Eurocentrism

Eurocentrism is a political term coined in the 1980s, referring to the notion of European exceptionalism, a worldview centered on [Western civilization](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Western_civilization), as it had developed during the height of the [European colonial empires](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_colonial_empires) since the [Early Modern period](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Early_Modern_period).

The term Eurocentrism itself dates to the late 1980s and became prevalent in the discourse of [political correctness](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Political_correctness) and [cultural relativism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_relativism) during the 1990s, especially in the context [decolonization](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Decolonization) and [development aid](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Development_aid) and [humanitarian aid](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Humanitarian_aid) offered by industrialised countries ("[First World](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_World)") to developing countries ("[Third World](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Third_World)").

The term Eurocentrism (French eurocentrisme) was coined in 1988, by [Samir Amin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samir_Amin), a French-educated [Marxian economist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marxian_economist) from Egypt, director of the Institut Africain de Développement Économique et de Planification from 1980.

The earlier adjective Europe-centric came into use in the early 20th century. The term appears in precisely this form in the writings of the right-wing German writer[Karl Haushofer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karl_Haushofer) during the 1920s. For instance, in Haushofer's 'Geo-Politics of the Pacific Space' (Geopolitik des pazifischen Ozeans), Haushofer contrasts this Pacific space in terms of global politics to the 'European' and 'Europe-centric' (europa-zentrisch)(pp. 11–23, 110-113, passim).

The term Europocentrism appears in the 1970s, through the Marxist writings of [Samir Amin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samir_Amin) as part of a global, core-periphery or dependency model of capitalist development. 'Eurocentrism' appears only by 1988, in the titles of Amin books as the definition of an ideology.

European exceptionalism

During the European colonial era encyclopedias under the lemma "Europe" often sought to give a rationale for the predominance of European rule during the colonial period by referring to a special position taken by Europe compared to the other continents.

Thus, [Johann Heinrich Zedler](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johann_Heinrich_Zedler) in 1741 wrote that "even though Europe is the smallest of the world's four continents, it has for various reasons a position that places it before all others ... its inhabitants have excellent [customs](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mores), they are courteous and erudite in both sciences and crafts."[[1]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eurocentrism#cite_note-1)

The [Brockhaus Enzyklopädie](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brockhaus_Enzyklop%C3%A4die) (Conversations-Lexicon) of 1847 still has an ostensibly Eurocentric approach, claiming that Europe "due to its geographical situation and its cultural and political significance is clearly the most important of the five continents, over which it has gained a most influential government both in material and even more so in cultural aspects." [[2]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eurocentrism#cite_note-2)

European exceptionalism is widely reflected in popular genres of literature, especially literature for young adults (for example [Rudyard Kipling](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rudyard_Kipling)'s [Kim](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kim_%28novel%29)) and adventure literature in general. Portrayal of European colonialism in such literature has been analysed in terms of "Eurocentrism" in retrospect, e.g. as presenting idealized and often exaggeratedly masculine Western heroes who conquered 'savage' peoples in the remaining 'dark spaces' of the globe.[[3]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eurocentrism#cite_note-3)

History

Early Eurocentrism can be traced to the [Renaissance](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Renaissance), during which the revival of learning based on classical sources were focused on the ancient [Greek](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Greece) and[Roman](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Rome) civilizations, due to their being a significant source of contemporary European civilization.

The effects of the verity of European superiority increased during the period of European imperialism, which started slowly in the 15th century, accelerated by the[Scientific Revolution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scientific_Revolution), the [Commercial Revolution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commercial_Revolution), and the [rise of colonial empires](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_European_colonization_wave_%2815th_century%E2%80%9319th_century%29) in the "[Great Divergence](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Divergence)" of the [Early Modern period](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Early_Modern_period), and reached its zenith in the 18th to 19th century with the [Industrial Revolution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Industrial_Revolution) and a [Second European colonization wave](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Second_European_colonization_wave_%2819th_century%E2%80%9320th_century%29).

The progressively mechanised character of European culture was contrasted with traditional hunting, farming, and herding societies in many of the areas of the world being newly conquered and colonised by Europeans, such as the [Americas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Americas), [Asia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asia), [Africa](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Africa), and later the [Pacific](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pacific) and [Australasia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Australasia). Many European writers of this time construed the history of Europe as paradigmatic for the rest of the world. Other cultures were identified as having reached a stage through which Europe itself had already passed—primitive [hunter-gatherer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hunter-gatherer); [farming](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Farming); early [civilisation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civilisation); [feudalism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feudalism); and modern liberal-capitalism. Only Europe was considered to have achieved the last stage.

For some writers, such as [Karl Marx](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karl_Marx), the centrality of Europe to an understanding of world history did not imply any innate European superiority, but he nevertheless assumed that Europe provided a model for the world as a whole. Others looked forward to the expansion of modernity throughout the world through trade, imperialism or both.

The colonising period involved the widespread settlement of the Americas and Australasia with European people, and the establishment of outposts and colonial administrations in Africa and parts of Asia. As a result, the majority populations of the Americas, Australia, and New Zealand typically trace their ancestry to Europe.

The longitude meridians of world maps based on the [prime meridian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prime_meridian), placing [Greenwich, London](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greenwich%2C_London) in the centre, has been in use since 1851. Various other prime meridians were in use during the [Age of Exploration](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Age_of_Exploration). The current prime meridian has the advantage that it places the [International Date Line](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Date_Line) in the Pacific, inconveniencing the smallest number of people.

"[European miracle](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_miracle)" – a term coined by Eric Jones in 1981[[4]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eurocentrism#cite_note-4) – refers to the surprising rise of Europe during the Early Modern period. During the 15th to 18th centuries, a "[great divergence](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_divergence)" took place, comprising the European Renaissance, [age of discovery](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Age_of_discovery), the formation of the [colonial empires](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Colonial_empire), the [Age of Reason](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Age_of_Reason), and the associated leap forward in [technology](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Technology), and the development of [capitalism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capitalism) and early [industrialisation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Industrialisation). The result was that by the 19th century, European powers dominated world trade and world politics.

Early anticolonialism

Even in the 19th century, anti-colonial movements had developed claims about national traditions and values that were set against those of Europe. In some cases, as with China, where local ideology was even more exclusionist than the Eurocentric one, Westernisation did not overwhelm long-established Chinese attitudes to its own cultural centrality, although some would state this idea itself is a rather desperate attempt to cast Europe in a good light by comparison.[[5]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eurocentrism#cite_note-5)