What is the proper role for Europeans in the archaeology of the recent past? This simple question has become increasingly relevant at the outset of the twenty-first century. The mid-twentieth-century archaeologists who founded American historical archaeology took it for granted that the archaeology of European settlements would frame their field and they overtly expressed a nascent global perspective by arguing that “a comparability of artifacts [existed] between East Africa and Virginia” (Pilling 1968:8). This approach came to be called “a comparative international perspective” (Deetz 1991:8).

Large-scale, truly international comparison has yet to be accomplished in historical archaeology, but post-Columbian, European colonialism has always been in the consciousnesses of historical archaeologists. In fact, as early as 1943 the archaeology of post-1500 history could be reasonably termed “Colonial-Archaeology” (Setzler 1943:218). The earliest historical archaeologists envisioned their research as the intellectual counterpart of precolumbian archaeology, the field in which most of them had been trained (see South 1994). Most historical archaeologists continued to acknowledge their interest in colonialism, if sometimes only obliquely, and by the mid-1970s most practitioners had accepted that their focus of study was “the archaeology of the spread of European culture throughout the world since the fifteenth century and its impact on indigenous peoples” (Deetz 1977:5).

Today, most practicing historical archaeologists have abandoned the callow understanding that culture contact is exposed by the quantitative ratio of European to indigenous artifacts (e.g., Quimby 1939, 1966; Quimby and Spoehr 1951). Archaeologists who have reframed the intellectual position of the discipline toward European colonialism no longer perceive European artifacts as historical documents designed by superior people, nor do they believe that indigenous peoples uncritically and impassively accepted the foreign artifacts they were offered. Archaeologists no longer imagine Europeans as the only effective cultural performers, agents of superiority who could perfectly enact their colonial plans in perfect conformity with their original designs com-
pletely oblivious to the natural environment (e.g., Mrozowski 2010; Rockman 2010) and to the indigenous peoples whom they encountered (e.g., Jordan 2008; Lucas 2006; Lydon 2009; Metcalf 2010; Middleton 2008). This new wave of research (after Stoler 1992:319–320) has profoundly altered the discourse of colonialism by promoting concepts of identity and entanglement, acceptance and rejection, acquiescence and resistance. In the process, the archaeological understanding of post-Columbian history has been significantly enriched.

It would be anachronistic and retrograde to criticize the achievements realized during the maturation of historical archaeology into a more culturally sensitive and anthropologically relevant endeavor. The intellectual achievements within the realm of culture contact studies alone have exponentially improved the appositeness and extra-disciplinary authority of the field and have transformed the archaeology of the colonial endeavor into a major intellectual force with transdisciplinary relevance. Without seeking to diminish these improvements, I do wish, however, to engage with one facet of the project to transfigure the archaeology of colonialism: recent attempts to assign Eurocentrism only as a pejorative theorized, purely ideological view of Eurocentrism in the effort to privilege heretofore silenced the desire of European (and later American) rulers to transplant their citizens around the globe—based on diverse political, religious, philosophic, and economic rationales—was an integral element of the imperialist project, which at its root is “the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory” (Said 1993:8). By the start of the twentieth century, Europe’s role in colonizing, conquering, and reshaping what came to be called the Third World had created acute cultural crises (Prashad 2007) as it became abundantly clear in retrospect that “no one colonizes innocently” (Cézaire 2000:39).

At its most basic, Eurocentrism is the perception that Europe constitutes the center of the universe. Eurocentrism is an internalized intellectual space that inculcates biased cultural centering (Sayyid 2003:128–129)—albeit in a loosely defined, relatively disorganized, and contextual manner—that first grew to prominence during the Renaissance among educated elites who had access to the most authoritative tracts of primitive ethnography (see Gerbi 1973; Hodgson 1971; Lambropoulos 1993; Rabasa 1993; Smith 1999). The most renowned polemists advised that Europe and its peoples were specially endowed to conquer the world as part of a universalist, evolutionary
doctrine. This set of tenets—a collective “fallacy of developmentalism” (Dussel 1993:67–68)—was perfectly consistent with the modernist rationality that characterized the European Enlightenment (Kanth 2005:91) and the eventual development of Social Darwinism (Brantlinger 2003). Eurocentrism thus developed as a rather incoherent, albeit generally consistent and “spell-binding” (Peet 2005:937), set of distorted social theories that subjugated indigenous ways of being and knowing to those of a collectivized Europe (Amin 1989:90; Rabasa 1993:14). The persistence of these social theories—often presented as tropes of liberation—has often meant in practical terms that “Europe works as a silent referent in historical knowledge” (Chakrabarty 1992:2).

Widespread critical consciousness about Eurocentrism surfaced during the rise of multiculturalism, as community activists, cultural survivalists, and politically engaged scholars began to argue that non-Western cultures—including their traditions of art, literature, architecture, dance, and music—have intrinsic value and deserve to be acknowledged on their own terms (e.g., Hughes 1992). Long before the academic “discovery” of Eurocentrism, however, a number of oppressed groups in colonial and postcolonial territories had voiced their opposition to the view that the world revolved solely around Europe(Ans). The 1920s was an especially active decade for the establishment of coteries of resistance to European imperialism. Many of these European-based organizations—such as the Ligue Universelle de Défense de la Race Noire, La Comité de Défense de la Race Nègre, and the League Against Imperialism—had avowed Communist affiliations or at least had been influenced by the emancipatory rhetoric of the Russian Revolution (Young 2001). The League specifically openly advocated the building of revolutionary forces to fight imperialist oppression in the cause of global freedom and democracy (Jayawardena 1974:10; Johns 1975:216). At the same time, Marcus Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement and Conservation Association and African Communities League (UNIA)—founded in Jamaica in 1914—found adherents around the globe. Even in apartheid South Africa, the Communist Party had 1,600 black members in 1928 (Cobley 1990:195). Leaders of postcolonial resistance movements continued to struggle for many years “to resolve the problems to which Europe has not been able to find the answers” (Fanon 1963:314), but that Europeans, for the most part, had created or at least exacerbated.

