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THINKING THE RE-THINKING OF THE WORLD

DECOLONIAL CHALLENGES TO THE HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES FROM AFRICA, ASIA AND THE MIDDLE EAST

Edited by Kai Kresse and Abdoulaye Sounaye

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Thinking the Re-Thinking of the World

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Decolonial Challenges to the Humanities and Social Sciences from Africa, Asia and the Middle East

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We are grateful to all the series' speakers and this volume's contributors for participating in the joint and ongoing endeavour of sifting through and critically addressing some of the most relevant questions and pressing issues in the current research-scapes of our transregional and multidisciplinary (often interdisciplinary) fields of research, and the need for their re-thinking, reconceptualisation, and reconfiguration. Beyond the authors represented here, we particularly thank Claudia Derichs and Nahed Samour, both based at Humboldt Universität in Berlin, who contributed to our discussion series as speakers and who are part of our Berlin-based initiative for an international network of colleagues. Here, on a regular basis, we continue to discuss related questions in joint online meetings – and in more personal meetings, which will hopefully also be more frequent and regular. These discussions, in which our contributors also regularly participate, have underpinned and accompanied the finalisation of this volume.

Our goal is to deepen and further expand these discussions with our colleagues based in Africa, Asia and the Middle East, and ultimately also beyond. For this purpose, while this volume was being prepared, we have been building our initiative, and, together with our colleagues at the Freie Universität Berlin and Humboldt Universität, have gained funding from the newly constituted Berlin University Alliance (BUA) for our network "Conceptual Collaboration: Living Borderless Research Interaction" (co2libri), and the related joint initiative, the annual "Berlin Southern Theory Lecture" (with the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology at Freie Universität Berlin and in collaboration with Ethnologisches Museum), which began in December 2019 and is by now well established, lectures by Felwine Sarr, Prathama Banerjee, and Djamila Ribeiro having taken place and an open access series initiated (https://refubium.fu-berlin.de/handle/fub188/34872).

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Kai Kresse and Abdoulaye Sounaye

Kai Kresse, Abdoulaye Sounaye

Introduction: 'Thinking the Re-Thinking of the World' as Urgent and Necessary Process

However we may want to phrase it, the world, and worlds – in insistent plural – that we as humans jointly inhabit, need to be rethought; and for some time already, such rethinking has been taking place. This is what the current calls for decolonisation demand, and rightfully so. The dominance of a Eurocentric conceptual apparatus, and of Eurocentric analytic languages and approaches of investigation and interpretation in the humanities and social sciences, has not yet been overcome, but has now long been critically engaged, from several angles, schools of thought, and regional perspectives. One needs only mention the eras of independence in former colonies, particularly in Africa and the Middle East, and the formation of national universities in those contexts.[1] But how, and how seriously, has such dominance actually been criticised from outside the western world and Europhone paradigms, given also that postcolonialism has itself been criticised as a particularly Europhone discourse?[2] Postcolonial critique, but also (and perhaps more importantly in the long term) steady work in disciplines such as history, anthropology, literature, philosophy, and religious studies, as specifically grounded in and decisively engaged with texts, people and events, has been questioning the terms, methods, and assumptions of investigation from which Eurocentric approaches have operated, and has partly been able to show the lack of empirical grounding on which such work has been based.

However, for a critique of Eurocentrism to be effective and work meaningfully toward overcoming unjust hierarchies and distortions in the presentation of knowledge, intellectual histories, and philosophies, it is crucial to insist that we need to be specific, and to criticise what needs to be criticised with a sense of good measure. How can a critique of Eurocentrism – and of whatever kind of centrism – be productive in this context of not only entangled histories but also entangled futures? In line with the imperative to be relevant to our time and to the world that is unfolding before us, and at the same time in order to remain critical of epistemic injustice,[3] it is crucial that we avoid the old traps of colonial political regimes, social orders and conceptual imperialism that reduce the world

1 Guèye 2017; Livsey 2017; Holiday 2002; Shami 1989; Gaillard and Waast 1988; Ike 1977; Waardenburg 1968.

2 E.g. Barber 2007; Werbner 1996.

3 Fricker 2009.

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to one single frame. It is also particularly important that we challenge any epistemology that reduces that world to one canon. Therefore, no author, in either past or present, is to be rejected simply for their origin or skin color – and while we are engaged in making accessible, in different ways, the important work of many more authors from around the world who are 'thinking the world' with conceptual and linguistic paradigms that are different from established Eurocentric ones, we should not accept the dismissal or exclusion, because of their origin, language or appearance, of people seeking to contribute to relevant debates. What matters is a focus on points or arguments, how they are brought forward, and how sound they are.

I

The title of this book, 'Thinking the re-thinking of the world,' seeks to signal the relevance and currency of a topic that spans across research in area studies widely conceived, and which concerns the humanities and social sciences as a whole. Here, experienced scholars involve and engage perspectives from within (as well as on) regions, societies, and life-worlds, in Africa, South Asia, and the Middle East, but also from within disciplines, and critically re-assess their potentials and limits for knowledge production on these regions, while also pushing and crossing disciplinary boundaries creatively. The contributors draw on the long-term transregional histories and interconnections of and within these regions in different ways, and engage in critical re-evaluations and alternatives of these designations. Our book title also indicates a pathway towards attending to and dealing with issues and questions that shape current debates on rethinking the world, in different yet complementary ways. In current debates on decolonisation, increasing emphasis is placed on the tendency to privilege certain keywords, thinkers, and assumptions as hegemonic, to the exclusion of many others. There is a danger, then, of yet again overlooking, silencing or ghettoising[4] neglected or lesser known perspectives on how the world has been imagined and experienced (from different kinds of 'elsewhere'), or of side-lining alternative attempts that use different approaches to currently dominant ones when seeking to come to grips with challenges of decolonisation. For example, while thinking with Fanon is good and important, it does not necessarily get us far when engaged in non-Europhone intellectual traditions.

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4 See Santos 2018.

'Thinking the world,' in terms of reflexive efforts that lay out an understanding of and normative orientation within the lifeworlds that people live in (following established genres and intellectual traditions), is taking place everywhere, all around the world. We can find references to, and evidence of this, in discursive and non-discursive forms of mediation, in texts, material culture, performances, etc. If a fairer sense of the equal value of different regional traditions of knowledge and intellectual histories currently existed, much more intellectual energy and economic resources would be invested into mediating and making accessible ways of 'thinking the world' from everywhere, engaging with them and assessing their intellectual contributions and practical benefits.

These ways of thinking the world must then also be taken as potentials for a global human community that consists of inter-reliant and interdependent groups that ultimately need to work together, for the possibility of a global peaceful future. How regions, and particularly marginal and formerly colonised regions, are represented and represent themselves, how knowledge about them is produced (from within and the outside), and how their traditions of knowledge feed into such a production and representation (or do not), matters a lot here. Commenting both on the nature of intellectual debates among African academics in the postcolonial 1970s, and on visions of 'African philosophy,' Paulin Hountondji, a well-known philosopher from Benin, criticised how these debates were dominated by 'extraversion,' i.e. directed at an external (Western) audience as the internalised centre of power. Instead, he argued, it was important for them to free themselves from such self-subjection and develop and cultivate their own debates among themselves, according to their own needs and criteria.[5] Similar dynamics and critical interventions were at work in Middle Eastern and South Asian debates as well, as engaged academics of different kinds were sorting out their visions, rethinking the world in the postcolonial era with practical and political goals in mind.

Developing and cultivating our own debates around shared interests and concerns, among peers and equals based in different parts of the world as a joint endeavour is something we see ourselves engaged in with the production and dissemination of this book. Coming into conversation and regular exchange from different vantage points, regions, languages, intellectual traditions and traditions of academic scholarship is a first foundational step toward a meaningful long-lasting debate. And sharing concerns, experiences, and opinions with colleagues who become conversation partners across the world – as a longer-term process of mutual engagement – is something that we seek to build and endorse,

5 Hountondji 1996; Hountondji 1997.

together with our contributing authors and further like-minded colleagues from around the world. Cultivating intellectual discussions and developing research collaborations while "thinking across traditions"[6] as the outcome of such ongoing processes of jointly re-thinking the world, in order to reassess the tasks and challenges that we are facing as responsible scholars, with obligations in different (and sometimes conflicting) directions – the questionable North-and-South – is to be continued after and stimulated further by the publication of this volume.

II

An acknowledgement of the fact that global structures of academic research continue to be driven and guided by Western interests and Eurocentric key concepts and epistemologies is a central basis of this book. As is well documented, such interests and conceptual frames often subjected other, formerly colonised lifeworlds, to teleological misrepresentations on the basis of Eurocentric conceptions of 'modernity,' 'knowledge,' 'development,' 'human rights,' and even what 'rights' are, and what it means to be 'human' itself. Who is left out in this process? What counts as knowledge? What modes of reasoning and thinking are (can, and should be) regarded as valid, valuable, and relevant? This volume picks up on and addresses such questions with a focus on specific regions and transregional perspectives, and with a view to disciplines and interdisciplinary trajectories, through engaged writings by authors who themselves are largely from, and based in, Africa, South Asia, and the Middle East (or West Asia, as Seteney Shami proposes in this volume).

Critically reassessing these questions and processes is part of what is currently being pursued within the work of decolonial critique. To proceed adequately and effectively, this reassessment needs to be linked to, or embedded within, the relevant disciplinary and regional bodies and sub-fields of knowledge to which it contributes. What matters centrally within this project, and has often been addressed, is a common paradigm shift from a Eurocentric/Westerncentric one[7] to one of a more adequate nature, of 'pluriversality' or the like,[8] accompanied by processes that push the "provincialisation" of Europe and Western perspectives[9] and, at the same time, the "deprovincialisation" of non-Western per-

6 Banerjee et al. 2016.
7 See Moosavi 2022.
8 Tamdgidi, Ciccariello-Maher, and Grosfoguel 2013; Mbembe 2015; Sarr 2019.
9 Chakrabarty 2007.

spectives,[10] as a central part of the conceptual decolonising process. And while these programmatic goals can be quite easily agreed on and declared, the actual processes of diverse kinds of research work (e.g. in terms of regional knowledge, and linguistic, disciplinary and interdisciplinary expertise) feeding into the actual change and reversal of Western paradigms to other, truly decolonial ones, are slow-going by nature, and hard to accomplish.[11]

Our title 'Thinking the re-thinking of the world' (initially used for a series of lectures organised in 2019–2020 at Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient in Berlin) seeks to encapsulate some of the foundational dynamics and processes involved with regard to the conceptual and epistemological dimensions of thinking about decolonisation. Indeed, a number of the publications in decolonial studies use formulations, expressions, and phrases that resonate well with the meanings and associations that we sought to evoke when choosing the title. Let us pick up on some of the examples, while also noting that, due to the nature of colonial oppression and the imposition of Europhone terms, one could (and perhaps should) speak of several layers, or loops, of re-thinking that are relevant here. After all, the forceful imposition of European languages, terms, and Western infrastructures of learning and education followed distorting ideologies and representations, epistemologically violent re-thinking processes that have themselves to be re-thought. This seems reminiscent, somehow, of the way in which Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o has written about the "re-membering" tasks and processes that are a necessary response to violent colonial impositions of "dis-membering."[12]

III

"The world does not lack alternatives," what it lacks is "alternative thinking about alternatives," states Santos.[13] He refers to the fact that the understanding of the world overall far exceeds the scope of Western understandings.[14] He argues that an active engagement in developing such kinds of alternative thinking – in our terms, pathways of re-thinking the world – is itself a condition of possibility for re-structuring or re-ordering the world on the basis of "cognitive democracy"[15] as

10 Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018.
11 See Mamdani 2018.
12 Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o 2009.
13 Santos 2018, 295.
14 Ibid., 296.
15 Santos 2018, 295.

an inclusive approach involving diverse existent epistemologies and conceptual frameworks that have something to offer to this process. Potentially, all different kinds of epistemologies and intellectual traditions can be relevant here, and a range of non-Europhone concepts can take important inspiring roles in intellectual re-orientation for a dynamic 're-thinking' of the world, thinking it in alternative ways and from alternative perspectives, as part of decolonisation efforts (see Pandey, this volume). In this vein, Santos mentions concepts that have already had an inspirational input for alternative thinking and he encourages us to think more with them, citing, for example, the South African term *ubuntu*.[16]

We welcome this invitation, as it points to conceptual resources of diverse languages and epistemologies as relevant and inspirational to think with also for human beings living in very different circumstances. Indeed, references around the world to *ubuntu* (which means being human, being good, morally committed in one's actions) provide one example for such relevance from Africa. As a term that has guided South-African post-apartheid politics and especially its difficult truth and reconciliation processes, *ubuntu* was used prominently by Archbishop Tutu and also by presidents Mandela and Mbeki and their governments, and a central reference point for Biko's humanism, integral to his black consciousness thinking.[17] *Ubuntu* has been thoroughly debated in discussions about African philosophy, personhood, ethics and morality, in and beyond South Africa. Indeed, references to *ubuntu* have shown its value for thinking differently and in alternative ways about what it means to be human, and good, in theoretical but especially also in practical and political dimensions. We, the editors, have ourselves engaged in our own respective research on related East African and West African terms – the Swahili *utu* and the Hausa *boko*[18] – and we think that the relevance of engaging conceptual reservoirs, seeking key concepts of different dimensions of being human, be they political, moral, aesthetic or otherwise, to grounded and impactful work of decolonisation can hardly be over-emphasised.

Drawing attention to the analytical gains of using these and similar concepts, a decolonial perspective, we suggest, could look at them as part of a conceptual reservoir for all to use, as different paradigmatic key terms, drawn from alternative intellectual traditions.[19] As an act of intellectual awareness, such a move would demonstrate not only theoretical alertness, but also a sensitivity to

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16 Ibid., 9.

17 Mbeki 1998; Biko 1978; 2002.

18 Kresse 2007, ch. 5 (excerpts included in Bonavec and Phillips 2009); Kresse 2011; Nassir 1979; Sounaye 2021.

19 See e.g. Wiredu 1996; also Pandey, this volume.

the epistemic intersectionality that characterises most academic and learning institutions, in particular in non-Western contexts. In fact, engaging the world today requires conceptual frames and methodological approaches capable of paving the way for pragmatic intellectual and academic practices that are receptive and open to alternative modes of world-making. Such awareness, pragmatism and receptivity seem to be the conditions for the development of dialogical epistemologies, an order that makes room for, and engages with, all epistemic traditions.

In many contexts, academics are already operating on daily basis in a topological space that requires translations and adjustments as we navigate multiple vocabularies, systems of meaning and epistemologies. Under such circumstances, beyond overcoming Eurocentrism, a more productive decolonial act will then be to start rethinking the world through dialogical frames and epistemologies that correspond to our contemporary academic *topoi* and conditions of knowledge production. In this vein, we commend Rakesh Pandey for his contribution to this volume, in which he discusses in depth age-old conceptual presuppositions of modern Indian thought with attention to specific detail, and linguistic and epistemic sensitivity for relevant Hindi and Sanskrit terms and a view to South Asian intellectual history. Pandey explicitly presents his discussion as a historically grounded programmatic contribution to conceptual decolonisation, which he develops also with the help of recent Western philosophy. Could we then take Pandey's invitation and point to the urgency of working from such intersected conceptual environments, sites and epistemic cultures, which have become ours? One of the key questions is of course: how could a proper and just engagement with the world today overlook the reality of our condition? In our scholarly and academic engagement with the world, we find it important to pay attention to other epistemologies and cultivate a sensitivity to alternative modes of thinking. Even more, to be theoretically sound and to align with current demands in the humanities and social sciences, we might need those alternatives to be conceptually vocal, outspoken and academically articulate.

Our contributors Prathama Banerjee and Rakesh Pandey, in a stimulating and foundational article, have shown how the difficult, thorough, and long-term study of different intellectual traditions (with different languages and conceptual frames) in relation to each other pays off and can bring diverse conceptual approaches into productive conversation. Scholars who seek to keep the whole world in mind while paying attention to the specific details of epistemologies, rhetoric, and arguments, can benefit much from their approach of "thinking

across traditions."[20] In their contributions to this volume, both Banerjee and Pandey work explicitly with this motif in mind. Banerjee does so in a masterful historically contextualised narrative that presents a South Asian alternative conceptual paradigm for thinking the political, namely 'ascendancy,' replacing the need to think with the Eurocentric and ill-fitting (for South Asian contexts) key term 'sovereignty.'[21] Pandey, as mentioned above, goes to great lengths to explain and lay out the conceptual perspective he develops, *through* history, as explicitly decolonial while drawing from old South Asian scriptural intellectual traditions and their key terms.

IV

Complementing Santos' systematic efforts to sketch out pathways for a grounding of decolonial work in epistemologies of the South, Walter Mignolo and Catherine Walsh similarly push decolonial scholarship to work "towards an otherwise of thinking," and also of sensing, believing and doing.[22] This is surely useful, and resonates with our intuitions as well as with multistrands of anthropological research. With a view to language, Mignolo points to historical systematic efforts by colonising Western powers to suppress and silence rich non-European civilisational languages of the times.[23] However, he seems to stay rather silent on non-European languages and their relevance in guiding and leading conceptual decolonisation, or the role of intercultural translation within it, points that are fundamentally important for us, and also for Santos. While himself operating in a Europhone sphere, Mignolo's approach which emphasises 'coloniality' as a decolonial concept,[24] has a productive critical edge to it, as the term expresses insight to, as well as consciousness of, the externally determined character of the life-world as an continuing condition: from the colonial to the postcolonial era, it needs to be challenged and re-dressed from within. 'Delinking' oneself from

20 Banerjee et al. 2016. This article has stimulated some of our discussions here in Berlin, where some research projects have set themselves the task to engage explicitly and adequately with several different regional and linguistic intellectual traditions (see Pontzen 2022; Mahazi: https://www.zmo.de/en/research/mainresearchprogram/age-and-generation/jasmin-mahazi).

21 For a related important contribution by Banerjee in terms of re-thinking the political, see her Berlin Southern Theory Lecture from December 2020, "Time and the Limits of the Political: Anti-Historical Excursions from South Asia" (revised and published open access, as Banerjee 2021).

22 Mignolo and Walsh 2018, 4.

23 Ibid., 113.

24 Ibid., 111.

the grip of coloniality is the pathway that Mignolo recommends as decolonial method.[25] Even though he does not seem to specifically emphasise language use (particularly of non-Europhone and non-colonial languages), we could add that the living decolonial praxis to be cultivated as a liberating response should (and perhaps needs to) include, and can perhaps best be imagined as, a re-orientation guided by alternative conceptual reservoirs to which many social actors then have recourse.[26] This is, of course, something that earlier postcolonial critics, most prominently perhaps Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, but also Okot p'Bitek, had already brought forward and pushed for long ago, from their respective vantage points in Africa.[27]

In another related manner, the need for "rethinking thinking" has been flagged up by Ndlovu-Gatsheni[28] with a view to a contemporary world haunted by epistemic and systemic crises. He characterises this motif of rethinking thinking as a "decolonial move,"[29] which in practice has a lot to do with what Mignolo calls the necessary exercise of "learning to unlearn,"[30] partly in order to re-learn, as a central decolonial practice. This indeed also raises questions for us as differently trained scholars with different sets of disciplinary and methodological expertise – but also personal backgrounds, and particular biographical trajectories and experiences – that qualify our scholarship and research. How far are we, as researchers in the humanities and social sciences, in different ways and on different fronts (regarding discipline, personal background, institutional base, and other factors), separable from (or otherwise representative of) the histories of the institutions and schools of thought that have impacted, taught and trained us, no matter where we are and have been in the world?

While we cannot dwell on this here, it is important to keep our backgrounds and all the particularities that shape us, in view. As scholars, we have an obligation to engage in decolonial work, to redress the impact of earlier sholarship which was either explicitly or inadvertently complicit in a Eurocentric or colo-

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25 Mignolo and Walsh 2018, 125.

26 Note, however, that Mignolo has himself been criticised from the perspective of indigenous „decolonial thinking" from Latin America. Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui criticised Mignolo for the lack of „attention to the internal dynamics of the subalterns," claiming that, by means of the insufficiently complex representations into which indigenous thinkers are sometimes coopted, the practices of decolonisation become „neutralised". The liberating force of the decolonial project would in this way be undermined. See Cusicanqui 2020, 69; 64.

27 Ngugi 1986; Okot 1970.

28 Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018, 23.

29 Ibid., 24.

30 Mignolo 2011.

nising agenda. And in whichever way we do so, we are not free to release ourselves from perspectives and methods that we may have acquired over years and decades of training and professional experience. Perhaps most constructive, and most easily realisable, in terms of a shift to more decolonial (i.e. fairer, more collaborative etc.) approaches and research practices by individual researchers, is the process of self-questioning and the critical re-adjustment of one's research perspective. What can each of us specifically contribute to the overall project, given where we are based and coming from?

To be sure, there are important contributions to be made by all involved. If the colonisation of knowledge affects all of us, in different ways in the North and South (on reservations about those terms, see also the chapters by Shami and Badat in this volume), decolonisation is a task for us all, in different ways. Each of us needs to find specific tasks and pathways for our respective contributions, which may each be conceived of as part of a complex building-site that needs to be attended to in a well-coordinated manner.

For us, being placed in the North also places an obligation upon us to address matters of academic inequality and epistemic injustice, from *here* (the ongoing power centre). It is from here that work towards change for richer and more just representations of the world's traditions of knowledge, and social theory proper,[31] can proceed. Taking this on will ultimately also be working towards grounding/rooting and practicing the humanities and social sciences in a more adequate, plurally informed way.

Having made this point, we can now introduce a more extensive understanding of this volume's contributions. We see here different kinds of projects at work and in progress, partly overlapping and partly complementary. All envisage the project of the decolonisation of scholarship, though they approach and tackle related problems and issues in quite diverse ways. The authors build on long-term records of research, training and expertise, and long-term research commitments to a region, often their region of origin. Some offer specific re-readings of intellectual history (Banerjee, Osha, Seidel, and Pandey) or of sociology as a discipline that needs to be re-thought in order to appropriately take on board demands, positions, and perspectives from 'the Global South' (Al-Hardan). On the intellectual history side, we are introduced, for example, to a conceptual re-take on the key figure for Afrocentric thought, the Senegalese historian and scientist Cheikh Anta Diop, in a re-reading that flags up his relevance and potential stimulation for decolonisation today (Osha). In another re-reading of intellectual history, this time in Iran, we follow a fascinating account of a well-known Iranian scholar

31 See Moore 1996.

who, alongside his expertise in Islamic sciences, was also deeply engaged in Enlightenment philosophy and especially with Kant, whose thought he appropriated and disseminated further (Seidel). Other chapters offer reflections on renewing and re-positioning the field of area studies (for the Middle East, see Shami, for Africa, see Badat).[32] Yet in each chapter, the focus, approach, and other relevant aspects are differently pitched, building on the author's positionality and their previous works and experiences. On the whole, as all the contributions show, the work of re-thinking requires careful and attentive re-reading, but also critical re-writing.

Let us briefly flag some of the most important specific thematic strands, conceptual challenges, and topical foci, as they are approached and discussed in the chapters. Against the background of longstanding critical debates about area studies as problematic[33] interdisciplinary fields that have to be re-thought, reconceptualised and reconfigured, the chapters by Shami and Badat explicitly take on the discussion of the problematic of a regional focus for research on former colonial territories in the Middle East and Africa that continue to be shaken by political crises. How to conduct research on and for Africa adequately and appropriately, under the current conditions of postcoloniality (Badat), whereby Eurocentric measures and criteria continue to dominate the ways in which the continent and its people (and their histories, cultures, societies) are understood and represented to the world? Badat speaks from long-term experience as a former political activist (during the apartheid era), leading university administrator (in post-apartheid South Africa), and former senior decision-maker on research programmes and funding priorities for Africa by the Mellon Foundation. Similarly, Shami engages with the current falling-apart of the Arab world that she had witnessed (in terms of lifeworld and scholarship) on the basis of decades of engagement both as researcher and research council member. The re-orientations both suggest need to be taken very seriously on the various levels of research design, infrastructure, administration, and international collaboration. We add that the other chapters, too, push for a reconfiguration of the centrality of thinkers, concepts, and histories of the regions concerned: Osha, for instance, establishes the value of re-reading Cheikh anta Diop and taking him on as a guiding figure for decolonisation; and Pandey highlights the lead role of key concepts from the

32 On the project of reconfiguring area studies with regard to Africa, see also the large research cluster at the University of Bayreuth, "Africa Multiple" (https://www.africamultiple.uni-bayreuth.de/en/index.html).

33 Mitchell 2004; Quayson 2007.

region; along similar lines, Banerjee pushes for thinking with tropes and paradigms emerging from the regions and societies concerned themselves.

These issues are also linked to the problem of disciplines and their need for substantial and radical internal transformation, reacting to constantly-building internal pressures; as public consciousness and academic debate about the unacceptable dominance of Eurocentric paradigm continue to grow and itensify. This is especially true for sociology and philosophy – two flagship disciplines of Western theorising – both of which are discussed here in case studies of different sorts. Al-Hardan provides us with a critical review of the field of sociology (where the works by al-Atas, Bhambra, Baymeh, and Moosavi have had some impact), pointing to an internal and engaged perspective to pressing demands, important figures, and recent constructive developments – among these are, again, re-readings and re-configurations. These include, as Al-Hardan mentions, the role and value of W. E. B. du Bois as an exemplary figure in a more adequate and truly global sociology.

Philosophy, too, as the most prominent and prestigious discipline (and the most Eurocentric in reputation), is under the same kind of pressures, and engaged in related heated debates. Some years ago, these partly spilled over into the general public, when outrage about the reluctance of philosophers and university administrators to budge from their stance on an exclusively Eurocentric understanding of the history and practice of philosophy expressed itself in the *New York Times* and elsewhere.[34] Interestingly, the same debate was also driven by similar outrage from the other side, by philosophers – Western traditionalists, we should say – who rejected the thought that the term 'philosophy' should be extended to any other regional tradition or school of global intellectual history other than the established Western one.[35] Such ongoing defence of the Western exclusivism of Philosophy (in popular and academic terms) is alarming and indeed disturbing. Still, there have also been developments to the better, towards internal transformation and an inclusive outlook that seeks to give an appropriate account of the diverse regional traditions of philosophy, globally speaking, as part of a re-writing and re-reading of the history of philosophy. A notable dialogical project here, reflecting such sentiments and demands, is Peter Adamson's initiative, *The history of philosophy without any gaps*. This consciously visits and portrays different regional strands of non-Western and non-Europhone traditions

34 Van Noorden 2014; Park 2013.

35 Rejected fiercely by Dabashi 2015; for philology, see also Pollock 2015.

of philosophy (based on podcast interviews that are turned into book chapters) in close collaboration with scholars from and experts on those regional traditions.[36]

We have also seen, over the last two decades, new kinds of leading figures in global Philosophy that represent a more plural and inclusive self-understanding of the discipline. With Kwame A. Appiah as former leader of the American Philosophical Association, and S. Bachir Diagne (whose expertise includes logic, science, mathematics, and phenomenology, as much as Islamic and African philosophy in past and present) as among the most prominent and well-recognised philosophical voices in Europhone publics around the world as much as in Africa, such instances perhaps indicate a more general acceptance of an inclusive global philosophy. However – and this question is central to Seidel's chapter in this volume – how can we most adequately deal with the European tradition of Enlightenment and its historical transregional mediation and appropriation, its translation, and further dissemination, after its classic European representatives (Kant, Hume, Voltaire, and others) have been shown to be racists? Seidel provides us with a fascinating account of an Iranian intellectual, Mīrzā Āqā Khān Kermānī, a late nineteenth century scholar whose thinking was significantly shaped by (in addition to schools of Islamic philosophy) engaging with Kant's Enlightenment philosophy. Seidel, himself trained in Farsi and in Islamic Studies as much as in Western philosophy, portrays the thought and biographical trajectory of this scholar in a micronarrative of global intellectual history that seeks to do justice to complex overlapping strands of different intellectual worlds and traditions. These are present in, and pushed by, a non-Western mediatory figure of Western Enlightenment thought. What, in the end, can such narratives teach us? In Seidel's words, a web of similar transregional micronarratives "provides a means for a decentred intellectual history in which south-south intellectual relations become equally important and must not necessarily take the detour via the Centre (Europe/the North)."[37] As such, he argues, "They may provide a decolonial means for questioning the alleged centricity of the 'Centre.'"[38] Such arguments for an active and critical engagement with relevant aspects, interpretations, and mediations of European Enlightenment as used elsewhere should be taken on board and engaged with further.

