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# Historians Confront Space[1]

Keywords: mental mapping, frontiers, geo-politics

This essay seeks to analyze how historians have treated the concept of space as an analytical category, by focusing on three spatial concepts: frontiers, Europe and the world. The argument proceeds along several lines: first that historians have long been engaged in debating the interaction of geography and culture, thus foreshadowing the "spatial turn," second, that representative figures in different specialties have been working away against a Eurocentric conceptualization of space and third that in order to achieve these ends they have employed theoretical insights from the social sciences. The essay concludes that the spatial turn has provided a fresh perspectives on the ways in which space has been conceived by employing terms like frontiers and place to illuminate cultural categories, but that there is a danger for historians that this "turn" can lead into imprecise or abstract formulations that lose their heuristic possibilities.

### Raum in der Geschichtswissenschaft

Schlüsselwörter: Grenze, Geopolitik, Kognitive Karten

Der vorliegende Essay analysiert, wie Historiker das Konzept des Raumes als analytische Kategorie behandelt haben. Anhand von drei Raumkonzepten (Grenzräume, Europa, die Welt) werden folgende Punkte herausgearbeitet: Erstens, Historiker haben den Zusammenhang von Geografie und Kultur schon lange im Blickfeld und nahmen dadurch einiges von dem vorweg, was heute als „spatial turn" populär ist. Zweitens, prominente Vertreter verschiedener Spezialfächer haben schon früh gegen eine eurozentristische Konzeptualisierung von Raum angeschrieben. Um dies zu erreichen, haben sie sich, drittens, theoretischer Einsichten aus den Sozialwissenschaften bedient. Der Aufsatz endet mit einem Caveat: Zwar hat der „spatial turn" auch in der Geschichtswissenschaft durch die Verwendung von kulturwissenschaftlichen Begriffen wie „Grenzräumen" (frontiers) erfrischende Perspektiven eröffnet. Es besteht aber die Gefahr, dass damit ungenaue, abstrakte Formulierungen an die Stelle von heuristischen Kategorien gesetzt werden.

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Historians may be forgiven for regarding the concept of "the spatial turn" with some bemusement. The idea that geographical frames owe as much or more to cultural criteria and meaning as to physical features may not be quite so innovative as has been advertised. Moreover, "turn talk" has begun to wear thin and lose its heuristic value. (AHA Forum 2012) At best, the "spatial turn" has made us more sensitive to the dangers of "scientific" and structural explanations, although many historians have long conceived of space as an intersection of territoriality and culture in the same way they have regarded time as a "seamless sequence" of events while slicing it into periods in order to recognize important turning points. The spatial turn also serves to remind us how concepts of space and time have been dominated by Eurocentric perspectives. But once again, historians working before the spatial turn have also been critical of a Eurocentric perspective and have offered alternative vantage points.

The purpose of the following essay is to highlight the work of these historians by examining their treatment of three spatial concepts: frontiers, Europe and the world. The argument maintains that these historians have pursued two different lines of inquiry, one theoretical and the other contextual. On the one hand, they have re-conceptualized space as both place and process, while acquiring over time symbolic or ideological meaning. On the other hand, they have reinterpreted how the concept of Europe was created and then situated it within a broader (world-wide) context or disassembled it into universally identifiable parts (regions). In the process, they have not so much abandoned the paradigmatic national narrative as they have transformed it. In conclusion, these historians should be perceived not only as precursors of the spatial turn but also as moderators between the model builders of the social sciences and the traditionally hermeneutic fields within the humanities.

## 1.    Delimiting Frontiers

Frontiers are as ancient as the state, and the history of frontiers begins as far back as Herodotus, but the frontier as a cultural concept is of recent origin. Three major pioneers in situating a dynamic, multivalent frontier at the core of their historical interpretations were Frederick Jackson Turner, Paul Wittek and Owen Lattimore. Coming out of different historical traditions and intellectual milieux, they shared, nonetheless, similar perspectives on the role of the frontier in shaping such divergent societies as the North American, the Ottoman and the Chinese. Although their original theses have given rise to much debate and revision, they remain seminal figures as forerunners of the spatial turn.

Their lives and careers were deeply marked by major events of their time: for Turner the communications revolution at the end of the nineteenth century and the official closing of the frontier in the U.S.; for Wittek, his service in the Austro-Hungarian army in World War I and his flight from Nazi Europe to England in 1940; for Lattimore the Sino-Japanese War and the coming of the Cold War. They were unconventional historians in their day by virtue of what would now be called their interdisciplinary approach: Turner in agricultural economics, Wittek in literary studies, Lattimore in anthropology. These labels hardly do justice to their variety of intellectual influences that shaped their historical thinking. They gave geography a prominent place in their analysis without becoming geographical determinists. They adapted ideas from the leading European social scientists, Marx through the filter of the Italian economist, Achille Loria, for Turner and Karl Wittfogel for Lattimore, and Max Weber for Wittek, yet they can hardly be called Marxists or Weberians. They balanced the role of physical geography and social forces

by introducing agency in the form of an idealized, heroic type of frontiersman: for Turner the farmer-rancher, for Wittek the holy warrior (*ghazi*) and for Lattimore the pastoral nomads (Benson 1951; Haywood 1988; Rowe 2007).