Individuals who directly experienced the personal cost of colonialist domination were not the only opponents to Eurocentric policies. As early as the 1820s, Jeremy Bentham (1830:1) had made an impassioned challenge to France to surrender its colonies, arguing that “justice, consistency, policy, economy, honour, [and] generosity” all demanded it. More recently, many prominent scholars—largely led by literary critics—have foregrounded the problems inherent in constructing European cultural assumptions as “the normal, the natural [and] the universal” (Ashcroft et al. 1998:90–91). The European, post-Columbian “obsession with self-aggrandizement” (Ephraim 2003:4)—which in history included the coalescence of capitalism, patriarchy, racism, colonialism, anthropocentrism, and Christian ideology (Kanth 2005:91)—constructed Europe as uniquely progressive and innovative and everyone else much less so (Blaut 1993:18). For many, Europe became the quintessential embodiment of cultural exceptionalism (e.g., Landes 1998).

Historians have been especially sensitive to the charge of European exceptionalism, and many of them have exposed the history of the exceptionalist discourse and explicitly disavowed its practice (e.g., Blaut 2000; McGerr 1991; Wilnetz 1984). Other historians have written global history from a non-Eurocentric perspective (e.g., Crossley 2008; Hart 2008; Marks 2002). Perhaps the strongest, most concerted effort to demolish the fallacy of Eurocentrism has come from Sinologists. Their examination of global history has demonstrated that many of the cultural features generally attributed to Europe(Ans) were actually first developed in Asia, most notably in China (e.g., Frank 1998; Goody 2006; Pomeranz 2000; Wong 2000). As Frank (1998:117) has noted, “the entire world economic order was—literally—Sinocentric. Christopher Columbus and after him many Europeans up until Adam Smith knew that.” Statements such as these have understandably occasioned much debate and reanalysis (e.g., Duchesne 2001–2002). At a minimum, they proffer a global perspective on recent
history that is inclusive without being Eurocentric.

Historical archaeology in the United States emerged as a profession during the rise of the anticolonial struggles that followed the Second World War, but its practitioners managed to ignore them. For the most part, they tended to segment European and indigenous topics even in socio-historical situations of direct, face-to-face cultural contact (e.g., Walthall 1991; Walthall and Emerson 1992). As the field matured and began to be refashioned as a truly global pursuit in the 1990s (Falk 1991; Hall 2000; Orser 1996), some archaeologists responded to analytical segregation by offering stiff critiques of the role that Europe should play in the field. Their intellectual rationale was consistent with the emerging, more nuanced understanding of culture contact, as well as with the developing interest in ethnogenesis, the construction of history, and the realization that colonization was not solely the province of post-Columbian history (e.g., Cameron 2011; Dietler 2010; Dyson 1985; Gosden 2004; Lawrence and Shepherd 2006; Lyons and Papadopoulos 2002). These works collectively established that the creation of colonies—dependent territories situated within empires (Abermethy 2000:21)—have a much greater time depth and a substantially greater geographical breadth than historical archaeologists had originally imagined. The broader view of colonialism became archaeological canon, even though a number of social theorists—notably the proponents of world-systems analysis—argued that the creation of a capitalist world-system made post-Columbian colonialism unique (Wallerstein 2004:23–41).

A more substantive engagement with the role of Europe sought to reach beyond its narrowly perceived spatial and temporal limits as post-Columbian and western European, with critics subtly questioning whether Europe was even a valid research topic within anthropologically inspired historical archaeology. They posed numerous, trenchant questions, such as: If we are trained anthropologists practicing archaeology, should we not focus our considerable interpretive power on the non-European world? Is not one great strength of anthropology—including its archaeological component—the examination of cultures with orally transmitted knowledge bases? Should not all archaeologists reject the distorted theories of Eurocentrism (following Asante 1999)? And perhaps most basically, is not the study of Europe(ans) inherently Eurocentric?

The sharpest critics of allocating a prominent role in historical archaeology to Europe(ans) have labeled such research as irredeemably Eurocentric (Schmidt and Walz 2007a:54, 2007b:129). This serious charge carries the implication that “African, not to mention Asian, Native American, Australian, and Pacific, histories will remain inexcusably silenced by archaeologists unwilling to tackle questions that count” (Schmidt and Walz 2007a:67, emphases in original). Similarly, any effort to “provincialize” Europe (after Chakrabarty 2000)—“to escape from European/Western paragdigs”—merely serves to “limit the gaze of historical archaeologists upon other societies and their pasts” (Schmidt and Walz 2007a:54). This is a weighty condemnation of an entire subfield of archaeology that had been explicitly created to examine European colonialism.

An even more pessimistic view of historical archaeology has recently been offered by Dawdy (2010:763), who argues that historical archaeologists, by attempting to examine the material and spatial characteristics of “modernity,” have been engaged in a clever “self-deception” that causes them to be “condemned to repeat or simply elaborate on the grand narratives of the period.” Not all anthropologists have apparently been “duped by modernity,” but historical archaeologists seeking to engage with Europe(ans) have most certainly fallen prey to the trap.