Now to the chapters themselves. Seteney Shami's contribution, **"South and North, East and West: Knowledge Circulations and Connections in a Disordered World"** is a perceptive and sensitive discussion of the 'Arab world' in

36 Adamson 2014.
37 See p. 184
38 Ibid.

crisis. This is an engaged, critical, and in the end somewhat hopeful text, about fundamental shifts in the self-projection and self-positioning of Middle Eastern Arabs. Shami explores the idea that a re-labelling of the Arab World/Middle East to 'West Asia' might bring constructive challenges with it, and lead to positive re-alliances and transformations. Shami uses the existential picture of a 'disordered world' given by Amin Maalouf (2011), as a leitmotif for the current situation in the Arab world. Long-standing truths and taken-for-granted realities are disintegrating for many, and crises and inequalities of unseen proportions have created new and disturbing spaces of disorientation. Under such conditions, what kind of perspective, if any, is there for knowledge production, for academic institutions and for youths to be educated as critical citizens within them? Shami suggests that accepting 'West Asia' as new denominator provides opportunities for re-thinking – and re-orienting – the Arab World from within, thus shaping a new kind of transregional perspective, of retraced continuities and historical links in Asia. For Shami, an experienced senior social science scholar *from* and *on* the region, taking on 'West Asia' as a new (re-newed) perspective, for thinking through the current crisis, it is important to assess the possibilities this may bring. In the current and seemingly hopeless scenario of a 'disordered world' – for which Beirut provides the fitting evocative image – Shami sees a chance for widening and re-grounding identity in geographical and transregional terms, as 'inter-Asian.' Yet such a new orientation pulls uneasily Eastward to Asia while also engaging in newly found alliances with others in the 'Gobal South.' Shami's powerful narrative points to the hardship and despair of many, as these issues are approached and re-thought.

Saleem Badat, in his chapter "**Contesting Northern Hegemony in Knowledge-Making in the Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences: Research on, for, with, in, and of Africa,"** provides complementary yet quite different kinds of reflection that circle around inter-related questions of how, and in which particular ways, African Studies widely conceived, and all kinds of Africa-related research, can and should be set up and conducted (anew), so that the interests of, and benefits for, African societies are adequately considered and represented. Badat points to the ongoing dynamics of historical and institutional entanglements in knowledge production relating to teaching and research. These constitute burdens and challenges that, stemming from colonial (and apartheid) histories of inequality and exploitation, have been perpetuated within the systems of and structures of research and higher education. The challenges he identifies may at times seem almost unresolvable. For how could it be possible for Africa (and African research) to catch up in terms of output and results with other parts of the world and, at the same time, fundamentally re-structure research criteria and re-adjust expectations that are regarded as adequate and desirable? Badat

points to the fact that the reflection and resolution processes leading to relevant changes, towards a sustainable long-term change for the better, need to be consciously embraced. These can then be used for timely and responsible decisions, toward innovation and transformation that are supported from within.

Prathama Banerjee's chapter, **"Sovereignty and Ascendancy: South Asian Reflections,"** as we said above, provides an example of the programmatic exercise of "thinking with traditions."[39] She provides us with a contrasting picture of Western political thought, which has been centred around the notion of 'sovereignty.' This concept, as she points out, has distorted scholarly understandings of South Asian political principles, subjecting the observation and analysis of South Asian politics to an alien framework and perspective. This, says Banerjee, has hindered scholarship until now, to understand and take on board properly the ways and criteria by means of which traditions of South Asian politics were conceived, implemented and practiced in the past. As an alternative and more adequate paradigm, Banerjee works out the principle of 'ascendancy,' which, in her view, has crucially shaped the dynamics of governance and political power in precolonial South Asia. She does so by means of careful attention to South Asian intellectual history, seen in relation to historical sources and accounts of rulership, politics, and power relations. Working through the precolonial Sanskrit and Persian models of royal power in South Asia, organised around the "two central terms *artha* and *daulat* – in Sanskrit and Persian respectively,"[40] she notes that one shared central aspect here was the co-constitutive character of the political and the economic as elements for rulership. In contrast, the Western paradigm has been based on a binary separation between politics and economics, and state and market, an analytical framework destined to distort actual South Asian political realities and practices. 'Ascendancy' as an alternative and endogenous conceptual paradigm, according to Banerjee, can be brought to bear more adequately for an understanding of rulership, due to "its inescapable connotation of contingency and change as constitutive of political authority."[41] As a paradigm that captures the relevant moving dynamics at work, thinking with ascendancy (and thus using a more adequate alternative understanding from the region) "may help us rewrite not just regional but also global histories of political thought,"[42] for such new paradigms can also be used further and applied elsewhere.

39 Banerjee et al. 2016.
40 See p. 104.
41 See p. 105.
42 Ibid.

Anaheed Al-Hardan's chapter, **"Knowledge and Power in Sociology: Colonialism, Empire and the Global South,"** provides a critical overview of recent dynamics in the discipline in sociology. Al-Hardan discusses contributions and approaches from within the discipline that have, in recent years, helped to re-shape sociology more toward a dedicated anti-colonial endeavour, building (and counting on) the inclusion of theoretical contributions from the global South. This makes the (often invoked but rarely practised) project of a proper 'global sociology' more tangible and relevant. Al-Hardan's analytical and conceptual focus raises, in the end, the following relevant questions: "What kind of theory and theorists must we invoke, from what locations, and for what purpose, if we are invested in a self-consciously critical social science and sociology that understands colonialism as central to its own making, and one that we can continue to teach as relevant across the world?"[43] As she seeks to build an "anti-colonial social theory,"[44] she pushes for further critical engagement of sociology with power and knowledge relationships, particularly along the lines of recent innovative approaches (by figures like Bhambra, Meghji, Moosavi, Prashad, and others), which have centrally engaged three themes: "the political economy of the circulation of global knowledge, the question of geography in the generation of social theory, and the question of colonial and postcolonial theory in the social sciences."[45] Her chapter not only provides us with an insight into the making of sociology as a discipline, i.e. a particular settled knowledge domain; it also inspires us to look differently at academic fields and their making.

Sanya Osha's chapter, **"C. A. Diop's Decolonising Historiography: A Re-Reading of *Precolonial Black Africa* Today,"** invites us to think through the particular case study of an influential African intellectual, the famous Senegalese Afrocentrist, Cheikh Anta Diop – whose influence, Osha seems to argue, could and should have been much bigger and more widely felt both within academia and far beyond, in the (pan)African popular consciousness, across the continent, and in North America. Osha embarks on the re-reading – re-thinking – of Diop's book *Precolonial Black Africa* (first published in 1987), to show how this general approach to the narrative of an Afrocentric history is cogent and convincing, and that it does indeed "resonate beyond the customary Afrocentric circles."[46] Osha sees "a powerful decolonising tendency"[47] reflected in Diop's writings and activ-

43 See p. 123.
44 Ibid.
45 Ibid..
46 See p. 129.
47 Ibid.

ities. Yet while his famous and wide-ranging claims about the African origins of ancient Egyptian civilisation (and by extension, Greek civilisation) had much impact on wider ideological frameworks and debates in African history and African philosophy, the academy largely resisted taking up his work and engaging more thoroughly with it. Through his commentary on Diop in his exercise, Osha urges us to re-engage with this wrongly neglected writer. He shows how Diop's explorations of Africa's precolonial history, especially e.g. of the Islamic character of the early West African kingdoms Ghana, Songhai, and Mali, known to be powerful and wealthy far beyond their boundaries at the time, offer themselves to instil pride and confidence in African readers. "All of these ideas debunk the standard Eurocentric notion of an Africa without history, culture, or civilisation."[48] What Diop has left us, and particularly Africans, says Osha with admiration, is "an oeuvre of affirmation and agency, of significant and noteworthy black presence, and a rebuttal of severe exclusionary Eurocentrism."[49] This, Osha argues, should be consciously taken up and used for the current decolonising agenda.

Roman Seidel's chapter, **"Decentring the Grand Narrative of the Enlightenment: The Transregional Micronarrative of Mīrzā Āqā Khān Kermānī's Writings in Global Intellectual History,"** has been commented on above already. This important, refreshing, and detailed narrative of the biographical trajectories and intellectual entanglements of a nineteenth century Iranian scholar who had dedicated himself to European, and especially Kantian, Enlightenment philosophy provides us with an important example, especially when pursuing a decolonising agenda. Seidel shows us how it is worthwhile to explore, with attention to detail, the attraction that some European Enlightenment thinkers and texts may have had for thinkers and societies in very different contexts. Some of them were eagerly read and engaged with, and appropriated and disseminated further in altered forms and ways that differed from the original author's intentions. On the whole, Seidel's chapter proposes "a decentred take on both the history and the idea of the Enlightenment, which may open up pathways to re-think the history of Enlightenment."[50] This, he also sees as a means to build "a decolonial perspective towards multiple entanglements in intellectual history."[51] In other words, working with micronarratives of this kind, which offer an insight into specific kinds of entanglements, offers us a perspective to build and contribute to deco-

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48 See p. 137.
49 Ibid.
50 See p. 156.
51 Ibid.

lonial thinking. Indeed, Seidel's is a novel way to examine the Enlightenment as an intellectual moment and style. Taking seriously the diversity of intellectual traditions, genres and practices, his contribution calls for openness to the actual historical entanglements, differences and nuances of the world, and also to questions about how to organise accounts adequately, in epistemological, social and cultural terms. With a view to Kermani himself, Seidel asks another intriguing question, which we would like to flag in conclusion: "As a thinker in his own right, is it adequate to label Kermānī an Iranian, Middle Eastern, transregional or global protagonist of the Enlightenment?"[52]; is he all of these, or none?

Rakesh Pandey's chapter concludes this volume. His thorough and detailed essay **"The *Pūrva-Pakṣa* of Modern Indian Thought: Plurality of Universals and Humanistic Knowledge"** constitutes a substantial and multifarious project of thinking across traditions. It consists of a combination of a programmatic philosophical treatise toward decolonisation from South Asia, including a deep reading of intellectual history, conducted with a commanding sensitivity for the relevant South Asian language usages, with a thorough and sophisticated discussion of recent debates in mainstream ('Western') philosophy. Building on his introductory discussions, he frames and justifies his argument about the usages and the kinds of conceptual relevance that *pūrva-pakṣa*, i.e. presuppositions (perhaps also assumptions) in early modern Indian thought have had. On this basis, he takes us along to explore the wider (ongoing) benefits of thinking further with these sets of conceptual tools. This chapter is all about the exploration of unique "intellectual resources beyond the Eurocentric traditions."[53] At the same time, Pandey presents, as he says, "an attempt to reflect upon the possible frame of decolonial thought by addressing the *pūrva-pakṣa* of the three realms of human intellection, speech, and sociality, drawing upon their diverse historical and cultural genealogies in Indian intellectual traditions."[54] For him, doing so provides a new basis to imagine new, decolonial forms of humanistic knowledge grounded in South Asian intellectual traditions. These may be brought to bear in order to fend for new political (and other) visions and intellectual engagements in contemporary South Asia and beyond. Pandey's contribution is surely an act of translation that illustrates how different epistemic systems and languages can be put into conversation, but also points to the challenges that await us all, especially in terms of training, skills, and expertise, as we move to dialogical epistemologies.

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52 See p. 183.
53 See p. 191.
54 See p. 222.

In conclusion, "Re-thinking" ...

Wrapping up, we can say that the intersecting themes and discussion offered in this volume will, in effect, contribute to processes of decolonisation and the overcoming of Eurocentrism. And with reference to Chakrabarty's project of 'Provincialising Europe,'[55] we think that enabling our readers to think the world, the human, the social, and the political through patterns that are different from the established vantage-points provided thus far by the humanities and social sciences is a crucial asset for future research and academic dialogues. Other alternative approaches, ways of thinking, vocabularies and turns of phrase need to be understood, translated and made accessible to wider audiences. Only then can they be used as new (i.e. newly appropriated) paradigms to think with and ultimately re-think the world.

For that reason, and to fully decolonise, our academic work should not consist of mere decentring. Building bridges and creating the conditions for effective dialogical conversation should be one of our main goals. Keeping this in mind, we caution that decolonialisation must not be simply about discarding regimes of knowledge and epistemologies we refer to as European or Western. More importantly, our work should be (also) to challenge the false claims of universalism we have discovered in those regimes and dismantle them, also in light of other alternatives, and possibly alternatives from elsewhere that themselves make universal claims, be they termed local, indigenous or pluriversal. It must not be about mere systemic decentring, but more about paradigm recentring, helping us overcome cultural narcissism[56] and exclusive nationalisms that have marked both European colonialism and the exclusive nationalisms it has directly or indirectly produced.

Rich and vivid debates and a vast number of publications have ensued over the last ten to fifteen years about the features and demands of, and for, "Southern theory"[57] and "theory from the South."[58] This volume and its contributors build on these debates, but in their diverse and original ways also show that thinking and theorising is perhaps, more often than not, entangled and situated 'across' and 'between' positions and traditions, ambivalent, fluctuating and mediating, rather than deeply rooted or clearly localised. In our own research and institutional contexts, we, as editors, have pushed for and participated in initiatives that

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55 Chakrabarty 2007 [2000].

56 Mbembe 2016.

57 Connell 2007.

58 Comaroff and Comaroff 2012.

bring more public attention to thinkers and theorising from the "global South".[59] However, as scholars who have long engaged in related fields while coming from different regional and academic backgrounds – from Germany and Niger, and both with doctorates from the Anglophone academic world – we would like to draw attention to the relevance of the slow and steady process of privileging substantial accounts (e.g. different intellectual histories or relevant thinkers expressing themselves in non-European languages). In our view, the value of such contributions can hardly be overstated. It is this kind of (slow and difficult) work, with texts, and with people who are embedded in other linguistic and intellectual traditions, the work of exploring, collecting, and translating, that will ultimately provide the alternative thinkers and textual sources from elsewhere that are called for, for us all to think with.

Before concluding, it is appropriate to reiterate what may be obvious but must nonetheless be said: the systematic framing of many of the relevant issues here in terms of a North/South divide can be reductive, reproducing the colonial order we reject and foreclosing the very possibility of a decolonial collective endeavour (see also related critiques in the chapters of Shami, Badat). The epistemologies of the South, as we term them, are not always and necessarily separate from those from the North, if this mapping can be used at all. Conceptual universes and traditions of thinking, and the kind of epistemologies we need today, can hardly operate in dichotomic characterisations of reality. By their nature, the epistemologies that decolonial project should prioritise must transcend rigid understandings and representations of the world. First, because a map is not territory, as Smith pointed out;[60] and second, because concepts travel and may over time become de-linked from the very context that produced them, appropriated in other contexts and yet continuing to be relevant to our work of critically engaging the world.

As we indicated above, we also need to respect individual profiles and agendas of researchers, in addition to seeing them linked into networks and engaging in collaboration. Researchers need freedom and intellectual space for their individual work to develop and be productive. The specific biographical

59 For a most recent publication, see Kresse and Nyarwath 2022. Institutionally, see the annual *Berlin Southern Theory Lecture*, jointly organised by ZMO and the Anthropology Department at Freie Universität Berlin; or the 'co2libri' initiative, a Berlin based international network of scholars in the humanities and social sciences with the goal of facilitating and cultivating debates and discussions, with a view also to collaborative research practice between global North and South (funded by the *Berlin University Alliance*); 'co2libri' stands for 'conceptual collaboration: living borderless research interaction.'

60 Smith 1993.

trajectories of education and training that underpin their work cannot be easily subsumed to categories of 'North' and 'South.' Indeed, such trajectories are the outcome of complex pathways and intellectual histories, and diverse interests in reading and research. What we would like to stress, nonetheless, is precisely the need for rethinking the institutions and settled knowledge systems that have shaped our trajectories, whether these institutions and systems are inherited from colonial regimes, from rapports of subjugation, indigenous epistemologies or whatever order that made the imbalanced world the way it is. We understand that South and North are categories to which we cannot reduce individual authors and thinkers. South and North are signposts that point – specifically in these times of enduring inequalities – to locations (institutional, political, etc.), as well as to relationships, relationalities, imbalances, and conceptual subjugations that inform academic and scientific knowledge-production, which need to be addressed and overcome.

To end this introduction appropriately, as a continuous beginning (which it is): as the Swahili say, dear readers, 'knowledge/learning has no end': *elimu haina mwisho*.

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Seteney Shami

South and North, East and West

Knowledge Circulations and Connections in a Disordered World

Where do we stand today after several decades of reflecting on prevailing and changing knowledge hierarchies and circulations? From the perspective of the Arab region, this essay will discuss geographies of knowledge production on two levels: conceptual and infrastructural. Conceptually, what is the promise of deliberations on decentring, globalising, and decolonising knowledge? Secondly, what kinds of infrastructures of research and knowledge production are implicated in such conceptual agendas? Finally, what emergent geographies of knowledge hold promise for transcending prevailing categories of East, West, North and South?

I begin with the idea of a disordered world, move to a discussion of conceptual and infrastructural conditions of knowledge production from the 'Global South,' and end with some thoughts about knowledge at risk. Thinking through the current disorder of the world leads us to question (once again, and under different circumstances) the cardinal directions that have for so long shaped and configured knowledge production. This rethinking confirms and enhances postcolonial critiques of 'East/West' and the promises of transregional perspectives. It helps us understand the frictions that productively allow critical and feminist voices to emerge and reshape understandings of power and positionality in different locations. However, it also questions premature celebrations of the 'Global South' as a source of theory and decoloniality, especially when this assumes a fixed geography and pre-set starting points of critique. The disorder also extends to the current state of knowledge institutions, and points to the emerging political economy that is underwriting profound changes in knowledge production, and the risks that are entailed in them.

Disordered World

I borrow the term "Disordered World" from Lebanese/French author Amin Maalouf's book of the same title *Disordered World: Setting a New Course for the Twenty-first Century*. He opens by stating "We have embarked on this century

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without a compass."[1] The French version of the book was first published in 2009, while the English version, with a new foreword, was published in 2011, at the crest of the wave of uprisings that crashed across the Arab region in that year. It is a book published at a seminal moment in the region. It simultaneously looks backward and forwards to understand the falling-apart of systems that, a few years before, appeared to be self-propagating and enduring, and to find a route to a better future. Maalouf's book was published before the wars and civil conflicts and the casualties and population displacements that are now tearing apart half, or more, of the countries of the region. And both versions came out before the second wave of uprisings that engulfed Algeria, Sudan, Iraq and Lebanon in 2019.

Maalouf's representation of the unfolding disorder, *le dérèglement du monde*, succeeds, as the Arabic saying goes, in "putting its finger on the hurt." It poignantly identifies the many hurts wrought by capitalism and its globalisation. Rather than offering a balm – it presses on the hurt, and increases the pain. The book describes, with a novelist's eloquence, how Islamism, Nationalism and Marxism all failed to produce the needed socio-political imaginaries, or to meet the practical needs of the region in order to achieve the cultural, social and political dignity (in Maalouf's terms) sought by the peoples of the region. He describes the disarray created by the demise of meta-narratives, and the devastation created by the predatory capitalisms of our times.

Maalouf writes with a novelist's intuition rather than a sociologist's precision, and fervently wishes to hold on to the ideas of civilisation and Europe and the 'West'[2] or at least some platonic version of these notions, if not their empirical realities. He retains his trust in elites, culture, and education as leading the new way and sculpting the new course he seeks. In this, Maalouf reflects and reproduces a certain type of Enlightenment project referred to as the 'Nahda' in the Arab Region,[3] and falls into describing at least some of the disorder as a 'clash of civilisations,' however much he attempts to nuance this formulation. In the end, he glosses over many hierarchies and inequalities, and dynamics of centre, periphery, and marginalisation that the disorder represents and also creates.

The disorder Maalouf depicts requires us to let go of East/West as cardinal points that guide moral compasses and ontologies. I would argue that this experience should make us equally distrustful of replacing them with new fixed geographies, that of 'South' and 'North.'

1 Maalouf 2011, xxi.
2 Ibid., 19.
3 See Hansen and Weiss 2106.

Conceptual Terrains

Let us revisit the conceptual terrains and problems arising from structuring argumentation and seeking counter-narratives in terms of East and West. This deeply entrenched binary comes with insidious meanings and layers. It is also one of the main limitations of many of the critiques of Orientalism, not as method, which is deeply important and significant, but as geography. There has been important work on where and how the line between East and West was drawn at different times, for example, Maria Todorova's illuminating work on the Balkans as 'the dark side of Europe' and as 'the Orient within.'[4] However, much more could be done in this vein to show not only the shifting and blurry lines between East and West, but also how the focus on where and what the Orient is was a necessary project for a simultaneous making of the West.

Are the same dynamics at play when it comes to notions, constructions and geographies of North and South? Are these terms as Janus-faced as 'East' and 'West'? East and West look away from one another, but are eternally conjoined at the core. In Roman religion and myth, Janus is the god of beginnings, gates, transitions, time, duality, doorways, passages, and endings. His two faces look simultaneously to the future and to the past.[5]

Do North and South invoke the same difference and conjoining? It seems to me significant that usually we say East/West – thus East comes first and defines the West. However, we usually say North/South. Thus, it is the North that identifies and makes the South. East has agency, however much it is subordinated and othered, whereas South appears to be a byproduct. We read about 'Eastern philosophy' and 'Eastern Religions,' for example, but South is not seen as having the same coherence or autonomy of self and thought. It is a blank slate on which the coloniser has written as he wills. In response, she, the colonised South, speaks back and demands to create her own identity and knowledge, and, sometimes more problematically, her essence. As such, theorising or even speaking from the South is less foreshadowed and potentially a more emancipatory project than speaking from the East.

At an African-Arab School on Theorising from the Global South,[6] the discussion showed both the potential and the difficulties of dialoguing across many

4 Todorova 2009; see also Hentsch 1992; Hentsch 2009.

5 Holland Gaithwaite 2020.

6 Organised in October 2019 by the Arab Council for the Social Sciences, the Center for Indian Studies in Africa, Witwatersrand University and the American University in Beirut. Faculty included Syed Farid Alatas (National University of Singapore), Mjiba Frehiwot (University of Ghana),

divides, even when united in spirit and goals. The School was innovative in bringing together young researchers from African and Arab countries and its convening coincided with the first week of the Lebanese revolution[7] that brought more than 1.5 million people to the streets in a country of 4 million. For the participants in the School, this created a context of excitement and shared hope, but also divergences, as participants debated the limits of academia versus action, of voyeurism at a time of conflict, of what engaged scholarship means and what forms it takes.

Several different but complementary approaches to theorising from the South were presented at the School. Dilip Menon's methodological interventions sought decoloniality through contemplating words from indigenous languages across the South, not to be used to discover the essential indigene, but rather to be turned into concepts for an alternative system of knowing.[8] For Syed Farid Alatas,[9] South is not a place or geographic location, rather it is a subaltern form of knowledge that resists and seeks autonomy from Northern hegemony. And centrally, for him, what makes this knowledge decolonial is that it must necessarily be linked to democratisation in the South, and to speaking against narrow state, nationalist and sectarian agendas. For Mjiba Frehiwot, an important effort was to recover a moment of Pan-Africanism and Third Worldism through listening with contemporary ears to the words of Nkrumah and Nyerere, and practicing a politics of citation that privileges writers from the South.[10] For Anaheed al Hardan, decoloniality is built on a contemporary discovery and reading of Afro-Asian solidarities in the time of Bandung, while acknowledging their limitations.[11]

The presentations and discussion showed that theorising from the South can have different starting points, different trajectories and multiple goals. Edward Said, in his book *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (1985), explores the importance of where and when one 'begins' a narration. The ways in which South-South encounters of the past present a 'beginning' for contemporary emancipa-

Anaheed al-Hardan (American University of Beirut) and Dilip Menon (Witwatersrand) as well as 20 African and Arab junior researchers from 12 countries.

7 In this text, I call this eruption a revolution, for it was experienced as such at the time, and held the promise of meaningful transformation. The complex politics that emerged and diluted the movement, as well as the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic in emptying the streets, is beyond the scope of this paper.

8 Menon 2022a; Menon 2022b.

9 Alatas 2019.

10 Frehiwot 2016.

11 See the project led by al-Hardan at the American University of Beirut, "Afro-Asian Futures Past." https://www.aub.edu.lb/aafp/Pages/default.aspx, accessed January 2, 2022.

tions is important, but so is understanding their limits and, indeed, constraints. Recovering Ibn Khaldun as the originator of Sociology was a meaningful project that animated a slew of writing in the Arab region in the 1980s in an attempt to indigenise the social sciences.[12] This was followed in the 1990s with projects on the Islamisation of the Social Sciences,[13] which created a number of institutional infrastructures. What accumulations and advances in our thinking do these past projects perform: Do they produce canons? Do they produce intellectual genealogies? Do they, as one of the participants in the School asked, produce heroes? Given these questions, it is not surprising that the decolonising and decolonial project, or rather projects, have a strong pedagogical thrust – questioning curricula, masterworks and forms, and practices in the reproduction of knowledge and metanarratives.

A second point concerning the conceptual terrain that we are trying to traverse is that a disordered world leads to disordered words. Beginning this reflection with the idea of a disordered world leads me to present some disordered words rather than a smooth, calibrated text. It is a problem when language becomes paramount over meaning, and not only makes meanings opaque, but actually obscures them. We recall many wonderful texts that emerged in the 1990s, celebrating the end of the Cold War and the advent of a globalisation that was to be all-inclusive, and where people across the world would be freed of the tyranny of territory, location and collective identity. These texts, inspiring as they were, and filled with a promise of emancipation through unfettered circulation, suffered from a hyper-articulation that often became an obfuscating mechanism – inspiring but also masking – giving false hopes concerning rewriting the world. Words have power, and knowledge helps to rewrite the world. However, this rewriting needs to find ways of acknowledging the friction, brittleness, uncertainties and improvisations inherent in the world. This acknowledgement implies that these new ways of thinking and writing will necessarily need to be disordered.

One of the inspiring video clips on social media that came out during the 2019 Lebanese revolution featured a representative of a feminist organisation explaining that, as a feminist in a situation of revolution, she lives many contradictions, and that this state is in fact a feminist state of being. A particularly thought-provoking example she gave concerned her support for a chant that became the rallying call of the revolution, directed at the foreign minister. The chant played on a well-used vulgar curse referring to the minister's mother. She explained that she could chant this vulgarity with full conviction, while also pro-

12 See Mursy et al. 1987.

13 See Abaza 1993; Abaza 2002a; Abaza 2002b.

testing using women's bodies as an expression of disgust and venality. The chant "My vagina is not a curse" was loudly heard in the squares of Beirut during those weeks. The speaker gave many examples of living in contradiction as a condition of her feminism and femininity. She lives in disorder. And she demands that we accept this, and that it is productive.

The feminism at the heart of the 2019 Lebanese revolution was striking. This was not because the mere presence of women in the streets was somehow new, an infuriating and condescending observation widely circulated in global media at the time, obscuring the long history of women in the streets of the region; one only needs to think of the public roles of women in Algeria and Palestine and Kurdistan in contemporary times. Historically, through riots and public protests in eighteenth and nineteenth century Aleppo, Cairo and Damascus, women remonstrated with both the state and their menfolk.[14] Such remonstrations were echoed in the Lebanese revolution.[15] The main slogan of the revolution was "All of them means all of them" – referring to the rejection by the demonstrators of the whole political class, regardless of sect or political orientation. This has produced another variant for women: "All of them means all of them, and my husband is one of them."

A revolution against patriarchy was at the heart of the Lebanese revolution, from the call for women to be able to pass on their nationality to their children (when the husband is non-Lebanese), to calling for reforms in personal status laws governing marriage, divorce and custody, to protesting sexual harassment in all spaces, including the space of the revolution itself. Typically, there were voices saying that these are side issues that should not take up space in the revolutionary square, but there was equally a clear awareness that gains made against patriarchy were gains made against the sectarianism and corruption of the state and its institutions.

Feminist critique has always been born out of disorder and friction, even in 'stable democracies' (if one such state still exists). Feminist voices speaking from disruption and violence are transformative, even if the struggle to be heard is interrupted or muffled. Let us recognise and respect the productive disorder of words. Words that do not aim at completeness or unity, but recognise loose ends and compromises, and are open-ended: inclusive of roads and thoughts not yet taken or followed.

14 For example, see Meriwether 1993.
15 Equally in Iraq, Algeria and Sudan in 2019 and in the earlier uprisings of 2011 across the region.

Infrastructural Contestations

The importance of the infrastructural in knowledge production cannot be overstated. Ignoring the centrality and formative power of the institutional modes and mechanisms and practices through which thought is shaped and formed and implemented is itself part of the abstraction of the intellectual from the real, the dislocation of praxis, the dismemberment that takes place when we separate thought from action. Edward Said described Orientalism as a 'guild,' and indeed it may be fruitful to extend the metaphor to all forms of knowledge-making within their institutional frameworks.

The famous quip that "academic politics is the most vicious and bitter form of politics, because the stakes are so low" is attributed to a number of authors. Of course, as the reserve army of adjunct instructors, and the legion of un-unionised professoriate and faculty and workers in liberal arts colleges that are closing down, knows, the stakes are no longer low. And the stakes for the subjects and objects of research are not low either, as knowledge systems powerfully, if sometimes indirectly, enable means of oppression and control.

When we consider knowledge production about East/West, North/South, there is remarkable continuity and resilience in university systems of knowledge production, the protection of academic territory through disciplinary specialisation, and in other ways through which the self and other are produced and reproduced. How to organise knowledge about 'the rest of the world' and divide it into units of study, are enduring intellectual and organisational problems for universities, not least when the very structure and future of universities may be at stake, for better or for worse.

