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Ranajit Guha and Dipesh Chakrabarty on the Limits of History: dialogues with Rabindranath Tagore

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Abstract

At the turn of the 21st century, South Asian historians Ranajit Guha (1923-2023) and Dipesh Chakrabarty (1948-) turned their attention to the discussion of the limits of history. In this paper, we analyze the limits of history and possible new approaches to historiography as understood by both historians, with a focus on the dialogue with the works by Rabindranath Tagore proposed by them. We argue that: 1) the validity of history as a concept or as discipline to deal with categories such as the Anthropocene or the planet does not depend on expanding the conceptual limits of history indefinitely, and could benefit from the methodological strategy of writing oneself into a history that is, to some extent, one's own; 2) to do so, creativity, imagination, and empathy combine not to write another version of a single and all-encompassing history, but to recognize multiple worlds that articulate the human, the non-human, and the more-than-human.

Keywords

Concept of history; Historical Knowledge; India

Introduction

South Asian historians Ranajit Guha (1923-2023) and Dipesh Chakrabarty (1948-), both members of the *Subaltern Studies* project from its early years, while pursuing individual research interests driven by distinct motivations at the turn of the 21st century, discussed the limits of history, as well as perspectives of dealing with or overcoming such limits. This discussion, which entailed an examination of the foundations of the modern concept of history predominant in the Western tradition, and the consequences thereof for the discipline of history, was condensed in three works selected for analysis in this paper: *An Indian Historiography of India: A Nineteenth-Century Agenda and its Implications* (Guha, 1988); *History at the Limit of World-history* (Guha, 2002); *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age* (Chakrabarty, 2021a). A distinctive feature of the corpus selected for analysis is the presence of the Bengali artist Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) as a source of inspiration for new perspectives in historical thinking.

With the aim of examining how Ranajit Guha and Dipesh Chakrabarty presented and questioned the limits of history in such works, we start with a conceptual discussion. For Guha, the concept to be reconsidered was the *World-history* embodied by the philosophy of Georg W. F. Hegel (1770-1831); for Chakrabarty, the *anthropocentric human history* forged from the thinking of Giambattista Vico up to the 20th century. In both cases, the emergence of history as a concept is indissociable from restrictions and exclusions, and served as foundation for the discipline of history, that, consequently, presented itself incapable of apprehending whole parts of the human experience in the world, and/or dealing with the non-human. For Guha, those restrictions could not only be projected backwards to the 19th century and the notion of "peoples without history,"i.e. the populations outside Europe or European influence that stood beyond the limits of history as imagined, but remained as limitations even to contemporary historiography. For Chakrabarty, the concept of history made the discipline ill-equipped to deal with the contemporary planetary crisis (the Anthropocene and climate change), and future scenarios of life on Earth.

We consider, then, the interpretations offered by Guha and Chakrabarty about Tagore's insights on history and nature. This dialogue with the work of the Bengali artist broadens the understanding of historical knowledge, adding nuances to the concepts of *historicality*, in Guha, and *planetary regime of historicity*, in Chakrabarty. Reading Rabindranath Tagore, both historians point to the possibility of deepening and pluralizing history as a discipline if fields of experience beyond the conventional conception of historical fact, or non-human and technological dimensions encompassed by the planetary, for instance, are taken into account.

Ranajit Guha's and Dipesh Chakrabarty's intellectual biographies are inextricably linked by the *Subaltern Studies* project. Guha's demise in 2023 inspired a new round of appraisals of the *Subaltern Studies*, and Guha's role therein, including by Chakrabarty himself (Chakrabarty, 2023b). Although the criticism of historiography, an inherent aspect of the collective's proposal, does feature partially in our argument, to reconstitute either the entire project in its multifarious tendencies and trajectories, or Guha's and Chakrabarty's unique intellectual biographies would divert the course of the present argument that deals with a specific development in each historian's reflections on history. To avoid the risk of overestimating coherence in their body of work, by assuming that everything they wrote must have some connection with earlier writings, we refer to debates on the *Subaltern Studies* project only when pertinent.

In the same vein, our analysis of Chakrabarty's works in this article concentrates on his stance on the debate regarding historiography and the Anthropocene. We therefore avoid a revision of the entire debate, already extensive, not least because Chakrabarty's work does that itself. Our main interest here is to select one facet of the author's argument, that is, his reading of Rabindranath Tagore, inasmuch as it can be related to Guha's reading of the Bengali artist, both subsumed in the context of a larger debate (the limits of both the concept and discipline of history). Tagore appears as an important reference in this article, alongside European Continental philosophers such as Hegel and Heidegger. These authors also carry an extensive history of debates and commentaries about them, from which we selected readings on what was pertinent to our argument: Tagore's reflections on history and nature, Hegel's concept of history, and Hegel's and Heidegger's vision of nature. The selection was based on Guha's and Chakrabarty's readings of these authors, with no intention of providing an interpretation to the whole body of thought developed by them.

Ranajit Guha on the Limits of History

A recurring preoccupation in the historical studies written by Ranajit Guha (1923-2023) was historiography itself, as can be noticed in the article that opens the first volume of the *Subaltern Studies* collections of essays, "On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India" (Guha, 1982). There were two occasions in which the historian was able to dedicate himself specifically to the subject of historiography, both of them coincidental in form: two series of lectures. In 1987, Guha delivered the *Sakharam Ganesh Deuskar Lectures on Indian History* before the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences in Calcutta, published in 1988 as *An Indian Historiography of India: A Nineteenth-Century Agenda and its Implications*. In 2000, Guha spoke at the Italian Academy for Advanced Studies in America at Columbia University. These lectures were published in 2002

under the title *History at the Limit of World-history* (Guha, 2002). A similar preoccupation on both occasions can be perceived, as well as a significant change in Guha's approach to the matter in the second set of texts. The preoccupation refers to the possibility that colonized (or subaltern) subjects write their own history, that is, to produce a discourse about their past in a mode of thinking and narrating the past that is alien to their culture. Such a mode of thinking and writing about the past is precisely the discipline of history developed in post-Enlightenment Europe. The change in his approach refers to a move away from thinking *within* disciplinary history to a fully developed critique of history as a Eurocentric concept. In the Italian Academy lectures of 2000, the limits of the discipline of history itself are brought into question.

