipatory politics of plurality and democracy. Our thinking at this juncture is at considerable remove from being ecological. The word “ecology” is derived from “economy,” and economy is not what economists have made of it, namely mathematical models to which the world should render subservience, but rather “household management,” and the husbanding of resources. To think ecologically is to think wisely, to be cognizant of the resources available at our disposal, to be sensitive to plurality, and to accept the principle that freedom is indivisible. Far-sighted as the policies of the Sierra Club, for instance, appear to be, they might only be destructive for much of the rest of the world – the ultimate example of this being the policy which advocates the zero cutting of trees in the US, but does not stress the reduction of consumption levels in the US. (It will no longer be coal that has to be carried to Newcastle, but wood to wooded New England.) Nor is this far from being analogous to American-style war, where, as I have suggested before, any number of casualties on the enemy’s side is acceptable, so long as one’s own soldiers do not have to be brought back in body bags. The problems of inequity and inequality are not yet sufficiently addressed by ecological discourses – construing “ecological” here in

the widest sense, as stretching beyond biodiversity and diversity to the very survival of cultural plurality and the restoration of the word “economy” to its proper usages. If a small island nation, Gandhi once remarked with characteristic foresight, had to bleed the world to satiate the needs of its people, then how much exploitation would be required to bring the needs of the many millions more inhabiting India [or China] to the same level? That levels of consumption in the United States exceed those of the developing world by a ratio of 40:1 is only one of the sad verities of our times, and no amount of American philanthropy can even minutely compensate the world for the displays of excess in which the country revels. To think ecologically is to understand that while some parts of the world are undoubtedly underdeveloped, if one is at all inclined to that modality of thinking, it is nonetheless the overdeveloped parts of the world which ought to give greater cause for anxiety. The rich, not the poor, are the problem for humankind and the earth’s resources in the long run.

Neither multiculturalism nor free elections, and most certainly not the ecological movements of the West, can stand in place for a more complex and less ethnocentric conception of ecological plurality. While it is desirable to allow a multiplicity of voices, this can only add to the “chic” of the West, particularly when these voices speak in the same register. The language of history, to take one example, has submerged ahistoricist discourses to such an extent that “the peoples without history” are poised now to become peoples without myths.<sup>5</sup> Though, to appropriate T. S. Eliot’s language, the modern world is in agreement that a sense of history is an inescapable element of freedom, it may well turn out to be the inescapable condition of servitude. As I argue with greater or lesser force throughout this book, to question the dominant frameworks of knowledge is to open the way to other forms of engagement – the Western “local” with the Gandhian “global,” the historicist with the ahistoricist, the finite game with the infinite game. The necessary oppositions are not between tradition and modernity, or between particularism and universalism; rather, the intent is to probe how one set of universalisms, associated with the trajectory of Western reason, came to establish their predominance, and what are those competing universalisms which can claim our allegiance. It is a truism of the 1960s that the activists were inspired by the slogan, “Think globally, act locally”: it still resonates strongly with liberal and progressive forces around the world. However, it is the burden

of this book that in that slogan lies the charter of our oppression, and freedom from oppression moves us to the realization that we are bound to “Think locally, act globally.” This ambition, rather than any predisposition towards postmodernism, which like my friend Ziauddin Sardar I am inclined to view as another wonderful thing for the West,<sup>6</sup> but with little in it to instruct those civilizations where the ground reality and ethical thinking always inclined towards plurality,<sup>7</sup> accounts in part for what might occasionally appear as the disjunctive elements of my writing or the arrangement of this book, with perhaps seemingly odd juxtapositions of Gandhi and Bill Gates, the ecology of equality with the economics of inequality.