In the North, representing the world is a constitutive problem of universities, whose identifying ambition is to encompass the whole of human knowledge.[16] This has taken many forms over time. The 'Civilising University' served as a repository for artefacts and expertise on the rest of the world, like its sibling institution, the museum. Universities regarded themselves as guardians and teachers of civilisations, as instantiated in languages, literary and philosophical texts, and objects of art or utility. The 'National University' was the form that was the most modular and exportable to 'developing countries' and 'new nations.' Here, universities pursued new roles as consultants to governments in the construction of their nations, as well as the modernisation of their societies and the participation of their states in world affairs.

16 For a fuller discussion, see Stevens et al. 2018.

Today, many universities in the North claim that they represent a new form, that of the 'Global University.' Leaders of global universities seek to expand on the ancient notion of academic cosmopolitanism, coalescing people, ideas, and material resources in novel ways. Common organisational expressions of the global university are study-abroad programmes, transnational partnerships and exchanges, the active recruitment of international students, satellite campuses, and digitally delivered instruction. The logic of the global university remains under construction and, at present, lacks a paradigmatic organisational form. It is also a logic that does not translate easily to universities in the South. This is not least because it is an *interrupted* project, interrupted by financial crashes, geopolitical rifts and pandemics. In the Global South, this form co-exists uneasily with the rapidly declining national university, and points to a complicated emergent political economy of knowledge production.

Farid Syed Alatas points out that part of the challenge of creating an autonomous and decolonial social science is the sorry state of academic dependency in the universities of the South.[17] One cannot gloss this over by celebrating the few institutions and individuals that manage to overcome the odds and maintain good levels of creativity and innovation. For example, in the Arab region, the weakness and official neglect of the social sciences and humanities have much to do with the notions of development and modernity that have governed educational and philanthropic planning in the region, with the post-independence focus on the sciences, medicine and engineering, and adding, in the last decades, finance, management and the skills in demand by the private sector. The problems of the social sciences equally epitomise shortcomings of entire educational systems in the region, and particularly deficiencies in institutions of higher learning, where increasing enrolment has come at the price of quality. The appearance, starting in the 1990s, and rapid growth, of private education in the tertiary sector has contributed to marked discrepancies between educational institutions, which have led to, among many other outcomes, the marginalisation of the social sciences. These developments have been accompanied by the diminishing role of academics in influencing public policy and public discussion, with mutual accusations that research is not policy relevant, and that policy-makers are not interested in research findings. The end result is that research is used in parochial ways, is not used to inform public policies, and does not engage public interest.[18]

In the Arab region at large, the academic community in general, and the social science community in particular, have in the main lost their ability to

17 Alatas 2019.
18 For an elaboration, see Shami and Elgeziri 2010.

engage in three essential functions of an autonomous intellectual domain: the ability to articulate evidence-based alternatives to hegemonic and ideological agendas; the ability to impact public discussion; and the ability to protect and promote professional interests. Equally importantly, because of institutional weaknesses, academics from the Arab region have not been able to participate fully in regional or cross-regional knowledge networks. In an insightful survey of the state of the social sciences in the Arab region, Mohammed Bamyeh lays part of the blame on what he calls the "weak academic memory" prevailing in Arab universities and disciplines.[19] Whereas "a collective academic memory makes each science appear as a continuation of cumulative past efforts"[20] we do not find this sense of continuity or genealogy in the writing and teaching of the social sciences in the region. Instead, we find the fragmentation of knowledge systems in the region and the "replacement of an organic relationship to a past heritage with a rhetorical one."[21] Thus, even in a region with a strong, shared scholarly language and centuries of intellectual circulation, to what extent are we talking about intersecting or even contiguous discursive communities?

A hopeful sign has been an emergence of new knowledge institutions in the new millennium, starting before the uprisings of 2010–2011, strengthened by them and by the uprisings of 2019, and becoming an important set of transnational voices in the region. These knowledge-producers range from research centres to research and advocacy NGOs to informal collectives, and have taken upon themselves the task of producing new types of knowledge, crossing boundaries (for example between the social sciences and the arts, or media and academia) and giving public voice to new actors and new audiences. The fact that they tend to operate outside the universities and formal institutions, and that many of them take the form of informal collectives, is part of their strength, but also their fragility. This presents a complex and hopeful landscape of knowledge production comprising the institutional, the inter-institutional and the interstitial.

This new generation of institutions and knowledge-producers supports researchers, cultural producers and activists in the region through funding, training and convening. In addition, however, they have crucial normative functions to fulfil in the search for new ways of knowing, interrogating disciplines and fields, questioning prevailing research agendas and policy discourses, and

19 Bamyeh 2015.
20 Ibid., 8.
21 Ibid. See also Hanafi and Arvanitis 2016.

in arguing for new imaginaries. Do these imaginaries also disrupt the entrenched notions of East and West and the emergent notion of the Global South?

Emergent Geographies of Knowledge: Claiming West Asia

The fetishisation of borders and boundaries, of in and out, of self and other in the age of nation-states found its reflection in knowledge sectors not only in terms of concepts such as 'national (knowledge) capacities' and 'national security,' but also in delimiting disciplines, fields of knowledge and world regions. Theorists have been engaged in the past thirty years or so in exploring the potential and the emancipatory promise of boundary crossing, whether through transnationalism or interdisciplinarity. Yet there is an amazing, almost admirable, stubbornness in holding on to these boundaries and the inclusions and exclusions that they inscribe. New concepts and fields thus accumulate and pile onto older ones but do not completely obscure them.

Here is an interesting thought-experiment: What if we were to rethink and rewrite the Arab region as West Asia? The idea of exploring this dynamic surfaced in the context of a transregional project aiming to nurture new research to overcome geographical and knowledge divides that have long carved up Asia itself into subregions as well as glossed over deep histories of Afro-Asian connections.[22] For the past two decades, InterAsia has been a productive framework for rethinking Asia through mobilities, circulations, convergences and comparisons.[23] An expanding generation of scholars are researching InterAsian transregional networks and spheres of influence that transcend state boundaries and area studies geographies. Case studies range from the study of religious institutions and leaders who created a shared culture across Central Asia, Iran and India,[24] to hidden networks that reveal the entanglements of trafficking and capitalism,[25] to

22 The InterAsia Partnership is a transregional multi-institutional collaborative programme led by the Social Science Research Council (New York) since 2008, and whose secretariat has been transferred to the Arab Council for the Social Sciences since 2021. See https://www.ssrc.org/programs/interasia-program/, accessed January 2, 2022.
23 Chakravartty and Roy 2017; Duara 2019; Ho 2017; Ludden 2003.
24 Pickett 2020.
25 Mathew 2016.

the interlinked histories of commerce, law and empire in the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean,[26] to trans-species relations across borders.[27]

What is at stake in the ways in which geographies are named, categorised and made legible? Unpacking geographical categories is an exercise in thinking through intellectual genealogies, tangled histories, literary and artistic expressions and ideological battlegrounds. In ‘claiming West Asia’ from my location, based in Beirut, Lebanon, I see wrenching difficulties that do not arise in other terms designating the same, or parts of the same geography. The more familiar paradoxes of the term ‘the Middle East,’ or the older term ‘Near East’ have long been discussed in the literature, while they are increasingly entrenched in academic infrastructures such as area studies centres, associations, journals and funding programmes. Other, older, terms such as ‘the Levant’ are recently in circulation again, despite its Orientalist and colonialist legacies, as better embodying the ethnic and linguistic diversity of the eastern Mediterranean and crossing the boundaries drawn between Europe and Asia. ‘The Mediterranean’ is another term which speaks clearly both to a past global economy and cultural crossings, as well as to present intertwined, if fraught, relations of politics, migration and labour.

What are the gains and losses, openings and closings implied in the contrast between the term ‘the Arab World’ and the term ‘West Asia?’ Viewed from Lebanon, ‘the Arab World’ has a comfortable, familiar fit, even as it is cynically disparaged for its ineffectiveness, or mourned as falling apart. ‘The Arab World’ is usually positively contrasted with ‘the Middle East’ as historically organic, as opposed to representing a colonial and imperialist imposition. ‘West Asia,’ on the other hand, makes little sense. It might be seen by the academic and literary elites as yet another ‘import’ into the vocabularies of the region. However, it is not one that comes with a clear political agenda or source, and hence, it is incomprehensible.[28]

What’s in a name? Many things, it seems. Two quotes illustrate some of these points:

26 Bishara 2017.

27 Aiyadurai 2020.

28 ‘West Asia’ is in use by UN organisations, for example the Economic and Social Commission of West Asia – ESCWA. Another acronym used by some INGOs is WANA – West Asia and North Africa.

> My father felt most at home in Delhi and Bombay; I myself looked to Beirut and Cairo; my son has studied in the States but I am sending him to work for a few years in Singapore before he comes home.[29]

> [...] when asked what had been achieved after ten years of socialism, one wit replied, “We've made the Mahris speak Arabic, made the Hadramis think they're Yemeni, and made the people ask for a lower salary.”[30]

The quote from the speech by the Foreign Minister of the UAE shows how, in the space of three short generations, the points of reference, the geographies of belonging, and the ways of framing self and collectivity, shifted dramatically, but also are perhaps already swinging back to recover older geographies, whose sundering is still within living memory. At the same time, in this formulation, the nation-state moment transcends itself and contains its own transnationalism, for the Minister's eyes turn not only internally to Dubai or Abu Dhabi, but outward to Cairo and Beirut, which are, each in its own different way, wellsprings of Arab Nationalism. As for the quote about Yemen, it would appear as though, in this case, the nation-state moment successfully erases past connections, and repackages individuals into single, unitary identities. Thus, the Hadramis, who are part of an old and wide-flung diaspora across the Indian Ocean, take on Yemeni national identity, and a linguistic minority (the Mahra) are Arabised. Engseng Ho's monograph, *The Graves of Tarim,* also shows us how that nation-state moment is fraught and riven by all the contradictions, and also the richness, of long histories that created communities across the Indian Ocean linked by genealogies, memories and material exchanges, all of which continue to be deployed in the present-day.

To Arab ears, the phrase ‘West Asia’ feels unfamiliar, awkward and not ‘natural.’ This is precisely why it needs to be used and unpacked, for it invokes an earlier geography of connections, before Arab Nationalism (though certainly not before Arabness) and before European Hegemony.[31] It is not a coincidence that the two quotes above originate from the Arabian Peninsula, from the easternmost and southernmost tips of the so-called ‘Arab World.’ Here, the memories of **eastward** connections past are very much alive – in ways that do not resonate today in Beirut and Cairo. These eastward connections are not centrally part of the ‘golden age’ past that Arab nationalists (mostly based in Beirut, Damascus and Cairo) deployed for constructing the notion of the Arab Nation in the late nineteenth

29 Mr. Anwar Gargash, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of the United Arab Emirates, addressing the participants in the first SSRC Inter-Asian Connections Conference, Dubai, 2008.
30 Ho 2006, 311.
31 Abu-Lughod 1989.

to mid-twentieth centuries. Why not? In constructing the Arab Nation, Arabness and Islam were brought together in ways that would seem extendable eastward. Is it the **westward orientation** of Arab nationalism and its central investment in modernity (as mediated by the West) that blinds these ideologies and scholarship to the richness of the eastward connections? This is part of the answer.

The other part is that eastward connections raise uncomfortable questions for theories and ideologies of Arab Nationalism, concerning how and why parts of today's Arab geographies and their peoples became part of the Arab World, and how and why other possibilities thus became unthinkable. Engseng Ho examines in detail how late British colonial expansion in the 1930s into Hadramawt, in the southern Arabian Peninsula, led to wrestling with the question: "[…] did Hadramawt – and the Aden Protectorate more generally – belong in the Middle East or in India?"[32] Could the 'Arab Gulf' have become South Asian? Could Oman, linked as it is through empire, trade, kinship and slavery to Zanzibar have become African? Could they still?

What is at stake, therefore, are the pasts that are obscured by terms such as 'the Arab World' and 'the Middle East,' and that are revealed by 'West Asia.' Furthermore, with the rise of China and other parts of Asia, West Asia is a phrase that points, and potentially links to, the future, or at least to *a* future. It is precisely the nature of this global moment that 'things to come' recover for us 'things that have been.' And yet what is 'to come' is highly fraught because it is resisted by a century or two of state-building and nation construction that dismantled precisely that past, and constructed an alternative narrative of immanent nationness that is, by necessity, inward-looking.

This nation-state moment in the South is not to be dismissed or passed over lightly, for it came about through anti-colonial struggle, through courageous political action, and through visionary thinking. However, it also led to authoritarian states, corrupt regimes and pervasive social inequalities. The uprisings in Arab countries since 2011 and ongoing today are poignant daily reminders of both the immense potential and bankruptcy of the politics of post-independence state and nation-building.

There is yet another aspect of why issues of West Asia may be uncomfortable for Arab nationalism and Arab identity. The term brings to the fore, to the centre of the geography that is invoked, the Arab Gulf States. These 'desert kingdoms,' which were comfortably relegated to the periphery of the Arab world and (not coincidentally) to Middle Eastern Studies in the Global North, were long seen as only contributing to modern history after the discovery of oil. The trading pasts

32 Ho 2006, 267.

of these countries and the seamless ways in which historic ports that were part of the Indian Ocean trading routes turned into the huge airports of today, are not part of the narratives constructed about the Arab World.

The wealth and power that these states have amassed makes them impossible to ignore. While they themselves present an incoherent set of identity projects: from adopting classic 'nation-building' narratives that are rendered absurd in a situation where the 'native population' represents less than one percent of the inhabitants to positioning themselves as guardians of a sacred past and architects of modern Islam by building cultural institutions such as Islamic museums as well as establishing Islamic schools across the world, to representing themselves as harbingers of a futuristic globalisation by erecting skyscrapers and hosting world sporting events, as well as creating research institutions that aim to solve global challenges like climate change. All the time, in these projects, what is perhaps the most interesting (and fraught) aspect of these societies tends to be ignored – namely the massive experiment in human and labour migration.

For the rest of the Arab region, quickly backsliding economically and socially, it is impossible to ignore how capital from the Gulf is flowing into Arab countries, especially after 9/11 somewhat slowed down investments in the U.S., and how this capital is reshaping economies[33] as well as the historical urban fabric, the public spaces and intellectual circles that incubated Arab nationalism and identity in the first place. The increasing and direct role of some of these wealthy countries in backing certain regimes and pulling the rug from under others, and funding certain opposition groups against others makes the relationship between the Gulf states and the rest of the Arab region full of conflict and contestation.[34]

These are some of the ways in which, for the Arab region, 'West Asia' puts into question a history and present that has been normalised and naturalised through ideology, education and various political projects. From the vantage point of Beirut, 'claiming West Asia' means new and uncomfortable relations with the West, with the Arab Gulf States, with the Indian Ocean worlds and with China. This could enrich the 'golden age' narrative of Arab and Muslim pasts but also shows up the disjunctures of the neo-liberal and violent present, and reinscribes a new geography with new centres and peripheries. It implies abandoning westward orientations and looking to the future in the South and in South-South relations.

Perhaps most significantly, and at the most general level, the wrenching sense of displacement and dislocation arises from reinscribing East as South, or

33 See Hanieh 2018.

34 Relevant to this discussion but beyond the scope of this paper are the "Abraham Accords," the so-called 'peace agreements' between a number of the Gulf States and Israel.

at least in juxtaposing East and South as imbricated geographies, rather than discrete entities. While 'East' was continually constructed over the centuries as a political, geographic and intellectual project, 'South' and 'Global South' are as yet unstable geographies. For the Arab region, becoming part of the South implies connections with Asia, Africa and Latin America that are robust in reality, but extremely tenuous intellectually. It requires a sustained and remarkable effort to sufficiently invest in this new type of knowledge production.

This reflection does not aim to ascribe to, or to stabilise, the cardinal directions of East, West, North and South as points of reference, as essential categories, or even as grounds to stand upon in producing knowledge. Rather, it is to explore the consequences of writings and concepts that do try to fix them and make them meaningful, whether as categories of domination or categories of emancipation. An inspiring method is suggested by Kuan-Hsing Chen:

> This turn toward Asia is suggested by the argument that only by *multiplying the objects of identification and constructing alternative frames of reference* can we undo the politics of resentment, which are too often expressed in the limited form of identity politics. Only by moving beyond such fixations can new forms of intellectual alliance be built and new solidarities forged in the new context of globalization;[35] (emphasis mine).

The potentially emancipatory power of being able to simultaneously hold multiple forms of identification and frames of reference is a worthy intellectual endeavour. From the Arabian quotes above we see how, at least in some parts of the 'Arab World,' this can be articulated in a single sentence that invokes official and vernacular comparisons and connections, a speech act that does the work of "inter-referencing Asia."[36]

Claiming West Asia from an Arab perspective has the shock value that can shake up ready-made formulas and preconceived judgments. It also has the potential of creating "new forms of intellectual alliance."[37] For this reason, it seems to me an intriguing and positive agenda and worth pursuing, until it serves its purpose.

The metaphor of the compass helps us contemplate the implications of standing our ground in one place and looking in one direction, versus standing in a place that itself is liquid and shifting and looking in multiple directions at once. This is the dizzying effect of Amin Maalouf's world without a compass.

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35 Chen 2010, 2.
36 Roy and Ong 2011.
37 Chen 2010, 2.

Knowledge at Risk: Time is Not on Our Side

The intellectual alliances called for by Chen can only be formed through the creation of new infrastructures of knowledge production and circulation. Such attempts as there are, however, are taking place in the context of a disorder, and new political economies of research and learning, that put knowledge at risk. On the one hand, as has been discussed, the current disorder explodes longstanding frameworks that enabled an important accumulation of knowledge but also had significant blind spots, such as locating the universal in the West and the particular in the 'rest,' which then was divided according to the geographies of knowledge produced by Area Studies. The unmaking of these knowledge hierarchies entails productive risks that are worth taking as they help us rediscover and uncover what we had neglected for long, even if it leads us to profound and confounding uncertainties.

On the other hand, there are the obvious tragedies of war, conflict, death and displacement: the ruptures caused in people's lives, and in institutions, that destroy hard work and progress achieved over time and that overwrite important narratives, oral histories and legacies. There is the collateral damage to data, archives and archaeological artefacts, not to mention seedbanks that are destroyed or plundered or transported 'for safe keeping' to institutions in the Global North, in ways that duplicate earlier colonial times, the cultural plundering of Iraq being a powerful and painful example.[38]

Then there is the gradual closing off of sites of fieldwork due to dangerous conditions, but also due to clampdowns, as authoritarian regimes retrench and restrict the freedom of expression, including academic research, thus expanding and extending the ways in which states exercise the erasure of history.[39] Researchers within these regions had long experienced the criminalisation of research, now increasing in severity and scope.[40]

Another long-term risk is that to knowledge as a public good. The privatisation of knowledge is a risk that threatens all, whether in the privileged North or dis-privileged South. This risk comes from the fact that knowledge production is increasingly market-driven and privatised. This privatisation happens in dif-

38 See Polk and Schuster 2005.

39 El Shakry 2015.

40 See Tarek Ghanem. "History hurts, disturbs, inspires, revives." https://www.madamasr.com/en/2016/11/20/opinion/u/history-hurts-disturbs-inspires-revives/, accessed January 2, 2022; Ahmed Ragab and Mustafa al Marsafawi. "Jadaliyya – Giulio Regeni: Scattered Facts." https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/33062/Giulio-Regeni-Scattered-Facts, accessed January 2, 2022; for an early exploration, see Shami and Herrera 1999.

ferent ways, some more visible than others. Universities are increasingly corporatised and becoming clients of the private sector, which affects not only research funding and hiring opportunities, but permeates the very ethos of the university, with students increasingly seen as clients and paying customers. Also important is the increased precarity of academic employment, the adjunctification of teaching, the increasing role of administration in the university and the decreasing role of faculty in university governance.[41]

Another form of privatisation arises from the fact that the landscape of knowledge production is an increasingly complicated ecosystem that includes universities, research centres, think tanks, private research companies, NGOs and so on. Complexity and multiplicity are not bad in themselves, however a hidden cost is that the idea of producing knowledge for the public good is increasingly diminishing, and the transparency of research and access to data is compromised.

For almost three decades, a wave of scholarship across many disciplines has urged us to transcend boundaries: geographic, political, disciplinary. Our semantic abilities to do so have evolved exponentially as we discuss processes of globalisation, transnationalisation and virtualisation, and emphasise the importance of transregional, multi-local, glocal and cyber-worlds. Our ability to imagine our worlds differently, however, often seems to exceed our ability to actually research it empirically – and to marshal the necessary resources (multilingual training, multi-local fieldwork, transregional collaborations etc.) to do so. Especially, we are less than successful in including within our conceptual frames the schismogenesis of the contemporary world, where some are hybrid, playful and fluid, and others are immobilised, immiserated and ethnically cleansed. The retrenchment of national, ethnic and sectarian identities, the hardening of borders, the building of new walls and the securitisation of everyday life is as much part of globalisation as the accelerated circulation of people and ideas.

Yet academia seems to be dealing with these phenomena not as related – in fact intertwined – but rather as belonging to different spheres of analysis and even disciplines. The Covid-19 pandemic has spotlighted the contradictions of knowledge silos. The pandemic reinforced divisions by raising walls around countries, cities and even neighbourhoods, and creating a field of vaccine politics while, at the same time, showing how desperately the world needs to come together and ideas need to travel freely, not just in terms of scientific and medical collaboration but also in terms of everyday strategies of survival through a medical siege.

41 Bass 2022.

Amin Maalouf calls for “a new form of solidarity among people which goes beyond all borders.”[42] He gives the Arab region some hope in that, “[…] if there is a lesson to be drawn from the events of 2011, it is that the future does not allow itself to be contained within the limits of what is foreseeable, plausible or probable. And it is precisely for that reason that it contains hope.”[43]

However, he also sounds a warning note:

> [M]y main aim is to find a way to persuade my contemporaries, my travelling companions, that the ship we find ourselves aboard has gone adrift. It is off course. It has no destination and no compass, and it is hard to see the way ahead on a stormy sea. Emergency action is required if we are to avoid shipwreck. It is no longer enough to stick to our current course, for better or worse, somehow navigating by sight, avoiding obstacles as they rear up and leaving it to time. Time is not on our side; it is our judge […].[44]

In this essay, I have explored some of the possibilities ‘to see the way ahead.’ Current projects of decolonising knowledge and developing perspectives from the Global South hold much promise, as do new transregional and transdisciplinary endeavours. However, it is important to avoid mainstreaming new approaches in ways that pay simple lip service, or gloss over important differences of history and experience, and therefore create new geographies of erasure. The ‘Global South’ must not become a new monolith. Rather, decolonial projects need to be multiple and to garner strength in their multiplicity. Vernacular and academic comparisons and contrasts need to be explored to direct the analytical gaze in several directions at once. It must also be recognised that shifting positions and directions involve dislocations and disruptions, not only for the powerful North but within the South as well. The ways in which intellectuals in the Arab region vacillate between, or straddle, being East and/or South provides one example of how these dislocations may be productive of new perspectives while posing new questions that remain open-ended.

I have argued that friction is productive – and so this text displays internal frictions and disconnections. I have reflected on, and brought in as examples, a number of projects, engagements and institutional experiences, that do not form a coherent journey or exhibit natural affinities. In some, I was cast as, and participated as, a scholar from the East, in some as a research administrator from the

42 Maalouf 2011, 164.
43 Ibid., xviii.
44 Ibid., xxii.

North, and in some as a voice from the South. These "contrapuntal"[45] juxtapositions are productive for me, but may be jarring for others.

Finally, all this takes place in a context of shifting infrastructures and political economies of knowledge production. The kinds of space and time that academic institutions used to provide for research, reflection and dialogue are ever more compressed, not least due to urgent conditions of conflict, pandemics, climate change, and global emergencies. As noted in the introduction to this volume, these contexts pose important challenges to epistemologies, intellectual practices, and academic relationships. There is an urgency that is both constitutive and inimical to the production of new knowledges.

And indeed: Time is not on our side.

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45 Said 1978.

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Saleem Badat

Contesting Northern Hegemony in Knowledge-Making in the Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences

Research on, for, with, in, and of Africa

Introduction

Introducing Marx's *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, O'Malley writes that:

> [I]f one is to revolutionize human society in the interest of its perfection and welfare one must understand its nature, workings and failures, one must impart this understanding to others, and one must somehow effect the translation of this understanding into organized political action which will transform society in the interest of the common good. The unity of theory and praxis (means) the inseparability of these three efforts in genuine social criticism.[1]

If the three-fold process of critique begins with self-clarification, I prefer to think of the second phase as the clarification of one's understanding with, and its enrichment by, others, as a prelude to social action; the latter is critical, for, as much as practice without theory is blind, theory without practice is sterile.

In this essay, I reflect on the questions of research on, for, with, in, and of Africa in relation to knowledge-making in the arts, humanities, and social sciences.[2] These are large issues to which I cannot do full justice in this short essay. My purpose in engaging them is to illuminate challenges that require interventions of various kinds, and by diverse actors, if African arts, humanities, and social sciences[3] scholarship is to thrive, overcome its subordinate position in global scholarship, and contribute meaningfully to Africans' leading rich, rewarding, and secure

1 O'Malley 1970, xiv.

2 My thanks to Fred Hendricks, Emeritus Professor and former Dean of Humanities of the university currently called Rhodes, for his critical comments on a previous draft of this chapter. I also thank the two anonymous peer-reviewers for their invaluable, pertinent, and challenging questions and comments on the final copy of the chapter. My gratitude too to Hussein Badat for his diligent proofreading of the chapter.

3 At universities in Africa the distinctions between the arts, humanities and social sciences are not clear cut. Schools or faculty's designated 'Arts' or 'Humanities' may include other disciplines and sometimes also social science disciplines.

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lives, and to the global stock of knowledge and understanding that advances human well-being. At the same time, given the increasing critique of the structure of the knowledge domain by Global South scholars, I hope that my arguments contribute to efforts to erode Eurocentric[4] hegemony, decolonise knowledge, and advance epistemic justice, all of which are necessary for African scholarship to flourish. I approach my tasks as a male, black South African, historical sociology activist scholar and former student militant, university administrator and international philanthropic foundation grantmaker focused on Africa and the Middle East, informed by historical materialism and drawing on diverse knowledge and experiences but also simultaneously limited by those same resources.[5]

Althusser contends that “in order to exist, every [society] must reproduce the conditions of its production at the same time as it produces, and in order to be able to produce.”[6] This reproduction, a multifaceted historical process, is simultaneously ideological and material. On the one hand, it involves reproducing the material means through which humans satisfy their basic needs and desires. On the other hand, it involves reproducing the social relations under which humans and societies exist, social relations that in the contemporary world are characterised by domination, repression, and inequalities of various kinds. Althusser pointed to the critical role of education in cultural and social production and reproduction.[7] Concomitantly, because prevailing social relations maintain and reproduce inequalities, domination and subordination, privilege and disadvantage, they engender social struggles that challenge and attempt to undermine, erode, and transform those unequal and unjust relations.

Unequal social relations powerfully condition who produces knowledge; whose and what knowledges are valued, privileged, and subordinated; in what languages knowledge today is principally produced; who has voice and does not have voice; who publishes and what is published; and who does not publish and what is not published. The recent Reuters ‘Hot List’ of ‘the world’s top climate scientists’ nicely illustrates the role of an influential global multimedia company like Reuters in shaping views on whose research counts or does not count. More than “three quarters of the scientists on the list are located in Europe and North America. Only five are listed for Africa.”[8] Reuters presents the list “as a neutral,

4 Perhaps, more accurately, Anglo-American and French domination, as pointed out by one of the anonymous peer reviewers.
5 Given the nature of this chapter, it is important that I declare my positionality as it is bound to affect my analysis and interpretation, both insights and oversights.
6 Althusser 2001.
7 Ibid.
8 Hunter, Okem, Sutherland et al. 2021.

data-driven assessment of the top climate scientists, [but] it is silent on the questions of power, authority and inequality" that are "a result of unequal access to knowledge production essentials and processes."[9]

Reuters demonstrates "the unequal valuing of climate-change scientists' research focus, which for scientists in the Global South is often context-specific, to improve human outcomes and achieve localised return on investment in knowledge."[10] Unequal social relations also shape the knowledge orientations and agendas of universities in both the North and the Global South, impinge on notions of quality and standards and on a host of conditions related to the making, sharing, and dissemination of knowledge. Unequal relations in the field of knowledge, in turn, contribute to reproducing unequal social relations in the economic and social spheres between the North and the South, and globally. This is not at all to imply that there is a straightforward, smooth, and uninterrupted reproduction of dominant social relations. Those relations, and the institutions, policies, and practices associated with them are contested in various social arenas, including the spheres in which knowledge is created, enhanced, disseminated, and preserved – universities, higher education institutions more generally, and various scientific institutions. Moreover, 'Global North' and 'Global South' should not be considered as monolithic and homogenous or in purely geographical terms. They are geopolitical concepts, pointing to shared though not identical histories, conditions, and experiences. This paves the way for more nuanced analysis and recognition, for example, of the existence of different academic approaches and traditions previously in eastern Europe, which post 1989 have been eroded and marginalised by hegemonic dominant Anglo-American and French traditions. It alerts us to also pay attention to possible shifts in centres of knowledge production and higher education, their possible geopolitical and other consequences and what they could portend for more equal and equitable relations in the knowledge domain.[11]

Recent years have seen the spread and intensification of struggles to combat and displace hegemonic Western thinking on and approaches to knowledge, for example in the "Rhodes Must Fall" and "Black Lives Matter" movements, and calls to decolonise knowledge and universities. These struggles are welcome. They express the longing of Black Africans and marginalised social groups for fundamental change in the domains of knowledge, universities, and the wider

9 Hunter, Okem, Sutherland et al. 2021.
10 Ibid.
11 I am thankful to one of the anonymous peer-reviewers for drawing my attention to these important issues.

society, and for belonging and social connectedness based on logics other than the prevailing mimicry and assimilative and isomorphic rationalities rooted in ideas of Western modernity as the apogee of human development. They are essential for liberating scholarship from old, tired, and pernicious orthodoxies that impede knowledge-making, arbitrarily value and devalue certain modes of knowledge-making, and constrain research and thought; for developing new curricula and pedagogies; and for democratising knowledge. These struggles are also critical for creating *African* universities, as opposed to what are currently, in their outlooks and curricula, largely mimics of universities in the colonial metropoles.[12] Whatever the shortcomings in the thinking and actions of those progressive movements, they manifest the ongoing and renewed struggle for epistemic and wider social justice, and are an integral part of the general arc of progressive anti-colonialist, anti-imperialist, and democratic struggles.