As the earliest proponent of a frontier thesis in history, Turner's multivalent approach combined economic theories of "free land", cultural typologies and ideologies of "Manifest Destiny" and Social Darwinism. He sketched in broad strokes in the form of an essay, brimming with ideas that were not fully developed. Thus, he invited debate, criticism and revision which took off in two directions, one theoretical and the other contextual. By characterizing the frontier as both place and process, acquiring symbolic meaning, Turner moved freely across another, intellectual frontier dividing the social scientist from the humanist. As the same time, his concept of the frontier as a moving line rather than a static boundary separating two cultures and producing its own hybrid was easily transported to the analysis of other frontiers either as a model or a foil.

Consequently, historians of the American frontier were already predisposed to adopt and integrate cultural and post-colonial studies as well as post-Marxian and post-Weberian theoretical models in anthropology, geography and sociology into their revision of Turner. At the same time, these revisionist concepts were picked up by historians of non-American frontiers and applied or modified to suit similar but not identical conditions in their areas of specialization. This made possible a growth industry in comparative frontier studies.

Let us see first how the most recent spatial turn has influenced the concept of the frontier by conceiving space as lacking independent existence. Since the nineteen nineties, geographers have sought to rescue their discipline from a moribund state induced by a surfeit of "scientific" methods. Through the concept of symbolic geography, they seek to explore "the interdependencies between politics, memory, culture and place […]." Thus, they undertake "topographic" culture, for example, by reading the land in which buildings and places in Britain are tied together or American blues singing is located within a "geography and experience re-imagined through the turntable" (Driver/Samuel 1995, iii–iv). Geographers working on local history and influenced by cultural studies began to redefine the ideas of space and frontiers in terms of linguistic and social contexts (Godlewka/Smith 1994; Driver/Samuel 1995; Wigen 2000). The so-called textual approach appealed strongly to non-European post-colonialist scholars who coined the term "textualizing the world," to reveal how "mental mapping" of the globe and its discursive sub-divisions (Europe, Asia, Africa, Middle East) through cartography and ethnography was designed to impose a Eurocentric vision of the world. Sociologists and anthropologists explored ways in which ethnic identity and concepts of citizenship corresponded to the drawing of territorial boundaries (Brubaker 1992). Semioticians perceived frontiers as "zones of cultural bilingualism" (Lotman/Uspenski 1984, 3–15). American historians of the frontier applied these theoretical insights to reinterpret Jackson's original work which, by virtue of its discursive vagueness and insufficient empirical base, invited new theoretical perspectives.

For example anthropologists challenged Turner's concept of the frontier as a dividing line between "savagery and civilization" or alternatively as a forward movement into "empty lands." They proposed an alternative vision of the frontier as a "middle ground" where native Americans and European settlers engaged in a variety of cultural and commercial "frontier exchanges." (White 1991) Reflecting the views of post-colonial theory, the image of the Native American underwent a profound reappraisal as both the object and subject of colonial rule. Sociologists balanced Turner's vision of the West as an environment that bred rugged individualism and privileged self-reliance by giving equal prominence to social collectivities. In an early application of the "cultural turn" critics also uncovered a darker side of the heroic frontiersman in the lega-

cy of a gun culture and a persistent cult of violence (Graham/Gurr 1969). Under the influence of environmental studies, historians exploded Turner's Arcadian picture of natural harmony on the frontier by exposing the depredations, manipulations and "species shifting" impact of the western advance (Cronon/Miles/Gitlin 1992). More recently, debates on the interaction of geography with race, class and gender have revived older ideas of conflict and conquest in order to rescue once again, albeit in much altered form, the unique role of the frontier in American history (Nobles 1997; Wooster 2009; Gitlin 2010).

## 1.1 Transferring Turner

The comparative approach on the frontier also raised questions concerning the applicability of the Turner thesis to other geographical sites including the white settler British overseas communities (Canada, Australia and South Africa in particular), Russia's expansion into Siberia and the sinicization of China's outer provinces (Xinjiang, Mongolia and Manchuria). The British settlers shared certain common features of the frontier experience with the United States including the struggle to tame the wilderness, the ambiguous interaction with the indigenous population, the ideology of manifest destiny and the origins of a democratic society. But because the frontier, in its original Turnerian discourse, was conceived as process as well as place, its role in the formation of nations, to say nothing of empires, took on a different cast; above all it did not produce the myth of exceptionalism that prevailed in the American historiography (Nugent 1994; Katerberg 2003).