Some of the archaeologists who apparently have been duped by modernity are those who accept that culture contact involves at least two cultures. In their critique of Stahl et al. (2004), Schmidt and Walz (2007b) oppose the plan of “studying the lives of those on ‘both sides’ of the power divide” and deny that this perspective “reveals how actors in a variety of positions are mutually implicated in the historical processes that shape present sensibilities and possibilities” (Stahl et al. 2004:96). Rather, they understand (after Cooper and Stoler 1997) that colonialism was shaped by unilateral indigenous “struggle,” and propose that “this dynamic relationship is much more than simply seeing and understanding both sides of power interactions” (Schmidt and Walz 2007b:136). A more careful reading of the Cooper
and Stoler (1997.ix) quote, however, discloses that Schmidt and Walz downplay the clause “thinking about empire as much as the daily efforts to manage it.” Stoler and Cooper (1997:3) continue in this vein: “Our interest is more in how both colonies and metropoles shared in the dialectics of inclusion and exclusion, and in what ways the colonial domain was distinct from the metropolitan one” (emphasis added). Their interest lies in “the contingency of metropolitan-colonial connections and its consequences for patterns of imperial rule” rather than in subtracting Europe(ans) from the equation (Stoler and Cooper 1997:1, emphasis added).

By adopting the position that indigenous agency is unbounded by sociohistorical context, Schmidt and Walz eliminate domination and oppression, and consequently reinforce the European power structure. By exclusively empowering local narratives, they effectively separate public problems and daily life, a program that ultimately “leads to an acceptance of the status quo, of injustice and inequality” (Rosenn 1992:84n). In privileging “the agency of the ‘colonized,’” Schmidt and Walz simultaneously erase history and refute the postcolonial project. By rejecting the “inequality of knowledge” that existed in the suppression of freedoms associated with European colonialism (Balibar 1994:56), they reinforce the power structures reproduced by dominant elites in colonial sociohistorical spaces. Their perspective is reminiscent of Lenin’s (1970:132) observation that “Bourgeois scholars and publicists usually come out in defense of imperialism in a somewhat veiled form; they obscure its complete domination and its profound roots, strive to push into the forefront particular and secondary details and do their best to distract attention from essentials.”

A foundational piece of reasoning for such critics concerns the establishment of manichean essentialisms. They argue that the creation of dualities in archaeology—most notably history:prehistory and premodern: modern—has infused epistemological blindness into the discipline. For example, they argue that the employment of “modernity” as a subject precludes cross-cultural analysis and eliminates the close examination of cultures not influenced by the colonizing practices and imperialist designs of Europe(ans). The co-

comitant “silences” substantiate “false separations” (Schmidt and Walz 2007b:142), and the use of “modernity” in “most social sciences and humanities” (Dawdy 2010:763)—and certainly in post-Columbian archaeology—encourages an inherently unfair and biased perspective on the past (e.g., Funari et al. 1999:3–5; Little 1994:16). Indeed, explicit exegesis about such dichotomies leads to more profound introspection about the relationships between process and history (e.g., Kohl 2008), short-term events and long-term structures (e.g., Harding 2005), and imposed artificiality (e.g., Lightfoot 1995; Silliman 2005).

The problems posed by the creation of the prehistory:history divide as false separation is cogently examined in the city of New Orleans by Matthews (2007). In his careful examination of “being Indian” in an urban environment supposedly devoid of indigenous involvement, Matthews offers one of the most profound illustrations of the wisdom of eliminating periodization in archaeological reasoning while at the same time refusing to eliminate the relevant relations of power. Shifting the focus from Native American individuals—people moving through space-time as subjects—Matthews concentrates on the trans-temporal performance of being Indian. This distinction has two significant implications that defy facile temporal segmentation. First, it demands that archaeologists reflexively confront the creation of “the Indian as native research subject” against the backdrop of archaeologist-Native American community politics. And second, it permits insight into the sociohistorical contexts in which the interactions between Indians and non-Indians led to the creation of “the practical meanings of cultural difference” in the past (with “the past” literally meaning “before today”) (Matthews 2007:274). These implications lead Matthews to inspect the role of “being Indian” in New Orleans, an investigation that purposefully conflates the relationships between political economy, state formation, and essentialism in archaeological practice. He determines that labeling Native Americans “prehistoric”—a historicized and racialized stereotype—causes them to disappear from nineteenth-century life. This act of being effectively disappeared perpetuates multiscalar violence: to the individuals themselves, to nineteenth-century New Orleans’ society, and to the
present-day conceptualization of past lived reality. In this respect, Matthews performs an act that is intellectually equivalent in plan if not in methodology to the archaeology of desaparecidos in Latin America (Funari and Vieira de Oliveira 2009:28–29) and of mass graves in dictatorial Africa (Haglund et al. 2001).

Matthews’s thoughtful interrogation of the construction of history using power, authority, struggle, and visibility—in contradistinction to the view offered by Schmidt and Walz (2007a, 2007b)—raises several issues of profound significance to contemporary archaeological practice, not the least in importance being to call into question the prehistoricizing of the past. Matthews (2007:287) argues, for example, that “even in historical archaeology, our job is to recover for present consumption what has been lost or buried—i.e., made prehistoric—about past human lives.” This salient point resonates with the critique of false periodization, even though Matthews does not diminish the impact of European domination; the very label “prehistoric” cannot be applied without the purposeful European marginalization of Native Americans living in New Orleans. With the loss of native self-determination, because of the rise of non-native power and authority in south Louisiana, Native Americans were “essentialized as persons of different culture whose principle attribute was their anachronistic ‘other’ way of life” (Matthews 2007:284).

Matthews concretely illustrates that indigenous archaeology of the post-1500 era—regardless of theoretic perspective—cannot be truly informed in the absence of Europe(ans) (also see Liebmann and Murphy 2010). His research helps to demonstrate that to create a truly new archaeology of post-Columbian sociohistory one must not gloss over difference in favor of an Enlightenment-inspired “intensive universalism” (Balibar 2004:58–59). Ignoring European global dominance does violence to the telling of the past and harms the social consciousness that postcolonial archaeology celebrates (see Lydon and Rizvi 2010).