A similar problem appears as a starting point in both series of lectures: if the Indian subcontinent (and Asia, broadly speaking) had no history, as Hegel argued in early 19th century, and if Indian nationalists in late 19th century were claiming that India needed its own historiography to counteract histories written by foreign authors, specially the British, how should one consider histories of India already written in the same period (the 19th century) *by Indian authors, in Indian languages?* The 2000 lectures were dedicated to a pioneer among these authors, Ramram Basu (1751-1813), "who", writes Guha in the Dedication, "introduced modern historiography in Bangla, his native language, by a work published two hundred years ago". The work, *Raja Pratapaditya Caritra* (1802), was a history of the previous governments of Bengal.

If such works already existed, why was the writer Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay (1838-1894) arguing in 1880 that "Bengal must have her own history" (*apud* Guha, 1988, p. 1)? This demand is Guha's starting point in the lectures of 1987. He examined what was colonialist historiography, and what was, for Indian nationalists, the agenda for an Indian historiography – why it emerged as an agenda and the impediments to have it fulfilled. An Indian historiography of India depended on the realization, by Indian intellectuals of the 19th century, of two tenets of the modern, rationalist, post-Enlightenment European conception of history: the question of language and the question of power. The overall conclusion is that an *appropriation* (an important concept in Guha's argument) of local languages and of the exercise of power involved in the writing of history could potentially give rise to an Indian historiography of India. This potentiality became an actuality only in the first decades of the 20th century. From *within* the modern conception of history, Indian authors could develop their own history, as long as they paid attention to its linguistic and political aspects.

Linguistically, the modern, rationalist, post-Enlightenment idea of history demanded a narratological structure that did not coincide with existing South Asian narrative traditions. It required a continuous, processual past that was antithetical to the past "made up of discrete

moments recovered synchronically" (Guha, 1988, p. 11) that the British observed Indian subjects mobilizing in their everyday lives. It also demanded "closure", that the past could be sealed up, compartmentalized, and separated from the present (Guha quotes Hayden White for this need of closure in modern historiography; 1988, p. 12). The language and methods of French structuralism influenced earlier works of Ranajit Guha, such as *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (1983), a well-known and relevant book associated with the *Subaltern Studies* project (Sarkar, 1998, p. 87). Having applied a linguistic analysis to historiography, Guha concluded that the linguistic structure of rationalist historiography was not an insurmountable obstacle for an indigenous Indian historiography. In fact, if in Europe historiography and the novel developed practically simultaneously to create a new form of narrative (temporally organized to distinguish past and present and to emphasize the narrator's present), in the Bengali language, "the demolition of the absolute past of the Purana [an epic, timeless past] began with historicization rather than with novelization" (Guha, 1988, p. 34). It is as part of this flourishing of historiography in Bengali that the work composed by Ramram Basu can be understood, as a request from the British administrator William Carey. Guha ponders that this de-mythologizing of India's past did not occur overnight, but it gained momentum throughout the 19th century, to the eventual victory of history (Guha, 1988, p. 33-34). Guha goes on to analyze the narratological differences between myth and history, including the contrast between "the appearance of objectivity or narrative closure" and the "anecdotal mode of story-telling – the mode of Indian *akhyayika*" (Guha, 1988, p. 45), and the imposition of linear time on cyclical temporalities. Romila Thapar analyzes in depth the combination of both forms of temporality in annals and chronicles from ancient South Asia (Thapar, 2018, chapter "Time Before Time").

If the linguistic aspect of modern historiography did not hinder its development, the same cannot be said about the aspect of power. The absence of a radical critique of power, argues Guha, delayed the possibility for an Indian historiography of India in the 19th century. Indian historiography needed to expropriate its past from its expropriators; to do so, it needed to question "Britain's right to rule India" (Guha, 1988, p. 50). The absence of "a critique of the necessity of colonialism itself" (Guha, 1988, p. 56) became the main factor, for Guha, for the lack of an indigenous historiography lamented by Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay. Capturing the ambiguities and complexities of the Bengali writer and civil servant under the British rule, struggling under "the duress of colonial rule, and greatly tormented by the prospect of reconciling duty to faith, discipline to passion" (Sen, 1980, p. 757), Ranajit Guha considered that Bankimchandra himself was not able to provide a new approach to historiography. Although he formulated a concept that related to the exercise of power and its resistance, "*bahubol*, [meaning,] literally, the strength of arms" (Guha, 1988, p. 59), when historicized by Chattopadhyay, such a concept was applied only to historical events in

which Hindus fought Muslims, not the British. It stressed "the Hindu character of that past" and a "purely Hindu identity of that nationhood" (Guha, 1988, p. 62). The object of the force in *bahubol* was neither the British, nor colonialism itself. "By putting *bahubol* in the wrong place in Indian history, that is, by displacing it to the pre-colonial period", Bankimchandra lost sight of a critique indispensable for the construction of an Indian historiography, the "critique of the fundamental power relations of colonialism" (Guha, 1988, p. 67).

In the 2000 lectures, Guha expanded his critique of the modern conception of history: no matter what could be done from *within* it, by force of its inherent limits, the modern, rationalist, post-Enlightenment idea of history was bound to *exclude* large parts of the human experience of being in the world. Therefore, these 2000 lectures did not dialogue with historians preoccupied with writing an Indian historiography of its past, but with an intellectual and multitalented artist who openly discarded the very concept of history at the core of that kind of historiography: Rabindranath Tagore. This change became possible through a further development of themes already present in 1987, such as the relations between language and history, as well as a greater attention devoted to ideas and authors that appear only marginally in the 1987 lectures, especially Hegel and Tagore. The concept of *historicality*, central in Guha's 2000 reflections, is used only in passing in 1987 (1988, p. 45). If, in 1987, the historian was interested in how history as a discourse on the past was introduced in India due to demands of the British administrators, later he traced the source of this concept of history to Georg F. W. Hegel – who, in the 1987 lectures, appears not as an object of critique, but as support to his arguments, providing Guha with reflections on the idea of *appropriation* (Guha, 1988, p. 48-49, p. 57). Tagore also received a far humbler role in 1987 than in the 2000 lectures. Guha's analysis of the difference between history and myth would also become deeper in 2000, as well as his analysis of the concept of *Itihas*, the word used to translate the European concept for history. In 1987, Guha examined works that bear *Itihas* or its equivalent *Itihasa* on their titles (such as Krishna Chandra Ray's *Bharatvarsher Itihas: Ingrejdiger Adhirkarkal*, Kantichandra Rarhi's *Bharatvarshe Ingraj Rajatwer Samkshipta Itihas*, and Rajkrishna Mukhopadhyay's *Pratham Siksha Bangalar Itihas*), but did not delve further into the word *Itihasa* itself. The question ceases to be when and how colonized subjects mastered a "mode of reckoning the past" alien to their culture, and becomes why we are still attached to that mode as it is, when it arguably does not encompass fundamental aspects of our being in the world (Guha, 1988, p. 3). Ranajit Guha thus comes to discuss the limits of the discipline of history vis-à-vis crucial parts of the human experience, moving from a problem in history of historiography to a problem in historical theory.

