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When Europe Became the Measure of Humanity

Muhammad Adel Zaky | 23 September 2026

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One of the most important conclusions I have reached through my engagement with the critique of Eurocentrism in political economy is that there is a major methodological error in reducing European domination of the world, since the beginnings of its modern rise, to technological, military, or even economic superiority. What happened was far deeper than that.

A vast system of domination emerged—one that extended into knowledge itself and into the way history was written. We came to face a form of domination that shaped human beings and redefined them within our modern world. This victorious civilization was not content with the destructive military victories it achieved. It went further: it claimed the very meaning of victory and reshaped it according to its own perspective. In this way, everything that did not belong to it, or did not pass through its own historical experience, was marginalized, until it appeared to stand outside history or to have no significant historical impact.

Over time, the idea became firmly established that the European experience was the sole standard by which progress and humanity itself should be measured. Within this ominous framework, what came to be called “modern science” emerged within a structure of intellectual rupture that separated the “European mind” from an “East” portrayed as a realm of myth. This is where the story begins, as told by the European historian. Greece appears—but only after being separated from its Eastern roots and from its interaction with ancient Egyptian, Babylonian, and Phoenician thought—as a pure, rational, and self-contained origin, detached from its historical contexts, as though thought had been born fully formed within the boundaries of the West. Time itself was then rearranged. European history became world history, while its major moments, such as the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution, were transformed into reference points for the history of humanity as a whole.

The histories of other peoples, meanwhile, were pushed to the margins, or rewritten as though they began at the moment they encountered colonialism, as if everything that had existed before that encounter were unworthy of remembrance. India, for example, was reduced to an image of exoticism and backwardness. Africa was portrayed as a continent without history. Arabs were presented as nomadic peoples until Europe “discovered” them. In this way, a single narrative took root, speaking in the name of all humanity and defining the meanings of “modernity,” science, religion, freedom, and

identity. Whatever did not conform to these categories was relegated to the realm of folklore, or to the supposedly backward stages of civilization and history. Nor did this process stop at the level of concepts. It extended to the erasure of entire peoples from human memory.

Even religion was not spared from this process of reconstruction. It was presented through a particular set of representations dominated by European imagery, while its diverse historical and Eastern dimensions receded into the background. Theology, in many of its forms, became a discourse that legitimized one particular center and excluded everything beyond it. Although Jesus was a son of the East—and therefore a man of an Eastern, olive-toned complexion—the image of the white, light-eyed Jesus has been repeatedly used in ways that erase the memory and history of non-European peoples and suppress the psychological self-image of Black peoples. And the Virgin Mary, as portrayed by the European imagination, is certainly not an Eastern woman, but a woman with European features. Thus, colonial Europe wrote the history of the world beginning with its own history.

In the political sphere, European democracy was presented as the only acceptable model of rationality and civilization, while other forms of social and political organization were ignored or distorted, as though they were deviations from a single predetermined path of history. And so we imported, often unconsciously, communism, socialism, secularism, nationalism, liberalism, and so on—concepts repeated almost in a state of bewilderment, without even attempting to stop and understand them as products of particular civilizations at particular historical moments.

Language, too, became an instrument of domination. European languages became associated with science, the university, and modernity, while other languages were relegated to an inferior position, as though they were incapable of producing contemporary knowledge. The same process took place in culture, where art, music, and theatre were redefined according to European standards, until it seemed that human creativity could be recognized only when it passed through these forms. What we are facing, then, is an integrated system that reproduces the world according to its own standards, rather than merely a case of material superiority. That is why critiquing Eurocentrism becomes an intellectual necessity. It is a critique that opens the way toward recovering the plurality of human experience and liberating knowledge from monopoly. Humanity cannot move forward if its voice remains confined to a single experience, while the experiences of others are destroyed or erased from collective memory.

About the author

Muhammad Adel Zaky is an Egyptian researcher specializing in the history of economic thought. He graduated from the Faculty of Law, Alexandria University, in 1992, and practices law before the Egyptian Court of Cassation and the Supreme Constitutional Court. He is the author of *Critique of Political Economy*, which has gone through six editions. His research focuses on the evolution of economic ideas in relation to social and historical change. He has published more than 50 research papers, all of which are available through his ORCID profile.