**Modern-World (Historical) Archaeology and Problematizing Eurocentrism**

The inspiration for a different approach to historical archaeology—an explicit modern-world (historical) archaeology—that refuses to ignore Europe(ans) has developed out of the dual realization that the purely methodological definition of historical archaeology has inherent merit, and that the historical-archaeological research of Classical, postcontact Mayanist, and pre-Ming-era Chinese archaeologists provides a different discourse of knowledge than the archaeology of the post-1500 world (Orser 2004b:9–14). Using the works of numerous scholars from the same general intellectual tradition (Braudel 1973, 1977; Marx 1967, 1970; Marx and Engels 1970; Patterson 1997; Wallerstein 1974, 1979, 1980; Wolf 1982, 1999), modern-world (historical) archaeology understands the post-1500 world as a different place than earlier eras. Accordingly, this archaeology, like “the practices of anthropology remain[s] very much embedded in an eschatology of modern rupture” (Dawdy 2010:763), and explicitly so.

Rather than to accept false periodization, the real intent is to investigate the constituents of the process of modernity. The intellectual tension embodied by the murky relationship between history (past actuality) and its examination (chronicle created from selected past actuality) is celebrated rather than condemned. Accordingly, all modern-world archaeology is historical archaeology by definition, but not all historical archaeology is modern-world archaeology. The archaeology espoused by Schmidt and Walz is historical archaeology but not modern-world archaeology because it denies the myriad relationships of power, dominance, and oppression forced on indigenous peoples by various European nation-states since about 1500. Their archaeology rightly concentrates on struggle but ignores the reasons behind the need to struggle. Modern-world (historical) archaeology necessarily relies on research in historical archaeology but looks beyond it.

The archaeology of the modern world—investigated as a process of becoming and being (Orser 1994, 2004a, 2013)—produces unique opportunities but concomitantly creates special burdens. As a research project, modern-world (historical) archaeology will be forever developing because the very word “modern” is itself contested and mutable. It does not dispute the ethnographic and historical research that illustrates the presence of multiple modernities (e.g., Englund and Leach 2000; Kahn 2001; Tambiah 2000;
Zurndorfer 1997). Rather, modern-world (historical) archaeology perceives modernity as composed of myriad, intertwined spatio-temporal levels. As such, the simplest definition of “modern” suffices: “late, recent, not ancient, not antique” (Johnstone 1760:506). This definition relies on a flexible temporality and presents a way “to think about the history of power in an age when capital and [its] governing institutions [were developing] a global reach” (Chakrabarty 2002:12).

Instead of shying away from the complexities inherent in the meaning of “modern” or to dispute the simultaneous reproduction of multiple modernities, the practice of modern-world (historical) archaeology embraces the confusion and celebrates the dissonances between globalized, regionalized, and localized sociohistorical contexts in the post-1500 world.

As a process, modernity need not be initialized or periodized. It need only be stressed that modern-world (historical) archaeology commences with the conjunction of forces, beliefs, ideas, and independent developments that “come together in ways that interact with one another, creating a unique historical moment” (Marks 2002:12). Modern-world (historical) archaeology accepts that after about 1500, a history-altering conjecture of four forces united to create simultaneously numerous new worlds. The four forces have coeval planes of existence and in the broadest sense are pan-cultural. Each is enacted in the post-1500 world through a complex, multilevel series of actions, practices, and traditions within structures that are generally homologous though none are teleological. Their execution in real space-time creates history. These four forces, because they are still being enacted, also affect the ways in which contemporary archaeology is practiced. These forces thus hover over archaeological practice—the telling of history and the practice of research—regardless of whether or not archaeologists wish to acknowledge them. The overarching, meta-forces are: colonialism—the spatial movement of people from one culture or region into another culture’s territory with the intent of creating temporary, intermittent, and permanent settlements using enforced relations of power including conquest and control (as opposed to colonization [following Rowlands 1998]); capitalism—an economic system with significant sociocultural manifestations that are expressed on many spatial levels (collectively denoted as “the capitalist project”); racialization—the process of inventing biological and social inferiority using ideology, pseudo-science, administrative power, repressive authority, and other legal and extra-legal forms of domination and oppression (see Orser 2007); and Eurocentrism—a specialized form of ethnocentrism that elevates to superiority an imagined, homogenized “European” culture and heritage over all other cultures and heritages. These four forces, as they were envisioned, idealized, and put into practice in the world after about 1500, are tightly interlinked and coterminous. For example, “without the power of capitalism, and all the structural innovations that accompanied it in political, social, and cultural organization, Eurocentrism might have been just another ethnocentrism” (Dirlik 1999:12). Capitalist globalization and racialization are similarly linked in the same structural fashion (see e.g., Weiss 2006), as are the other meta-forces of modernity.

The forces provide the uniqueness of the modern world, a universe in which “the towering outline of Europe’s early modern and modern story has been impossible to ignore... The magnitude of the effect was the central fact of human experience in the past three centuries” (Crossley 2008:107–108). Archaeologists wishing to investigate post-1500 history are “for better or worse forced into an encounter with both Western modernity and Western narratives of modernization” (Kahn 2001:651). Ignoring these processes only creates new silences. While performing the admirable work of foregrounding indigenous local narratives, disregarding the meta-forces submerges the often-terrible realities of lived history (Eagleton 1996:52). Re-problematizing Europe(ans) is thus a central task of modern-world (historical) archaeology. Part of this work of intellectual adjustment involves coming to terms with the meta-forces of modernity.

Instead of viewing Eurocentrism unidimensionally as an intellectual deficiency to be overcome, modern-world (historical) archaeology seeks both to expose and overthrow the historical dangers of Eurocentrism at the same time that it explicitly interrogates its beginnings, manifestations, and continuance. Rather than constituting a
triumphalist view that exploits European exceptionalism (Bagchi 2005:10), this interrogation of Eurocentrism is a process of discovery and recovery. Part of this process involves reinvesting in multiscalar analysis.