Research on Africa

What is the *purpose* of undertaking arts, humanities, and social science research on Africa, whether by African scholars who are located within Africa, or by scholars and universities in other parts of the world? I approach the issue of purpose as an *institutional* question, rather than one to do with the preferences of individual faculty, though their interests, concerns, and proclivities do, of course, shape institutional positions.

The purpose of arts, humanities, and social science research on Africa is neither self-evident nor without disputation. On the one hand, the intention may be to pursue what universities tend to do best: advance understanding of our natural and social worlds, and enrich our accumulated scientific and cultural heritage through producing new knowledge; test "the inherited knowledge of earlier generations;" reinvigorate knowledge; and share findings with others.[13] Such research could encompass the most arcane and abstract issues, and the

12 What constitutes an 'African university' in terms of its character, purposes, functions and roles as opposed to a university in Africa that tends to be a mimic of European universities is an important issue. For an initial engagement on this challenging question, see my chapter 'Re-envisioning universities in Africa as African universities,' forthcoming in M. Cross and E. T. Woldegiorgis, (eds.): *Creating the new African University*. Under preparation by the Ali Mazrui Centre for Higher Education Studies, University of Johannesburg as part of the Brill series, 'African Higher Education: Developments and Perspectives.'
13 Boulton and Lucas 2008, 4.

"most theoretical and intractable uncertainties of knowledge."[14] It could undertake long-horizon enquiries "that may not appear immediately relevant to others, but have the proven potential to yield great future benefit."[15] Additionally, some basic scholarly research is entirely unconcerned with policy and policy-making, or has policy as its focus but not its purpose.

On the other hand, the purpose of research on Africa may be to grapple with short-horizon, contemporary, and urgent problems, and to seek solutions to those in the forms of policies, strategies, technologies, and practices. This kind of research has as its purpose either analysis *of* policy, or analysis *for* policy. Analysis *for* policy could either limit itself to advancing policy options and delineating their implications, or could extend to the designing of policies, policy-making instruments and processes, and matters concerned with the implementation of strategies and plans. The distinction between research that is unconcerned with policy and that which is geared to policy development parallels a distinction between 'weak interventionism' and 'strong interventionism' in the social world respectively. It coincides with Bauman's distinction between intellectuals as 'interpreters' and intellectuals as 'legislators,' with Habermas' categories of 'cognitive interests' and 'strategic interests,' and with Schatzki's distinction between research that is concerned with 'cognitive ends,' and research that is oriented towards 'practical ends.'[16]

Related to the question of purpose is that of *interests* regarding research on Africa: whose interests does research serve, whose interests are ignored or subordinated, and whose interests should be served? Given the entanglement of knowledge and power, how is the public good to be protected and promoted in the face of the usually narrow private interests of economically and politically hegemonic social groups? Kassimir notes that the promotion of areas studies, including African Studies and the study of languages, is not always undertaken to advance knowledge, human dignity, and inter-cultural understanding, or in the spirit of internationalism. Instead, at times research has been connected to and shaped by Cold War politics, colonial and imperial ventures, political and economic rivalries, and competition for influence and mineral and other resources.[17] Knowledge production and research are enmeshed with wider social relations and concerns. Given ongoing enmities, conflicts, and competition among nation states, what the concerns of research on Africa should be, what research should

14 Boulton and Lucas 2008, 4.

15 Ibid.

16 See Mouton and Muller 1995; Schatzki 2009.

17 Kassimir 2016.

be prioritised, what its objects should be, and how it should be resourced institutionally are all critical questions.

I favour an approach that values, and in principle supports, all kinds of arts, humanities, and social sciences scholarship – blue skies, strategic and applied, theoretical, methodological, and empirical, disciplinary, interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, and transdisciplinary, whose horizons are long and distant, short and immediate, and both concerned, and unconcerned, with policy. I recognise that, because of economic, political, and social considerations and available resources, in practice, countries and institutions may need to prioritise and make trade-offs about the kinds of research they support. It is critical that the scholarly community be involved in the formulation of priorities; support for different kinds of research be judiciously balanced; narrow instrumentalism and utilitarianism be eschewed; and research not be sacrificed on the altar of narrow conceptions of 'relevance.'

Regarding research on Africa, we must ask: What are the goals and specific objectives of such research? What strategies does it deploy? What are its time horizons? How is it resourced, and so forth? For example, are research goals to be connected entirely with economic competitiveness and growth, contemporary political phenomena, social reproduction, social 'cohesion' and the like, with universities directed or steered towards questions of immediate economic and political 'relevance' as defined by governments? Or are researchers also to be concerned with wider issues, including the critique of state discourses and policies, questions of equity, social justice, and transformation, and history, aesthetics, and culture? It is not here possible to address all these questions. Suffice it to say that, as with the question of purpose, critical issues emerge when we treat research goals and strategies and so forth with healthy critical reflexivity rather than as incontrovertible.

Research for and with Africa

The questions raised above on the goals and objectives of research on Africa, the strategies to be deployed and the like, lead to the matter of arts, humanities, and social science research *for* Africa. While the complex intersections of knowledge and power in the arc of knowledge-creation have generally improved the human condition, research and 'knowledge' claims have also had devastating consequences for specific social classes and groups and geographic areas, and especially for the Global South. A pertinent question, then, is whether the institutional pursuit of research on Africa, whether undertaken by those in Africa or in

the North, results in knowledge-making that is *for* Africa? Given the economic and other asymmetries between the Global South and Global North, and how these powerfully shape and reproduce asymmetries in infrastructure and resources for research, knowledge dissemination, publishing, libraries, archives, and information and communication technologies, does research on Africa advance African goals, and address concerns, questions, and objects pertinent to Africans? This question is rhetorical, because we know that it largely does not. At the same time, the normative question of research that is *for* Africa is not without its problems. Well-intentioned research has caused and can result in mayhem in Africa and the Global South more generally.

What are 'African' goals, priorities, and questions? These are neither a given nor obvious. They are ultimately the objects and outcomes of ideological and political struggles between and within different classes, social groups, and institutions.[18] The quest for knowledge-making that is *for* Africa is also not to license propaganda that masquerades as research, or research that principally serves the narrow and dubious agendas of political and economic elites. While knowledge of all kinds on Africa must be advanced, we must heed Said's counsel that "there is always something radically incomplete, insufficient, provisional, disputable, and arguable about humanistic knowledge."[19] We should also "be critical of humanism in the name of humanism," for our "experiences of Eurocentrism and empire" have shown us the abuses 'justified' by so-called humanistic thought. This means that, rather than a misguided parochial Afrocentrism and a new kind of universalising, we need to "fashion a different kind of humanism that (is) cosmopolitan."[20] Instead of approaching "humanism as a form of smugness," we have to consider it as "an unsettling adventure in difference, in alternative traditions, in texts that need a new deciphering within a much wider context than has been hitherto given them."[21] Said provides a useful point of departure; whether, how, in what ways, and to what extent his thoughts animate future research and with what success remains to be seen.

In the North, interest in research on Africa is often linked to ideas about internationalisation. But the extent to which internationalisation occurs within

18 In my view, key African priorities are ensuring environmentally sustainable economic and social development (not just growth), advancing social equity and extending and deepening democracy in ways that eliminate inequality, poverty and unemployment, address basic needs (decent jobs, education, health and welfare), end coloniality and Northern hegemony, build effective institutions, foster Pan-Africanism and end the myriad indignities that African experience.

19 Said 2004, 12.

20 Ibid., 11.

21 Ibid., 55.

a context of persistent asymmetries and practices that assume the superiority of Western modes of knowing and theorising severely confounds the establishment of equitable North-South institutional relationships. Two comments are in order here. First, rationales for internationalisation can be cultural, social, economic, and political. These rationales change in priority over time and vary in importance by region and country. On the one hand, internationalisation could be strongly linked to national economic and political interests, foreign policy imperatives, and specific institutional interests. Engel observes that "currently [...] time and resources" are being invested by scholars and officials "in activities that [...] are primarily directed at what is good for *their* university, and will enable *it* to climb up the global rankings."[22] On the other hand, internationalisation could (should) be predicated on the best traditions of internationalism: social solidarity, a conception of the public good that is global rather than national, respect for difference and diversity, social inclusion, reciprocity, and mutual benefit for countries, institutions, and individuals. In this second model, a mutual commitment exists to undertake research that is not just 'on' Africa, but *for* Africa, and that advances African goals, priorities, and interests.

Wagner is correct that the creation of "knowledge produced by Africans for Africans" requires forging "strong networks [...] amongst ourselves instead of relying on partnerships with developed countries [...] often driven by funding areas of research that are more important to them than to us," and being "involved in international research networks to give a voice to priorities for research in our countries."[23] However, research that serves Northern institutional or national interests does not inevitably make it detrimental to Southern interests; it need not be a zero-sum game. Moreover, not all Northern national and institutional interests are illegitimate, and it may be unreasonable to expect Northern institutions and researchers to entirely forsake their interests for African interests. Arnot argues that "the different ways of forging knowledge and understanding issues which are being produced in response to African realities are increasingly re-influencing academic thinking in the Global North" and provides "a window of opportunity for academics and universities on the continent."[24] She suggests that "the knowledge in universities in Africa will increasingly start to re-influence the metropolitan knowledge base in response to the big global challenges" and that "the increasing number of African scholarship students at universities in the

22 Engel is head of the European Association for International Education. In MacGregor 2016.
23 Wagner 2016, 91–92.
24 Paterson and Luescher 2022.

Global North is reshaping the canon at these institutions."[25] Her call is for academics in Africa "to surf the next wave in higher education, which is the crucial contribution that the African knowledge base can make; and to forge more equal, productive and mutually beneficial relationships accordingly."[26] Research *for* Africa need not be conducted in Africa or by Africans alone; nor does it need be research *on* only Africa. In the case of the former, researchers' commitment to Africa and its sovereignty and development is much more important than their location, birth, or origins. In the latter case, research that is *for* Africa cannot have Africa as its sole object. It must extend to theorising and empirical work on issues like the foreign policy and 'aid' regimes of the United States, European and other countries, the operations of the Bretton Woods and other global institutions, the so-called 'Washington consensus,' and their often pernicious consequences for Africa, and on many other issues.

Second, internationalisation that involves cross-border collaboration on the part of Northern institutions requires forging partnerships and cooperation. Too many Global North and Global South partnerships evince "the dominance of Northern institutions" and "dominant perspectives and [...] beliefs and practices that relegate Southern universities to the status of junior partners, receivers of knowledge and providers of talent or data."[27] Genuine partnership entails institutions from different countries working together on the basis of equality, equity, and mutual respect, with appreciation that a common endeavour can yield greater benefits than working separately. In this kind of system, institutions jointly identify scholarly opportunities and sensitively and diligently cultivate, build, and sustain mutually respectful and beneficial collaborations. They make use of their respective insights, strengths, and resources to exchange ideas authentically, and achieve common goals and objectives. Many institutions and scholars express the desire to collaborate, yet power relations, asymmetries, unfortunate assumptions, conventional wisdoms, and ingrained historical practices make successful collaboration and partnership between Northern and Southern institutions difficult, demanding, and often elusive.

A recent study on the involvement of Southern researchers in three relatively new fields of knowledge – gender studies, climate change and HIV/AIDS – notes that "the production and circulation of organised knowledge is marked by global inequalities. Quantitative indicators of research output and citation show North

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25 Paterson and Luescher 2022.
26 Ibid.
27 Chasi 2021.

America and Europe predominating" across all fields of knowledge.[28] However, "it is not simply that universities and research centres in these regions quantitatively produce more. They have also provided paradigms for knowledge-work in other regions, and receive data from those regions. The Global North, more specifically the complex of its elite institutions, is the centre of a knowledge economy with global reach."[29]

There is, too, 'author parasitism,' defined as the publication of articles with "no listed authors from the LMIC [low-income and middle-income countries] in which a study is conducted."[30] A recent study in the health area notes that research undertaken in LMIC's "often involves collaboration between researchers from LMICs and high-income countries (HICs). However, imbalances in power, spoken languages, opportunities for funding, academic and research priorities can make the benefits of such collaboration unequal, with HIC investigators traditionally benefitting more."[31]

The study found that almost 15 % of articles manifested 'authorship parasitism,' and that this "was more common in articles [...] published in North American journals [...] than in sub-Saharan African journals" and that "investigators from the USA, UK and Canada are commonly involved in such articles."[32] This is "despite multiple calls to 'decolonise global health,' to build research capacity in LMICs, and to avoid exploitative research practices in LMICs."[33]

Connell et al. argue that a "global economy of knowledge centred on the elite institutions of the metropole is a massive fact. It shapes both established disciplines and new domains. It affects training, funding, research methods, publication, prestige and recognition."[34] This pattern, termed 'academic dependency' by Alatas and 'extraversion' by Hountondji, denotes "the practical ways knowledge workers in the periphery are oriented to, and dependent on, the institutions, concepts and techniques of the metropole."[35] Extraversion refers to "the intellectual labour process" in the Global South and in the periphery being arranged "around relationships in which the knowledge institutions" in the Global North "have predominant authority. This authority may be exercised directly," as when Global North "funders define the problems for researchers in the South," or indirectly,

28 Connell, Pearse, Collyer et al. 2018, 42.
29 Ibid.
30 Rees, Ali, Kisenge et al. 2021, 2.
31 Ibid., 1.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid., 2.
34 Connell, Pearse, Collyer et al. 2018, 54.
35 Alatas 2003; Hountondji 1997; Connell, Pearse, and Collyer et al. 2018, 45.

"through such practices as researching within an established methodological framework, or teaching curricula modelled on those of Northern institutions."[36]

Not surprisingly, "relationships built around extraversion have difficulties. The partnerships may be exploitative and arouse anger. Metropolitan paradigms [...] may be seen as a damaging constraint on knowledge and action." They evoke "contestation as well as accommodation. The paradigms may be modified. Equal authority may be demanded in collaborative projects. Some research groups in the Southern tier develop distinctive agendas."[37] Global South scholars are not merely hapless passive victims of extraversion. They are actors who develop strategies and tactics to manage, counter, and push back against unequal relations, creatively exploit opportunities, and advance knowledge from the Global South. In the "three new domains of knowledge," there

> is neither subordination nor separation but a collective *negotiation* with the power and resources of the global North. The global economy of knowledge depends on inputs from the majority world, and there are bases for negotiation at many levels. In this negotiation Southern tier researchers put forward claims, express discontents, challenge priorities, create resources and frame new problems.[38]

It is recognised that "such collective negotiation may not be possible for all parts of the global periphery."[39] Indeed, one must be cautious of generalising based on a study of researchers in new fields, and located in Australia, Brazil, and South Africa. Connell et al. suggest that "as managerial power in university systems grows, a tighter integration into the Northern-centred knowledge economy is likely." Concomitantly, challenges to Northern hegemony in knowledge must continue as must "the need to re-think knowledge frameworks."[40]

Auerbach, noting that "concrete actions are [...] needed if we are to interrupt received systems and redress a global hierarchy that equates south with underneath," advances thoughtful propositions for "more equitable knowledge practices around the globe" that universities in the Global South "can and must increasingly demand for equitable research relationships and outputs."[41] Her point of departure is important: the "forms of research practice that we now take for granted today were, in fact, integral to the process of European domi-

36 Connell, Pearse, and Collyer et al. 2018, 54–55.
37 Ibid., 55.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid., 55–56.
41 Auerbach 2021.

nation of global knowledge systems," and the "well-being of the majority of the planet has been compromised by the dominance of one culture of knowledge and knowing."[42] For Auerbach, first, a "decolonisation of the mind" is needed – "a recognition of the extent to which almost all of us currently working in higher education have been shaped by received notions of excellence and expectations." Second, there is a need for historical "awareness of both dominant and contesting histories of place, space and relationship."[43] A third requirement is "the decolonisation of data," because, "unless access to outputs, but also to servers, technologies, research sites, materials and conferences, is made more inclusive," Southern scholars are marginalised, or must use 'illegal' means to stay abreast of developments in knowledge.

However, more than a "diversity of data sources" is required, because Eurocentrism will continue to reign supreme in terms of its views and ways of analysing and interpreting conditions, unless research models ensure "a diversity of lenses through which sources are interpreted."[44] Epistemological, theoretical, methodological innovation is critical if "the deleterious, constraining, distorting and obfuscating effects of received or imposed perspectives" are to be eroded and overcome.[45] Fourth, to fight "gatekeeping," a "decolonisation of expertise" is required; it must be understood that "expertise comes in many forms and from many different journeys through knowledge systems," and not only through university credentials. Finally, "inclusive teams" are required, and a substantive diversity that is not "skin deep." "[T]o really work across the scars of history" means paying attention to "class, gender, race, body type, neurodiversity, physical ability, age, parenthood, and so much more." Auerbach argues that, "in the knowledge hierarchy of Euro-American late-capitalism, there is little place for relationship, care, and commitment to sustaining or improving the future."[46]

Earlier, I alluded to the need for 'genuine' partnerships. To this end, in 2015 the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation's International Higher Education and Strategic Projects programme that I led deployed various strategies. One was dedicated to securing funding for supranational institutional research collaborations, especially but not exclusively among institutions in the Global South.[47] Univer-

42 Auerbach 2021.

43 Ibid.

44 Zondi 2016, 251.

45 Ibid., 253.

46 Auerbach 2021.

47 Between 2014 and 2018, I served as the first Programme Director of International Higher Education and Strategic Projects at the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation based in New York. The Foun-

sities supported by Mellon submitted proposals jointly, and committed to work together respectfully and reciprocally. Lessons learnt included that meaningful partnership required extensive lead-in time, preliminary support through planning grants, careful identification of partners, effective logistical support by universities, and capable and committed leadership. An equitable and productive academic partnership that has yielded many positive lessons is that between the Interdisciplinary Center for the Study of Global Change at the University of Minnesota and the Centre for Humanities Research at the University of the Western Cape. A second strategy was to provide initiatives with global ambitions – such as the International Consortium of Critical Theory Programs led initially by Judith Butler and Penelope Deutscher, and the Global Humanities Curriculum headed by Homi Bhabha – planning grants prior to consideration of full support. The planning grants required the leaders of globally oriented programmes to host seminars in different parts of the world – including specifically Africa, Asia, and South America – to forge support for envisaged programmes, identify potential partners, elaborate meaningful inclusive collaboration in research-related activities, governance, and other aspects of the programmes.

Of interest, too, is the new and unfolding Social Science Research Council (SSRC) of New York's Transregional Collaboratory on the Indian Ocean. This project arises from a welcome "burgeoning attentiveness to the role that funders and funding collaborators in the Global North can play in perpetuating inequalities in knowledge production in the Global South, even via projects that were nominally collaborative."[48] The Collaboratory seeks "to foster a new model of transnational research ethics that emphasises South-South collaboration and supports institutions and researchers that have been overlooked by models of research funding and collaboration historically driven by institutions from the Global North," and "to support novel modes of engagement through which locally situated researchers can access the resources needed to coproduce knowledge alongside international peers."[49] Other initiatives – of the Canadian Bureau for International Education, the Volkswagen Stiftung, Perivoli Africa Research Centre, and the Global Africa Group of the Worldwide Universities Network – also seek "to 'challenge, explicitly, the historically rooted inequities and existing orthodoxies in the global field of knowledge production' and to develop new

dation exclusively supports the arts, humanities, and humanistic social sciences. I draw on that experience to exemplify some of my contentions.

48 Social Science Research Council 2021.

49 Ibid.

epistemological and methodological approaches for research collaboration with African partners that enable equitable knowledge production and innovation."[50]

A further question concerns research that is not just on Africa and for Africa, but that is undertaken *with* African universities and institutions; explicitly involves African scholars and students, with their theoretical, methodological, and empirical insights shaped by place and space; and contributes meaningfully to building institutional capacities and cultivating individual research capabilities. While the priority could be research on Africa, it would be unfortunate if collaboration with African universities was limited entirely to arts, humanities, and social science research *on* Africa, even if this was research *for* Africa. Globalisation has resulted in economic, social, political, and technological transformations on a planetary level; far corners of the globe are now joined in myriad ways. Despite the existence of technological and productive capacities to enhance human well-being and freedom, the dominance of neo-liberalism and its orthodoxies has meant that old social problems have been accentuated, and new economic and social problems have arisen at local, national, and global levels.[51] While these transformations have especially acute implications for Africa, they are global in nature, and have to be addressed globally. It is, therefore, critical to study collectively and from multiple perspectives the "vast and complex" social, political, and environmental challenges that confront humanity, and in which the arts, humanities and social sciences especially can "play a crucial role of translation and communication for the public at large."[52] This requires collaboration both between and across the arts, humanities, social sciences, natural sciences and other sciences, one based on a *transnational* and *global* concept of 'public interest' and 'public good.' It implies that the arts, humanities, and social sciences "have to be international in scope," "craft a language, and forge" organisational structures that address and "extend across" historical, national, linguistic, cultural, and epistemological divides.[53] These tasks are challenging but imperative; realising them can contribute greatly to more equitable, productive, and fulfilling relations between Global North and Global South scholars and institutions.

Previous and conventional forms of internationalisation, such as faculty and student exchanges and international and area studies, are now inadequate. Also necessary are robust national, transnational, and global institutional partnerships between Northern and Global South universities around knowledge-

50 Chasi 2021.
51 See Nayyar 2008; Berdahl 2008; Taggart and Weber 2008.
52 Lewis 2015, 7.
53 Ibid., 8.

production and interventions on key global challenges. This new form of internationalisation requires a principled commitment from Global North universities to support the development and enhancement of Global South universities' capacities. It means promoting "systems of international academic mobility, exchange, collaboration, connectivity, and regulation that generate and sustain empowering knowledge networks that are guided less by the polarizing and profiteering pressures of the market and more by the developmentalist and democratizing demands of global 'public good.'"[54]

Research in Africa

It is trite but necessary to emphasise that research on Africa must have its centre of gravity *in* Africa, occur principally *in* Africa, and be undertaken *by* Africans. Arts, humanities, and social science research is poorly funded in most African countries, and few dedicated research centres exist. Although social science publishing output has been rising, the African contribution to arts, humanities, and social science publishing remains negligible. Between 2005 and 2007, 13 countries and 30 universities produced the bulk of the 13,129 social science research publications that originated in Africa. South Africa produced over 50 % of those publications, and eight out of the top ten publishing universities were in South Africa.[55] There continues more generally to be a "great disparity" in scientific publishing among African countries.[56] Between 2001 and 2018, Africa produced 508,102 publications in science, 7.6 % of the total world output; however, 10 countries produced some 84 % of publications.[57] This indicates a continental system of higher education and national systems of higher education that are highly institutionally differentiated and diverse, with a small number of countries and universities on the continent and within countries engaged actively in research and knowledge production. Many of the leading research universities in Africa – 16 from 10 countries – are members of the African Research Universities Alliance, inaugurated in 2015 to "enhance research and graduate training in member universities through a number of channels."[58]

54 Zeleza 2005, 3.
55 Mouton 2010, 5, 6.
56 Sawahel 2022.
57 Sooryamoorthy 2021, 367.
58 See https://arua.org.za/about/ and https://arua.org.za/member-universities/.

Table 1 below illustrates certain features of humanities and social science publishing in Africa between 2000 and 2018. While the data is useful, it must be treated with caution. Ranking performance on the criterion solely of output is problematic. It is insensitive to the different (unequal) contexts of the production of research and articles, to the overall goals and priorities of countries and universities, and the like. Moreover, local African journals, as noted below, may be excluded from international databases of bibliographic citations as may be articles produced in Africa and published in non-English language journals, thus affecting counting of output and assessment of their performance. In this regard, assessing and ranking the performance of universities and countries on singular or select criteria that are abstracted from goals and contexts suffer from the same shortcomings as the now fashionable global university rankings. I have noted elsewhere that such rankings are a perverse and present burden.[59] They are based on dubious social science, are "primarily about reputation for its own sake, about the aristocratic prestige and power of the universities as an end in itself" and have little concern with equity and social justice.[60] Rankings reflect the obsessive performative culture of the new public management of recent decades, and advance national and institutional interests that in conditions of the commodification, commercialisation, marketisation, and corporatisation of higher education seek to gain in status, income and power. Marginson puts it well: "discourses of social status are primary in the sustaining of status and are all the more powerful when joined to the force of calculation."[61] Rankings can distort the purposes, goals, and roles of universities and result in homogeneity and isomorphism, and collusion with them corrodes knowledge and science. They can have especially pernicious and deleterious effects on the arts, humanities and social sciences.

The critique of global university rankings is not a rejection of critical public scrutiny of universities in Africa and the Global South. Performance indicators and benchmarks, as distinct from rankings, are of much value when they are carefully conceptualised and designed with clarity of purpose and aims, and are respectful of institutional mission and policy goals. They have an important role to play in institutional improvement and development and, through these, in achieving national economic and social development priorities and goals. So too with the effective monitoring, evaluation, and penetrating reviews of universities. These important goals, however, are not advanced by the current rankings.

59 See my critique of global university rankings: Badat 2010a and Badat 2010b.
60 Marginson 2007, 138–39.
61 Marginson 2009, 601.

Table 1: African publishing in the humanities and social sciences, 2000–2018[62]

Indicator	2000	2010	2018
Humanities publication output[63]	201	1 442	2 016
Social sciences publication output	823	4 377	10 220
Humanities percentage of world share	0.5 %	1.9 %	2.2 %
Social sciences percentage of world share	1.0 %	2.2 %	3.5 %
Humanities relative field strength[64]	0.4	0.8	0.6
Social sciences relative field strength	0.7	0.9	1.0
Humanities mean normalised citation score (10-year window)[65]	1.0	0.8	1.1
Social sciences mean normalised citation score (10-year window)	0.7	0.8	0.9

62 The data for the table was kindly provided by Prof. Johann Mouton of the Centre for Research on Evaluation, Science and Technology (CREST) at Stellenbosch University. It is based on the CREST version of the Web of Science (Core collection).

63 Publication output is based on full paper counts of articles and review articles, and excludes books, book chapters conference proceedings, letters, and editorials. CREST notes that traditionally both the humanities and the social sciences and humanities have been underrepresented by the Web of Science and Scopus. The Web of Science has attempted to improve their coverage, but there is a remaining language bias against papers published in non-English languages.

64 Relative field strength (also referred to as the Relative Activity Index or Relative Specialisation Index) is calculated by dividing the number of humanities and social sciences papers as a proportion of total African output by the proportion of total humanities and social sciences as a proportion of world output in all fields. It is, thus, a proportion of a proportion. If the relative output of the humanities of total African output were to be the same as total world output in humanities as a proportion of all world output, the value would be 1. A value lower than 1 (in this case 0,6) means that the humanities in Africa produce less than one would expect when compared to the world as a benchmark – meaning that African output is relatively weaker than world output in the humanities. The value of 1 for the social sciences in Africa means that its relative activity/strength is commensurate with that of the rest of the world. Johann Mouton, CREST director, personal communication, 25 June 2021.

65 This refers to the publication outputs and their citations over a period of up to 10 years after the paper has appeared. Those figures are normalised by comparing them with the expected citation score of all humanities and social sciences articles in the world over the same period. A standardised/normalised value of a score of 1 means that Africa's papers in these fields have the same citation visibility or impact when compared to all papers in the world in these fields. The scores of 1.1 and 0.9 are good – the citation impact of humanities is slightly higher than the world average and that for the social sciences is slightly lower. Johann Mouton, CREST director, personal communication, 25 June 2021.