The pre-revolutionary Russian historians of the frontier drew on many of the same intellectual foundations as Turner, although they did not develop an explicit frontier thesis (Bassin 1993). Moreover, in contrast to Turner's optimistic vision of the frontier experience for Americans, their interpretations emphasized the negative effects: the draining of resources from the center, the unfavorable impact of hard climate and poor soil, the threat of nomadic incursions. Historians in the early Soviet period added to this somber list the exploitation of conquered people, exemplified by M.N. Pokrovskii's well-known image of the empire as a "prison of nations". A strong reversal set in only after World War II when the new state school of Soviet historians extolled the peasant colonizer as a heroic figure and revived the pre-revolutionary term *sblizhenie* (drawing together in friendship) to signify the civilizing mission of the Russian people. A third spatial turn has been taken only recently by the emerging regional (Siberian) school of historians who, in readjusting their focus to the specific features and values of societies on the periphery at odds with those of the center, have nonetheless also acknowledged a debt to Turner (Remnev/Savel'ev 1997; Zamiatin 1999). In the most recent general reassessment, Boris Mironov has interpreted colonization as primarily a demographic phenomenon. In his view Russia's territorial expansion was the optimal solution for a society burdened by overpopulation, poor in capital but rich in human resources and land available for colonization. In making comparisons with the United States, he used the Turner thesis and its critics to emphasize the differences and the greater benefits brought to American civilization by frontier expansion (Mironov 2000). Since the nineteen eighties a new generation of American and British specialists in Russian colonization has been incorporating fresh insights borrowed in part from Turner's revisionists to emphasize Russia's multiple frontiers as loci of exchange and hybridity, a "the middle ground," and frontier utopias (Moon 1997; Barrett 1999; Breyfogle 2005; Breyfogle/Schrader/Sunderland 2007).

In his pioneering studies of the Inner Asian frontiers, Owen Lattimore acknowledged that Frederick Jackson Turner was an acute observer, while adding: "what he saw so clearly he saw standing on his head. In large measure, when he thought he saw what the frontier had done to society, he was really seeing what society did to the frontier" (Lattimore 1962). In a different spatial setting Lattimore defined the Chinese frontier in socio-economic terms as the "optimal limit of growth." At the margins of intensive cultivation of the land a unique system developed which he called "frontier feudalism". Under Chinese patronage the social organization of the nomads shifted from a clan to a territorial based organization allowing for a fruitful exchange so long as both sides respected the terms of the interaction. Lattimore's interpretation of the continental frontier as the formative influence on Chinese history remained outside the mainstream of Sinology until the nineteen eighties when a new generation of scholars began to follow up his leads (Fletcher 1986; Barfield 1989; Jagchid/Symonds 1989). From these studies the nomads emerge as more dependent and hence more committed than the imperial power to the maintenance of an exchange culture on the frontiers. This led to a spatial re-conceptualization of Imperial China as an Inner Asian empire, challenging the view that the Han people were a homogenous ethnic group (Crossley 1997; Rawski 1998; Milward 1998). Their interpretations reinforced by insights borrowed from revisionists of the Turner thesis stimulated comparisons between the Chinese, Russian and Ottoman frontiers (Perdue 2005).

## 1.2 The Ottoman Exception

The founders of the Ottoman frontier thesis, Paul Wittek and Mehmet Fuad Köprülü identified its three constituent traditions as: the nomadic warrior, the Islamic religious and the Byzantine imperial. Wittek stressed the *ghazi* warrior milieu rooted in Islamic religious zeal. By the thirteenth century, he argued, warrior cultures appeared on both sides of the porous Turkic-Byzantine frontier. They were originally composed of Islamic *ghazis*, and Greek *akritai* increasingly replaced by Turkmen tribesmen recruited from the other side. In this intermediate zone, war and trade often alternated in a pattern similar to that on Roman and Chinese frontiers and facilitated the penetration and conquest of the Byzantine Empire by the Ottoman Turks.

The concept of the early Ottoman Empire as a *ghazi* state, one emanating from an Islamic warrior culture, has given rise to as much debate among Ottoman historians as the Turner thesis has among Americans, and has led similarly to a similar number of revisions without denying the value of the original thesis as a point of departure. It is now clear that *ghazi* meant different things to different people as reflected in the frontier narratives and subsequent Islamic religious texts. Over the centuries the various interests – rulers, border warriors and *ulema* – vigorously promoted their own views of what *ghazi* activity meant. The current view is that like so many terms employed in the attempt to construct a founding myth *ghazi* has always been highly contested. Recent interpretations substitute for the "Ghazi Thesis" an Islamo-Christian syncretism and expand the time frame, broaden the context to include the larger Islamic world, re-examine the sources critically and factor in the spatial distance of the frontier from the distant central state (Darling 2000; Lowery 2003). One thing is certain: no longer can the early Ottoman frontiers be equated with the idea of *jihad* or holy war. But there is no denying that it represented the frontier spirit in Ottoman state building.

*Jihad*, a term with both military and spiritual aspects derived from the precepts of Islam, was employed by the Ottoman ruling elite to represent the division of the world into two cul-

tural spheres, *dār ul-Islām*, the abode of Islam and the *dār ul-harb*, the abode of war. Between them lay a frontier zone a contested territory where warriors fought the just war consecrated by Islam. This provided the ruling elites with a justification for the expansion of the frontiers in all directions. But this rigid duality could not be strictly maintained. The Ottoman rulers created frontier marches (*uc*) under the leadership of frontier lords who enjoyed considerable autonomy. In return they were obliged to furnish armed men, both Muslims and Christians, as frontier troops. The image of the Islamic warrior tradition eroded over the following centuries, bringing change to the concept of frontiers.