Archaeologists’ interest in multiscalar analysis may have begun for many with the discovery of Braudel’s (1966) three temporal rhythms (e.g., Ames 1991; Bintliff 1991; Ferris 2009; Little and Shackel 1989; Smith 1992; Voss 2008). Still others have employed multiscalar analysis without explicit reference to Braudel (e.g., Crumley and Marquardt 1987; Lightfoot et al. 1998; Miroff and Knapp 2009; Nassaney and Sassaman 1995). One of the inherent strengths of a multiscalar perspective is that it exploits the tensions in archaeology between multifarious scales—the myriad spaces of social practice (after Lefebvre 1991)—by opening a space “to grasp the relationship between the small scale” and the “wider processes of transformation” (Johnson 2006:13; also see Hall and Silliman 2006:8; Orser 2010:116–120). This practice permits analysts to perceive the “coherence and collective causal power” (Linebaugh and Rediker 2000:193) of discrete archaeological sites that may appear unlinked when viewed exclusively at one scale.

One way to conceptualize the multiscalar analysis in archaeology is by adopting the metaphor of a photographer adjusting a camera’s zoom lens:

Imagine a photographer focusing on the broad outlines of a large object located far away in order to learn something about the object. The photographer then twists the zoom lens to obtain a more detailed, higher-resolution image of a selected part of the distant object. As a result something new is observed through greater attention to the part’s details. The zoom lens may be adjusted further to permit more precise examination of an even smaller part of the object. Each adjustment permits a novel visualization of reality by enabling the observer to come closer to whatever is being observed, in a subjective if not literal sense. For this reason each twist of the zoom lens can generate a new description of reality and perhaps new ideas to account for what the lens adjustment has revealed [Abernethy 2000:31].

This metaphor allows for “socio-structural framing” (the selection of levels of resolution) that, for modern-world (historical) archaeology, must necessarily be reflexive. Individual archaeologists must understand that they consciously select specific space-time frames, they must ponder and accept the reasons for selecting the frames of analysis, and they must appreciate the role that frame selection plays in interpretation. Unlike the archaeological practice advocated by Schmidt and Walz, modern-world (historical) archaeology overtly conceptualizes the various socio-structural frames, seeking dialectically to engage critically with “entities and the relationships between entities, past, present, and future” (Marquardt 1992:103).

Brief reference to the European-enforced enslavement of people of African heritage will suffice to demonstrate the analytical promise of socio-structural framing. Shortly after 1500, the major European nation-states all adopted the structure of African enslavement as a core element of their Eurocentric belief system, arguing that non-Europeans were slaves “by nature” as an element of their philosophical doxa (Gerbi 1973:74–76), developed partly as a response to their own enslavement by North Africans (Colley 2004:56–65). Thus, in the largest frame, we may accurately view post-Columbian, European-enforced slavery as an element of Eurocentrism (which also contains the necessary inclusion of colonialism, capitalism, and racialization). On the next, more circumscribed frame, however, the careful analysis of European nation-state slavery reveals that not all slavery was the same: Anglocentric, Lu-socentric, Francocentric expressions of African enslavement appear in various sociohistorical contexts. Taken deeper, differences appear in the practice of Anglocentric slavery. During the American Revolution, for example, many slaves decided to flee to the British because they perceived Anglocentric slavery to be milder than Americentric slavery (Jasanoff 2011:48–49). At the smallest frame, particular differences might be viewed between individual plantations or households within the Anglocentric world.

This hypothetical example illustrates that no need exists to denigrate research conducted within the boundaries of any socio-structural frame. On the contrary, the reflexive knowledge inherent in accepting the presence of individual frames—
both in the lived past and in the analytical present—strengthens the overall interpretive power of the archaeology. At the same time, though, we must acknowledge the inherent danger of working within only the smallest frame (i.e., site). By invoking the uniqueness of a specific space-time frame—and concentrating on it to the exclusion of all else—we run the risk of reproducing the “partitioning strategies” of the colonialist project (Young 1995:165).

The Dutch in the Upper Hudson Valley as Eurocentrists

To demonstrate what an archaeology of Eurocentrism has to offer, I wish to focus upon Dutch New Netherland as an example of one small frame within colonial North America. I specifically confine myself to the Upper Hudson River Valley in the region around present-day Albany, New York, during the years 1624–1664. Detailing the complex specificity of intercultural contact and conflict in this region—enacted variously between Dutch, English, French, Mohawk, Mohican, and numerous smaller native cultures (e.g., Bradley 2007; Cantwell 2008; Dunn 1994; Parmenter 2010; Rothschild 2003)—is far beyond the scope of this paper. This brief examination will illustrate only that Eurocentrism can be investigated in various socio-structural frames from the largest (the Dutch nation-state as European) to the smallest (the space-time of the individual inhabited property). My separation of Eurocentrism is purely heuristic because its practice was tightly entwined with and inseparable from the other metanarratives of modernity.

The seventeenth-century Dutch are especially renowned for their expertise in developing “commercial pragmatism” (Schama 1987:67). In 1598, speculators from five trading companies sent ships to Indonesia to trade for spices and other valuable commodities. The public rejoiced when the ships returned the following year loaded with cargo and the shareholders realized a 100-percent profit (Boxer 1973:25). This success led, in 1602, to the union of the individual companies into a single monopoly, the Dutch East India Company (VOC). The creation of the Dutch West India Company (WIC) followed in 1621. The creation of the VOC existed within a global socio-structural frame because its originators designed it as a competitor to the English East India Company, chartered in 1600 (Arrighi 2010:143) and as a direct assault on the power of Spain in the New World (Boxer 1973:54). Many of the features common to today’s global capitalism were established by seventeenth-century Dutch entrepreneurs (Dash 1999:101–102; Garber 1989; Irwin 1991; Robins 2006; Scammell 1981:403; Schama 1987:347–348).