Hegel's *Weltgeschichte (World-history)* performed for history an operation that was general in post-Enlightenment European knowledge: the superseding (*Aufhebung*) of actual existence into philosophical concepts. It is here that the concept of *historicality* is introduced by Guha: it refers to the "true historical existence of man in the world", and it is superseded "into philosophy of history and the concreteness of the human past made to yield to the concept of *World-history*" (Guha, 2002, p. 3). The concept of *historicality* thus introduces the main issues of the Italian Academy lectures of 2000: the potential gap between a philosophy of history and a *World-history* and "true historical existence," and the fact that this existence is of "man *in the world*" (our italics). The "inadequacy of historiography" becomes the very problem, linking "colonial past" and a "narrowly defined politics of statism" (Guha, 2002, p. 5). The "peoples and nations of the Oriental realm are excluded from [Hegel's] *World-history* because, according to the philosophy that has constructed it, they have not matured fully into statehood" (Guha, 2002, p. 38-39). The political aspect of historiography changes from the recognition of the exercise of power to the assumption that power is the only recognized historical experience – it defines the limits of history, and, as such, those outside such limits. Guha retraces Hegel's thought, specifically targeting the relations between past, present, and future and the role of everyday life in history for the German philosopher (Guha, 2002, p. 20-21, esp.). The essential point in his reassessment of Hegel is how the state becomes the locus of the Spirit in the world – and, by extension, in history –, and how a *prose of history* is born (standing for "reason in history"), to which statehood is the content. This describes "the conversion of the prose of the world into the prose of history in terms of Spirit's progress towards freedom and self-consciousness" (Guha, 2002, p. 32). For Guha, the main point is how *World-history* "turns out (...) to be no more than a region claiming to speak for the world as a whole (...) leaving large chunks of *historicality* out of the plot" (Guha, 2002, p. 34-35).

Hegel's Eurocentric view of history has been the subject of extensive discussions, for instance, in Teshale Tibebu's work (Tibebu, 2011). Andrew Buchwalter, although recognizing it, allows for a "lighter" version of Eurocentrism in Hegel's view of history (Buchwalter, 2009, p. 87-110). Although referencing specific works on Hegel's historical thinking, the present article does not intend to confront Ranajit Guha's reading of Hegel with the extensive bibliography on Hegel's reflections on history. As a critique of the limits of historiography and the theoretical framework that sets them, Guha's argument can be tested against Hegel, but also against general historiography since the 19th century, including his own (Guha, 2002, p. 74), with a few exceptions. Therefore, what characterizes his interpretation is not a reading of Hegel that claims special status amongst Hegelian commentary, but its force as a call to historians to examine the limits of disciplinary history and possible theoretical reasons for their existence in the first place.

As Hamid Dabashi (2015, p. 37-43) and Dilip Menon (2022, p. 2) did more recently, Guha considered the translation of concepts a central problem in thinking theory from the Global South. Ranajit argues that the translation of "history" as *Itihasa* in South Asia changed the latter's original connection to experience, and, therefore, its assumed link to a lived past. *Itihasa* belongs to a tradition of storytelling based on the retelling of stories that began with the instigation of the listeners, not with the narrator and his need to share his unique experiences. In the logic of retelling stories, there is no original against which the copies are checked, explains Guha. "In other words, there has been no experience to validate the claim of this cycle of *Itihasa* stories as an authentic reproduction of some lived past". Therefore, when it comes to the issue of *historicality* in its Western and South Asian conceptions, "the function of the past (...) differs from one paradigm to the other". Although *Itihasa* "has the past as its essence (...) it is a past anchored to no experience in particular" (Guha, 2002, p. 68). The incessant retelling also posits another important distinction between both paradigms: there is no closure in *Itihasa*, as opposed to Western history and novel.

The state-centric foundation of the discipline of history was also highlighted by Priya Satia (2020), as the basis for 19th century historicism. For Satia, British imperialism in South Asia was forged, among other factors, upon the historical imagination of historicism, in particular its future-oriented progressive temporality. The future-oriented historicism had a teleology that culminated in the nation-state as its end. The state embodied all possible political imagination and narrative of history. As a counterpoint, Satia offers alternative political projects that did not have the state as an ultimate goal – forms of political imagination found throughout South Asia in thinkers such as Faiz, Maulana Maudani, Gandhi, and Tagore, among others. Similarly, for Ranajit Guha, one must listen to these voices to find a critique of a concept of history that excluded historicality, the "true historical existence of man in the world".

Historicality must, therefore, be searched for elsewhere, outside historiography, and it is found in literature, "which differs significantly from historiography in dealing with historicality" (Guha, 2002, p. 5). It is here that Rabindranath Tagore appears in a completely different role from that played in the 1987 lectures. Tagore's vision of history owed "nothing to the guild that has reduced the study of the past to a blinkered colonialist knowledge" (Guha, 2002, p. 6). By living close to the limits of language as a creative writer, Tagore could not have failed (and did not fail) to recognize other limits, such as in Hegelian *World-history*. But a different call is issued in these lectures: Tagore's "call for *historicality* to be rescued from its containment in *World-history*" (Guha, 2002, p. 5). Therefore, more than reclaiming a past from *within* the discipline of history, which would enable historians to elaborate alternative historiographies, the issue becomes reclaiming our true historical existence in the world *from* historiography itself.

Ranajit Guha Reads Rabindranath Tagore

Rabindranath Tagore is only introduced in the epilogue of *History at the Limit of World-history*. Guha analyzes one of the last *prose writings* by Tagore to be published before his passing in 1941. The essay, which transcribed in the appendix amounts to less than five pages in Guha's book, is an authorized transcription of Tagore's comments in a dialogue. It received the title *"Sahitye Aitihasikata"*, which Guha translates as "*Historicality* in Literature" (Guha, 2002, p. 76). Speaking about history, Rabindranath assumes an "unmistakably hostile" stance against historiography and historians. But, as Guha clarifies, "Tagore is evidently not interested in taking a stand against history as such but in pleading to a different approach to it" (Guha, 2002, p. 77). Fundamental both to his hostility towards historiography and to his defense of an alternative approach to it is his perception of the limits of historiography: how it shrinks history in a way that excludes whole parts of the human experience in the world from its narrative. In a study of Tagore's reflections on history, Sabyasachi Bhattacharya draws attention to the same May 1941 essay that Ranajit Guha considers to embody Rabindranath's fundamental critique of historiography. Bhattacharya also observes that Tagore contrasted the public events of history with "common people's existence", and pointed to a "history beyond history, at the core of the human spirit". However, Bhattacharya understands this as part of Tagore's philosophy of history and the "balance between necessity and freedom: historical determination on the one hand and the mind's freedom on the other" (Bhattacharya, 2020, p. 276). For Guha, Tagore's criticism extended beyond this, pointing to the very limits of historiographical narrative.