Indicator	2000	2010	2018
Percentage of Humanities publications in the top 10 per cent citation percentile intervals	8.4	9.3	9.4
Percentage of Social sciences publications in the top 10 per cent citation percentile intervals	7.5	7.3	7.9
Collaboration profiles in Humanities			
Single author	77.1 %	73.3 %	61.4 %
National collaboration	7.9 %	13.5 %	17.3 %
Collaboration with African countries	0 %	1.7 %	2.5 %
Collaboration beyond Africa	21.9 %	18.9 %	28.2 %
Collaboration profiles in Social sciences			
Single author	33.0 %	30.1 %	17.1 %
National collaboration	28.7 %	30.7 %	30.1 %
Collaboration with African countries	1.0 %	1.8 %	3.8 %
Collaboration beyond Africa	41.8 %	39.6 %	51.2 %
Collaboration intensity with other countries in Humanities and Social sciences between 2000 and 2019 Humanities: Largely with South Africa, followed by the United States, the United Kingdom, Egypt, and Nigeria. Social sciences: Largely with South Africa, followed by the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Egypt, Nigeria, and Tunisia.			

Between 2000 and 2018, there was a more than ten-fold increase in publications in the humanities, and a more than twelve-fold expansion of publications in the social sciences, which translated into Africa's share of global publications increasing during this period, from 0.5 % to 2.2 % in the humanities and from 1.0 % to 3.5 % in the social sciences. The largest contributors to this publishing are South Africa and some Maghreb countries; humanities and social science publishing "from East and West Africa is minimal and often appear[s] in local national journals not indexed in the Web of Science."[66] In 2018, Africa "produced around 3.1 % of total world output," but although overall humanities and social sciences output increased "in real counts over the past two decades, the relative share of the humanities (2.2 %) is lower than expected while the social sciences "output (3.5 %) is higher."[67] Since Africa constitutes an estimated 17.2 % (1.34

66 Johann Mouton, CREST director, personal communication, 25 June 2021.
67 Ibid.

billion people) of the global population (7.79 billion people), its contribution relative to population size, despite some progress, remains low.[68]

Other indicators of publishing performance also register positive developments. There are interesting variations in collaborations in the humanities and social sciences. Single-authored publications are the norm in the humanities (77.1 %), but far less so in the social sciences (33.1 %). Conversely, the social sciences reflect much more collaboration across institutions and national borders – extra-African international collaboration in the social sciences is 41.8 % compared with 21.9 % in the humanities. The extreme lack of research collaboration between scholars and institutions within Africa, irrespective of research fields, is disconcerting.

Where it does exist, "it is often driven by non-African scientists based on former colonial ties and output tends to be dominated by a single country in a region, like South Africa that is responsible for 79 percent of the output in [...] the South African Development Community."[69] The paucity of collaboration among scholars within Africa is probably a consequence of the absence of, or very limited, funding by national states for inter-institutional and cross-national academic partnerships; donors prioritising Global North–Global South partnerships; the desire of academics within Africa to collaborate with leading scholars (African and non-African), who tend to be located in Europe and North America; and academic resources and publishing networks being overwhelmingly located in the Global North. Anecdotal evidence suggests that South African academics are keener to build institutional partnerships and individual collaborations with Global North scholars than with scholars in other parts of Africa and the Global South.

International collaboration occurs principally across a very small number of countries – South Africa, Egypt, and Nigeria, which have the most developed national university systems and research and publishing capacities in Africa – and the United States and United Kingdom. Given the varied nature of those African countries university systems, collaboration occurs largely through a limited number of key research universities. The predominance of collaboration with extra-African scholars and institutions is likely the consequence of historical colonial networks, donor funding policies, support principally for North-South partnerships rather than south-south collaborations, and more extensive scholarly publishing opportunities in the Global North relative to the Global South.

68 UNPD 2020; For an identification of the barriers that inhibit producing research in Africa, see Wagner 2016, 92.
69 Wagner 2016, 91–92.

The differences in the extent of collaboration between the humanities and social sciences could be due, amongst other things, to field and disciplinary differences, the goals and objects of research, and available funding for collaboration.

Apart from generally inadequate public support for universities by African states, the social sciences, and the arts and humanities especially, experience significant challenges. The quest to harness universities for economic advantage means that knowledge and research generated by the natural, medical, and business sciences and engineering is privileged. There is either benign tolerance or outright neglect of the arts and humanities and, to a lesser extent, the social sciences. In a seminal article that emphasises the importance of "the science and technology systems" to the "new economy," Castells immediately adds "including, of course, the humanities".[70] Nevertheless, the late Thandika Mkandawire rightly bemoaned the fact that "attempts to improve Africa's prospects by focusing on scientific advances and the benefits accruing from them have all too often overlooked the important perspectives which the humanities and social sciences afford."[71] Arguing that granting "the social sciences and humanities [...] their rightful place" is vital to "fully and properly" addressing "Africa's development challenges,"[72] Mkandawire usefully cautioned against a 'developmentalism' in which research becomes the narrow instrument of "the developmental state" and ignores various other "aspects of our people's lives."[73] Here, 'development' becomes "an alienating and humiliating concept for people helplessly sensing that they are to be 'developed' and made to feel that their preoccupations are retrograde."[74] As Mkandawire contends, "our people's spiritual concerns, their history, their sense of identity, their intellectual and aesthetic aspirations – all these are marginalised or even banished from a discourse whose primary concern is 'development.'"[75]

This is salutary counsel. The arts and humanities have a critical contribution to make to culture and society, with the responsibility to investigate and interpret human activity and history in all its rich variety, to present it in multitudinous forms, and to conserve it in the form of archives. Lewis rightly argues that

> while the modern and global world constantly confronts humanity with the far-reaching effects of politics, economics, science and technology, the roles of image and word, of song

70 Castells 1993, 69.
71 Mkandawire 2009, vii.
72 Ibid.
73 Mkandawire 1994, 4.
74 Ibid.
75 Ibid.

> and story in the understanding of self and other, of society and nature remain primary. The arts and humanities are the ground on which humanity constructs its image of and discourse about itself and in which it anchors human dignity and collective understanding. Their work must be advanced in tandem with that of the sciences if a hospitable world is to survive.[76]

It is the task of the arts and humanities to "recreate the narrative [...] of humanity, which may be told or sung or depicted or enacted and ultimately needs all those forms of expression to attain what we grasp as its integrity."[77] The arts and humanities alone have the ability "to capture human experience persuasively and carry forward the values of humanity as we have come to understand them, historically and philosophically, as the connective tissue of collective identity.[78] The arts and humanities have the task of also interrogating critically ideas and conventional wisdoms related to development, progress, democracy, equality and inequality, their meanings, and their articulation within divergent discourses.

Despite various challenges, African universities and higher education evince positive developments and a new vibrancy. It was noted that the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa's 2015 conference proceedings "indicated significant recovery taking place in higher education systems."[79] A key challenge is to build strong, durable, autonomous yet publicly accountable *African* universities (as opposed to universities in Africa that are imitations of metropolitan institutions) predicated on academic freedom, as part of creating flourishing and democratic societies. Institution-building in the arts, humanities, and social sciences involves cultivating, strengthening, and sustaining institutional capacities for research and scholarship; building graduate programmes that effectively produce new generations of scholars and professionals; supporting research institutes, centres, units, programmes and projects; introducing innovative curriculum and pedagogic initiatives at the undergraduate and graduate levels; and strengthening scholarly collaboration, networks, and publishing nationally and internationally.[80]

International foundations like the Carnegie Corporation, Andrew W. Mellon, VW Stiftung, and Bosch, donors such as the Swedish International Development

76 Lewis 2011.
77 Ibid.
78 Ibid.
79 In MacGregor 2015.
80 For an identification of possible interventions to enhance research and publishing in Africa, see Wagner 2016. She notes that "the list of things that need attention seems endless. Of course one cannot exclude the need for spending money on research and the infrastructure that it requires [...]" (93).

Agency and the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation, and foreign universities all have important contributions to make. Given historical experience of dependence on the Global North, including the vagaries of donors, which at times have caused damage to universities in Africa, the nature and terms of interaction between donors and African institutions must be principled and negotiated, so that principally African rather than Global Northern interests are served. The critical actors and agents of renewal, development and transformation must, however, be African scholars and universities, African national states, and pan-African institutions. It means universities, states, and governments committing to a multifaceted and comprehensive agenda that systematically develops the institutional capacities of universities generally, but especially in research- and knowledge-production; ensures adequate funding for universities, research, participation in global scholarly networks, academic salaries, and the support of new generations of scholars, including in the arts, humanities and social sciences; provides the necessary autonomy and academic freedom for universities and scholars to pursue their core purposes and goals, within an agreed framework of public accountability; and forges principled bilateral and multilateral partnerships with scholars, universities and institutions in both the Global South and Global North. To be pursued purposefully and realised over time, such an agenda requires principled, decisive and creative leadership at institutional, national, and continental levels. Absent this and a durable social compact to realise the promise of universities and the contribution that the arts, humanities, and social sciences can make to wicked contemporary problems and to development and democracy, African universities and states will continue to languish and remain peripheral actors on the global knowledge terrain.

Earlier, I argued that African institutions, organisations and scholars must lead the renewal and development of scholarship in Africa. This, however, is not a call for insularity and parochiality and to look entirely inwards. Many contemporary challenges are global rather than only local and the public good must be conceived in global rather than merely local terms. It is, therefore, vital to forge principled and equitable forms of collaboration with institutional and individual partners from around the globe and to mount programmes and projects that are attentive to questions of difference, diversity and inclusion and assemble scholars who draw on different intellectual traditions, epistemological and theoretical foundations and methodological approaches, possess different field and disciplinary knowledge and expertise, have experience of different geographical areas, and think, communicate and act in different languages.

Research of Africa

I want to conclude with the question of research that is not only on and for Africa, undertaken with African scholars and institutions and principally in Africa, but that is also *of* Africa. What ideas and approaches might underpin and advance scholarship that is *of* Africa?

Processes associated with colonialism and apartheid – conquest, occupation, extermination, subjugation, dispossession, exploitation, dehumanisation, exclusion, and marginalisation – rationalised on the basis of ideas about 'race' and 'civilisation,' not only wreaked havoc on indigenous and black people physically, but also impacted thinking and thought, particularly with respect to how the colonised came to "acquire knowledge, understand their history, comprehend their world, and define themselves."[81] As Sartre noted, "colonial violence not only aims at keeping [...] enslaved men at a respectful distance, it also seeks to dehumanise them. No effort is spared to demolish their traditions, to substitute our language for theirs, and to destroy their culture [...]."[82]

The concept of 'coloniality' points to "enduring patterns of power (and) a way of thinking and behaving that emerged from colonialism but survived long after its seeming demise."[83] Coloniality goes beyond the corollaries, past and current, of colonialism in the economic and political domains. It draws attention to the "Eurocentric epistemology, ontology, and ideology" that underpinned and legitimised European domination and European knowledge, with its "colonial epistemic monoculture," and to the concomitant decimation, erosion, and marginalisation of the knowledges, cultures, languages, and experiences of colonised people.[84] Various theorists associated with postcolonialism and the decolonial school have highlighted the problems associated with European epistemology.

First, predicated on an imperialist and racist outlook and economic and political power linked to the colonial domination of the Global South, European epistemology unilaterally assumed the right to stipulate what knowledge was and how it was produced, proclaiming its "scientific truths" universal and "valid across all of time and space."[85] This universalism extended to the idea, expressed in modernisation theory, that what was held to be progress and development in

81 Bulhan 2015, 241.
82 Sartre in Fanon 2004, 1.
83 Bulhan 2015, 241.
84 Ibid.
85 Wallerstein 1997, 95.

Europe "represented a pattern that was applicable everywhere."[86] Eurocentrism was "constitutive of the geoculture of the modern world," and powerfully shaped "science and knowledge in universities everywhere."[87] The European claim of its ideas' universality functioned to simultaneously erase "its own particularity" and obscure "how this claim is sustained through the exercise of material power in the world," as well as "the ways in which relations of power underpin both knowledge and the possibilities of its production."[88] This Eurocentrism, Said contended, was an impediment to human understanding because

> its misleadingly skewed historiography, the parochiality of its universalism, its unexamined assumptions about Western civilization, its Orientalism, and its attempt to impose a uniformly directed theory of progress all end up reducing, rather than expanding, the possibility of catholic inclusiveness, of genuine cosmopolitan or internationalist perspective, of intellectual curiosity.[89]

Second, education based on Western canonical thought erased the traditions of the Other and, therefore, had to "be jettisoned or at the very least submitted to radical humanistic critique."[90] Said drew attention to the fact that academic disciplines, fields, and curricula were not immune to, but shaped by, social struggles. As he observed, the emergence of "African American studies as a new, albeit, scandalously delayed [...] humanistic field represented in the academy [...] called into question the formulaic, perhaps even hypocritical universalism of classical Eurocentric humanistic thought [...]."[91] It also

> revealed how the whole notion of humanism, which had for so long done without the historical experiences of African Americans, women, and disadvantaged and marginalized groups, was [...] undergirded by a working notion of national identity that was [...] highly edited and abridged, indeed restricted to a small group that was thought to be representative of the whole society but was in fact missing large segments of it [...].[92]

Third, concomitant to "Western enlightenment thought" from the outset positing "itself as the wellspring of universal learning, of Science and Philosophy" is that

86 Wallerstein 1997, 95–96.
87 Ibid., 95.
88 Bhambra 2014a, 120.
89 Said 2004, 53.
90 Ibid.
91 Ibid., 45.
92 Ibid., 45–46.

> it has regarded the non-West […] primarily as a place of parochial wisdom, of antiquarian traditions, of exotic ways and means. Above all, of unprocessed data (and) reservoirs of raw fact: of the historical, natural and ethnographic minutiae from which Euromodernity might fashion its testable theories and transcendent truths, its axioms and certitudes, its premises, postulates and principles.[93]

Fourth, as a consequence, scholars from the Global South are considered to be “tokens” of their “culture”; in contrast, scholars from the Global North are “theoretically minded” persons.[94] On this assumption, “the First World has knowledge, the Third World has culture; Native Americans have wisdom, Anglo Americans have science.”[95] Of course, the “epistemic dependency of Third World countries as well as of their scholars and intellectuals” is rooted in “economic dependency.” It is not an original state, but the product of colonial subjugation and unequal relations over centuries.[96]

Fifth, it is not surprising that scholarship by Africans on Africa operates “at only a fraction of its true potential,” given how “it is hampered by the preferences, policies and politics of the western academy.”[97] According to de Waal, knowledge on African political economy “is poor because in the higher reaches of the western academies the focus is not on generating accurate information, but on inferring causal associations at a high level of abstraction, from datasets” that are “far too weak for any such conclusions to be drawn.”[98] Moreover, “the structure of academic rewards and careers systematically disadvantages those who either do not have the skills or capacities for this kind of high-end quantitative endeavor,” despite it being “profoundly flawed.” There is, thus, “a severe dissonance between actual lived experience, and academic work validated by the academy.”[99] There is also an “‘Occidentalism’ in theory and policy,” meaning “the tendency to ascribe a cogency to the intellectual and cultural products of the west, that it does not in fact possess.” Thus, “despite sustained critique […], the western experience of state formation remains the standard against which the rest of the world is indexed.”[100] In this context, Mamdani asks the important question: what does it mean to undertake arts, humanities, and social science research and teaching “in the current historical context and, in particular, in

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93 Comaroff and Comaroff 2012, 1.
94 Mignolo 2011, 118.
95 Ibid.
96 Ibid.
97 De Waal 2015.
98 Ibid.
99 Ibid.
100 Ibid.

the post-colonial African context," when "the dominant intellectual paradigms are products not of Africa's own experience but of a particular Western experience[?]."[101]

Given Global North hegemony over the social relations of knowledge production, and deeply entrenched Eurocentrism, Mignolo advocates "for political and epistemic delinking," and for "decolonizing knowledge and decolonial knowledges as necessary steps to imagining and building democratic, just, and non-imperial/colonial societies."[102] 'Delinking' entails jettisoning Eurocentrism and assimilative and isomorphic rationalities rooted in ideas of Western modernity as the apogee of human development.[103] It is, however "not a turn to nativism that harks back to some pure and glorious past, or anachronistic nationalism [...]." Instead, it seeks "to appropriate, subsume and redefine the emancipatory rhetoric of modernity in order to understand citizenship, democracy, economic relations, human rights and humanity beyond the narrow definitions of European modernity."[104] Moreover, it is a basis from which to "study Africa from inside and to generate endogenous intellectual discourses and thus enable Africans to speak for themselves about themselves in a non-hegemonic conversation with the world. In this sense, delinking or unthinking alterity offers opportunities for a decolonial turn in African scholarship."[105]

Overcoming dominant epistemologies' obliviousness to their own Northern- and Euro-centrism "requires [...] a commitment to the production of knowledge that is decolonial in intent and practice."[106] Such a "decolonial epistemic perspective requires a broader canon of thought than simply the Western canon;" it also "cannot be based on an abstract universal (one particularly that raises itself as universal global design), but would have to be the result of the critical dialogue between diverse critical epistemic/ethical/political projects towards a pluriversal as opposed to a universal world."[107] Noting the supposed opposition between traditional and canonical, and new and contemporary thought, Said suggests that one way of understanding a 'canon' is as fixed and bounded. Another way, however, is to view it as "expressing motion, playfulness, discovery, and [...] invention."[108] When

101 Mamdani 2011.
102 Mignolo 2011, 119.
103 See Zondi 2016, 50.
104 Ibid., 254–55.
105 Ibid., 255.
106 Bhambra 2014b, 149.
107 Grosfoguel 2007, 212.
108 Said 2004, 23, 25.

> viewed in this way, the canonical humanities, far from being a rigid tablet of fixed rules and monuments bullying us from the past [...] will always remain open to changing combinations of sense and signification; every reading and interpretation of a canonical work reanimates it in the present, furnishes an occasion for rereading, allows the modern and the new to be situated together in a broad historical field whose usefulness is that it shows us history as an antagonistic process still being made, rather than finished and settled once and for all.[109]

For Mignolo, "decolonial thinking and knowing" becomes a contestation of "imperial disembodied and un-located assumptions about knowing and knowledge-making," and an "unveiling" of "the hidden geo- and bio-graphical politics of knowledge of imperial epistemology."[110] He argues that it is necessary to focus on foundational assumptions, and that "in order to call into question the modern/colonial foundation of the control of knowledge, it is necessary to focus on the knower, rather than on the known."[111] A key

> assumption is that the knower is always implicated, geo- and body-politically, in the known, although modern epistemology managed to conceal both and built the figure of the detached observer, a neutral seeker of truth and objectivity who at the same time controls the disciplinary rules and puts himself or herself in a privileged position to evaluate and dictate."[112]

Yet, "we always speak from a particular location in the power structures. Nobody escapes the class, sexual, gender, spiritual, linguistic, geographical, and racial hierarchies" within which we are located.[113] Knowledge-making is about "location" and "situated and embodied knowledges," not about "transcendence and splitting of subject and object;" we have to be "answerable for what we learn how to see."[114]

Contesting the subordinate role allocated to Africa in knowledge-making, the Comaroffs advance two key claims. One is that "modernity in the south is not adequately understood as a derivative [...], a callow copy or counterfeit, of the Euro-American 'original.'"[115] Instead, "it demands to be apprehended and addressed in its own right;" and "because the history of the present reveals itself more starkly in the antipodes, it challenges us to make sense of it, empirically

109 Said 2004, 25.
110 Mignolo 2011, 118.
111 Ibid., 119.
112 Ibid., 123.
113 Grosfoguel 2007, 213.
114 Haraway 1988, 583.
115 Comaroff and Comaroff 2012, 7.

and theoretically, from that distinct vantage point."[116] A second claim is that in opposition to the "Euromodernist narrative" that

> has the global south tracking behind the curve of Universal History, always in deficit, always playing catch-up, there is good reason to think the opposite: [...] it is the south that is the first to feel the effects of world-historical forces, the south in which radically new assemblages of capital and labor are taking shape, thus to prefigure the shape of the global north.[117]

I will address this contention later. Here, what matters is that the postcolonial and decolonial critique of the social relations of global knowledge-production and its impact on Africa and the Global South is telling and valid. If critique, as I have suggested, must culminate in social action, the question is 'What is to be done?' How is the egregious and pernicious domination of the knowledge arena by the Global North to be eroded and overcome, and how are Africa and the Global South to be equitable partners in knowledge-production? To begin with Mignolo's proposition of "political and epistemic delinking," what would this mean in practice in the current conjuncture? Grosfoguel rightly notes that the search for "a horizontal, liberatory dialogue as opposed to a vertical Western monologue [...] requires the *decolonisation of global power relations*."[118] Precisely, and therein lies a significant challenge. 'Delinking' has merit, but given current ideological, political, financial, and other conditions, it is hard to envisage either states or universities or most scholars in Africa easily embracing 'delinking,' either epistemically or, especially, politically. In addition to those scholars who have already delinked to some extent, others could be galvanised to do so, but currently the number and proportion is likely to be small.

The best strategy at the moment is continuing but more assertive engagement on various fronts and of different kinds, based on a widely consulted and agreed-upon agenda led by key Pan-African institutions and supported by influential Global North institutions – one which concertedly advances African priorities. 'Delinking' and engagement by those committed to radically different relations of knowledge-production and economic and social relations are not entirely mutually exclusive. Auerbach has stated that "African universities could play a much harder ball game than they currently do."[119] I concur, indeed, "it is up to us not to request, but to require, inclusion and access at all stages of the research conceptualisation, undertaking and dissemination as critical pre-conditions of

116 Comaroff and Comaroff 2012, 7.
117 Ibid., 12.
118 Grosfoguel 2012, 96, emphasis added.
119 Auerbach 2021.

knowledge sharing and research participation, especially from Western scholars parachuting in for research projects."[120] Here, the SSRC's 'Transregional Collaboratory,' which intends to consultatively and collectively generate a charter to guide ethical conduct in research partnerships could be a promising initiative.

Ultimately, alongside mobilising for the decolonisation of knowledge, "subverting the colonial archive and colonial library," "epistemological disobedience" and "challenging [...] the existing methodologies,"[121] also critical is 'deimperialisation.' If "decolonization entails abandonment of epistemological colonization, deimperialization gestures towards abandonment of the colonial framework as well as Europeans learning to be 'humble about [their] knowledge claims' as part of deimperialization of theory, methodology and epistemology."[122] Undoing decolonisation is the historical task essentially of Africans and more generally of those in the Global South; 'deimperialisation,' undoing hegemonic "Euro-American 'imperialist histories and the harmful impact those histories have had on the world'"[123] has to be principally the work of progressive scholars and institutions in the Global North. 'Deimperialisation' becomes the "process through which Europeans decolonize their minds."[124] Of course, whether dominant social forces in the Global North are willing to respect and "adjust to the needs of others"[125] is a debatable point that must be factored into Global South strategies.

Regarding Mignolo's call for "decolonizing knowledge and decolonial knowledges," both are critical for undoing coloniality and are more prominent in discourse today than previously. How, in what ways, and to what extent these challenges are embraced by universities and scholars in Africa, and with what results, remains to be seen. Recent years have seen the institution of various programmes and projects, especially in South Africa, as part of the 'decolonial turn' inaugurated by the 'Rhodes Must Fall' student protests of 2015, described as being about "cognitive justice."[126] In the aftermath, a prominent initiative supported by the Mellon Foundation is 'Unsettling Paradigms: The Decolonial Turn in the Humanities Curriculum at Universities in South Africa.' This "collaborative project" of "eight research-intensive universities in South Africa" deploys "a conceptual lens that considers the 'decolonial turn' as an organising frame within which to gener-

120 Auerbach 2021.
121 Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Zondi 2016, 13.
122 Ibid., 5, citing Chen 2010, 3.
123 Ibid., 9, citing Chen 2010, vii.
124 Ibid., 10.
125 Comment of a colloquium participant, cited in Mirza 2017, 31.
126 Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Zondi 2016, 5.

ate a shift toward an inclusive and democratic curriculum."[127] The project "aims to have a clear and measurable[128] impact on South African universities" with research focusing on the "decolonisation and transformation of the academy in terms of rethinking and reforming curricula, redefining pedagogical practices and modes of teaching and learning, shifting staff demographics, and reconfiguring institutional cultures."[129] Hopefully, the initiative responds to Mamdani's challenge and contributes to innovating "intellectual paradigms" based on "Africa's own experience" to guide future research and teaching in the arts, humanities, and social sciences.

The Comaroffs' view that developments in Africa "prefigure the shape of the global north" is an interesting but debatable contention. It should, however, not obfuscate the reality that, because of colonialism and underdevelopment, African institutional capacities are severely constrained relative to the North in critical areas of knowledge-production and dissemination, such as the number of universities relative to population size, their institutional capacities, quality, the adequacy of their financing, the extent of scientific publishing, undergraduate and postgraduate student enrolments and outputs, and the like. The current marginalisation of Africa means, for one, ensuring greater knowledge-production in Africa and by Africans, stronger representation in knowledge networks, and the production of "more accurate knowledge of Africa;" for another, it requires African scholars "to formulate and apply intellectual theories and categories" that draw on African conditions and "the concrete experiences of African historical agents."[130] Both are urgent if long-standing tasks.

Alongside confronting dominant epistemologies and theories that are oblivious of their Eurocentrism, another task is to build new academic and institutional cultures that genuinely respect epistemological difference and diversity and

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127 University of Pretoria "Unsettling Paradigms: The Decolonial Turn in the Humanities Curriculum at Universities in South Africa." https://www.up.ac.za/unsettlingparadigms, accessed December 13 , 2021. See also the important essays in Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Zondi 2016.

128 Various problems are associated with measurement. Apart from whether it is possible to measure certain things, including impact and outcomes, with any certainty, what is measured, how, when and for what purposes are important issues. As has been observed, "Not everything that can be counted counts. Not everything that counts can be counted." W. B. Cameron 1963 "Informal Sociology: A Casual Introduction to Sociological Thinking", https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/250497-not-everything-that-can-be-counted-counts-not-everything-that, accessed July 29, 2022.

129 University of Pretoria "Unsettling Paradigms: The Decolonial Turn in the Humanities Curriculum at Universities in South Africa." https://www.up.ac.za/unsettlingparadigms, accessed December 13, 2021.

130 Creary 2013, 3.

social justice in the domain of knowledge-making. Santos contends that there is much "abyssal thinking," which grants "to modern science the monopoly of the universal distinction between true and false to the detriment of […] alternative bodies of knowledge."[131] This results in "global cognitive injustice," so that "the struggle for global social justice" will necessarily "be a struggle for cognitive justice as well."[132] The pursuit of cognitive justice means being alert

> not only to [other] forms of knowledge but also to the diverse communities of problem solving. What one offers then is a democratic imagination […] where conversation, reciprocity [and] translation create knowledge not as an expert, almost zero-sum view of the world but as a collaboration of memories, legacies, heritages, a manifold heuristics of problem solving.[133]

This implies creative work, principally in the Global South, that: deconstructs "the standard narratives based upon the universalisation of parochial European histories;" reconstructs "global narratives on the basis of the empirical connections forged through histories of colonialism, enslavement, dispossession and appropriation;"[134] "provincialises" ideas that are based on European experiences but are univeralised globally;[135] and builds "counterhegemonic understandings and uses of Eurocentric concepts, such as human rights, the rule of law, democracy, and socialism."[136] Undertaking this work is about more than geographic or social location: it is fundamentally about "epistemic location" – thinking, researching, and writing from a subaltern epistemic location.[137]

Conclusion

This chapter advances six core arguments. First, to advance African development and democracy and, indeed, address global challenges, it is vital that the arts, humanities, and social sciences scholarship *of* Africa come to the fore. Second, support by African states, pan-African institutions, and international donors is critical for nurturing and sustaining vibrant self-referring communities of schol-

131 Santos 2007, 48.
132 Ibid., 53.
133 Visvanathan 2009.
134 Bhambra 2014b, 149.
135 Chakrabarty 2009.
136 Santos 2014, ix.
137 Grosfoguel 2007, 213.

arship at African universities with the material means and intellectual confidence to undertake rigorous empirical and comparative work. Third, a key challenge is to develop imaginative theories that account for African conditions, as part of decolonising knowledge and producing decolonial knowledge. Fourth, there is a need to expand the archive on African activity in all its forms, as a basis for underpinning and enhancing new knowledge-production. Fifth, scholars across the continent need to be connected through robust scholarly networks and publishing platforms. Sixth, universities and scholars in Africa must relate to scholars and institutions beyond Africa on the basis of agendas that advance their interests and are predicated on mutual respect, reciprocity and dignity.