The commercial success sought by Dutch merchant-speculators could not be accomplished purely as a powerful European nation-state, because globally they required the collaboration of numerous indigenous peoples. This situation obtained in the smaller socio-structural frame of the New World. In the still-smaller frame of the Upper Hudson River Valley, the Dutch first staked their claim with the construction of Fort Nassau near present-day Albany, New York, in 1614. This small fort, created for mercantile reasons within Mahican territory, “provided both a year-round base for resident traders and a clear destination for Native people” (Bradley 2007:35). Dutch traders inhabited this fort for at least three years (Huey 1988:12–13; Jameson 1909:48). The Dutch West India Company made a permanent claim to the region in 1624 with the construction of Fort Orange (Huey 1991:30, 2010:143). In 1630, an Amsterdam diamond merchant named Kiliaen van Rensselaer received authorization to develop a huge patroonship—named Rensselaerswyck—in the vicinity of Fort Orange, again on Mahican land (Bradley 2007:59; Dunn 1994:100; Jacobs 2005:116–119; Merwick 1990:7–8; Nissenson 1937; Venema 2010:241–267; Wilcoxen 1984:9–10). In 1652, the multicultural settlement that had developed north of Fort Orange, technically within Rensselaerswyck, was delineated and named Beverwyck, to indicate the residents’ commitment to commerce based on the beaver rather than an allegiance to van Rensselaer as landlord (Venema 2003:53).

Eurocentrism can be observed in each of these Dutch creations in various socio-structural frames: globally, continentally (the New World frame), regionally (the Hudson River Valley stretching from New Amsterdam to Rensselaerswyck/ Beverwyck-Fort Orange), and territorially (Rensselaerswyck/Beverwyck-Fort Orange). In
every frame, the Dutch economic designs were explicit and appeared to be foremost: “Commercial rather than political matters, the enhancement of trade rather than the transplantation of a Dutch society, became the first order of business for the West India Company in New Netherland" (Condon 1968:70). But the Dutch mission in New Netherland was not purely economic; they also had cultural designs on the region. The earliest Dutch settlers in the region established Dutchness in the Upper Hudson Valley as an element of their Eurocentrism. They accomplished this Low Country version of Europeanization with their buildings and their portable objects.

Excavations at Fort Orange (Huey 1988, 1991, 1998a, 2010) reveal that the Dutch built the fortification in the typical, bastioned style of European forts. Dutch military engineers were the first to follow the Italians in building forts with bastions (Duffy 2006:10), and like most colonial European powers, they attempted to construct such forts wherever they intended to stay. Thus, they built Forte Oranje in Pernambuco, Brazil, in 1631, to be nearly identical to Fort Orange on the Hudson River (Menezes and Rodrigues 1986:110–111). Identical European fortifications built in disparate colonial territories represent “the violent beginnings of colonial occupation” (Pels 1997:170) and overtly espouse Eurocentrism. As imposing, foreign structures they visibly proclaim the pan-European, global universality of Eurocentrism by their very presence.

The artifacts excavated at Fort Orange are equally pan-European in nature. The ceramic assemblage, for example, includes majolica and delft manufactured in the Netherlands, as well as other earthenwares and stonewares from Italy, England, the Iberian Peninsula, and Germany. The presence of porcelain, originally from China but filtered through European networks, indicates the expanse of the Dutch trading empire and reference their adoption of non-European cultural traits into their quotidian lives. Their glass drinking and storage vessels were similarly European in manufacture, made in workshops throughout the Netherlands, Venice, and Germany. These findings were duplicated at seventeenth-century Dutch house sites in the area belonging to various settlers: a brickmaker (1631–1653), an independent trader (ca. 1639–1648), Juriaen Theunissen (1654–1664), Arent van Curler (1643–1660), and Volkert Jansen Douw (ca. 1652–1685) (Bradley 2005; Fisher 2008; Huey 1987, 1996, 1998b; Moody 2002, 2003, 2005; Wilcoxen 1999:14). The global expression of Dutch Eurocentrism, through the mechanism of transoceanic, intercultural trade, is demonstrated by the presence of identical artifacts found at contemporaneous sites in the Netherlands (e.g., Baart 1987; von Dongen 1995). Their transplantation of European fort design is perfectly homologous with the overall pattern of their portable material culture, as both overtly express Eurocentrism.

The co-occurrence of artifacts in and around Fort Orange and in the Netherlands is not surprising; historical archaeologists take for granted the presence of European artifacts at colonial settlements. The unquestioned expectation is that colonialist settlers sought to recreate tiny pieces of their homelands in their new environments. But why should this be so? Why did European colonists not take just a few objects that would ensure their initial survival—cutting tools and fire-making equipment, for example—with the expectation that they could live off the land? Why did they not expect to learn from the indigenous inhabitants? Why did the colonial Dutch transport such a vast amount of material culture across the Atlantic Ocean and then up the Hudson River just to create “Holland on the Hudson” (Rink 1986; see also Huey 1991:50)?

The answers to these questions seem so patently obvious that perhaps we need not even ask them: as anthropologists we know that people take their cultures with them when they emigrate. By not asking such apparently obvious questions (even tacitly to ourselves as reflexive conundrums), however, we ignore them and dismiss the reflexivity they inspire. Our expectation that Dutch settlers would bring Dutch materials with them and that they would thus turn up in archaeological excavations is Eurocentrism simultaneously operating in temporally distinct socio-structural frames. The importation of European objects outside Europe informs a global Eurocentrism, just as the differences observed between patterns of seventeenth-century Dutch and English importation (see Rye 1865:71) suggest nation-state distinctions in the presentation of Eurocentrism.
The only true variation we might see in the overall affiliations of the artifacts by household appears in the presence of Native American objects. Excavations at the brickmaker’s house in Beverwijk, for example, produced a bear effigy smoking pipe that has an Iroquois affiliation, as does another pipe found at Fort Orange (Huey 1991:57–58; Moody 2005:127). Similarly, the mid-seventeenth-century trader’s house also in Beverwijk yielded numerous pieces of chipped stone, including bifaces and projectile points (Moody 2002:3.21). Nevertheless, indigenous objects in Dutch homes constitute the exception rather than the rule; the artifacts found inside the remains of Dutch houses are overwhelmingly European in manufacture.