Rabindranath exemplifies his critique with his own history, the history of how he became a poet. For him, his becoming began with childhood experiences of, as Guha translates, "seeing the dew glistening on top of a coconut grove at sunrise, seeing a mass of dark blue clouds gathering in the sky above his ancestral house one afternoon, and seeing a cow licking the back of a foal with the affection usually reserved for her own calf" (Guha, 2002, p. 77). Not one of these experiences would feature in a historiographical account of Tagore coming into being as a poet. They would not count as historical events. But, for him, they "belong truly to the history of his growing up as a poet but do so as a possibility". Unlike a historical reconstruction "from broken shards", deemed "incomplete for want of evidence, what we have here is entirely future-oriented". It "requires no evidence of actualization, nor even of a beginning, but simply the recognition of something yet to be" (Guha, 2002, p. 78). The consequences are decisive: "By displacing actuality in favor of possibility and situating the inaugural moment of his life as a poet *within* a mere tendency of the possible, Tagore is projecting *historicality* into areas beyond the bounds of historiography"

(Guha, 2002, p. 79). These experiences have no *factuality* of the kind historiography works with; therefore, Guha mobilizes the concept of *facticity*, elaborated by Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), to characterize it. Heidegger's facticity involves an "innerworldly" being that perceives its destiny as bound to that of the other beings it encounters in the world. In contrast to the *factuality* of historiography, retrospectively established, *facticity* "must be grasped in advance" (Guha, 2002, p. 79).

In opposition to this reductive view of history (which, at its core, has a state-centric approach), Tagore "argued for a notion of the past big and broad enough to accommodate all of creativity, so that history might fulfill its promise in the plenitude of historicality" (Guha, 2002, p. 90). This view has mainly political history as its target, and it argued for a history that encompassed people's everyday life. Literature can show the way, as in Rabindranath's collection of short stories, *Galgapuccha*. To "recover the *historicality* of the quotidian", Tagore conceptualizes the everyday life by combining "two of the most commonly used words in his language": *pratyahik sukhduhkha*, "everyday contentment and misery".

> Now, the Bangla phrase *sukh*, taken by itself, means contentment, happiness, weal, and so on, while *duhkha* stands antonymically for misery, sorrow, woe, and so forth. However, the compound *sukhduhkha* exceeds the sum of their separate meanings to connote, in ordinary usage, something like the entire range of lived experience. (...) Thus the discourse of weal and woe, *sukhduhkher katha*, has come to signify the concern that characterizes the solidarities of a shared world (Guha, 2002, p. 93).

Ranajit Guha chose to translate *katha* as "discourse". Other possible meanings for the word are "story" and "tale", both pointing to a connection with the broader understanding of *Itihasa* proposed by the historian and discussed previously: a tradition of storytelling. This tradition is indissociable from experience, understood, as already noted, not as the personal experience of the narrator, as in Western tradition, but as the recursivity of the listener's experience, of constantly revisiting and reliving a narrative. According to this understanding, the concept translates the temporality of the repetitive, that nevertheless hides in each iteration the possibility of something new – as in the repetitive time of everyday life, that challenges the historian to find the event (a unique happening) in the seemingly identical stream of day-to-day life.

It is not that historiography had not been alerted to this before, even in Europe. Guha mentions Henri Lefebvre quoting Marc Bloch on the deceitful redundancy of the familiar, and the need to keep an eye open to its *historicality*. However, Guha finishes the book sharing a suspicion that these voices were not truly heard since they have spoken. This is a significant point, since the

argument is not merely about writing a history of everyday life, an enterprise that bore important contributions to historiography since the second half of the 20th century (as in Michel de Certeau's groundbreaking *The practice of everyday life* [2002]). A history of everyday life written from the perspective of *historiographical representation* and its notion of *factuality*, instead of from the perspective of *historicality* and *facticity*, can still exclude large parts of the human experience in (and of) the world. Especially if it remains bound by state-centric approaches, thus speaking of a history of everyday life *in France, in India,* etc. Guha calls for something different with the idea of *sukhduhkha*, which allowed him to complete a thorough re-examination of the concept of history and hence to move further from the preoccupation of a historiography written from an alternative perspective to a concern with narratives written from an altogether different conception of history. Ranajit's language speaks of the *limits* of history, of what is left out, and how it could be grasped from *within* historical thinking.

What stands outside the limits of historiography as we know it is "the concern that characterizes the solidarities of a shared world". *World* is a central category for Guha in the 2000 lectures. *World-history*, a category extracted from Hegel, represents the restrictive view of history. It is the narrative that defines peoples with history and peoples *without history*. The *world* in *World-history* is the Eurocentric, state-centric world. At the same time, it defines the content of the *prose of history*, a narrative that selects and discards from the *prose of the world*. In this second expression, *world* signifies historicality, "the true historical existence of man in the world" (Guha, 2002, p. 3). The conjunction of *world* and *history* in the Hegelian *World-history* actually means, therefore, a reduction of the (prose of the) world to (the prose of) history. Guha perceives what is left out of history through Tagore. The latter's examples of events that fall out of the historiographical notion of *factuality* possess a similarity: they do not own their existence directly to human agency ("the dew glistening on top of a coconut grove at sunrise", "a mass of dark blue clouds gathering in the sky", "a cow licking the back of a foal"). Personal, human aspects do play a role in these pictures (like "his [Tagore's] ancestral house"), but none of the verbs in the sentences has a human subject. Nonetheless, there is a decisive element of human agency in creatively making sense of these moments inwardly, in one's inner world. As Ranjan Ghosh has observed, commenting on "The *Historicality* of Literature" (and quoting it by Ranajit Guha's translation), the "being alone" of the human individual in this creative moment "is also [a] 'being with'", a "power that historical sense generates – the *historicality* built with a cow, donkey, cumulus, the light on the trembling coconut fronds" (Ghosh, 2015, p. 142). Thus, even though *historicality*, as "the true historical existence of *man* in the *world*", is an anthropocentric concept, nothing prevents it from transcending such anthropocentric dimension through a combination of human and non-human faces of life in the world.