Advancing scholarship that is on and for Africa, that is undertaken by Africans and with African scholars and institutions, principally in Africa, and that is *of* Africa, requires scholars, universities, and research institutions in the Global South and those in the Global North who stand in solidarity to forge appropriate strategies and tactics that systematically challenge, erode, and overcome Northern hegemony in knowledge-making in the arts, humanities, and social sciences. This is an enormous, yet necessary, task. Inventiveness requires "reassembling from past performances, as opposed to the romantic use of invention as something you create from scratch. That is, one hypothesises a better situation from the known historical and social facts."[138] There is a need for "intellectual performances on many fronts, in many places, many styles that keep in play both the sense of opposition and the sense of engaged participation."[139] This work involves not "a single great intellectual, a master-thinker endowed with the sole resources of his singular thought, or by the authorised spokesperson for a group or an institution presumed to speak in the name of those without voice, union, party, and so on."[140] Instead, it calls for "the collective intellectual," understood as shifting collections of thinkers and actors, who work on common questions and "play an irreplaceable role, by helping to create the social conditions for the collective production of realist utopias."[141] Alongside purposefully locally, nationally and internationally coordinated efforts, there is also place for "everyday acts of resurgence" on the part of scholars, universities, and other actors who are committed to an equitable global knowledge order.[142]

138 Said 2004, 40.
139 Ibid.
140 Ibid., 138.
141 Ibid.
142 Ritskes 2012, 88.

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Prathama Banerjee

Sovereignty and Ascendancy

South Asian Reflections

The king is non-violent, though he kills
Chaste, though he has women
Truthful, though he lies
Ever fasting, though he eats well
A hero, though he uses trickery
Rich, though he gives away.
Kingship is rather strange![1]

Introduction

This paper argues that sovereignty is not a universal concept even though colonialism and nationalism have laboured to naturalise and universalise it across the world. European thinkers have themselves questioned the indiscriminate application of the term 'sovereignty' across time and place. Foucault has shown that modern governmentality has to do with distributed and disciplinary, rather than singular and spectacular, forms of authority;[2] and Balibar has argued that sovereignty has been more of a juridical claim than a historical fact,[3] always already thwarted by the counter-powers of market, capital, community, corporation, and cultural/religious heterodoxy.

And yet sovereignty continues to be widely used as a universal term to describe modern political phenomena such as the nation-state (national sovereignty), democracy (popular sovereignty), security regimes (state sovereignty), constitution (juridical sovereignty), rights (sovereignty of person), and so on. In fact, sovereignty returned to European political philosophy with renewed analytical purchase in the late twentieth century. Political philosophers of widely different ideological persuasions, like Claude Lefort, Jacques Derrida and Giorgio Agamben,[4] resurrected the post-World War II work of Carl Schmitt and

1 *Amukta-Malyada* by King Krishnadevaraya of Vijayanagara (r. 1509–1529), cited in Rao et al. 2004, 611.

2 Foucault 2004, 37.

3 Balibar 2004, 133–54.

4 Agamben argues that governmentality and sovereignty are twin, rather than opposing, principles of rule in European history. See Agamben 2011. Also see Derrida 2009 and Lefort 2006.

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Ernst Kantorowicz[5] in order to argue that the political theology of sovereignty lies at the very heart of contemporary questions of democracy and human rights. Not only in Europe, in South Asia too,[6] the term sovereignty remains in common use both in the academy and in government-speak.

In this paper, I dispute this apparent universality of sovereignty as a concept. I argue, drawing examples from South Asian history, that there may be other conceptions of rulership operative in the world. I propose 'ascendancy' as one such possible concept. Taking cue from a formulation in Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, one of the earliest treatises of statecraft in South Asia, perhaps even the world, I conceptualise ascendancy as the movement of *utthan* – literally the movement of 'being on the rise'. Ascendancy, I suggest, is a temporal concept, which implies that political power and efficacy are necessarily subject to waxing and waning through time. Unlike sovereignty, ascendancy does not exist in perpetuity in a transcendental form – be it of God or State. Ascendancy is both achieved and lost and therefore works as a political imagination that returns contingency and changefulness to both regimes rule and forms of struggle.

I should clarify right away that in opening up the concept of sovereignty to interrogation by other conceptual histories, my effort is not to 'provincialise Europe.' Nor is it to propose a philosophical nativism that pits a purist or monochromatic notion of South Asian philosophy against an equally purist and monochromatic imagination of European political philosophy. Instead, I seek to expand our shared horizon of thought, by 'thinking across traditions'[7] – European, Sanskrit, Perso-Arabic and Indic vernacular – in a way that allows us to rethink the theory of the state, across spatial and temporal locations. In fact, as will become evident, some of the features of historical rulership in precolonial South Asia that I discuss can also be found in precolonial Europe, which is why I suggest that thinking political power as ascendancy rather than sovereignty might be a fruitful exercise for academics of both the north and the south, because it might help unsettle the hegemonic vocabulary of colonial modernity which has come to be naturalised and ossified in time. Needless to say, such an

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5 Schmitt 2005; Kantorowicz 1957.

6 I use the term 'South Asia' with some hesitation because its use tends to gloss over the subcontinent's unmistakable diversity. However, since I work with historical instances from precolonial times, the term 'India'– denoting the modern nation-state – is equally inappropriate. In earlier times, Pakistan, Bangladesh and to some extent Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Afghanistan were very much part of a territorial and political continuity, irrespective of linguistic and cultural diversity. Colonial India too was included these regions as part of the same British empire. Hence my use of the term South Asia should be understood as a tentative placeholder, and no more.

7 Banerjee et al. 2016.

exercise follows and builds on postcolonial and decolonial criticism but imagines itself as a more positive and affirmative orientation, of developing new theoretical possibilities from out of multiple times and histories.

Histories of Rulership in South Asia

As we know, sovereignty is not just another synonym for political power. It has a particular conceptual and historical constitution, derived as it was from European traditions of Christian kingship, and reinvented many times over through the centuries – in the carrying over of the Roman legal conception of *dominium* to medieval theories of kingship; the seventeenth century recasting, à la Bodin and Hobbes, of the king/state as an absolute power in all matters civil and military; the eighteenth century imagination of the world state as the epitome of universal Reason à la Hegel; the nineteenth century rise of the liberal figure of the sovereign (male, property-owning, rights-bearing, white) individual, who functioned as a symmetrical and countervailing concept to the sovereign state; the globalisation, via liberal imperialism of the British and French varieties, of the notion of a globally regnant 'rule of law'; and, above all, the rise of twentieth century democracy predicated upon a conceptual unity called 'the sovereign people.' This is by no means to say that there were no criticisms of sovereignty or forms of non-sovereign and/or distributed power in European history.[8] Rather, this is to engage the hegemonic form that the concept of sovereignty assumed, once carried over into modern political thought and universalised through the worldwide circulation of colonial epistemologies.

In this hegemonic form, the concept of sovereignty had the following constitutive elements. Firstly, sovereignty was a prescriptive rather than descriptive concept. Its purpose was to theoretically distinguish state power from actually existing dispersed forms of social, commercial, ritual, intellectual and/or communal power. Secondly, sovereignty was posited as a form of transcendental authority – in analogy to the Judaeo-Christian God's – and so beyond the fact of social antagonisms.[9] Thirdly, it was in a relation of alterity to the sovereign that 'society'

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8 Much historical work draws on alternative sources such as myths, popular iconography, and archives of legal disputes to show how, in pre-modern Europe, sovereignty was hardly a settled condition or a unitary concept. See Sheehan 2006; Canning 1996; Miller 2008.

9 Jones 2017. For the redefinition of state sovereignty as the sovereignty of reason (both Hegelian and bureaucratic), see Houlgate 2001. Histories of the evolution of the modern state (and with it 'civil society') were often stories of the increasing de-socialisation and rationalisation of the

became thinkable in modernity as a coherent and civil whole, perfectly aligned and opposed to the state. Fourthly, sovereignty was fundamentally predicated upon a notion of personhood – a mystical, fictitious, immortal personhood that permitted the imagination not only of the king's 'two bodies' but also the modern state as an abstract and enduring entity, irrespective of who the ruling classes were. The same notion of personhood produced the imagination of a heterogeneous people as a singular and sovereign unity called the 'people,' just as it made possible the legal fiction of the modern economic form of the joint-stock company as a person with rights of ownership equivalent to that of any real individual.[10] Fifth, law and violence were constitutive of sovereignty as an idea, sovereignty being defined as both the source of law and the exclusive prerogative to violate the law.[11] Sixth, sovereignty was posited as a perpetual or atemporal substance, in that it outlasted regime changes and political revolutions.[12] Seventh, sovereignty was a spatial concept, implying that there could never be two sovereigns in the same space at the same time – which is why sovereignty found its ultimate form in the modern nation-state. And finally, sovereignty was seen as analogous to (though not the same as) property, in that the sovereign state, despite its claim to 'eminent domain,' i.e., the right to dispossess people of their property in 'public interest,' faced both its own mirror image and its own limit in the heroic figure of liberalism, namely, the property-owning, autonomous, rational, sovereign individual and his domain of 'private interest' and his inalienable right to life, liberty and property.

In precolonial South Asia, however, political power did not quite consist of this configuration of elements. Political power here was not in any obvious conceptual antinomy or transcendental relationship to social life. Kingship was only one of the polity's many nodes, alongside guilds, religious sects, monasteries, temples and caste assemblies, networked into a general 'social constitution'.[13] The operative dichotomy here was not so much between state and society as between *the social and the anti-social*, the latter being the dissident/secession-

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state as a political form. For classic histories of state formation, see Anderson 1975; Bourdieu 1999; and Thapar 1984.

10 Esposito 2015; McWhorter 2018. McWhorter in fact says that Foucault's critique of sovereignty can only be completed through a simultaneous critique of the concept of personhood in European history.

11 Agamben 1998; Primera 2014. For a discussion of how war, occupation and law came about simultaneously through colonial trade and conquest, see Cohn 1989; Singha 1998; Fitzmaurice 2018; Benton and Ford 2016.

12 Kantorowicz 1957.

13 Kolff 2008.

ist domain of ascetics, wandering warriors, untouchables, outcastes, and 'wilderness' peopled by mobile, hill, forest, and desert communities.[14] The king was meant to tame this dangerous 'outside' and enforce social norms universally. Or so it was demanded by Brahmanical normative texts, the *dharmashastras*.

The social constitution was variously imagined and intensely contested: as the hierarchical order of castes and stages of life (which the king was meant to uphold);[15] the order of principled conduct (with kings, ascetics, priests, *ulama*, monks, and village assemblies vying over the right to adjudicate what constituted right conduct according to diverse norms and customs); the order of justice/governance, predominantly structured by politics, war and statecraft (epitomised in the tradition of the *Arthashastra* of Chanakya/Kautilya); or the productive society of householders (the taxable but potentially rebellious subject population defined in opposition to various orders of renouncers).[16] Within this social constitution, however imagined, different institutions exercised fair autonomy and power. Kingship was thus one amongst many forms of power, including spiritual, intellectual, commercial, and ritual power, each competing with the other for supremacy.

According to the caste constitution, Brahmans were supreme, because they monopolised knowledge and the language of knowledge, which was Sanskrit. The friction between Kshatriya warriors, who aspired to kingship, and Brahmans, who aspired to authorise kingship, was one of the most fascinating dynamics of political power in early India.[17] Often wrongly read as a struggle between politics and religion, this was in fact a struggle between two imaginations of the social constitution, one based on the principle of efficacy and justice, and the other on the principle of ritual power and differentiated social rights.[18] While, by the caste principle, Shudras were meant only to serve, never to rule, there were actually numerous historical instances of Shudra kings in precolonial South Asia, showing that the social/ritual principle and the political principle were often locked in battle. Several instances of powerful Brahman rule, the Vakatakas of fourth to fifth century southern India and the Peshwas of seventeenth century

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14 Falk 1973; Parasher-Sen 1998; Madan 1988.

15 In this paradigm, humans were divided into four *varnas*: scholars/priests (Brahmans), warriors/kings (Kshatriyas), producers/traders (Vaishyas) and servants/labourers (Shudras). Individuals were supposed to pass through four *ashramas* or stages of life: celibate studentship (*brahmacharya*), householder (*garhastha*), retirement (*vanaprastha*) and renunciation (*sannyas*). The Shudra was however denied all *ashramas* except the householder's life of labour.

16 Much of my sense of ancient Indian politics draws from Singh 2017.

17 Ambedkar 1987, 67–69.

18 McClish and Olivelle 2012.

western India, belied the formal social division between priests and warriors.[19] Sovereignty, if it could be called that at all, was thus dispersed, disequilibrated, and contested – which is why scholars of South and Southeast Asia have talked of 'segmentary' polities, 'galactic' polities, 'shared sovereignties' and 'little' kingships rather than simply of sovereign states.[20] Characterised in Eurocentric narratives as incomplete or imperfect state formations, these constituted a different paradigm of political power, one not based on the neat binaries of state/society or social/political. Interestingly, the conception of the segmentary state was borrowed, in a classic act of thinking across traditions by Burton Stein, historian of early south India, from the history of forms of domination in Africa's Alur society, made famous by Aidan Southall, British anthropologist and one-time professor at Makerere University, Uganda.[21]

Like political power, the right to violence, too, was dispersed in South Asia. While Kshatriyas had the caste prerogative of war, Brahmans monopolised the violence of sacrifice. Hence in early India, kings often mobilised Brahmans to preside over immense royal sacrifices, great occasions for kingly display and wealth distribution, before and after war. No less feared than kings, as William Pinch shows, were the wandering ascetic warriors of the countryside, who often led lower- and middle-caste peasant communities.[22] The Tamil Sangam literature of southern India aestheticised local warrior heroes, who, though not kings in the conventional sense, were indeed rulers of a sort. Forest peoples like the 'heroic' Bhils of central India, and untouchable communities like the Doms of eastern India and the Mahars of western India, were also traditional warriors and highly desired military allies and mercenary employees.[23] This marked dispersal of the prerogative to violence is in stark contrast to the sovereignty paradigm of the king's exclusive right over life/death, a principle that later mutated into the liberal principle of the state's 'monopoly of violence.'

Violence rather than sovereignty was the most enduring political problematic in South Asia. Buddhist and Jain philosophies of non-violence critiqued Brahmanical sacrificial violence, though they admitted that a certain amount of thoughtful violence was constitutive of kingship. There were many Buddhist kings in South and Southeast Asia, including the exceptional figure of king Asoka, who undertook large-scale military exploits while exhorting his subjects

19 Bayly 2000, 26–30.
20 Stein 1980; Tambiah 1977.
21 Southall 1988.
22 Pinch 1996.
23 Constable 2001; Curley 2008; Guha 2006, 113–16.

to refrain from unnecessary violence, including the eating of flesh and inter-community verbal abuse![24] The epic *Mahabharata* offers the most famous contemplation of violence in South Asia. The story of the epic is of a universal fratricidal war leading to total destruction of the warrior caste. Here, a conceptual distinction is suggested between non-violence (*ahimsa*) and non-cruelty (*anrsamsya*), non-violence being the path for renouncers of society, non-cruelty the duty of social beings. The implication was that violence was the natural condition of both species' life and social life, and by no means an exception or emergency (in Buddhist and Jain lore, even agriculture was a violation of the earth and the earth's creatures). It was one's discriminatory sense with respect to violence that was at stake here, rather than any absolute division between violence and non-violence, political society and civil society.[25]

One of the earliest origin myths of kingship in South Asia went as follows. When mortals tired of endless battle – with big fish eating the small (*matsanyaya*) – they got together to elect Manu as the first king. But Manu refused kingship because he knew that kingship entailed the sin of violence. The gods and the people had to promise to absolve Manu of the sin of violence before he agreed to rule the earth![26] Note how distinct this narrative is from Hobbes' narrative of the state of nature, social contract, and the rise of the Leviathan. Needless to say, all texts of statecraft advised the king to be judicious in the use of violence – neither too little nor too much – and royal panegyrics meticulously balanced the king's warrior image with his benevolent and ascetic temperament, and sometimes even his aesthetic and poetic disposition!

In this paradigm of dispersed logics of violence, kingship was not about law (or the suspension of law), as in the sovereignty paradigm. Law was seen to preexist kingship. There was the early concept of *rita*, cosmological regularities, only imperfectly translated as law. Then there was *dharma*, the regime of social rights and duties, mostly connected to the stations of caste and gender, and enforced by the writers of *smriti* (traditions of timeless memory, also known as the *dharmashastras*). To this was later added the *sharia*, and at least four different schools of Islamic law. Then there were *deshachar* (regional laws), *sadachar* (laws of conduct followed by the virtuous) and *lokavyavahar* (customary or popular practices), all of which competed with royal decree and Brahmanical injunctions for the status of law. There clearly was no one Law with capital L vested with sover-

24 Singh 2017, 40–54.
25 Mukherjee 2014.
26 Singh 2017, 64.

eignty.[27] Kingship was about *nyaya* (justice) and *danda* (punishment) – i.e., about juridical discernment, arbitration, and judgment – and not about the institution or suspension of laws. Local professional and caste bodies as well as monasteries also functioned as courts of law based on community and regional customs. The *Arthashastra*, therefore, elaborately discussed judicial procedures, distinguishing between civil and criminal law in what appear like very modern ways, but said nothing about the promulgation or the source of law.[28]

We see in South Asia, therefore, a critical distinction between political power and the power of law. One could even say that political power was that which could cut through the regime of laws – as when lower-caste kings defied the Brahmanical law of caste *dharma*. The Kshatriya, or the kingly *varna*, thus became socially elastic, absorbing lower-caste groups within its fold whenever the latter acquired effective political power through war and realpolitik. This distinction between politics and law became even more salient during Mughal rule (sixteenth to eighteenth centuries), in the highly charged face-off between *siyasat* (political rule, the business of kings and princes) and *shariat* (religious jurisprudence, the business of *ulemas* and *maulavis*) – rival principles of governance, not to be confused with a binary between secular and religious power. The jurists demanded that Mughal territories be ruled on Islamic jurisprudential principles. But precisely because the kingdom consisted of multi-religious and multi-ethnic subject populations, the political dispensation had to be attuned not only to diverse regional and community laws but also to a universalistic philosophy of justice.[29] Emperor Akbar promulgated *sulh i kul*, roughly translatable as the doctrine of universal accord or civility.[30] And Prince Dara Shukoh, in order to fashion the philosophical basis of a new political universalism suitable to empire, undertook a grand project of reinterpreting the Upanishads through Koranic concepts, calling it the *Majma ul Bahrain* or 'the meeting of the two oceans'.[31]

That political power was a distributed rather than a concentrated or sovereign substance is clear from even a cursory reading of the Arthashastra. The king here was not the singular locus of the state. The state was meant to have seven limbs – *swamin* (king or lord), *amatya* (minister or counsel), *janapada* (territory cum people), *durga* (fort or city), *kosa* (treasury), *bala* (force or army) and *mitra* (friends and allies). In fact, in many latter-day texts, counsel and friend were seen

27 Derrett 1968.
28 Olivelle trans. 2013.
29 Alam 2004.
30 Ernst 2010, 356–64; Nizami 1989.
31 Ganeri 2012.

as more important than the king himself, as if a state could survive an inept king, but not bad counsel and treacherous friends! Kingship in this tradition was also imagined as part of a 'wider circle of kings' or *mandala*. In other words, political power was seen as necessarily circumscribed and countermanded by other political powers, variously classified as enemy, friendly, indifferent, enemy of enemy, neighbourly, rear guard and also oligarchic, foreign, barbarian, wild and so on. Vis-à-vis these diverse counter-powers, the king was meant to deploy the multipronged strategy of *sama*, *dana*, *bheda*, and *danda* (reconciliation, gift, divide and rule, and force) in order to achieve ascendancy.[32]

By the same logic of dispersal, political power, even though embodied, was never really imagined in terms of 'personhood' in South Asia. The king's body was often considered sacrosanct and majestic, but it was not the singular locus of political power, in either a corporeal or a mystical sense. The Mughal ruler's body was seen as the repository of royalty and divine luminosity, often represented in miniature paintings with a surrounding halo, but that royalty and luminosity could in fact be transferred through the gift of the king's robe (*khelat*) to subordinate rulers and subjects, an important Mughal courtly ritual.[33] The king's body was also subject to education and askesis – precisely because it was more vulnerable to vice and corruption (*dosa* and *vyasana*) that necessarily accompanied kingship.[34]

Consequently, the modes of identification between ruler and ruled in South Asia were not those of the state impersonating and unifying society à la Hobbes. In early times, as in the rest of the world, the king could be father to his subjects, bound together by love and care. The *Ramayana* imaged the ideal-typical king Rama thus. But the story of the *Ramayana* was really about how Rama came to be a tragic hostage to 'public opinion.' Rama was forced to subject his devoted wife, Sita, earlier abducted by the anti-hero Ravana, to a test by fire to prove her chastity in public eye. Even when she passed with flying colours, he banished her, pregnant and alone, to a forest hermitage. He was also compelled by public opinion to kill the low-caste ascetic Shambuka, because the latter dared outdo the Brahmans in austerities, even though in a seventh century retelling of the story by the poet Bhavabhuti, Rama did so reluctantly, lamenting that his right hand, which did the killing, did not belong to him![35]

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32 Olivelle trans. 2013, 48–49.
33 Bayly 1986, 299.
34 Singh 2017, 112–13.
35 Pollock 2007, 50.

The identification of the king with his subjects could also be imagined as cosmological, with the king embodying the times rather than the territory. If the king was corrupt, famine, pestilence, natural calamities, anarchy, and violence visited the realm. The Mughal king was in fact the Lord of the Conjunction of planets and stars. The king was also the court of final appeal, and the dispenser of justice, forgiveness, and mercy. A periodic release of prisoners was meant to mark important royal occasions. *Darshana*, the presenting of the royal self (like a deity) to public viewing and public appeal, was an important aspect of the king's daily routine.[36] Following the tradition of pre-Islamic Sassanid ruler Anushirwan the Just, the Mughal king Jahangir had a chain of gold-plated bells installed for any common petitioner to ring at his or her time of need, establishing the principle of a personal compact of justice with each subject.[37] Theoretically, the king was also the valiant warrior who could die in battle in order to protect the people; a provider (who gave tax exemptions in times of scarcity, distributed grants and gifts, built roads, roadside inns and irrigation works, and planted shady trees for the weary to rest under). The king was also supreme patron of spiritual and aesthetic adepts, and meritorious and needy people in general. Indeed, an ideal king was expected to be the primary node of wealth redistribution – giving grants of land, villages and other prerogatives and immunities to Brahmans, temples of various religious denominations, Jain and Buddhist monasteries, artisanal guilds, and in general distributing gifts to the public at auspicious moments. The myth of Raja Harishchandra, popular to this day including in modern theatre and cinema, told of a king who gives away his kingdom, wife, and son and, with nothing left to give away anymore, gives his own person away as a slave to the untouchable king Kalu Dom. It is from the untouchable, who oversees the polluting task of cremating dead bodies, that the king learns the ultimate truth about the mortal human condition.

The subject-king identification could also be more technical. Taking the example of the eleventh century poet-king Bhoja, Sheldon Pollock describes rulership as an imaginary regime of social and moral order that identified with the grammatical order of the 'language of gods', namely, Sanskrit. Pollock notes that in this paradigm the term for social station was the same as the term for the basic phonetic sound of speech – namely, *varna*.[38] Again, in the thirteenth century Mamluk Sultanat of Delhi, the king's premium subject was the loyal *banda* or slave – natally alienated and socially dead, and, precisely for that reason, uncon-

36 Singh 2017, 156, 334; Juneja 2011.
37 Kaicker 2020, 62.
38 Pollock 2006, 274.

ditionally committed to the service of kingship. Such royal slaves came to be important powers in north India (as in Egypt), producing the paradoxical phenomenon of slave kings and slave nobles.[39] Not surprisingly, *bandagi*, or servitude, came to be seen as a highly noble and ethical mode of identification, such that even devotion to God eventually came to be called *bandagi* in popular Islam, in analogy to *dasya bhava*, or the affect of servitude as practiced in some strands of the medieval *bhakti* tradition of Krishna-worship. This led to the production of a master-slave rather than sovereign-subject form of political identification, based on a relationship of bondage and intimacy rather than of transcendence and impersonation. Note that in the case of the slave king, political power did not imply freedom/autonomy as a sovereign attribute. In the case of the Mughal state (and Safavid Iran), on the other hand, the identification of the king with his premium subjects could take the form of a *murshid-murid*, a teacher-disciple relationship, as the *padshah*, or ruler, came to fashion himself in the image of the Sufi master or saint – once again involving a relationship of devotion and following, rather than of subsumption in the king's mystical body.[40] Alternatively, in the extensive Vijayanagara kingdom of the southern peninsula, premium subjects were 'political sons,' premium subjects chosen by the ruling king over the feuding biological successors to the dynasty.[41]

Note that, across these admittedly diverse and changing forms of political identification, the king-subject interface was not theological in the strict sense of the term, which brings me to the question of the relationship between religion and politics in South Asia, a crucial aspect of the European sovereignty paradigm. Kings in early South Asia were not imagined as divine in the standard sense of divine kingship, though one of the many origin myths of kingship was that the first king was made of particles from many gods, who assembled and alienated aspects of themselves in order to fashion a king who could defeat the anti-gods.[42] And yet, apart from the fact that gods were many, and competed with each other for supremacy, in early South Asia – as in many 'pagan' mythologies of the world (including Nordic tales) – gods (and anti-gods) were as kingly as kings were godly! The epics talked of kings as partaking in the nature of specific gods, and yet, as earthly kings, these part-gods, including god-incarnates, were suffering, troubled and morally compromised beings, like the gods in heaven, engaged in perpetual contest with humans and anti-gods for fame and success!

39 Kumar 1994.
40 Moin 2012, 272.
41 Chekuri 2012.
42 Singh 2017, 125.

Buddhism, for its part, denied the very existence of god, but elaborately theorised kingship, including the supremacy of the Buddha himself as world-conqueror. In later times, when South Asian kings began to claim a royal religion and construct royal temples – identifying with particular Vaishnava and Shaiva sects, i.e., competing followers of the rival gods Vishnu and Shiva – they continued to patronise multiple religious communities, including Buddhism, Jainism and, in later times, Sufi orders and Jesuits, because, as kings, they had to be seen as much as universal patrons as supreme devotees of one or the other god.[43] In fact, Christian Novetzke's depiction of the public sphere in twelfth to fourteenth century Maharashtra shows us how multiple forms of religiosities competed with each other for popular following, requiring the Yadava kings, despite their subscription to an overarching Brahmanical ecumene, to engage with multiple communal philosophies of devotion as well as social critique.[44]

The religion question became even more interesting in Mughal times. Akbar's court became famous for sponsoring regular disputations amongst Muslim, Hindu, Jain and Christian theologians regarding the truths of various religions. Eventually, braving the censure of many an orthodox jurist, he went on to promulgate his own spiritual doctrine, *Din-i Ilahi*. Yet, as A. Afzar Moin shows, Akbar's spiritual move was a neither a form of syncretism nor a case of political secularism but a way of pitching the king himself as a saint – with miraculous powers, a prophetic vision of the future, and a supremely personal sense of justice beyond the letter of the law. Unsurprisingly, in Mughal times we find intimate alliances as well as intense rivalry between the king and the Sufi because they were seen as holders of analogous master-offices.[45] The last great Mughal king Aurangzeb's attempt to establish a bureaucratic and legalistic vision of rule based on Sunni theology, Abhishek Kaicker shows, in fact became a popular target of derision by poets and satirists of Delhi, a city peopled by deeply heterogeneous Muslim (and Hindu) publics.[46]

In other words, the multi-religious and multi-ethnic demographics of the subcontinent prevented the rise of political theology of the kind we see in the history of early modern and modern Europe just as it disabled a unitary imagination of 'society' as *natio* and as the mirror image of a monotheistic sovereign. What Sheldon Pollock has shown for the Sanskrit cosmopolis can be said to be generally true for later vernacular and Perso-Arabic ecumenes – namely, that the king, even when marked by divine attributes, never became the centre of a royal

43 Singh 2017, 184–86.
44 Novetzke 2016.
45 Moin 2012.
46 Kaicker 2020, 102.

cult nor the object of religious worship. Most importantly, the king's god was never the god of a political *ethnie*. It is worth citing Pollock's comparison of the political category *imperium romanum* and literary and cultural category *latinitas* with the Indic politico-cultural order:

> [...] the populations that inhabited it [the Sanskrit cosmopolis] were never enumerated, standardization of legal practices was nowhere attempted beyond a vague conception of moral order to which power was universally expected to profess its commitment. Sanskrit cosmopolitanism never carried particularistic religious notions like those that marked the recreated cosmopolitan forms of Charlemagne and Otto. [...] Sanskrit cosmopolitanism was not about absorbing the periphery into the center but turning the periphery itself into a center, not about taking the whole world into our city (*ingens orbis in urbe fuit*) but taking our city into the whole world (*nagarim ekam ivorvim sasati*). Sanskrit cosmopolitanism duplicated locations everywhere; it was a world of all centers and no circumferences [...] .[47]

In other words, while kingship did have an intimate relationship to the spiritual question in South Asia – if one uses the term spirituality to simply mean a generic orientation towards existential and cosmological questions of life and beyond – it was not exactly theological, exegetical, or confessional in nature. One classical example of the kind of spirituality that was enjoined for kings is found in the ideal of the *rajarsi* – the sage- or the renouncer-king – whose legitimacy rested on the fact that he could give up territory and treasure.[48] Indeed, the ideal end to a successful king's reign was when the king retired voluntarily and went to the forest to meditate (as every upper-caste householder was expected to do and as allegedly did the sixth century BCE Maurya king Bimbisara) – the highest power in the world being the hard-earned ability to give up power itself![49] In fact, one could say that spirituality was salient to kingship precisely because kings had the greatest access to power and pleasure, making them particularly vulnerable to the kind of extreme fall and corruption that only power, and desire, can bring!