I had nearly completed the first draft of this book, and most of the introduction, when the terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup> upon the World Trade Center and the Pentagon transpired. Since the subject matter of the book has every relation to many of the issues that arise out of these events, I thought it prudent, indeed necessary, to attach a long postscript. It is my view that the arguments on offer in this book acquire all the more urgency in light of these events and, more significantly, the copious commentary that has issued forth from nearly every country in the last few months. That the world could have been indifferent to the plight of Afghanistan for so long, awakening to the turmoil of that region only when the Empire itself was viewed as being under an invasion, is in itself an illustration of the problems of “dissent” and “categories” with which my book is so concerned. As I point out in the postscript, Afghanistan never fell into the categories through which American scholarship seeks to appropriate or merely understand the world: neither the Middle Eastern specialists, nor the smaller fraternity of experts working on South Asia, ever had any interest in Afghanistan. Suffice to say only that the postscript, while it can be read independently, should also be viewed as an inextricable part of this book and as having a considerable bearing upon its central arguments, suggestions, and assaults upon the dominant frameworks of Western knowledge.

# 1 Reckoning with the Millennium

The twenty-first century is upon us. While the greater number of millennium-mongers squandered their energies on the “Y2K” problem, often indulging in more esoteric apocalyptic visions, and others were detained by the more pedestrian, though not meaningless, exercise of determining whether 1 January 2000 or 1 January 2001 marked the decisive moment in this turn of history, few paused to consider how “millennium” and even “century” came to constitute such ubiquitous categories of our experience. Like a great many other things, the categories by which time is calculated – hour, week, month, year, decade, century, and millennium – have been naturalized, but there is nothing self-evident about how a week of seven days became the unit by means of which time flows into our lives, or about the calendar that dominates much of the modern world system. Almost nothing is as clichéd as the observation that “we are all the slaves of time,” though that “we” is at times thought to exclude those of the non-Western world whose management skills at time still fall far short of minimally desirable standards; moreover, this enslavement not only does not evoke much resistance, it is welcomed as the most decisive marker of progress in human affairs and the orderliness of a world always on the verge of slipping into chaos and the chasm of discontent.

The schedule and calendar rule most lives, but there is nothing inevitable about this course of history. It is only in the mid-eighteenth century, with the emergence of industrialization and the factory clock, that the tyrannical discipline of time became a reality for the working classes. Another 100 years were to elapse before the standardization of time was achieved in the West itself, while in much of the rest of the world the Gregorian calendar was becoming paramount, though the “natives” had still to learn the lessons of the clock. If by some accounts the inhabitants of the underdeveloped countries still do not make good use of their time, they are nonetheless largely captive to the norms of the Western calendar. Birthday celebrations, for instance, are one of the most iconic measures of



how far modernity and secularism have crept into the sensibility of all cultures, though doubtless the birthday party has been molded and transformed by the idioms of local cultural practices. Doubtless, too, some cultures have retained their own calendars, but from the point of view of the moderns, that is no more than the churlish resistance of tradition-bound nativists and primordialists, or – considering the profound association of many calendrical systems with religion – an attempt to retain a religious space within the secular domain of modernity.

Having entered the new millennium, should we not stop to ask for whom it is that the millennium struck and continues to strike, and by what sleight of hand the Christian millennium became the benchmark for all peoples? What meaning can the millennium possibly have for (say) Muslims, if not to remind them that the entire world now lives in the thrall of the West, and that no one is safe from the ambitions, to use that phrase fraught with ominous consequences, of the world's sole superpower? Is it the imminence of the new millennium that, in the 1990s, appeared to have generated a certain melancholia in Islamic countries, and which formed the substratum of unease and anxiety among Muslims, whether in Malaysia, Indonesia, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Algeria, or elsewhere? A thousand years ago, a large swathe of the world, from the Atlantic extending across North Africa and the western Mediterranean to west Asia and Afghanistan, was under the sway of Muslim rulers. Today, by contrast, Western domination is supreme, and the derisive term "Islamic fundamentalism" has become commonplace.