Another way to perceive Eurocentrism among the Dutch is to interrogate their attitudes to and relations with the indigenous cultures that surrounded them. Their feelings toward and understanding of Native Americans were complex (Rothschild 2003:81). Whereas Henry Hudson was reported to have said that “The natives are a very good people,” the Reverend Jonas Michaëlius described them as savage, wild, “uncivil and stupid as garden poles” (Jameson 1909:49, 126). Economic realities rested beneath the intercultural relations between Dutch colonists and indigenous Native Americans, and these often translated into bad European behavior: “Empires of trade did not simply crank over smoothly, one deal, one trading season, one fleet departure after the next. They required ruthlessness” (Merwick 2006:267).

One of the factors of the sociohistorical landscape that the Dutch did not appreciate upon their arrival in the Upper Hudson was the long-term, intercultural rivalry between the Mahicans and the Mohawks (Burke 1991:283). The rivalry had long-standing reasons having nothing to do with Europeans, but if the Massachusetts Puritans had indeed encouraged the Mahicans to go to war with their indigenous neighbors (Jennings 1976:315), then the global intra-European conflict between England and the Netherlands had truly intermeshed with the regional socio-structure frame. At the same time, “it is impossible to understand Dutch-Indian relations in New York State independently of French-Indian ones in Canada” (Trigger 1971:277). The Dutch at Fort Orange needed the support of the Native peoples around them to survive; they “could not afford to offend either the Mahicans, on whose land they lived, or the Mohawks, who supplied most of the furs” (Bradley 2007:58). The Puritans’ possible goading of the Mahicans exacerbated conflict within a regional frame and simultaneously intensified it within a global frame. The Dutch in New Netherland were caught in a unique “ambiguity of universalism” (after Balibar 2004:15) because of the legal theory that had outlined their moral authority.

The legal basis for Dutch expeditions around the world was created in response to an inter-European conflict that had occurred within the global frame. In 1603, the renowned Dutch jurist Hugo Grotius came to the aid of the VOC in a dispute with the Portuguese in Southeast Asia (Borschberg 1999; Buckle 1991). In arguing against the concept of Portuguese primacy in the region, Grotius maintained that every nation-state had equal rights of navigation, fishing, and trading everywhere in the world (Hart 2008:102; Merwick 2006:52). The resultant “law of nations” that Grotius helped formulate—which at its core also substantiated an individual’s natural rights (Brook 2008:68)—was soon twisted “to justify the assertion of public authority by European states in the extra-European world” (Keene 2002:62). In other words, Grotius’s humanist writings about personal freedom, self-preservation, and natural rights meant that some people could express themselves “in extreme ways [such as] submitting to tyrannical government” (Haakonssen 1996:28). Though Grotius may not have approved of all the ways in which his dense legal arguments were used, a close relationship developed between his writings “and the modern practices of colonialism and imperialism” (Keene 2002:62). This, then, is the legal establishment of Eurocentric doctrine, not only for the Dutch, but also for the English and the other European nation-states (Haakonssen 1996:30). This pan-European understanding was applicable in all socio-structural frames: globally, regionally, and locally.

Dutch settlement design helped to reinforce Eurocentrism by transfiguring physical distance into cultural distance. Unlike French coureurs de bois, who tended to live within the Native villages, the Dutch were required to have Native traders
come to them (Jacobs 2009:176; Vernon 1978:206). The prohibition against allowing Dutch traders to visit Native villages was superficially economic—because the WIC wished to limit illegal trade—but it was also inherently Eurocentric. The Dutch, realizing that their fragile New World economic structure was built upon furs acquired and traded by Native Americans, strove to maintain good relations with the Mahicans and the Mohawks, but at the same time they could not avoid expressing their Eurocentrism. Dutch traders often allowed visiting Native traders to stay on their lots and even sometimes to lodge with them in their homes (Venema 2003:91–92), but while specific Dutch individuals may not have been racially biased against Native Americans, Dutch culture was Eurocentric. Adriaen van der Donck, the law enforcement officer in Renssalaerwick explicitly referenced the “Universal Law of Nations”—drawing directly from Grotius—even as he referred to the indigenous peoples as *wilden* (van der Donck 2008:103). The racialized rationale present in his use of the term *wilden* (Dutch for “savage” or “wild men”) is clear:

First, on account of religion, because they have none or so little as to be virtually in a state of nature. Second, as regards to marriage and in the recognition of landed property, they deviate so far from the general laws that they may well be called *wilden*, because they act in those matters almost at will. Third, as the Christians, to set themselves apart, give foreign nations the names of Turks or Mamelukes or barbarians, since the term *heathen* is too general and little used abroad, they did not wish to include the American natives in that term either. Similarly, the terms *black* and *white* are customary among those who have business overseas, to distinguish the Negroes from our and similar nations, but neither of those names quite fitted the Americans, who tend toward the olive colored [van der Donck 2008:75].

This quote reveals that “by calling the Indians wild men, the Dutch maintained an ambiguous description of them which suggested that they were not quite human, but neither were they unquestionably animals” (Otto 1995:98).