The matter of the rise and fall of kings brings me finally to the question of temporality which is at the heart of my interrogation of the concept of sovereignty. In precolonial South Asia, kingship was not imagined as perpetual or a-temporal, in the image of God presiding over eternity.[50] There was an abiding sense that the movement of time ensured an inevitable waxing and waning, rise and fall, of political supremacy. Time passed through cyclical ages, or *yugas*, of moral

47 Pollock 2006, 572.
48 Gonda 1969, 1–5.
49 Singh 2017, 85.
50 For diverse traditions of thinking political time and spirituality in South Asia, see Murphy 2011; for diverse philosophies of time in India, see Balslev 2009.

decline interrupted by intense political ruptures. The last of these epochs, seen as coterminous with the age of human history, was also meant to be the time of social inversion, in which lower castes and women rose to the top. The narrative of the *Mahabharata,* for example, begins at the onset of the *kaliyuga* and thematises the destruction of almost the entire ruling class prior to a restitution of the world.[51] In fact, colonial rule itself came to be thematised as *kaliyuga* in popular discourses of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries – implying that fundamental political rupture was also an inherent aspect of the movement of time.

As Afzar Moin shows, in Mughal India and Safavid Iran, kingship was imagined in terms of astrological and millennial temporality, with emperors – 'Lords of Conjunction' or *sahib qirans* – presiding over epochal change and engaged in competing prophecies about the imminent future (unlike in national times, when the contest becomes a battle over history).[52] This was in fact a much wider phenomenon. As Sanjay Subrahmanyam shows, the sixteenth century was a millennial century not just in South and West Asia but also in Europe.[53] Anne Blackburn on her part shows that in Buddhist kingships of Southeast Asia and Sri Lanka, political regimes imaged themselves in relation to particular temporal points in the cycles of Buddha's births and rebirths.[54] Again, Said Arjomand reminds us that the Persian term for supreme political power, *daulat* (often translated as sovereignty), meant 'political fortune' as well as 'a turn in power'. The implication was that rulership was by definition subject to dissolution. Revolution, or *inquilab*, here had a double connotation. It indexed both the natural, inexorable cyclical movement of stars and planets, which was subject to the science of astrology and analogous to the impermanence of all regimes and epochs; and the ever-present possibility of the ruler's moral decay and his failure to adhere to principles of justice, which called for righteous insurgency and the overthrow of the king. In that sense, the term revolution was already being used in Persianate cultures in a politico-temporal sense way before the astrological term took on political connotations in eighteenth century Europe.[55] In this imagination, political authority was always already subject to the relentless work of time, and widely recognised as such.

In the case of the mighty Mughal regime, Farhat Hasan shows that conquest and supremacy did not mean territorial consolidation as much as the creation of

51 Inden 1978.
52 Moin 2012.
53 Subrahmanyam 2003.
54 Blackburn 2017.
55 Arjomand 2012.

an imperial transactional network – of gifts and services – involving local rulers, corporate groups, and intermediaries, producing a 'public sphere' or 'political society,' to use today's terms. In this domain, popular protest (rather than popular representation in the modern sense) was a critical mode of people's participation in the regime. To cite Hasan, popular uprising was a technique of playing the 'diffuse and supple quality of the political cell', reproducing the king of kings, I would add, as a mediating rather than transcendent figure.[56] Kaicker shows for seventeenth and eighteenth century Delhi that street action by 'people' – ranging from shoemakers to lowly preachers to foot soldiers, poets, and satirists – was an enduring phenomenon in the very functioning of kingship. Popular protest in the Mughal capital functioned both to correct the king's errors and injustices and defend kingship when threatened by 'illegitimate' counter-powers like the English East India Company in 1857.[57] To take another eloquent example, the Vijayanagara empire, which boasted of extensive territorial overlordship in fourteenth to sixteenth century Deccan, developed the *nayamkara* system, by which the Raya or supreme king, and the Nayakas, regional/local leaders, came together literally as co-parceners – like members of a joint family – of sovereignty, each with entitlements to both revenue and governance. The Nayakas, in turn, distributed their share of sovereignty to other chiefs and leaders in a further parcelling out of rulership. And in Vijayanagara too, as Chekuri shows, popular rebellion was a recurrent phenomenon, not in the collapse, but in fact in the actual functioning, of the system.

In other words, the waxing and waning of political supremacy in South Asia had to do with a repeated tilting of balance, a regular alternation, between the ascendancy of trans-regional polities and that of regional and local polities via insurgency and secession. The breakup of both the great Mughal and the great Vijayanagar regimes were precisely of this kind, following the collapse of arrangements of shared authority between rulers, supreme rulers and commoners. It is for this reason that I propose that what we see in precolonial South Asia is a form of political power – termed variously in Sanskrit and Persian as *rajasri*, *sultanat*, *daulat*, *riyasat*, *siyasat* etc. – that is better conceptualised as ascendancy rather than sovereignty. Ascendancy indexes a form of power that is 'on the rise' and eventually 'subject to fall.' That is, it is power which is contingent, ephemeral, and hence predicated more on notions of flux and temporality than stability, perpetuity, and territoriality. Ascendancy also indexes power that is relative to other powers and not absolute, indivisible and perpetual as in the case of sovereignty,

56 Hasan 2004, 24, 53.
57 Kaicker 2020, 9, 16, 295–96.

which is why the supreme title of kings in both ancient and medieval South Asia was 'king of kings' – *rajarajadhiraja* and *shahenshah* – and not just 'king of the people.'

This dynamic – the waxing and waning of ascendancy – based on the erosion of time and on the inevitability of insurgency and secession – is captured wonderfully in the *Arthashastra* (*arthasva mulam utthanam*) – where it is said that worldly efficacy, of which kingship is the epitome, is ultimately a function of the capacity of *utthan*, or ascension, involving unceasing striving and alertness, running to stay in the same place, as it were! Even the most clever and just king fails for lack of this capacity. Nrisinghaprasad Bhaduri – in his study of *dandaniti*, the tradition of statecraft that went through multiple Sanskrit and vernacular reiterations from the time of the *Mahabharata* and the *Arthashastra* through the Mughal times to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries – argues that *artha* was seen as foundational to both ordinary everyday life and kingship. Even the achievement of *dharma* and *moksha*, i.e., religion and liberation, required this prior movement of ascension, the pursuit of *artha*.[58] In that sense, ascendancy was not an exclusive property of kings. Incidentally, classical aesthetic theory makes a distinction between *vir* and *rudra rasas* or affects. *Vir rasa* (roughly translated as valour) is seen to accrue to noble characters such as kings and warriors. Its main expressive form is *utsaha* or dynamic energy (both *utsaha* and *utthana* share the same Sanskrit prefix *ut*-, implying an upward movement) and its associated orientations are correct perception, decisiveness (*adhyavasaya*), political wisdom (*nyaya*), courtesy (*vinay*), army/strength (*bal*), influence (*prabhav*) etc. *Rudra rasa* (translated as anger) however accrues to demons, monsters and violent men. Its main expressive form is fury and its associated orientations are provocation (*adharsana*), insult (*adhiksep*), lies, assaults (*upghat*), harsh words, oppression (*abhidroh*) and envy. While *vir* and *rudra* may appear proximate, *vira* is distinguished by heroic *utsaha,* the orientation that produces the possibility of ascension or *utthan*, rather than simply conflict, dissipation and destruction.[59]

The Colonial Transition

It was in the above context of competing ascendancies that the English East India Company arrived. The Company, as we know, was a corporation,[60] chartered by

58 Bhaduri 1998, 22.

59 Masson and Patwardhan 1985, 48–58.

60 For the Euro-American story of the transformation of corporations from political entities to economic 'persons,' see Barakan 2013.

the British Crown and given monopoly rights over Asian trade. The Company, however, was as interested in territorial revenue as it was in commercial profit, which is why Philip Stern aptly calls it a Company-State.[61] And yet, while admitting that the Company was indeed a political entity and not just an economic body, we must take seriously the Company's unique double character, which made it an unprecedented form of political power in South Asia. The East India Company waged war, conquered territory, set up forts, municipalities, and law courts in different parts of South Asia – effectively acting as a sovereign, and invoking 'public' authority. But in its character as a commercial entity, it also frequently asserted its 'private' interest vis-à-vis both the English Crown and Indian kingdoms. In other words, the Company asserted both rights of sovereignty and rights of property, as two faces of the same coin. This was very much in line with how sovereignty as a concept had evolved in early modern and modern Europe, enabling the Company to alternate – depending on who it was addressing – as a sovereign ruler and as a sovereign property owner, the former on the basis of 'rule of law' claims and the latter on the basis of 'liberty' claims. It cited shareholder interest in face of demands by the Crown, and Crown authority in face of parliamentary and native criticism!

In South Asia, the Company encountered the Mughal empire, a shadow of its former self but still of great dignity and legitimacy, apart from a number of regional states who were autonomous of the Mughals. It is interesting that, in the initial years, the Company operated through the 'prerogatives' of custom-free trade and revenue collection (*diwani*), acquired from the Mughal 'sovereign.' By doing so, the Company pretended to be one amongst many South Asian rulers and merchant corporations who participated in the South Asian system of 'shared sovereignty.' In actuality, the Company saw Mughal rule as an instance of 'oriental despotism,' after the image of eastern tyranny that had come to be popular in Europe at this time.[62] This was the image of an all-powerful monarch who owned all the land of the country and extracted taxes/rent from a passive and obedient subject population who possessed no sense of liberty and property and therefore no right of redress against the state. This was the Company's ideological basis for denying the 'sovereignty' of South Asian kingships, including eventually that of the Mughals (leading to Edmund Burke's famous eighteenth-century criticism that the Company disrespected the 'ancient constitutions' of other nations).[63]

61 Stern 2011.
62 Travers 2007.
63 Chatterjee 2012; Dirks 2006.

It is true that in ancient and medieval South Asia, the king was meant to have a rightful dominion over the whole earth – embodied in the earliest form of the ideal of the *chakravarti*, indexing the king whose chariot wheels traversed all territories, his own and other kings'. This rhetorical usage led to the colonial misunderstanding that in reality, all land belonged to the king, who could grant and resume the subject's property at whim. Yet in South Asia, the king's dominion (*isitva* or lordship) over land was never a form of ownership. As Jaimini's *Mimamsasutra* (c. 300–200 BCE) put it, even in context of the *visvajit*, or world-conquering sacrifice, the king had no right to dispose of the earth as he pleased! The king, like any other person, had a right to *bhoga*, or enjoyment of the fruits of his dominion – in that sense he was no different from his any of his subjects. (Note here the distinction between enjoyment and ownership.) The *Narada Dharmashastra* in fact stated in so many terms: 'In this world there are three who are independent – the king, the teacher and *every householder of every caste in his home'* (emphasis mine), the last vouching for the fact that every individual of every caste, however 'low,' had a right to private property and a private sphere, though the term 'private' is a bit of a misnomer here. The only extra privilege the king had over other property-holders, as the *Baudhayana Dharmashastra* put it, was his entitlement to a 'support' of one-sixth of the earth's produce, in exchange for his protecting others' dominions. Note that the king here 'is supported' (*bhrta*) by revenue (the term *bhrta*, meaning to hold up, a usage which later yielded the term *bhritya* for servant). This was analogous to the fact that the king also shared in the collective merit of his subjects, and vice versa.

In fact, there was in precolonial South Asia a highly elaborate discourse on personal property, involving conceptual tools and legal instruments that could help assert individual ownership rights against rulers, rival claimants, and those with subordinate claims, like tenants, cultivators, mortgagees etc. As early as in Panini's grammar, circa 400 BCE, we find discussions of the abstract concepts of *svamitva* (ownership) and *svatva* (the condition of being owned), generating a long tradition of ordinary language philosophy that theorised both identity and property. The *Arthashastra* spoke of the 'relation between property and owner' (*sva-svami-sambandha*) as a specifically legal matter relevant to statecraft (called the domain of *vyavahara* or practicalities). Later, as in the thirteenth to fourteenth century *Navya Nyaya*, the 'new epistemology' school of logicians,[64] there were

64 *Navya Nyaya* was a school of logical/inferential reasoning inaugurated by Gangesa in the thirteenth century and elaborated in the next few centuries, especially in the eastern regions of Mithila and Bengal. There are many debates in this tradition around notions of identity, property, and ownership.

threadbare debates around rights of use and rights of ownership. The *dharmashastras* too had a lot to say about socially differentiated property rights, as did more practical documents like royal inscriptions of land grants, religious endowments, and tax exemptions granted to different communities and institutions. Given the multipolar nature of political power in South Asia, property dealings, unsurprisingly, were guided by multiple laws – state laws, royal decrees, *dharma*, local customs, community norms and so on, the latter often ensured by the presence of local councils and assemblies at moments of transaction.[65]

There was however one aspect to this elaborate property regime which is particularly salient with respect to the sovereignty question, and which came into contention at the moment of the establishment of colonial rule in the subcontinent. This was the critical distinction between *svamitva* (ownership) and *adhikara* (entitlement), which was central to the administration of property in precolonial South Asia. The idea here was that, without having ownership or alienation rights in a property, certain people – such as minors, wives, slaves, dependents, and the mentally incompetent – might indeed have both ritual and legal entitlement to it. The *Arthashastra*, for example, argued that slaves, who were the property of masters, were themselves entitled to property and/or share in property. It also debated what it meant for women and children to 'belong' to spouses and parents, and whether or not such belonging could be seen as a form of ownership. In short, property entitlements accrued to even those who would appear, in the European legal tradition, as non-persons or non-sovereign individuals. Or, to put it differently, private property here did not necessarily preclude the entitlement of others to that property, including those who might be otherwise considered 'unfree'– something that would also have been familiar in many regions of Europe prior to the enclosure of commons. Ownership was usually understood to rest with the *mula-svami*, the 'root' owner (as opposed to, say, the *svami* or the king, or the current user of the property), but that ownership did not imply 'absolute' freedom, because ownership also generated a certain set of obligations. In the two dominant property systems of north and east India – the *Dayabhaga* and the *Mitakshara* – the household was seen as the primary propertied unit, and the qualified rights of fathers vis-à-vis sons, wives, servants, and the sheltered were an important subject of discussion. In fact, a *Navya Nyaya* interlocutor asked if 'being owned' – the condition of 'owned-ness,' so to speak – was about an entity's susceptibility to be 'used just as the owner wished' or to be used 'in the right way'! (The question then became whether one could stake property claims on an object which one blatantly misused.) In other words, ownership here was not

65 This discussion on early South Asian property systems is drawn from Lubin 2018.

understood here as a sovereign quality or property of an individual, even though ownership was no doubt clearly marked, documented and legally justiciable.[66]

British officials misread this proprietorial complexity to mean that in South Asia individuals had no property rights, and the state therefore had despotic power. Accordingly, the East India Company and subsequently the British India Office set themselves up as 'despotic,' allegedly in continuity to the despotic tradition of South Asian kingship. I shall not dwell on this aspect of the story here, instead referring readers to Partha Chatterjee's excellent discussion on how liberal British thinkers justified authoritarian colonial rule on the basis of a paradigm of world history consisting of European political norms and non-European exceptions and deviances.[67] What is more relevant for us here is the fact that the colonial state, for the first time in South Asia, enacted the classical form of absolute and undivided sovereignty – a totally new experience for the colonised. This it did by pitching itself not just as a transcendental entity based on an abstract and universal 'rule of law' which had nothing to do with regional or community norms (though the move from multiple legalities to legal monism was a highly contested transition), but also by literally performing its own racial and civilisational 'foreignness' with respect to the society it ruled. The colonial state thus acquired an inscrutability and externality befitting a monotheistic God, producing for the first time in South Asia the hitherto unfamiliar state-society face-off![68] The postcolonial national state in India inherited this constitutive externality of sovereign power and, despite its formal representational structure, pitted itself as

66 In other words, ownership does not necessarily entail individualism or sovereign personhood. In precolonial South Asia, the sense of individuated embodied selves (*jiva*) was highly developed, despite colonial accusations to the contrary, as was the highly complex philosophical debate around the possibility of a universal or shared self. The *dharmashastras*, even though they were about the hierarchies of caste, community, and gender, saw the embodied individual as the main addressee of normative discourse. And the widely shared theory of *karma* – which argued that good and bad deeds resulted in the accrual of merits and demerits across multiple births – posited the individuated self or *atman* as a stable entity across time. None of these theories, however, was a theory of *personhood*, based on a clear-cut separation of persons from non-persons. In fact, what we find here is the imagination of a range of life-forms – from worms and plants to merchants, kings, and gods. The story tradition of the *Jataka*, for example, narrativises the Buddha as having to go through multiple births, both human and animal, before he achieves Enlightenment and universal compassion. The *Panchatantra* too gave lessons in political competence through animal stories! For a fascinating account of the relations between personhood, identity, property, and rulership in the case of a twentieth century 'little kingdom' in Bengal called Bhawal, see Chatterjee, "The Identity Puzzle," in Chatterjee 2002, 115–37.

67 Chatterjee 2011, 1–28.

68 Banerjee 2018.

a rational, superordinate force, exercising a rule of law untouched by the alleged corruptions and compromises of society, and entitled to intervene from above to forcibly modernise/develop a backward, irrational and superstitious people.

But then, in order to effectively assume sovereignty, the colonial state had to first neutralise the rulership claims of native kings – not just those of the imperial Mughals but also the variety of local and regional rulers and warrior communities that operated in South Asia as autonomous 'little kings.'[69] To do so, the Company embarked on a 'pacification' drive, a military exercise meant to disarm landholding, peasant and tribal communities. But, as importantly, the Company went about setting up what has been aptly called the 'rule of property' in the colony.[70] This it did by promulgating new kinds of land-revenue settlements across the country – most famously, the 1776 Permanent Settlement of Bengal. This Settlement was based on the idea that landlords should have unqualified, permanent, and absolute ownership rights over land, and should no longer be subject to any social, community or political obligations attendant on ownership. The only condition for ownership was henceforth a purely economic one – namely, the regular payment of annual revenue to the colonial state. Village headmen and smallholding peasants, too, were turned into similar revenue-paying property-owners.

This new set of arrangements had an unprecedented effect. It created in South Asia a class of propertied elite – landed gentry, the Company argued, invoking the class dynamics of the English countryside – who had economic power but no political right or responsibility (though that was not true of the British aristocracy). Company officials, in the name of 'free trade,' systematically dispossessed landholders of earlier forms of political, military, and commercial authority, simultaneously 'resettling' marketplaces as purely economic sites of exchange, without any cultural or political relationship to landownership and/or rulership in the locality.[71] The landed elite could no longer boast of political legitimacy and/or patronage functions. Their subjects – the *praja* – were also turned into pure economic agents, namely, workers and peasants. This new bifurcation between the political and the economic – reflecting the modern European dichotomy between the state as sovereign and the property-owning individual as its mirror image – transformed the nature of political dynamics in the south Asian countryside, with important implications for nationalist politics in the region. That, however, is the subject of another paper.

69 Berkemer and Frenz 2003.
70 Guha 1982.
71 Sen 1998.

Conclusion

The two central terms *artha* and *daulat* – in Sanskrit and Persian respectively – that denoted kingly power in precolonial South Asia conceptualised the political and the economic as co-constitutive of rulership. *Artha* – whence the discipline of *arthashastra* or the science of politics – had a range of meanings, including purposive action, meaning/implication of a word, worldly success, the science of managing territory and also, literally, wealth. *Daulat* meant political fortune, rulership, turnover in government and, indeed, also wealth. In other words, in earlier times, it was common sense that economic power necessarily had political implications, and vice versa. The disciplinary separation of politics and economics – the binary between state and market, sovereignty and liberty, state and individual – was thus quite unthinkable in earlier days. The modern idea of sovereignty, however, is crucially based on this politics/economics binary, which is why it is assumed, even today and in the face of overwhelming empirical evidence to the contrary (in the form of trans-national profiteering and diverse modes of impoverishment, destitution, and racism operative in the world today), that the nation-state is still a sovereign entity and the human individual still a sovereign rights-bearing subject, protected by sovereign law and the indisputable master of life, liberty, and property!

Of course, reality on the ground is another matter. Today, state sovereignty is radically challenged by transnational financial networks, big corporations, data companies, and ecological, energy and health challenges at a planetary scale. Equally, in South Asia and other parts of the Global South, myriad forms of 'shared,' dispersed and nested sovereignties operate in internal frontiers, borderlands, urban spaces, and religious/caste/racial/ethnic sites. To adequately perform its putative sovereignty, the nation-state therefore has to repeatedly take recourse to extra-legal action, sometimes outright violence, and emergency laws, against these so-called counter-sovereignties, often including communities of its own people. [72]

It seems to me worthwhile, then, to free ourselves from the hold that sovereignty as a concept has over our modern political sensibility. Thinking with diverse alternative understandings of power helps us get rid of a reified notion of the state (as well as of the corporation, and indeed the autotelic agency which we have come to know as Capital as such) as a *perpetuum ens*, i.e., a perpetual entity which lives on unaltered despite revolutionary changes in its concrete embodied form. Equally, it helps us to free ourselves from the modernist imagination of

72 For a discussion on shared sovereignties in contemporary South Asia, Turkey and Southeast Asia, see the E. L. Beverly 2020, 407–93.

the human as being in a sovereign proprietary relationship with the planet, and indeed with non-humans, including those humans who are politically dehumanised in today's world. In this essay, I have proposed as one possible alternative the term ascendancy, with its inescapable connotation of contingency and change as constitutive of political authority. To my mind, these alternative understandings may help us rewrite not just regional but also global histories of political thought.

I have also argued in this paper that, to fashion alternative concepts, we need to put mainstream philosophy and European history in critical conversation with other philosophical traditions and other histories of the world. Here, given the nature of the precolonial past of South Asia, I have had to traverse Sanskrit, Perso-Arabic and regional language traditions. Equally, I have had to gesture towards moments when historians and ethnographers of Africa and Southeast Asia have had to join South Asianists in critiquing the concept of an absolute sovereign state. And I have also had to bring into focus the changes wrought by colonial epistemology in South Asia and indeed the world at large.

I call this mode of analysis, perhaps rather inelegantly, 'thinking across traditions and temporalities,' though I admit this is neither an easy nor a fully achieved methodology. Today we are faced with geopolitical divisions that have hardened into disciplinary divisions, most explicitly in the Area Studies paradigm, which makes it difficult for us to set up conversations between different regions of the world. For historians, equally challenging is the archive question, given that the world is today organised in terms of discrete national archives which must be breached if we want to genuinely think across traditions. Thinking across traditions also requires multilingual skills of a rare kind, and even though many of us might be bi- or trilingual, we still have to depend on translations, which have had their own complex and fraught history in colonial and postcolonial times. Above all, thinking across temporalities is obstructed by the periodisation schema of the discipline of history, which again makes conversation difficult between classicists, medievalists, early modernists, and contemporary historians. Nevertheless, I do believe that, collaboratively, decolonial scholars of the world can begin a conversation across times and territories, and this paper has been a modest and limited effort at joining just such a conversation.

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Anaheed Al-Hardan

Knowledge and Power in Sociology

Colonialism, Empire and the Global South

The discipline of sociology has in recent years seen the concerted publication of books in English that have ultimately served to highlight the relationship between knowledge and power in sociology. They have done this through centring empires and colonialism in the making of modern social theory and as analytic categories of analysis;[1] calling for the "decolonisation" of sociology;[2] questioned the canon and the notion of the canonical;[3] proposed alternative forms of sociology;[4] and foregrounded the Global South as the site for the production of diverse sociological traditions.[5] As a result of this conversation, it has become increasingly difficult to dismiss the fact that who and what has come to count as theory and knowledge has reflected the status of the US and Europe as hegemonic global political powers.

This ongoing conversation in sociology has unfolded within the context of the discipline's normative identity, especially the two central and interlinked assumptions upon which it is based. The first revolves around the birth of the discipline from the upheavals wrought upon Europe by modernity, including the French and Industrial Revolutions. Closely related to this is the genius of three European men – Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Emile Durkheim – who made sociology possible as they attempted to come to terms with the resultant changes wrought on their societies. These assumptions, which continue to be advanced in undergraduate and graduate sociology textbooks across the world today, are based on the premise that modernity was a historical process endogenous to Europe and one that took place independently of Europe's imperialist colonisation of the majority of the world.[6] Moreover, they presuppose that the founders of sociology developed transcendent and universal theories, applicable to all

1 Bhambra 2007; Bhambra and Holmwood 2021; Steinmetz 2013.
2 Meghji 2020; Rodriguez, Boatca and Costa 2010.
3 Morris 2015; Alatas and Vinha 2017a.
4 Alatas 2006; Connell 2007; Go 2016.
5 Patel 2010.
6 See, e.g., Giddens and Sutton 2017.

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societies and historical eras despite their roots in the Enlightenment and Renaissance, and therefore worthy of study and engagement by aspiring and practicing sociologists across the world.[7]

More recent critical interventions in sociology, however, have demonstrated how the discipline was born in the capitals of imperialist societies, and was primarily concerned with elaborating laws of progress by theorising the difference between the "primitive" (i.e. colonised) and the "advanced" (i.e. coloniser).[8] As a study of "global difference," sociology essentially "displaced imperial power over the colonised into an abstract space of difference [through a] comparative method and grand ethnography [which] deleted the actual practice of colonialism from the world of empire."[9] Thus, rather than being concerned with modernisation and industrialisation in European societies, the early sociologists were in fact not primarily concerned with modernity, but with ancient, medieval or colonial societies.[10]

Moreover, sociology also didn't initially have a list of classics or a canon. The early sociology practitioners saw themselves as engaged in an "encyclopedic" and broad advancement of knowledge – rather than a canonical one – of their so-called new "science." "As late as the 1920s," the sociologist Raewyn Connell has argued, "there was no sense that certain texts were discipline-defining "classics" demanding special study [...] it was only in the following generation that the idea of a classical period and the short list of classical authors and canonical texts took hold."[11] Thus, the sociology associated with European modernisation, the Industrial Revolution and Marx, Weber and Durkheim, emerged following the First World War and in the US. This took place after the sociology of the first-generation was brought to an end by dynamics of global power and the eventual rise of totalitarianism in Europe which destroyed the intellectual community that had developed around the North Atlantic in the preceding decades. It is within this context that sociology re-emerged in North America following the Second World War, and was transformed to a study of difference within the imperialist centres. The search for legitimacy of this new sociology lasted well into the 1950s, and it operated in a conceptual vacuum in which the formation of what we today understand as sociology and its canon began. This was enabled by a change in the audience of sociology and the introduction of higher education on a mass

7 Alatas and Sinha 2017b.
8 Go 2016.
9 Connell 1997, 1530.
10 Ibid., 1516.
11 Ibid., 1514.

scale following the Second World War. It was only in the 1960s, following the student movements, that Karl Marx was added to the discipline's canon. This new sociology changed both its object and method, and became concerned with a study of metropolitan societies and their internal differences.

Despite contemporary claims to what sociology is, the discipline was therefore formed within the imperialist centres and as a response to the colonisation of the world by European empires. In view of this, sociology had to deal with the social relations of imperialism and colonialism, including race, and gender and sexuality, even if in order to justify the inferiority of the colonised. In this chapter, I will provide a sketch of this emergent sociological literature, particularly as it pertains to colonial modernity and its relationship to social theory; the "decolonisation" of the discipline; the canon and the notion of the canonical; alternative forms of sociology; and the question of a Global South sociology. I argue that a dissident sociology that attempts to effect political change in the classroom and beyond needs to foreground empires and colonialism as analytic categories that continue to structure our world, and that such a conceptual and analytic agenda needs to be grounded in the work of anti-colonial theorists. I understand anti-colonial theorists as thinkers, activists and movements who were, or continue to be, invested in dismantling colonial and neo-colonial structures of power and who propose theories with which to analyse these structures in order to overcome them. While the question of the geographical location of these thinkers does indeed matter – in terms of their institutional contexts, experiences, language and their "universe of discourse" more broadly – geography alone is not sufficient to delineate the site for the production of anti-colonial social theory. Instead, it is the explicit political positions of these thinkers, and the questions that they were engaged in, that are paramount to a rethinking of what counts as anti-colonial social theory, and therefore, the very questions that the discipline of sociology can ask in order to effect meaningful change in the world.

Colonial Modernity and Social Theory

Modernity has been social theory's dominant frame through which to understand the world. This frame has rested on two assumptions that continue to guide sociology, which the British postcolonial sociologist Gurminder Bhambra has argued is that of "rupture and difference."[12] The rupture is temporal, the move

12 Bhambra 2007, 1.

from tradition to modernity, while difference refers to the fundamental distinction between modern European societies and those of the colonised "others" of modernity. Central to these assumptions are therefore dominant and interrelated historical and conceptual views of modernity. The former posits modernity as an endogenous European process, rooted in the Renaissance and later the Industrial and French Revolutions, and unrelated to European conquest, genocide and slavery. The conceptual approach draws on this Eurocentric historical framing of the world to argue for modernity's universal conceptual applicability. This particular mode of thought, Bhambra argues, emerged in eighteenth century Europe, in which the "social" became a site of investigation, with colonial domination and slavery providing much of the data, even if implicit, for these arguments. In the nineteenth century, these arguments became the basis upon which laws of progress were expounded, leading to historical and normative understandings of modernity in sociology in general and later modernisation theory in particular.