In fact, the argument developed by Guha from his reading of Tagore's critique of history paints a more complex picture of the relationship between humans and the world. When discussing Tagore, Guha does not use the expression a *world around* the individual human being, but the phrasing individual *in the world*. And although there is an "appropriative seeing" on the part of the human individual, this seeing is the "material for creatively writing itself into the 'history which we ourselves are'" (Guha, 2002, p. 81, the last commas are a quotation from Tagore). Therefore, another significant difference between Hegelian *World-history* and the creative history drawn from Tagore is that we humans are not automatically written in the narrative of our own history. We must write ourselves into the "history which we ourselves are", and we do so through our creativity – namely, "the images that will distinguish its [the being's] vision from that of others, the words that will be recognizably different from those produced by other voices" (Guha, 2002, p. 81). After all, the main criticism of the Hegelian *World-history* concept was how it *did not* automatically count all human experiences as history. By contrasting this conception of history with Tagore's reflections, Guha shows how the answer may not be in an alternative all-encompassing, universal concept of history, that discovers an inherent human quality shared by all humanity, automatically making every experience part of a grand narrative of history. Even if this quality turns out to be inward creativity (that everyone potentially has), it still demands to be put to use to become historical. It still requires that the individual should "make the world his own", as Tagore did as a poet (Guha, 2002, p. 81).

Ranajit Guha is ultimately contrasting two ways of writing oneself into one's own history. The first is a Hegelian approach, necessarily mediated by the state, and available for those who recognize the state as the ultimate form of human interaction, those who take part in it or control it. The second draws inspiration from Tagore's mode of writing into one's own history, which comes as a process of creatively appropriating the world as one's own and thus attempting to grasp the full extent of one's *historicality*. Therefore, when dealing with the limits of history as a discipline, Ranajit Guha presented an answer that did not prompt historians to search for a new concept of history, one that enlarges itself to encompass all that was left out in the previous notion. Reading and interpreting Tagore, Guha points to a different direction: the question now is how to write oneself into one's own history, instead of expecting that a well-thought idea of history should automatically include everyone.

Dipesh Chakrabarty on the Limits of History as a Discipline

In his early years as a member of the *Subaltern Studies* project, whose intellectual centers were the Presidency College, at the University of Calcutta, and the Australian National

University, in Canberra, the Bengali historian Dipesh Chakrabarty (1948-) studied labor history, focusing on the identification and interpretation of "the agency of socially subordinate people in the making of their own histories" (Chakrabarty, 2021a, p. 2). In the mid-1990s, already working at the University of Chicago, he came closer to postcolonial thought and methods. The book *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (2000), according to Chakrabarty himself, was an attempt to contribute to the discussion of "the story of the globe that European empires, anticolonial modernizers, and global capital had fashioned together" (Chakrabarty, 2021a, p. 2).

A rupture with themes and methods previously pursued by the Bengali historian occurred in 2003, when, shocked and intrigued by destructive fires in Australia, he decided to investigate possible explanations for the climate crisis in that country. This personal interest in the 2003 Canberra fires led Chakrabarty to read Australian environmental historians, introduced him to deep history – the history of humans as a species and of human relationship to other species –, and to the scientific literature on the Anthropocene hypothesis. Such a move eventually allowed him to question the conception of agency adopted and discussed by himself and his fellows from the *Subaltern Studies* project (Chakrabarty, 2021a, p. 2-3; Chakrabarty, 2021b, p. 59-60).

The critique of human agency in Chakrabarty's work is directly connected to his four theses on climate and history, first proposed in English in 2009 (Chakrabarty, 2009, p. 201-207) and later revised and expanded in *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age* (Chakrabarty, 2021a, p. 26-30). Revisiting the theories of Vico, Croce and Collingwood, the author stresses that one of the underlying assumptions of the discipline of history is the shared understanding that humans and their perceptions of social and natural life are the measure for knowledge of both the human and the natural worlds. This human-centered approach would not have been challenged by environmental historians working in the late 20th century either, who wrote what Chakrabarty calls "natural histories of man", i.e., histories of human societies in dialogue with disciplines such as biology and geography (Chakrabarty, 2021a, p. 29).

Scientific literature on climate change, on the other hand, presented a new perspective for the Bengali historian: humans as geological agents. According to Chakrabarty, besides being biological agents, interconnected with the natural world, since the Industrial Revolution and, more potently, in the period of the Great Acceleration (1950-), humans became geological agents, subjects capable of intervening in nature on an unprecedented scale, mainly due to the use of energy-intensive technological innovations (e.g. coal and oil). This new level of agency is, following his reasoning, significantly distinct from human agency as conceived by historiographical approaches that informed his earlier work, such as the theories and methods developed by E.

P. Thompson and the *history from below* movement or Ranajit Guha and the *Subaltern Studies* project. For social history, as envisaged by Thompson and Guha, agency implies autonomous and conscious individual or collective action (Chakrabarty, 2021a, p. 3; Chakrabarty, 2021b, p. 59). Geological agency, on the other hand, refers to "an impersonal and unconscious geophysical force, the consequence of collective human activity" (Chakrabarty, 2021a, p. 3), best understood in terms of the human species.

Aiming to expand historical understanding of human agency, and, therefore, to push one of the limits of traditional history writing identified by himself, Chakrabarty proposes that three levels of human experience, conceived as three interconnected categories, should be considered: "[h]umans in their internally differentiated plurality"; "humans as a species"; "humans as the makers of the Anthropocene" (Chakrabarty, 2021a, p. 15). Methodologically, researching these three categories would imply an additional challenge for the discipline of history, best equipped to study mainly the first of them (i.e. humans as members of societies) and not yet convinced of the need of accessing the distinct archives, skills, and theoretical frameworks constructed for each of these categories as well as of systematically interpreting such interconnected levels of agency.

The assumption that, in the present, humans are capable of conscious individual or collective agency *and* geological agency would imply the coexistence of two different timescales that could be ultimately interpreted as two distinct although reconcilable *regimes of historicity* (following François Hartog's concept, 2015): the *global regime of historicity*, grounded on the chronology of human history and, therefore, on the limited timescale of the globe and its globalization histories; and the *planetary or anthropocenic regime of historicity*, based on geological time, on the inhuman and vast timescales of the planet and its planetary histories (Chakrabarty, 2021a, p. 4, 7-8, 32, 42, 68). The limits of history as a discipline emerge at this point as the inability of traditional historiography to cope with these two regimes of historicity at once. Even more challenging to historians appears to be the task of encompassing not only immense geological timescales into history writing but also decentered perspectives of life in the planet, i.e. points of view derived from deep history that place human beings as just one among the many species inhabiting Earth, inserted in a network of interdependent correlations that make life possible on the planet.