The expansion of the Ottoman frontiers was an almost continuous process from the fourteenth century to the late seventeenth century. The end of the period of rapid expansion and the first big loss of territories after the end of a long war with the Habsburgs in 1699 began the process of restricting the movement of nomads and attempting to settle them on vacant or under-populated land. This coincided with a reevaluation of the symbolic frontier that in theory separated the Islamic Ottoman polity from its Christian neighbors. Ottoman historians signaled the closing of the frontier in 1699, unlike that of the American frontier, as the end of the concept of unlimited expansion identified with the spread of Islam and the beginning of an almost steady retreat of the frontiers as the result of wars with the Habsburg and Russian Empires and the rebellions of the Orthodox population in the Balkans (Aksan 1999, 110; Abou-el-Haj 1969, 467–470; Rothenberg 1966). The Ottoman like the Chinese and Russian frontiers were contested by other great powers, again unlike the American, and the incorporation of new territories, again unlike the U.S., increased the problem of internal stability. By the early twentieth century, the Ottoman Empire had become a largely Muslim state with frontiers in Europe reduced to a small strip of territory shielding Istanbul. The collapse of the Empire meant a further shrinking of the frontiers in Asia and the re-constitution of the state boundaries along more generally Turkish national lines. The Turkish Republic abandoned all ideas of reviving the idea of an expanding frontier under the banner of Pan-Islamism or Pan-Turkism.

The histories of the American, Russian, Chinese and Ottoman frontiers uncovered spatial phenomena different from those Western Europe where state borders lacked the same dynamic characteristics of radically shifting territorial zones, continuously contested both militarily and culturally, with highly mixed populations resulting from mass migrations and colonization. Beyond this, the role of the extra-European continental frontiers was fundamental in the process of state building in ways that were also radically different from the frontiers of the overseas empires (Rieber 2004).

## 2. Imagining Europe

Historians have taken note of the fact that once the idea of Europe began to assume a new shape (in what is now called Early Antiquity), the problem of defining its frontiers, both real and imaginary, increasingly preoccupied clerics, scholars, intellectuals and statesmen not so much by its territorial boundaries as by its symbolic essence. The natural frontiers of Europe outlined by the bodies of water that surrounded it on three sides were open to the east where, following Herodotus, for thousand years the Don River had been accepted arbitrarily as a boundary. But the essence of Europe remained in flux. After the break up of the Roman Empire and for much of the High Medieval period, the term "Christendom" was used rather than Europe. Spatially, Christendom expanded in the west and north but shrank in the south (with the exception of the

*Reconquista* in the Iberian Peninsula) and east. But when Christendom, like Islam, was rent by a great schism in 1054 between Latin West and Orthodox East, the concept of Europe split into two parts.

As the concept of a secular Europe of national states began to replace that of Christendom in the fourteenth century, and the earliest plans for European unity began to appear, the question arose within the West of whether the Orthodox East (Russia being the only independent Orthodox state) legitimately belonged in the new symbolic order (Barraclough 1950; Hay 1954; de Rougemont 1966). The debate continued throughout the eighteenth century, though along different, secular lines. The men of the Enlightenment identified Europe with the center of civilized achievements. For Montesquieu, Europe was progress and Asia was stagnation. That tradition persisted through Marx's Asiatic despotism, Max Weber's patrimonial rule or sultanism until it was exposed by Edward Said as Orientalism. In terms of geopolitics, the issue appeared to have been resolved differently, beginning in 1815 with the formal admission of Russia into the Concert of Europe. Lingering doubts remained and revived during the nineteenth century, based mainly on socio-economic grounds, but often interpreted as deeper cultural and even psychological differences. The Russian intelligentsia were virtually defined by the dilemma of their relationship with Europe. This alienated them from both the state above and the peasant masses below. They were the first but not the last intellectuals from the Orthodox East for whom Europe was a physical space, which they visited with great regularity, and a symbolic order where they wandered like nomads finding no place to rest (Walicki 1989; Antohi 1996, 274–277).

For a brief historical moment Europe's "discovery", mapping, describing, colonizing and conquering of the rest of the globe created the illusion that Europe was not only the center of civilization, what Hegel called the place where everything had its beginning or reached its climax, but the model that should or must be emulated. The French notion of *mission civilsatrice*, the British belief in what Kipling lately called "the White Man's Burden" (although in a poem appealing to the United States to join the other European imperialists) and even the Russians all combined Christian, neo-Darwinian and geopolitical motifs in representing themselves as the instrument of Europeanizing the world of "barbarism" and "savagery" (Brunschwig 1966; Lowe 1967; Remnev 2001, 344–369). European hegemony rested not only on occupying global space but on inventing the modes of analysis, geography and history that filled those spaces with symbolic meaning.

In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries Europe went through additional permutations as part of the "free world" and then breaking loose spiritually from the Atlantic connection as once again a self-defining civilization with its own values, aspirations and membership cards. Ever since the plans of Sully, William Penn, St. Pierre and Kant, European unity had been identified with peace. Democratic practices and economic stability entered the equation much later. Even as Europe expands by admitting new members, its leaders and people recognize that it may have not only geographic but possibly even demographic limits. Has Europe made the transition from a world to a region or to a civilization of regions? (Harvie 1994). Or is "regional Europe" bound by peace, economic integration, and parliamentary democracy simply another version of its claim to being unique? Is the state of being European the equivalent of symbolic transformation into a "new man or woman" within an expanding space whose frontiers have yet to be closed? As the concept of Europe was shrinking from a world to a region, European historians expanded concept of the world Europe to the planet. This process took two forms: first the recognition of a multiplicity of civilizations and second, a redefinition of what it meant to be global.