Or, to ask questions in a different vein, though we have long understood how European powers effected spatial colonization, are we sufficiently cognizant of the dimensions of temporal colonization?<sup>1</sup> The recent postcolonial incursions into museum studies have alerted us to the exhibitionary complex of colonialism, and the epistemological significance and political thrust of the various "world fairs" that began to proliferate in Europe and North America in the second half of the nineteenth century, but much less has been written on the manner in which museums colonize time. The railroad timetable, the Gregorian calendar, the weekly schedule, the factory clock, and the office timecard inserted themselves with considerable virulence and bloodthirstiness into the culture of colonized peoples, and yet the imperialism of time may well have more deleterious consequences in the years to come. The homogenization of

time has not only facilitated the emergence of globalization and a worldwide culture of corporate business and management distinguished only by its extraordinary mediocrity and greed, it has also greatly assisted in narrowing the visions of the future. To speak of the resistance to clock and corporate time, which betokened a mentality nowhere better expressed than in the predictably American formulation that "time is money," is to point not merely to what some may deride as utopian thoughts, but to a cultural politics of time that would enable us to reterritorialize temporality.

### MONOLITHIC TEMPORALITY

It is with remarkable prescience that Lewis Mumford, more than 50 years ago, observed that

the clock, not the steam engine, is the key machine of the industrial age ... In its relationship to determinable quantities of energy, to standardization, to automatic action, and finally to its own special product, accurate timing, the clock has been the foremost machine in modern technic; and at each period it has remained in the lead: it marks a perfection toward which other machines aspire.<sup>2</sup>

Our sensibilities in late modernity are marked by an extraordinary but deadened awareness of time: it has become habitual to speak of having no time, of being too busy, and of being harried by time. Though industrialization and the age of cyberspace are associated with time-saving devices, the overwhelming number of people appear to be extremely short on time, and in countries such as the United States, the working week appears to have become longer for the laboring and corporate class alike. Juliet Schor's acclaimed study, *The Overworked American*, suggests that the working day over the last 50 years has become increasingly longer, and in the two decades between 1970 and 1990, an average of nine hours of extra work were added to most working lives each year.<sup>3</sup>

"What kind of rule is this?" asks Sebastian de Grazia: "The more timesaving machinery there is, the more pressed a person is for time."<sup>4</sup> What does it mean to save time? Or, indeed, to waste time? Is time saved when a phone conversation is conducted from the wheel of a car, and are those who resolutely fail to embrace this innovation thereby wasting time? Is leisure time wasted, or time well-spent? And if well-spent, when does it shade into squandered time,

idleness, anomie? What kind of investment does saved time represent, and why is it that this investment has had, demonstrably, such strange and poor returns? More so than in any previous age, lives appear to be tyrannized by clocks, office and airline schedules, and calendars. The story of temporal colonization has been told inadequately. "The invention of the mechanical clock was one of a number of major advances that turned Europe," David Landes remarks, "from a weak, peripheral, highly vulnerable outpost of Mediterranean civilization into a hegemonic aggressor."<sup>5</sup> The pervasive assumption of technological determinism behind this assessment should not obscure the fact that Europe at this juncture of history displayed considerably more interest in the scientific and mechanical keeping of time than most of the Asian, African, and other cultures that Europeans encountered, and both timekeeping and calendrics were among the many domains of social activity in which they claimed superiority. The infamous "lazy native" of colonial discourse, it need not be said, had no use for the watch and seldom kept time, and the clock-towers that are now found in the towns and cities of many formerly colonized nations were built under the dispensation of colonial regimes. European powers colonized, penalized, and traumatized their own dissenters and religious, ethnic, racial, and intellectual Others before proceeding to colonize the non-Western world, and in the matter of how time was reckoned with, the homogenization of the Western world was similarly to precede the entry of a uniform clock-time in the rest of the world.

### **The Pattern of the Week**

Though seconds, minutes, hours, and days – the rising and setting of the sun furnishing the divisions of day and night – constitute the basic units of time, the pre-eminent centrality of the week to the modern organization of time, odd as it is, must be underscored. Patterns of life are generally framed around the week: think of the weekly shopping day, the weekly magazine, the working week (and the ensual of Monday blues), the weekend, the weekly change of films, and so on. It is the weekly schedule which determines the shape of appointments. A year may equally be thought of as 12 months, or 52 weeks; but since recurrent events, such as winter, spring, and summer holidays, or school terms, seldom coincide with an entire calendrical month, one is more likely to think of a one-week vacation or a school term that lasts 10 or 15 weeks. Sociologist Pitrim A. Sorokin has written,