The distinction between *globe* and *planet* is central for the development of Chakrabarty's argument. Reviewing the use of the categories *earth, world* and *globe* by Martin Heidegger, the Bengali historian highlighted how all these terms were employed with reference to human experience and, therefore, comprehended only human history or, at best, human perceptions of nature understood as natural history (Chakrabarty, 2021a, p. 70-1, 74, 78). Such human-centered

approaches to the humanities and to history writing, more specifically, could be subsumed under the categories *globe* and *global history* and retain as primary concern the discussion of unequal power struggles, *within* and between societies, characteristic of globalization histories – in which even the proposal of provincializing Europe made by Chakrabarty in the early 2000s fits.

Developing further his reasoning, the author also stressed that, in his critique of imperialism and world history, Heidegger employed the word *planet* as a human-centered category (Chakrabarty, 2021a, p. 74), a usage the historian intentionally departed from. The *planet* or the Earth System, as a central element of his analysis of the limits of traditional historical thinking and writing, refers to a geological and biological entity with its own vast timescales (belonging to the realm of deep history), and equilibrium dynamics which remained, until the 18th century, significantly independent from human interference. In this connection, a term derived from planetary science – or the study of planets from a comparative perspective –, *habitability*, becomes a powerful concept in repositioning human beings in the interconnected dynamics of life and, therefore, in the history of life on the planet. Defined as a set of conditions that make "a planet friendly to the continuous existence of complex life" (Chakrabarty, 2021a, p. 83), *habitability* is crucial for the subsistence of diverse forms of life on Earth – not only for human life, it should be emphasized. However, the problem of *habitability*, of creating or finding conditions favorable to life on the planet, does not depend on human existence or agency to be solved. This perspective completely shifts the focus of historical thought from the human to the planetary, acknowledging geological and biological processes of long duration crucial for life on Earth that had been so far neglected by the discipline of history.

The *planetary regime of historicity* is also described as an *anthropocenic regime of historicity* by Chakrabarty. The term *Anthropocene* was first introduced by Earth scientists Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer to name the age in which humans became geological agents, and, as such, capable of significantly interfering with planetary dynamics and equilibrium. In terms of chronology, the duration of the Anthropocene is disputed. Nevertheless, the Bengali historian considered that its beginnings coincided with the Industrial Revolution in the eighteenth century and, therefore, with many of the historical processes studied by *globalization histories*. The Anthropocene refers to the extent of "our species' modification of the earth's geology, chemistry, and biology" as well (Chakrabarty, 2021a, p. 7), and, ultimately, to significant human-driven changes in elements of Earth's *habitability*. We acknowledge that the bibliography on the Anthropocene and its impact on historical thinking is extensive. Chakrabarty's work itself is a very reliable guide to it (Simon, 2023, p. 321-325; as a general introduction to the concept and

its historical implications, see Thomas [ed.], 2022). Therefore, focusing on the purposes of this paper, we do not take part in the Anthropocene discussion.

Although, as a regime of historicity, the *planetary or the anthropocenic regime* decenters the human, it does not replace the *global regime of historicity*. The Anthropocene is precisely the period in which human geological agency collapses the distance between the chronologies of global and planetary histories. The great challenge faced by historians in this era would be, thus, how to read together two registers traditionally conceived as irreconcilable: the timescales of capital (global) and species (planetary) histories (Chakrabarty, 2021a, p. 32, 42). Acceptance of this challenge could potentially lead to the emergence of the planet as a "category of humanist thought, a category of existential and, therefore, philosophical concern to humans" (Chakrabarty, 2021a, p. 68). Ultimately, it could broaden the notion of historical understanding. According to the Bengali historian, the emphasis placed by planetary histories on human species as a relevant level of historical agency defies the traditional Diltheyan conception of *historical consciousness*, intrinsically related to a "mode of self-knowledge" which requires experience as its basis. In spite of the fact that belongingness to human *species* cannot be experienced, its inference is not only possible, but increasingly instigated by the anxiety and fear surrounding the contemporary climate crisis. In this connection, species, understood as a non-essentialist category, inseparable of the interdependent collectivities of living and nonliving beings (animal, vegetable, and microbial species alongside technological structures, respectively), might become a powerful category for a new history of humankind (Chakrabarty, 2021a, p. 36-45). The proposal of naming this approach a *negative universal history* does follow Theodor Adorno's understanding that the particular is allowed to express "its resistance to its imbrication in the totality without denying being so imbricated" (Chakrabarty, 2021a, p. 47). However, in the anthropocenic or planetary age, the scope of such history must necessarily be expanded to encompass the non-human, whether living or nonliving.

Dipesh Chakrabarty Reads Rabindranath Tagore

Dipesh Chakrabarty acknowledges that there are no easy answers to the questions posed by the coexistence of the *global* and *planetary regimes of historicity*, and that, besides history writing, they significantly affect the fields of politics and ethics as well. As a result, his book *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age* dialogues with works across disciplines, with authors from different periods and regions, thinking directly or indirectly the main subjects approached by the Bengali historian. When it comes to South Asian contributions to the discussions of the limits of historical understanding, Chakrabarty foregrounded fragments of thoughts elaborated

by Rohith Vemula (1990-2016), a young Dalit student and activist, and Rabindranath Tagore, the multitalented Bengali artist. For the purposes of this paper, we focus on Rabindranath Tagore, the relationship between humans and nature, and the limits of historical understanding, according to Chakrabarty's appropriation of his work (Chakrabarty, 2021a, p. 130-2, 183-188, 197-198, 202).