## 3.   Spatial Worlds

The idea that "the world" constitutes a legitimate space for historical analysis also underwent a "turn" in the post World War II period. Universal history had been promoted long before, but this term was normally applied either to a specific "civilization" or to Europe and its overseas expansion and colonization. The "world" as a spatial concept is not upon closer examination so simple as it looks. Defining it becomes a symbolic act and a much-disputed enterprise. For ancient Greek and Chinese historians and chroniclers the world signified a civilization, or more precisely their civilization. This tradition has survived in modern, primarily European historiographies until the present day, although the term civilization has itself not met with universal approval. In one of the less controversial definitions, it stands for a largely self-contained or autonomous grouping of society around a core of ethical or religious practices and beliefs embodied in secular institutions and sharing an implicit commitment if only in theory to a unified state, social harmony and a common destiny. Even if such a definition is accepted two problems remain. First, how is it possible to construct an explanatory model of change on a world historical plane that integrates diverse and distinctive civilizations over real and imaginary geographies of space and time, in other words a "world system"? The distinction between a world of civilizations and a world system is important to make. In contrast to the former, which is the sum of a number of discrete units, the world system is a set of relationships that involves cultural contact and economic exchange, in a world of frontiers, among many if not all civilizations or regions of the globe.

Among the many definitions and distinctions between civilizations and world systems, a recent example reviews various interpretations and then offers its own which re-combines them both as "inter-societal networks that are systemic" or "interactional entities that [are] self-contained" (Chase-Dunn/Hall 1997). The second problem arises when a civilization identifies itself with the world and thus the only legitimate subject for the study of history. For example, the term barbarian (*barbaroi*) first used in Hellenic Greece to designate all non-Greeks was adopted by the Romans and applied in the same way (*barbari*). The Chinese ideograph for non-Han peoples was *I-mo* meaning barbarian or simply *I* which meant more specifically an eastern barbarian with a strongly pejorative emphasis. The description of nomadic life was repeated almost word for word in Greek, Roman Chinese and even medieval texts (Khazanov 1994, 8). A long tradition exists of imagining and constructing frontiers of imperial defense against the dark forces of the world. The Roman, Sasanian (Persian) Empires and Tang dynasty in China employed fixed frontier lines, heavily garrisoned and at key points reinforced by the construction of walls to enforce separation from the world of the nomads and barbarians (Frye 2000; Waldron 1990; Khodarkovsky 2002; Boeck 2007). The tradition continued in the Habsburg, Ottoman and Muscovite-Russian Empires in their expansion and confrontation with one another. In each case the reigning imperial ideology contained messianic elements that identified its imperial rule with a world mission.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the great German historian Leopold von Ranke launched his project of Universal History (*Weltgeschichte*). He started with the idea that there was a general historical life that changed its locus from one nation to another. But he exempted from this historical linkage the people of the "East" whom he described as standing aloof from the main stream. To be sure, Ranke had earlier moved beyond the conventional limits of European history with his study of the Ottomans and the Spanish Empire of the sixteenth and seventeenth century foreshadowing Braudel's monumental history of the Mediterranean almost a

century later. Ranke had also broken fresh ground in the lands of Eastern Orthodoxy with his study of the *History of the Revolutions in Servia* (sic) written in Vienna but drawing upon the rich Serbian oral tradition. But these excursions did not lead him to redefine the course of universal history.

The real pioneer of a comparative history of world civilizations was Ranke's contemporary, the Ukrainian scholar, Lev Ilich Mechnikov (1838–1888). His travels in Asia and the Near East and his association with the French geographer and anarchist, Elisée Reclus, inspired his much neglected comparative historical geography of the world's great river systems – the Nile, Tigris and Euphrates, Indus, Yellow and Yangtse – as the cradles of civilization. These civilizations were for Mechnikov emblematic of human cooperation and differentiation, the prerequisites for survival that gradually led to freely accepted agreements for common social goals tempered by organic requirements, culminating in full freedom and recognition of the universal rights of man (Mechnikov 1989a, 1989b). His symbolic geography of universalism and cooperation, like that of his fellow anarchist, the Russian botanist-geographer, Prince Kuropatkin, had little influence upon historians whose Europe was fragmented into national states engaged in unbridled competition.

## 3.1  The World as Civilization and Symbol

The First World War shook the belief of many European intellectuals in the unique values of Europe. Once again a split opened up between West and East over the symbolic center of civilization and hence the concept of world history. To men like Oswald Spengler and Arnold Toynbee the trajectory of world history followed a cyclical rather than a linear path. The Christian West was merely one of many civilizations – eight for Spengler and twenty for Toynbee – ordained to follow the pattern of rise and fall like its predecessors. In both cases the criteria for inclusion in the ranks of civilization were not always clear, consistent or convincing. The territorial boundaries were left vague. The geographies of the civilizations were more metaphorical than symbolic: Spengler's organic with four seasons; Toynbee's dialogic with challenge and response. For Spengler *Weltgeschichte* was *Weltschmerz*; civilizations were symbolic of the ultimate purposelessness of existence beyond the relentless process of succession. Toynbee was increasingly sensitive to this problem. After the outbreak of the Second World War he reverted to the older Augustinian tradition. He brought God back by offering the possibility of a universal religion in hopes of breaking the endless cycle of civilizations and establishing world peace. So there was a moral order to history after all, but it had to be found in a universal synthesis rather than an expanded Europe.