Such views, rooted in Eurocentric attitudes, necessarily created tensions. On January 12, 1630, van Rensselaer gave Bastiaen Jansz Crol instructions to purchase land “from the Mahiijcan, Maquaas [Mohawks], or such other nations as have any claims to them,” with the admonition that Crol should treat them “with all courtesy and discretion.” Further on, van Rensselaer included an important caveat: “In case he can not purchase the said lands from one or two nations, that he purchase the same *from all who pretend any right to them*” (van Laer 1908:159, emphasis added). By 1634, it had become clear, at least to van Rensselaer, that the Mahicans had decided to sell their land because their leader had died and because of “the defeat they suffered in 1629” at the hands of the Mohawks (van Laer 1908:306). Van Rensselaer erroneously believed that he had completely disherited the Mahicans from their land, but by the 1650s, the Mahicans and the Mohawks were beginning to complain about land purchases that “lasted forever” (Dunn 1994:101). Reacting to the tension, in 1659, the residents of Beverwijck built a palisade around their village to guard “against a sudden incursion of Barbarians” (O’-Callaghan 1868:385). This palisade inculcated a symbolic meaning that was embedded within its function: it “confirmed that Beverwijck was increasingly becoming a place with its own identity—for some, perhaps, a true ‘Dutch’ home base . . . [one in which] arriving new settlers [were] now separated from the natives” (Venema 2003:95). The palisade also reinforced attitudes about land use that mirrored those prevalent in the Netherlands (Merwick 1980:66). The separation enforced by the construction of the palisade was entirely homologous with the separation enforced by the European ceramics and glass: both reinforced the pan-national concept of Eurocentrism that existed outside and above nation-state pride.

So, while historians have generally viewed the Dutch to have been more benevolent than the English in dealing with their Native allies, the Netherlands did not act altruistically because, just like the English, they, too, were Eurocentric. As Eurocentrists, the Dutch required its agents to obtain legal title to the land they occupied so that they could obtain full legal rights by contract (Jennings 1988:14). The continuation of the story begun by the embryonic expression of Eurocentrism in the New World has been cogently summarized:
Colonization by the Dutch and land sale by the Mahican slowly started after 1630, receiving impetus only in the last decades of the seventeenth century. The colonists along the Hudson River appear to have preferred the Indian garden lands for their farms. Together with the quest for furbearers in more distant areas, this resulted in the slow removal of the Mahican away from the Hudson River to more remote corners of their territory” [Brasser 1978:203, emphasis added].

Conclusion

It remains true that one of the most important and yet challenging tasks of historical archaeology is to give voice to the voiceless, to represent archaeologically all those people who have been silenced by the powerful (Orser 1996:160–182). Historical archaeologists have been adept at preparing monographs that outline the ways in which excavation has illuminated past life in myriad sociohistorical settings. A central task of modern-world (historical) archaeology is to use archaeology to listen to the voiceless (as historical archaeologists), while simultaneously illuminating the forces that explain why the voiceless have been silenced in the first place (as modern-world archaeologists). Modern-world (historical) archaeologists do not simply use Eurocentrism as a pejorative indictment but rather embrace the view that powerlessness in the past must be thoroughly investigated as part of the postcolonial project to help comprehend powerlessness in the present. Rather than to rehabilitate the telling of history, ignoring the reasons for the silences ultimately creates new and perhaps even more dangerous silences. By failing to acknowledge domination, oppression, and bigotry, archaeologists run the risk of alienating themselves from the peoples whose history they investigate.

Modern-world (historical) archaeology openly accepts the significance of colonialism, racialization, capitalism, and Eurocentrism as primary, powerful meta-forces that operate in the post-Columbian world. The modern-world (historical) archaeologists’ critiques of these forces are designed to destroy the artificiality of the local-global dichotomy by overtly employing multi-frame analysis.

Consciously adopting socio-structural framing allows archaeologists to conceptualize Eurocentrism as one force in modern life that has substantial, dialectically relevant consequences for its advocates and its victims. The understanding of Eurocentrism by colonizing Europeans united the disparate programs of the individual nation-states into an overarching principle of post-Enlightenment thought. Despite each nation’s jingoistic attitudes, desires, and plans—and frequent intercultural wars—most Europeans simply accepted their collective supremacy over the world’s non-European peoples. At the same time, the colonial agents of the Netherlands, England, Spain, France, and all the other superpowers that have grown to power since about 1500 enacted their nationally specific Eurocentrism. The originality of post-Columbian Eurocentrism—unlike the universality of ethnocentrism—is that it acquired a terrible power when combined with colonialism, capitalism, and racialization. Each force fed off the others and intersected in complex, historically significant ways.

The Dutch in the Upper Hudson Valley acted like colonial Europeans elsewhere in the world. Instead of constructing permanent settlements that conformed to the realities of local environments, they built structures in villages that were European in design and plan. The similarity between Fort Orange in New Netherland and Forte Oranje in Brazil alone substantiates the urge to re-create Europe in the non-European world. Further homology is indicated in the Dutch desire to import heavy, costly objects into their colonial outposts as expressions of Eurocentrism with a Dutch flavor.

All archaeologists, regardless of area of expertise, know the terrible toll experienced by indigenous peoples when foreigners from Europe invaded their native territories seeking land and wealth. But it is the commonness of modernity’s meta-forces that is most poignant. Eurocentrism, capitalism, colonialism, and racialization are such a strong part of the world’s collective history that archaeologists may tend to overlook them, causing them to become naturalized and thus beyond the realm of analysis. A conscientious archaeology dedicated to decolonizing anthropology cannot treat Eurocentrism strictly as a contemporary perspective intellectually extracted from its history. Such an archaeology must completely reject
Eurocentric analysis as it simultaneously argues that ignoring the histories, effects, and lasting implications of Eurocentrism naturalizes its material manifestations and masks its tenacious sociocultural consequences, thereby minimizing the brutality that often accompanied its practice throughout the world.

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