On the one hand, Tagore's lectures at Oxford University, published as *The Religion of Man*, in 1931, are presented by Chakrabarty as a demonstration of the limits of the notion of a special relationship of mutuality between humans and the Earth (Chakrabarty, 2021a, p. 183-184). Part of a larger tradition of Western (and mainly German) thought (see, for instance, Raoni Padui's work on Hegel's and Heidegger's thinking on nature; Padui, 2023), prominent in the interstice between the two World Wars, promoting debates over the relation between humans and their civilization, as well as between humans and nature, the lectures given by Tagore focused on the critique of imperialism and nationalism. As a man of his age, speaking before the Great Acceleration, and not yet invited to think about human-driven destruction of nature as geological agency, the Bengali artist subscribed to the principles of the "structure of mutuality", or reciprocity: "(a) the specialness of humans, (b) the centrality of humans to the larger scheme of things, and (c) the idea that humans have the capacity to have visions of the whole world as totalities, albeit of different kinds" (Chakrabarty, 2021a, p. 185). In short, Rabindranath, reflecting on the history of the biological evolution of *Homo Sapiens*, remarked that: (a) humans were special because of bipedalism; (b) the world seemed to exist mainly to accommodate human needs; (c) bipedal humans, able to stand erect, had a better view of, and, therefore, a special understanding of, the world (Chakrabarty, 2021a, p. 185-187). Such perception of mutuality shared the assumptions of many humanist texts in which the world was conceived as an empty category, lacking materiality. This is a notion akin to spiritual and aesthetic experiences of landscapes, hiding "from us the catastrophic richness of the contingent histories of geology and life" (Chakrabarty, 2021a, p. 188), and preventing the emergence of a sense of complete otherness of the planet, connected to deep time and its histories.

On the other hand, if an anthropocentric limited perspective of the relation between humans and nature arises from the reading of a non-fictional work by Rabindranath Tagore, Chakrabarty stresses that is not the case with Tagore's poetry and songs, which could offer readers and listeners a glimpse of the planetary (Chakrabarty, 2021a, p.187). However, the historian did not choose a literary work to sustain his argument, but the correspondence between Tagore and Ramedrasundar Tribedi (1864–1919), in 1912, regarding the edition and publication of *Chhinnapatrabali* (Scattered Leaves or Scattered Letters). This collection of letters written by Rabindranath to his niece Indira Debi, from his family estate in Eastern Bengal, in the period between 1889 and 1895, is well-

known for emphasizing and elaborating on "the ancient existential bond between nature and humankind" (Shrivastava, 2020, p. 333, 326).

The exchange between Tagore and Tribedi concerned a sentence that had been apparently excluded by the editor from one of the letters in *Chhinnapatrabali*: a mention of the poet's experience of growing as a tree, which had faced ridicule in the Bengali press. Rabindranath strongly disagreed with such exclusion, because he felt the passage was not merely the poetic expression of an anthropomorphized recreation of nature – a kind of "historicized anthropomorphism, helping the reader imagine the primordial history of the earth's flora" (Shrivastava, 2020, p. 329) – but his very nature voicing itself. He believed to have *within* himself "memories of the entire material world", of the living and the non-living, in which his entire work was grounded. Dipesh Chakrabarty remarked that Tagore's interpretation of his relationship with nature could be understood through Heideggerian lenses, displaying a human-centered consciousness of belongingness to the world (Chakrabarty, 2021a, p. 131).

Nevertheless, the Bengali artist's missive to Tribedi also acknowledged the otherness of natural elements. Although Tagore felt he was able to recognize and carry the memories of the waves in the sea, or of the trees on the earth bathed by the sea, for instance, he was aware that neither the waves nor the trees recognized or remembered him (Chakrabarty, 2021a, p. 131-132). These natural elements were thus perceived as having an existence of their own, which cannot be fully grasped by human mind and sensibility, and, as a result, might constitute a radical alterity to humans.

Recent studies about the work of Tagore, its relationship with ecology and spirituality highlighted that the poet's perception of human belongingness encompassed two dimensions: the linkage with the earth, accordant with the Heideggerian view of *being-with-earth*, based on relationality (Khan and Rashid, 2023, p. 89-90, 94); and the connection with the cosmos, that "transcends the earth both materially and spiritually" (Shrivastava, 2020, p. 325; see also Gupta, 2001, p. 145-146). This second dimension expands the understanding of Rabindranath's views on humans, nature and the divine. The more conventional interpretation of his works as an expression of *pantheist* perspectives on the divine – an acknowledgment of the immanence of the divine, able to encompass and permeate both humans and nature – gives way to a *panentheist* explanation, stating that the divine simultaneously pervades and exceeds the earth, conceived as material and spiritual reality (Khan and Rashid, 2023, p. 98, 100; Shrivastava, 2020, p. 325).

Dipesh Chakrabarty interpreted Tagore's elaborations on his relationship with nature, recorded in the letter to Tribedi, in a secular vein. The recognition of the existence of an entity that stands apart from humans, shared with a panentheist approach, is secularized in the category of

the *planet*, which appears in the missive as a "celebration of his [Tagore's] existence as a human in the cosmos" and a response to the "invitations of the planetary" (Chakrabarty, 2021a, p. 132). As such, Tagore can also offer ways of thinking pertinent to the debate on a *more-than-human* history (concept outlined by Tamm and Simon, 2021), a history that encompasses "all forms of life (multispecies history), extends deep in the past and supports the interaction and integration of multiple time scales (multiscalar history), and takes seriously the role of transformative events and disruptions on a deep timescale (noncontinuous history)" (Tamm and Simon, 2021, p. 214).

The ideas of "planetary aspirations" and "invitations to the planetary", introduced by the Bengali historian in connection with his analysis of fragments of Tagore's works, though not developed further in *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age*, might offer inspirations to face the challenges posed by the coexistence of the *global* and *planetary regimes of historicity*. As discussed previously, to establish a dialogue between deep history and the discipline of history as it has been conventionally conceived, as proposed by Chakrabarty, would mean questioning the resistance to planet-centered categories such as *species*. Rabindranath Tagore's thoughts on kinship with nature – his poetical glimpses of the planetary (Chakrabarty, 2021a, p. 183-184) – could help to bridge the phenomenological gaps of belongingness to human species, once they encourage his readers to imagine what it is like to be part of the larger interconnected web of living and nonliving elements on Earth. Commenting the letter to his niece in which Tagore revealed his experience as a tree, recorded in *Chhinnapatrabali*, Aseem Shrivastava stressed that, while "the evolutionary sciences look for remote evidence, the poet's imagination evokes pictures out of the unvisualized facts of earth's distant pre-human past. Empathy 'shows' what geological history hides" (Shrivastava, 2020, p. 329). Shrivastava's remarks resemble the distinction made by Ranajit Guha between the factuality of the historical sciences, such as history and geology, with their epistemological specificities regarding evidence and knowledge (Cleland, 2001, and Tucker, 2004), and Heidegger's *facticity*, a more adequate way, in Guha's view, to speak of the tendencies and possibilities that Tagore includes as part of history, thus "projecting *historicality* into areas beyond the bounds of historiography" (Guha, 2002, p. 79), as quoted previously. It is part of creatively inscribing oneself into one's own history, which can be applied to inscribing humans into planetary history. Imagination and empathy as exercises preparing for belongingness to the human species and to the planet seem to be the greatest contributions of the Bengali artist for the construction of planetary histories, politics, and ethics.