To the East the centrality of European civilization as the locus of progress and reason, the culmination of the Enlightenment, was also challenged by the Bolshevik vision of history. Lenin's theory of imperialism and Trotsky's theory of combined development created a revolutionary myth that was no more speculative or ontological than Spengler's or Toynbee's. But as practical politicians first and theorists second, they retreated under the pressure of circumstances from a history and a geography of truly global proportions to those more and more limited by real frontiers. Stalin merely brought to its logical (or was it dialectical?) conclusion the gradual process of identifying the success of world revolution with the survival and development of the Soviet Union; inner messianism replaced outer messianism. The historians fell into line behind him. They made no attempt to write world history: or to be more correct they endowed the history of

the world with a new geography. By virtue of carrying out the first socialist revolution and commencing the building of socialism, they replaced Europe with the Soviet Union as the locus of world historical significance. They relegated other civilizations to even earlier stages of development and hence of importance. But geography now confounded their history. How was it possible to write the history of a state to say nothing of a civilization that had only come into existence in 1917; one that was composed both of territories with divergent histories long preceding their incorporation into either the Russian Empire or the Soviet Union and peoples at different stages of social and economic development many of whom had resisted that incorporation? During the Stalinist period only one attempt was made to write a comprehensive unified history of the territories comprising the state from pre-historic times to the 1950s. It was called anachronistically, *Outlines of the History of the USSR* (Akademiia nauk 1953–1958).

A mirror image of the postwar Soviet version of "world history" in the United States was the concept of "Western Civilization." The competing versions reflected one another in the way they sought to portray their respective political and social systems as having built upon and perfected the heritage of European civilization, albeit in a different geographic environment. The grand narrative of "Western Civ" (affectionately called from Plato to NATO by American undergraduates), began in the "fertile crescent" of the Near East, gathered momentum and an ideology in the defense of Greek (European) liberty against Asian despotism, developed through the contributions of the Judeo-Christian tradition, underwent a transformation during the fusion of "barbarian" (Germanic) and "civilized" (Roman) cultures, each part of Europe contributing to a new synthesis. At this point (the eleventh century or earlier), the Orthodox world of Byzantium and its ideological world (including, of course, Kievan Rus and Muscovy) dropped out of most interpretations of Western Civilization. A new frontier had been established between the Orthodox East and the Latin West. The latter emerged as the locus of the Renaissance, Scientific Revolution, Industrial and French Revolutions, all of which were missing from the histories of the Orthodox East to say nothing of the rest of the world. The process culminated in the formation of nation states and coming of the "dual revolutions" – French and Industrial – that redefined the frontiers of Europe ideologically and economically but did not change their boundaries. In the last chapters of this master narrative, the West survived the turmoil of world wars and depressions to emerge as the first or "free world." The rest of the globe then fell neatly into lesser worlds, the communist and the third worlds, each one entering the grand narrative only in the course of relating the expansion of Europe, the establishment of overseas empires, the communist revolutions and anti-colonial movements both taking place in the "backward" or "underdeveloped" worlds.

The symbolic geography of a unified West contained a hidden flaw, the absence of the history of the United States. Because there were only two attempts by an American and a Frenchman largely ignored on both sides of the Atlantic to integrate the history of the U.S. into the history of "Western Civ," there were in fact two grand narratives until very recently (Palmer 1959–1964; Godechot 1947; Godechot 1965; Greene 2008). The tension between them was only partially alleviated on the political level by the Marshall Plan and NATO. Despite the obvious presence of Americans in their histories, the Europeans showed a rather marked indifference to teaching U.S. (to say nothing of Canadian) history; the Americans could not make up their mind whether the U.S. represented a unique civilization, "the city on the hill" or heir to a West European civilization reinforced by immigration and cultural borrowing.

## 3.2  The World as Planet

A return to a truly universal global or planetary history was initiated by scholarly critics of the bi-polar concept of the postwar world (that is the Cold War) whose early work was not located in the mainstream of West European or U.S. history. William Hardy McNeill, Marshall G.S. Hodgson and Leften Stavrianos shared a common vision of the world as a more integrated set of regional geographies than Spengler or Toynbee had allowed, although they disagreed on most everything else. (All three, however, began their scholarly careers by studying the Eastern Mediterranean, one of the most continuously dynamic areas of cross-cultural and commercial exchange in the world.) McNeill's "world" was designed to show "how the separate civilizations of Eurasia interacted from the very beginning of their history […]." He found "coherence and structure" in world history in the networks of communications and transportation and the codification of merchant law. But he proposed a fresh agenda that would follow two levels of human encounters along those networks, the first biological and ecological and the second cultural (McNeill 1995, 14, 21).

McNeill's colleague at the University of Chicago, Marshall G.S. Hodgson, adopted a "hemispheric interregional approach", from whom I have borrowed the term, in order to avoid the pitfalls of Eurocentrism that he thought weakened McNeill's work. By training an Islamicist, he stressed the development of a common stock of human techniques and cultural resources within distinctive regions that he identified with hemispheres. While he acknowledged the importance of cultural borrowing, more important in his eyes were the internal processes of development drawing on religious traditions that gave each civilization its distinctive characteristics. For Hodgson, then, Afro-Asiatic history was a world unto its own (Hodgson 1993).

The third pioneer from the Chicago area was Leften Stavrianos of Northwestern University, a specialist in the Balkans whose world was by far the most culturally pluralistic. His answer to the dilemma of Eurocentrism was to give equal time and space to the third world where he perceived the seeds of vital renewal and a source of optimism for the future development of human values (Stavrianos 1976; Stavrianos 1981). In the short term, at least, his views were proven rather overly optimistic. He like other historians of the mis-labeled "Chicago school" had constructed their individual worlds and left no disciples. In the meantime two schools (or were they camps?) of world history did develop not so much in reaction to the Cold War as they were a part of it.

For the two most powerful social thinkers of the nineteenth century, Karl Marx and Max Weber, the history of the world was not the history of a place but of a process of becoming modern. Re-interpreters of Marx and Weber were the founders of dependency theory and modernization theory. In greatly simplified terms it would not be wholly inaccurate to define the magnetic poles around which they fashioned their world processes as the rationalization of power (military technology, bureaucracy, financial organization) and the rationalization of the economy (commercial expansion, industrial growth, entrepreneurial spirit). As might have been expected, there were more sociologists and political scientists in these camps than historians or geographers. But symbolic divisions of the world were no less in evidence. Significantly, their early debates in the seventies and eighties strongly reflected their locus of origin in "the West". Subsequently, representatives of the third world raised their voices against the persistent Eurocentric perspectives of both sides.

The modernization theorists attempted to develop a value free terminology and employ ideal types in order to establish criteria for a universal process. But despite their best efforts they ended up where so many of their predecessors had begun with a history of the world in which

"the West" set the standards for modernity and the pace for getting there. This was particularly the case with the American social scientists who originated the theory (Parsons 1951; Parsons/ Smelser 1956; Parsons and Shils 1973; Rostow, 1971). But this innate bias also undermined efforts to apply the theory objectively to the third world as it was coming to be known (Almond/ Coleman 1960; Almond/Verba 1963; Apter 1965). Historians sought to mitigate the Euro-American centrism but could not free themselves entirely from the methodological trap (Black 1960; Black 1966; Von Laue 1969). The question is whether the concept has been so attenuated as to have lost its explanatory value (AHA Roundtable 2011).

More strongly influenced by Marx the two most prominent advocates of world systems theory, Fernand Braudel and Immanuel Wallerstein enjoyed a close but not uncritical intellectual relationship. For Braudel the attraction was simply that "Marx's genius, the secret of his long sway, lies in the fact that he was the first to construct social models on the basis of a historical *longue durée* (Braudel 1980, 51). But he also found Marx too schematic, a fault he also located in Wallerstein's work. Building on his magisterial study, *La Mediteranée*, Braudel undertook to write a history of the world on the basis of a variation of the *longue durée* which he called "world time". By this he meant a temporal scale that governs certain areas of the world but not all of them. Its rhythms are set by the patterns of commercial exchange, communication and production for external markets. He is quick to point to the difference between the world economy and a world-economy (the hyphen bearing great weight). A world-economy is a relatively autonomous regional economy able to provide for most of its own needs. Such was the Mediterranean in the sixteenth century and Muscovy up to the eighteenth century. By contrast, the world economy includes all human societies engaged in trade and linked by the exchange of goods. At the center of each world-economy there is a great city. Thus, his history of the world begins with the history of a succession of cities as they become the focal point of a constantly growing market. He then pauses in his headlong flight toward "modernity" in order to analyze the non-European regions before taking up the question of the industrial revolution and the consolidation of European hegemony (Braudel 1979).

Similarly, Wallerstein shapes his theory of world history around shifting centers of economic power. This leads him, however, to devise a tripartite division of the world into center, semi-periphery and periphery reflecting different modes of production and the extent to which one group of countries representing the more advanced center, come to exert a strong or preponderant control over economies in the semi-periphery and periphery. At the same time, he demonstrates that the three modes of production are linked to and dependent upon one another, each contributing to the functioning of the whole. So here too the frontiers between the three modes are blurred. Wallerstein concludes that although the growth of capitalism was centered in the most dynamic region, Europe, it was a world historical phenomenon. He attributed the persistent success of Europe as the center of capitalist development to the inability of the so-called world empires like the Chinese, Persian, Ottoman and Russia to free their economies from oppressive political constraints. His description of their arrested development resembles a reformulation of Marx's Asiatic mode of production. For Wallerstein the crucial moment in the emergence of Europe (or Braudel's world-economy) as the dominant region in the world economy was the failure of the Habsburg Monarchy in the sixteenth century to achieve its aim of universal empire. Thus, Europe avoided the fate of other world-economies where a monopoly of political power stifled the growth of capitalist enterprise (Wallerstein 1974–1989).