Concluding Remarks

Ranajit Guha and Dipesh Chakrabarty, coming from trajectories in which the critique of historiography was a constant concern, through different paths came to question the very limits of the concept of history that served as foundation for the modern discipline. The Anthropocene poses a challenge for historians that operates in at least three different levels: our ideas of history, disciplinary history (or historiography), and history as a "mode of comprehension", as Zoltán Boldizsár Simon, following Louis O. Mink's distinction, points out. As Simon notes, this "broadest sense of historical understanding" can continue to exist even if disciplinary history ceases to, in the event of a larger re-alignment of the human and social sciences to face planetary crisis (Simon, 2023, p. 332). For both Ranajit Guha and Dipesh Chakrabarty, examining the limits of history touched on all the three levels mentioned above. Both historians identified crucial limitations of the predominant idea of history in Western tradition, that severely restrained the practice of history as a discipline. On the other hand, both saw, at least potentially, ways of re-imagining historical understanding that could become new foundations for historiography, with Rabindranath Tagore as an inspiration.

As argued previously, Ranajit Guha did not equate Tagore's critique of history with an altogether dismissal of historical knowledge. The artist's plea for a different approach to history (Guha, 2002, p. 77) was understood by Guha as a need for the discipline of history to recognize and encompass *historicality*. For Dipesh Chakrabarty, ever since the publication of the essay *The Climate of History: Four Theses* (2009), the issue of whether the discipline of history could address the planetary crisis also placed the discipline and the modern concept of history underlying it at the center of the debate. The recent "Foreword" to the volume *New Earth Histories*: Geo-Cosmologies and the Making of the Modern World (2023), edited by Alison Bashford, Emily M. Kern, and Adam Bobbette, shows Chakrabarty returning to the issue of the discipline of history. For Chakrabarty, the studies gathered in the volume

> move the debate forward by asking, with special reference to the discipline of history, What can historians of modernity, capitalism, empires, colonies, race, and indigeneity do to historicize the elements of geological or geobiological thought that have come into the social sciences in the wake of this debate? (Chakrabarty, 2023a, p. XV-XVI).

And the answer provided by *New Earth Histories* is positive: the book "provides an almost perfect demonstration of how that may indeed be done in so far as the discipline of modern history is concerned"; the studies in the volume "underscore the intellectual benefits of the historical

method, of writing differentiated histories of modernity and the globe" (Chakrabarty, 2023a, p. XVI). The discipline of history can offer significant narratives on the planetary crisis only by recognizing "the entangled diversity of the worlds that modern humans have made". No single history can suffice, nor a single way of writing history – therefore the need for "a diverse set of narrative, explanatory, and expository strategies". The discipline of history must account for a myriad of "worlds" made by modern humans (Chakrabarty, 2023a, p. XVI).

In Ranajit Guha's reading of Tagore, as discussed previously, the idea of worlds creatively made by humans is central to the concept of *historicality*, which is precisely what is left out of a restrictive idea of history (be it state-centric historiography, or other unifying narratives of modernity). When dealing with the limits of the concept of history, Guha presents an answer that does not send historians in search of a new concept of history, one that enlarges itself to encompass all that was left out in the previous notion.

Dialoguing with Rabindranath Tagore, the historian points to a different direction, away from attempts to arrive at a new universal concept of history. Instead, multiple and creative ways of inscribing oneself into one's own history should become the focus. Expanding on Guha's reflections to consider the category of the planet, and how it could serve as the basis for a new non-anthropocentric history, one could consider that the history of the planet is also a large part of humanity's own history (although, on the contrary, humanity is a very small part of the planet's history). Following Guha, it is not necessary that a new concept of history should emerge to deal with this issue, a concept encompassing a variety of temporalities, agencies, and interactions that Dipesh Chakrabarty has shown to be multiple and variegated, yet relational. Perhaps the question should be how humans can write themselves into planetary history, to which they also belong. What kind of creativity is required to make humans part of a history that does not allocate them automatically? In this connection, could concerns about the Earth figure in "the solidarities of a shared world" that form the *sukhduhkha* Guha found in Tagore's writings?

The reflections presented by Guha on the limits of history as a discipline emphasize the importance of observing not only what is missing in history at this stage of planetary crisis, but also what was excluded from historical thought in the beginnings of the discipline (however variegated those beginnings may have been). In his critique of Hegel, Ranajit Guha speaks of the "inaugural moment of history" (Guha, 2002, p. 17) after the "end of the primordial unity celebrated by poetry since the beginning of time" (Guha, 2002, p. 16): the unity between humans and nature (or, the unity of all things natural). Guha quotes Hegel's assertion that "organic Nature has no history" (*apud* Guha, 2002, p. 17), in contrast to the Spirit (*Geist*), which is time itself for Hegel. For the German philosopher, Asian cultures remain outside of history because they have yet to leave

a state of immersion in nature that, for him, was an obstacle for the Spirit's self-sufficient and free development (Guha, 2002, p. 37). On the other hand, when Guha analyzes Hegel's account of the Indian epics, the failure they denote for the German philosopher is in the realm of the individual. In these epics "man figures as a sort of apanage of the gods", explains Guha (Guha, 2002, p. 38). The individual is not free to develop on its own. Therefore, as far as Asia is concerned, two existential human conditions were excluded from the Hegelian *World-history*: human beings immersed in nature (as to the point of non-differentiation), and human beings subordinated to more-than-human forms of life (in that case, the gods).

These conditions, reassessed in contemporary planetary crisis, have now become challenges for historians. Yet, these may be only a few of the "worlds" that could be (re-) written into history. For Ranjan Ghosh, even the "deep 'past'" can be a part of this "worlding" at the limits of world history, thus freeing "history from the univocality of world history" (Ghosh, 2015, p. 148). Drawing inspiration from Tagore, historiography can get a glimpse of a different framework to think about humans, nature, and the divine or the more-than-human connected to the planet, as Chakrabarty perceived it. Additionally, the need to write oneself into one's own history highlighted by Ranajit Guha refers to discovering worlds creatively made by humans, which only the inhabitants or creators of these worlds can help turn into historiography, thus establishing the basis for multiple, variegated narratives, rather than a single history.

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