Third world critics on the left pounced on the idea common to both Wallerstein and Braudel that world history began in the sixteenth century. In their eyes Europe had retained its excep-

tional position and the contribution of the non-European world to the emergence of a world economy had been slighted. The race was on to shatter the symbolic frontiers of civilization. Such figures as the Latin American Marxist, Andre Gunder Frank, the Middle East historian, Janet Abu-Lughod, and the Indian economic historian, K.N. Chauduri, argued that by the thirteenth century if not earlier a multi-centric Eurasian system had come into existence. Europe's exceptional development rested upon its conquest of America rather than internal structural factors. Most recently, Frank suggests that the coming of modernity itself must be attributed to a complex economic and cultural interaction among several parts of Eurasia rather than the result of achievements by one civilization (Abu-Lughod 1989; Chaudri 1990; Frank/Gills 1992; Frank 1998). Fusing his more orthodox Marxism with a post-colonial outlook, Frank showed no reluctance to criticize Braudel and Wallerstein for their Eurocentric bias (Frank 1994). World history was in the process of being re-focused once again in what some were calling, following Hodgson, Afro-Eurasian history – still not quite universal world history.

Side by side with the attempt to imagine a pre-colonial world system, two approaches to a post-colonial world took their place. One of these remained within the traditional geographic framework, though not defined by geography; the other smashed that framework as an invention of the Enlightenment. Advocates of global history insist that historians should react creatively to the radical nature of change that characterizes the period following the Second World War and accelerating in the nineteen seventies. This could be done most imaginatively by shifting the concepts of frontiers from a spatial and even a symbolic base to a temporal one. In Braudel's terms the pace of "world time" has increased exponentially, and the effects of change have been more widely diffused than ever before. Yet the process of globalization has not been uniform. The frontier between world time and local time has widened in many areas of the globe. Similarly, there has been a striking imbalance in the availability and use of global products. Conceived in temporal terms the new global frontier is located spatially between north and south rather than east and west.

The global historians have adopted two methodologies: the first is to localize and then trace back as far as possible the processes that have been identified as global in scope. Problems immediately arise here over which are the key processes. They have been variously defined. One set consists of communications technology, weapons of mass destruction, environmental problems and multinational corporations (Mazlish/Buultjens 1994; Mazlish 1998). Another set is based upon the tension between "world-wide processes of unsettlement (the mobilization of peoples, things, ideas and images and their diffusion in space and time) and out of the often desperate efforts both locally (by communities of various kinds) and globally (by regimes of varying composition and reach) to bring them under control or, as it were, to settle them". They include the expansion of industrial forms of production and destruction; constitution of regimes of order from empires and corporate forms of capitalism to anonymous trans-national practices; migration first outward from Europe and now in reverse; the growth of the nation-state and the disillusionment with politics (Geyer/Bright 1995).

The second approach was to de-center the disciplinary epistemologies of both history and geography on several grounds; first, by arguing that they represent the offspring of an invented tradition, the Enlightenment which imposes a spurious unity on divergent streams of thought (Livingston 1999; Godlewska 1999); second, by discounting them as hegemonic discourses that impose Eurocentric modes of thought upon the rest of the world, denying its peoples their authentic voice (Spivak 1990); and third, most recently by claiming that the Enlightenment was not a European monopoly at all (Conrad 2012). The postcolonial critics have exposed the tenden-

cies of European travelers to focus on their own heroic accounts and to discredit the native interlocutors in gathering knowledge about the non-metropolitan world (Raj 1997). At this point numbers of historical geographers have reacted not by retreating behind the battered defenses of positivism, but advancing into the battlefield itself and adopting the tactics of the besiegers.

The definitional battle over the meaning of frontier, Europe and the world as viable spatial units for an understanding of history that transcends a specific culture or place can be attributed to two major transformations, one intellectual and the other political, beginning in the late nineteenth and continuing in the short twentieth century (a "period" yet to be identified!). The first was what might be called the interactive colonizing of the disciplines. That is the penetration of the social sciences into history and historical thinking into the social sciences. The fit was often incomplete and awkward, but the efforts to adjust it became a continuous and as yet unfinished process. The second was the European civil war of 1914–1918, the relative decline of European power and finally de-colonization, all of which contributed to a disillusionment with the Eurocentric perception of the world.

## 4.   Running out of Space

Historians have long been open to flexible definitions of space. By and large they have welcomed the enlarged cultural component of the most recent spatial turn. However, by the early twenty-first century concepts of space and relational terms – frontiers, place, landscape and borderland – have been so generously incorporated into the historians' vocabulary that there is a danger that they have lost much of their precision and their usefulness as analytical tools.[2] If they are to be rescued from the dust bin of rhetorical rejects, then it will be necessary to re-define them not in the abstract, but as historically determined multivalent concepts, subject to change over time and location (Rieber 2013). In other words, historians should continue to do what they do best: remain sensitive to the insights of social science in constructing their own well-designed middle range theories resting on an empirical base where the existence of facts is accepted while being subject to rigorous critical examination.

NOTES

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2    The American Hisorical Association's annual conference program (AHA Program 2013) lists two dozen panels in which the terms place, landscape, or borderland are used to designate a variety of topics, lacking any common theoretical foundation.

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