In a more recent book, Bhambra and Holmwood (2021) develop this argument to demonstrate how modern social theory, as a product of the history it seeks to interpret and explain, has been shaped by colonialism. They define modern social theory "as a product of European societies from the fifteenth century onwards, embodied initially in philosophical reflections about social changes that were beginning to transform those societies."[13] Social theory, they argue, is predicated on modernity's rupture and difference, as well as the double displacement of colonialism from both modernity and social theory. By rendering European colonialism in the Americas to the "pre-modern," colonialism has been made inconsequential to the development of modern European empires and modernity more broadly.[14] Similarly, nineteenth century social theory acknowledged and displaced colonialism and empire, while later social theory has been for the most part in denial about its configuration through Europe's colonial and imperial past.[15] The challenge, then, is to reconstruct "the colonial context in which the contemporary European understanding of modern social theory has been formed [and] take seriously the histories that created the context for the development of these ideas and the ways in which these colonial histories were elided in subsequent discussions."[16]

The implications of these postcolonial interventions in sociology is that we cannot think of modernity without thinking of those that modernity conquered,

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13 Bhambra and Holmwood 2021, 10.
14 Ibid., 5.
15 Ibid., 6.
16 Ibid., 21.

enslaved and exterminated; and that this has always been the other side of social theory and therefore of sociology. The centring of these structural and historical realities necessitates their conceptual translation into sociology and social theory more broadly. Before doing so, I will examine another two ways in which the centring of the relationship between power and knowledge has led to the reconsideration of the discipline of sociology. The first has been through calls to "decolonise" it, and the second through an invitation to reconsider the canon and the canonical in sociology.

The Decolonisation of Sociology

The belated arrival of postcolonial theory to sociology has also been accompanied by another late arrival: decolonial theory, and closely related to this, calls to "decolonise" the discipline. Post- and decolonial theorists are both inspired by the anti-colonial struggles and theorists of the post-World War Two decolonisation era. However, postcolonial theorists such as Edward Said ([1978] 2003), Gayatri Spivak (1988) and Homi Bhabha (1994) read these struggles and the works of anti-colonial theorists and activists primarily through French post-structuralism. Decolonial theorists, on their part, as exemplified by the research of the modernity/coloniality group of the mostly US-based South American scholars, have attempted to make an intervention in what they see as the largely British Empire-centric postcolonial theory.[17] The modernity/coloniality group centres the conquest of the Americas in the emergence of the modern and colonial world, and argues that the world continues to be governed by a form of global power that is fundamentally colonial even though nineteenth century colonialism is allegedly over (hence, "coloniality" and not colonisation).[18] Coloniality, they contend, can be countered through decolonial subaltern knowledges that attempt to confront and delink from the colonial matrix of global power (hence, "decoloniality" and not decolonisation).[19]

The Germany-based sociologists Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez, Manuela Boatcă and Sergio Costa (2010) edited a collection of essays that brings this "decolo-

17 This group of scholars emerged from a split within the Latin American Subaltern Studies group in the US in the late 1990s, between those who approached subalternity as a postmodern critique, and those who approached subalternity as the site from which to critique mainstream (including postmodern) knowledge (Grosfoguel 2007).

18 Quijano 2002.

19 Mignolo 2011.

nial turn" into a conversation with European sociology and from European perspectives, with the stated aim of "decolonizing European sociology".[20] The colonial relationship between knowledge and power, and an attempt to begin the task of undoing this relation, is therefore a central aim of the book. The editors attempt to further this aim through assembling essays that bring a postcolonial critique to sociology, pluralise modernity, and that examine difference, the others within and the south in Europe. Thus, what this collection also does is to bring the question of "decolonial theory" to sociology and social theory. By drawing on this theory, Rodríguez, Boatcă and Costa also propose that bodies of knowledge like sociology that are historically constituted through colonial power relations can be "decolonised."

Paying attention to recent decolonial interventions in postcolonial theory by sociologists is a welcome addition to recent attempts to centre the questions of colonialism and empire in the discipline.[21] Similarly, a serious consideration of what "decolonising sociology" entails is important in light of students' mobilisation in South Africa in 2015 that have most recently propelled the higher education decolonisation discourse. This mobilisation centred on the call for the decolonisation of universities through the removal of colonial era statues from campuses and the undoing of enduring structural colonial legacies like faculty and curricula composition.[22] In this spirit, decolonising sociology has led to arguments to "redesign curricula, reshape sociology's workforce, and redistribute resources" on a global scale.[23] At the same time, sociologists have also cautioned against the appearance of an intellectual decolonisation "craze" that has led to a "decolonial bandwagon" in the Global North.[24] This trend can also reinscribe the power relations it sets out to deconstruct, not least through overlooking the Global South as a site for the production of social theory.[25] Moreover, through an overwhelming focus on epistemology, the decolonisation discourse could also potentially downplay the structural aspect of relations of power.

Thus, one of decolonisation's meanings within the context of sociology today is increasingly professionalised. As a prefix, it is meant to signal a critical theoretical approach that seeks to rethink Eurocentric and therefore colonial social and political categories and ideas that we continue to use in universities, research and the classroom. The other meaning of decolonisation, tied to past and ongoing

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20 Boatcă, Costa and Gutiérrez Rodríguez 2010, 9.
21 Bhambra 2014; Meghji 2020.
22 Roy and Nilsen 2016.
23 Connell 2018, 399.
24 Moosavi 2020.
25 Ibid.

anti-colonial struggles,[26] is linked to a commitment to insurrectionary politics that unfold not only inside the university, but also outside of it, in connection not only with ideas, but also political mobilisation. Are these two different understandings of decolonisation reconcilable? They're only reconcilable if we tie the first understanding of decolonisation, the one based on critical theoretical work to the second understanding of decolonisation that comes from a particular history: which is an anti-colonial and anti-imperialist political commitment that needs to manifest itself structurally and institutionally in, and most importantly, outside, the university. Otherwise, "decolonising" does indeed run the risk of not only becoming metaphor,[27] but also another intellectual trend, which like all other trends will eventually wane while the important work of dismantling structures of oppression in the world remains as relevant as ever.

The Sociological Canon

The centring of colonialism in the discipline, and calls for its decolonisation, has been accompanied by a similar questioning of the sociological canon. A recent book by US sociologist Aldon Morris on the sociology of W. E. B. Du Bois has been particularly important in this regard. The main argument of his book is that contrary to disciplinary wisdom in which the Chicago School is generally seen as the pioneer of US sociology, Du Bois was the founder of the first scientific school of US sociology during his approximately decade-long tenure in the historically Black Atlanta University (1897–1910). Although completely obliterated from disciplinary memory, at Atlanta Du Bois built a sociological research laboratory that produced studies on Black communities and convened annual conferences that were open to all scholars and that attracted prominent scholars like Franz Boas. In addition, a first- and second-generation of Black sociologists educated in the north were mentored by Du Bois as researchers in Atlanta. These sociologists' commitment to empirical sociological studies of Black communities, and novel theories and research methods, were premised on their shared belief in, and commitment to, Black American liberation through sociology.

Morris (2015) contends that "it is ironic that a small black university, without adequate funds and considered inferior by whites, introduced scientific sociol-

26 Prashad 2007.
27 Tuck and Yang 2012.

ogy to the South under the leadership of a new type of sociological scholar."[28] Although a scholar denied, Du Bois drew on "liberation capital," or "capital used by oppressed and resource-starved scholars to initiate and sustain the research program of a nonhegemonic scientific school,"[29] and an "insurgent intellectual network"[30] to sustain the Atlanta School and its production of counterhegemonic ideas, students and mediums through which to produce and disseminate scholarship that challenged dominant paradigms. Central to Morris' argument, and the project of resuscitating Du Bois and his Atlanta School in sociology more broadly, are therefore the interrelated questions of power, racism and history, on the one hand, and their relationship to institutional structures of knowledge production, scholarly commitments, and the insurgent and liberatory potential of the activist sociology of the oppressed, on the other hand.

Syed Farid Alatas and Vineeta Sinha (2017a), two Singapore-based sociologists, have also recently taken up the question of the sociological canon and the notion of the canonical. They have done this through a textbook-style book which is designed as a practical tool with which educators could mitigate what Alatas and Sinha argue are sociology's persistent Eurocentrism and Androcentrism. Their book is not meant to discard European and therefore "classical" sociological theory altogether. Rather, their main concern is how to interrogate what is considered to be the "classical" canon in a way that is relevant to students who live amidst the continuing legacies of European empires and colonialism in the Global South. A second and interrelated concern is to provide students with a cross-section of theorists from the formerly colonised world who tackle the realities of colonisation and decolonisation in a way that is relevant to these students' lives and histories. They also introduce women thinkers to the canon with the aim of rectifying yet another shortcoming in sociological theory.

Alatas and Sinha's book is ultimately an attempt to redress the way in which sociology is taught in universities in Asia and Africa which they argue largely follows the European and North American model. To this end, the authors examine ten different social theorists and social thinkers, and draw on very different writing genres for their analysis. Most notable in their efforts is an attempt to establish Ibn Khaldun as a progenitor of sociology with relevance to a contemporary Khaldunian sociology; interrogate the classics against the context of empire and colonialism; introduce women thinkers to the canon; and incorporate anti-colonial activists and sociologists from the Global South into sociolog-

28 Morris 2015, 97.
29 Ibid., 188.
30 Ibid., 193.

ical theory. In conclusion, Alatas and Sinha argue that they are not invested in making the case for yet another must-read sociology list. Rather, their aim is to add names to the existing canon in order to enable a cosmopolitan sociology.

The questioning of the sociological canon is ultimately an attempt to address power and knowledge in the discipline: who and what has come to be counted as legitimate producers of theory, why and how they have been read, and what questions have been elided. Thus, the centring of Du Bois, and the introduction of a practical handbook for sociologists to mitigate the way in which sociological theory is traditionally taught, are both important endeavours in this regard. Other sociologists have also warned that, while doing so is important, sociologists must pay attention to both the accomplishments as well as shortcomings of thinkers who emerge from a reconsideration of the canon.[31]

Alongside calls to reconsider the canon and the canonical, sociologists have also put forward arguments for different approaches to the discipline, all of which are keenly attentive to the way in which knowledge and power operate in the realm of social theory. These different approaches point to these larger structural processes by putting forward political economy, colonial and postcolonial or geographical approaches to social knowledge production. They therefore critique normative understandings of knowledge production which obscure questions of power, and suggest alternative paradigms.

Autonomous, Southern and Postcolonial Sociology

In his book on the problems of knowledge production in the Asian social sciences, Syed Farid Alatas (2006) has argued that there is a problem of academic dependency in the Asian social sciences. Academic dependency translates into the dependence of social scientists in the Global South "on their counterparts in the West for concepts and theories, research funds, technologies of teaching and research, and the prestige value attached to publishing in Western journals."[32]

Alatas argues that there are two orientations within these alternative discourses: nativism and autonomy. While nativism encapsulates, for the most part, what Alatas sees as reactionary calls to reject Euro-American social science, autonomous orientations are based on calls for a social science that is neither

31 Burawoy 2021a. For example, I examine and critique Du Bois's Zionism, as indicative of a shortcoming in his analysis of imperialist colonialism more broadly, in Al-Hardan, forthcoming in Aldon Morris et al. 2022.

32 Alatas 2006, 31.

dependent on Euro-American social science structures nor the state in Asia: "The chief traits of autonomous social science," Alatas contends, "are autonomy in the conceptualization and prioritization of problems, in the development of research agenda, in the building of original theory, and in the conduct of empirical research […] lead[ing] to a constructive critique of Western knowledge as well as a serious consideration of non-Western sources of knowledge."[33]

Alatas's attention to the centre-periphery relationship in the realm of the political economy of global knowledge production is echoed in Raewyn Connell's (2007) arguments on what she refers to as "southern theory."[34] This theory, Connell contends, is meant to emphasise unequal power relations between intellectuals and institutions in the Global South and Global North; underscore and contest both the Euro-American and imperialist orientation of dominant articulations of theory in the social sciences; and emphasise that the location for the generation of theory in fact matters.

At the same time, the limits of geography are evident in Connell's discussion of Australia, particularly early Australian settler-colonial scholars, as historically part of the world periphery exporting facts on indigenous communities. She in fact demonstrates how these settler-colonial scholars were beneficiaries of the colonial global political economy of knowledge production, even if their status as "mere" exporters of knowledge on indigenous communities vis-à-vis their counterparts in the "centre" has not been on par with scholars based in the centres of empire. Her book begs the question, how can we define what constitutes the "southern" in southern theory?[35]

Sociological approaches which underscore political economy approaches to knowledge production, and those that foreground the question of geography, and its limitations, in the generation of theory, have recently been joined by calls for a "postcolonial" sociology. One of the most notable advocates of this approach is US sociologist Julian Go. Go (2016) argues for bringing postcolonial theory as developed in the humanities into a conversation with social theory as developed in the social sciences. This conversation, he argues, is necessary as the two theoretical traditions have developed in opposition to each other. Social theory, Go argues, was birthed in, of and for empire, while postcolonial thought, on the other hand, was born in opposition to it. By bringing these two divergent schools of thought into conversation, a postcolonial sociology could be developed which

33 Alatas 2006, 114.

34 The question of the south has been further developed, most notably by the Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos, see Santos 2014 and 2018.

35 For a critique, see Burawoy 2021b.

pays attention to empire and colonialism, and that is analytically centred on postcolonial relationality, subaltern standpoint theory and postcolonial perspectival realism.

A conversation between postcolonial theory and sociology, Go contends, could and should be developed into a "third-wave" of postcolonial thought based in the social sciences. It is essentially an invitation for sociology to reconsider its imperial and colonial standpoint in terms of its historical formation and analytic frameworks and assumptions; its persistent orientalism, Eurocentrism and historicism; its occlusion of empire and resultant analytic bifurcation and repression of colonial agency; and, finally, its metrocentrism, or the viewpoint from the former and current empire's metropoles that is ahistorically and apolitically universalised.

Global South Sociology

The emergent debates and different approaches discussed thus far foreground the question of the colonised "other" within sociology and colonial modernity. This "other" is centred on the Global South, understood as a geo-political demarcation based on "colonial legacies, neocolonial interventions as well as of resistance".[36] Such a definition could also include racialised and colonised communities in the US and Europe (what is sometimes referred to as the "Global South in the Global North"). When understood in this way, the critiques and approaches discussed thus far foreground the question of the Global South as the "other" of colonial modernity, analytically and conceptually, directly[37] and indirectly,[38] through the questioning of the canonical in the discipline, or the centring of postcolonial approaches.

The question of the past and present realities of the institutional location of the social sciences in the Global South is important for this conversation. It is examined in a collection edited by the Indian sociologist Sujata Patel (2010) on global sociology traditions in which Asian, African and South American traditions of social sciences are examined in great depth. The book is the fruit of Patel's labor as the Vice-President of the International Sociological Association's National Associations. Patel's aim in this edited collection, as per her introduc-

36 *Review of African Political Economy* 2020.
37 Alatas 2006; Connell 2007.
38 Go 2016; Morris 2015.

tory chapter, is to "create discussion on how to assess all aspects of the discipline organised and institutionalised across the globe: ideas and theories; scholars and scholarship; practices and traditions; and ruptures and continuities, through a globalising perspective that examines the relationship between sociological knowledge and power."[39]

Patel is emphatic that the book is not a Handbook of national sociologies. Rather, her goal is to present "diverse and universal sociological traditions [that] present distinct and different perspectives to assess their own histories of sociological theories and practices."[40] As a large number of the contributors to the Handbook are from Africa, Asia and South America, the book foregrounds approaches and debates in sociology in institutional contexts outside of Europe and North America, and fills an important lacuna in the English language in this regard. The different contributors approach the question of sociology within their own countries or regions in different ways. Some authors present a historical overview of the emergence of sociology in the respective countries.[41] Others undertake a transnational and/or conceptual approach.[42]

While an institutional examination of the question of the production of sociology and the social sciences is important, such an approach does not automatically centre the question of colonialism and empire in the discipline. This is evident in Patel's book, in which, for example, the chapter on South Africa by Tina Uys stands in stark contrast to the chapter on Israeli sociology by Victor Azarya. The latter ignores the realities and dynamics of Israeli of settler-colonialism and the discipline's intimate relationship to the architecture of the occupation of Palestine, focusing instead on its relationship to Euro-American standards of "academic excellence."

Thus, an institutional approach to the question of the production of sociology and the social sciences must be accompanied by a conceptual approach that explicitly examines the entanglement of the discipline and social theory with empires and colonialism, and that centres both as analytic categories of analysis. The US sociologist George Steinmetz's (2013) edited collection on sociology and empire does precisely that, and also offers historical sociological studies of colonialism and empire from different parts of the world. Such an analytic approach foregrounds historical, social and political experiences that have underwritten imperial societies and the formerly colonised world, and is an important back-

39 Patel 2010, 2.

40 Ibid.

41 Porti and Dwyer 2010; Pereyra 2019.

42 Briceño-León 2010; Beigel 2010; Sall and Ouedraogo 2010; Uys 2010.

drop to any examination of the institutional emergence of African, Asian and South America sociology and the social sciences more broadly.

Conclusion: Anti-Colonial Social Theory

In this chapter, I have provided an overview of an emergent conversation in sociology which I have argued is ultimately centred on a critical approach to the relationship between power and knowledge. If we understand Empire and colonialism as co-constitutive of modernity, and modernity as the necessary beginning of a conversation on social theory and sociology, then our starting point must be grounded in the how and why of social theory's support, justification or obscuring of the colonisation of the majority of the world at the moment of its emergence. The question of the colonised "others" of modernity has led to calls for the decolonisation of social theory and sociology as well as the questioning of the very notion of the canonical given that canons are reflective of hegemonic power relations. These critiques, which have led to the fundamental questioning of the core tenants and assumptions of social theory and sociology, have also yielded innovative approaches to the question of the study of the social. As I have demonstrated, these innovative approaches have centred on the political economy of the circulation of global knowledge, the question of geography in the generation of social theory, and the question of colonial and postcolonial theory in the social sciences. While a more sustained focus on the institutional context of the emergence of the social sciences in Asia, Africa and South America has been an important contribution to this conversation, an institutional focus can only be enhanced and enriched by an analytic approach centred on empires and colonialism.

This focus on the analytical and conceptual raises the questions: what kind of theory and theorists must we invoke, from what locations, and for what purpose, if we are invested in a self-consciously critical social science and sociology that understands colonialism as central to its own making, and one that we can continue to teach as relevant across the world? Here I'd like to suggest that examining and centring the works of anti-colonial theorists is one possible way to pursue and propel this conversation forward. This is because if the development of social theory and the social sciences was enabled through the imperialist colonisation of the world, a careful attention to an engagement with these structural processes, and their ideational justifications, by anti-colonial theorists allows for a construction of a genealogy of social theory formulated in order to understand structures of domination and for the purposes of overturning them. The examination of this kind of social theory begins from the political positions of these

theorists, regardless of whether they were writing, and continue to write from the centres of Empire or from the colonies. While the question of their institutional context and the traditions of discourses they invoke is of course important, a focus on the analytical and conceptual questions of colonialism and, conversely, anti-colonialism allows for the formulation of social theory, and a sociology, invested in analysing past and present ongoing systems of colonial and neocolonial domination and for the purposes of overturning them.

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Sanya Osha

C. A. Diop's Decolonising Historiography

A Re-Reading of *Precolonial Black Africa* Today

Senegalese physicist, historian, Egyptologist, and Pan-African activist Cheikh Anta Diop was born in Diourbel, Senegal, on December 23, 1923. He came from a Muslim Wolof family with an agrarian background who were part of the Mouride Islamic sect. Diop was educated in the Koranic and French institutions of the colonial era. In 1946, after obtaining a bachelor's degree in his native country, he travelled to Paris, where he continued his studies in physics at the Sorbonne.

However, shortly after his arrival, his attention was diverted to the study of the black African origins of Pharaonic Kemet. Diop's academic objective was to challenge and subvert the Hegelian and, by extension, Eurocentric notion of Africa as a conceptual cipher in world history in general, and, in particular, the figure of the black subject as a 'fungible' (non)presence within a spatio-temporal configuration.

At this juncture, his work had two central dimensions: the scholarly project and his activist engagement. Among his activist commitments, Diop served as Secretary-General of the Rassemblement Démocratique Africain (RDA) and worked to establish the first Pan-African Student Congress in Paris in 1951. He was also engaged in the deliberations of the First World Congress of Black Writers and Artists, held in Paris in 1956, and the second Congress, held in Rome in 1959. At the First World Black Festival of Arts and Culture held in Dakar 1966, he was honoured alongside W. E. B. Du Bois for leading the major orientations of twentieth century African thought.

During the early 1960s, Diop established two political parties, Bloc des Masses Sénégalaises (BMS) and the Front National du Sénégal, which challenged the pro-France policies of Leopold Sédar Senghor's administration. However, in 1963, BMS was proscribed; Diop responded by founding the Rassemblement National Démocratique (RND) in 1976. In addition, Diop served as the editor of the RND-affiliated Wolof-language journal *Siggi*.

Diop's academic life was no less eventful. In 1951, his doctoral dissertation affirming the black origins of pharaonic Egypt was rejected by his committee, though he was subsequently able to publish the work as *Nations nègres et culture* in 1955. With a battery of historians, anthropologists, and sociologists in tow in his defence, he was eventually awarded his doctoral degree in 1960.

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On the completion of his studies in France, rather than being granted the leeway to propagate his novel ideas in university classrooms, Diop worked at the University of Dakar as a research fellow in a radiocarbon-dating laboratory at the Institut Fondamental d'Afrique Noire (IFAN).

In 1974, with the assistance of his colleague Theophile Obenga, Diop again re-asserted his argument regarding the black African origins of pharaonic Egypt. After publishing *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality* (1974); *The Cultural Unity of Black Africa* (1978), *Towards the African Renaissance: Essays in African Culture and Development, 1946–1960* (1978), and many other books, Diop passed away in 1986 at the age of 63.

With the growing global awareness of decolonial analysis, C. A. Diop definitely needs to be accorded critical acceptance, for a number of reasons. Due to the hegemonic Eurocentric proclivity prevailing in African academic institutions, his scholarship and achievement were not fully understood or appreciated during his lifetime. In addition, the transdisciplinary nature and impact of his ground-breaking writings make it difficult to categorise his work. Finally, he encountered considerable intellectual, political, and ideological resistance on multiple fronts, which meant he was seldom read, and mentioned only to condemn and dismiss him. In other words, Diop was only read by his staunch advocates and not the wider public.

This essay argues for a reconsideration of Diopian scholarship which, as mentioned earlier, is often misunderstood, under-appreciated and sometimes brazenly vilified outside Afrocentric circles. Such a reconsideration might also lead to a degree of convergence between Diopian historiography and decolonial critique. Even in certain sections of the African academy, Diop's thought continues to be either misunderstood or ignored. The critical acclaim his work has received in Afrocentric circles has not exactly translated into universal valorisation. As such, this essay can be considered a plea for a serious re-evaluation of the Diopian corpus. Recent re-examinations of the Diop corpus include the last works of the late Ugandan scholar, Dani W. Nabudere (2011, 2012). Others who have lauded Diop's vital scholarship include the late John Henrik Clarke.[1] Oba T. Shaka,[2]

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1 John Henrik Clarke, a prominent African American scholar working primarily in the East Coast region of the United States of America, was an active participant in the Harlem Renaissance and worked with some of its key proponents. During the late 1960s, alongside other activist-scholars, he pushed for the establishment of black studies programmes in American academia.

2 Oba T. Shaka was a civil rights activist whose work commenced in the early 1960s. He eventually became a professor of African American Studies at San Francisco State University, California, where he was instrumental in employing Theophile Obenga, Diop's equally world-renowned Afrocentric scholar. Obenga was a loyal student of Diop.

Leonard Jeffries[3] and of course, Molefe Kete Asante[4] and Theophile Obenga.[5] Instructively, virtually all the scholars mentioned work within the Afrocentric school of thought. But the point is to see Diop resonate beyond the customary Afrocentric circles. Indeed, Diop's intellectual orientation, politics, and activism, which demonstrate interlocking linkages, reflect a powerful decolonising tendency. His now famous theses on the origins of ancient Egyptian civilisation have had a tremendous impact on the discursive orientations of anthropological and archaeological studies, and of course, African history and philosophy. Yet, as mentioned above, there has always been some resistance to his work in the academy.

Diop establishes and develops a number of important premises based on the two cradle theory encompassing the idea of Africa as the cradle of humanity and the cultural unity of the much-maligned continent. Instructively, we are now able to trace the origins of humankind via mitochrondrial DNA back to ancient Africa. Diop also demonstrates that female/male reciprocity which is indeed the first form of matriarchy and existential equilibrium, existed in ancient Egyptian social formations. He was versed in a wide range of disciplines spanning history, linguistics, cultural anthropology, history, physics and chemistry. Philosophically, he believed in the Kemetian foundational concept of *Maat* which refers to the notion of universal and ethical harmony. These ideas are re-configuring the trajectory of many African Studies-related disciplines and hence the necessity to begin to re-read Diop in a new light. In this particular essay, we are able to discern

3 Leonard Jeffries, another pioneer of black studies in the United States, was part of the processes that led to the first translations of Diop's work in the US. He has continued until the present time to disseminate Diop ideas in both academic and popular contexts.

4 Currently, Asante is the author of 97 books dealing with African and African American history, cultures and societies and he is also a professor of Africology at Temple University, USA. He began his ground-breaking research in Africology with his landmark *The Afrocentric Idea*, Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1987 and numerous other publications. See Zulu 2008.

5 Theophile Obenga, a native of the Republic of Congo, is a multi-disciplinary scholar specialising in African studies, linguistics (he speaks about ten or more languages) and philosophy, amongst other disciplines. He was a close collaborator of Diop and was present at the landmark UNESCO Cairo conference in 1974 where Diop presented his novel and path-breaking findings on ancient Egypt and other related intellectual conundrums. There continues to be some resistance within academia to Diop's more radical ideas, and the scholars mentioned here – Shaka, Jeffries and Obenga – have campaigned for greater acceptance of his work. It is instructive to note that Clarke, Shaka, Jeffries and Obenga have been particularly active in promoting Diop's work within the sectors of the American academy. Their efforts unfold through symposia, lectures and public engagements geared towards promoting Diop's work in practical terms.

his thesis concerning the cultural unity of Africa in his analyses of the ancient African kingdoms of Ghana, Songhai and Mali.

Diop's historiography invokes a radically different vision of Africa, a continent previously deemed to have been devoid of History, God, Truth, and Mind, to paraphrase a famous Hegelian formulation. In debunking the racist depiction of the African continent as elemental void, Diop proposes an antithetical thesis – nothing less than the repudiation of an entire episteme. In many ways, his project is more radical than that of négritudist ideology, in the sense that it seeks to move beyond merely affirming the validity of black subjectivity by erecting an entirely new epistemological paradigm based on Afrocentric principles. This project of radical epistemic decolonisation is undoubtedly transcendent in its unwavering approach and subsequent impact. Finally, this analysis is based on a re-reading of his *Precolonial Black Africa* (1987) in addition to his landmark presentation at the famous UNESCO-organised Cairo symposium in 1974.

African History: A Beginner's Guide

Ensconced in Diop's powerful historiography is an apt and all-important question: What have we lost through the colonial encounter? Diop's equally poignant and liberating response: "Our history." Thus, an analysis of his *Precolonial Black Africa* serves to prove this point in more ways than one. This chapter demonstrates how Diop sheds new light on the history of precolonial Africa and then concludes with a re-affirmation of Diop's thesis on ancient Egypt and its radical decolonising implications. Essentially, Diop offers generous historical accounts of the ancient kingdoms of Ghana, Songhai and Mali which shift our perspective on precolonial Africa.

At the beginning of this discussion, I examine Diop's work on black Africa itself to ascertain its Afrocentric value. Diop's pioneering contributions to Afrocentric scholarship have not been well received in the European academy and many parts of Africa. In my view, much of his work in relation to Afrocentric research convincingly debunks the long-held Eurocentric idea that, prior to the incursions of the white race, black Africa had no history, culture, or civilisation worth talking about. This premise serves as Diop's point of departure, in support of which he presents factual data and analysis regarding the existence of black Africa's remarkable historical past.

In *Precolonial Black Africa*, Diop immediately, without so much as a preamble, launches the task of attesting to Africa's past. First, he examines the institutional practice of slavery, particularly in what is present-day Senegal, and discov-

ers distinctive characteristics that distinguished different castes. It was socially frowned upon for an individual of a higher caste to materially exploit one of a lower caste. Even if individuals were less wealthy than others who were socially below them, they were expected to offer material assistance when called upon. Serfs and slaves were not social and economic outcasts, as they played important roles in the organisation and maintenance of society.

Diop posits that, because the social system was relatively stable, it did not engender revolutions against it; in the absence of supporting evidence, this would appear to be a generalisation. What did occur were revolts against those at the helm of the system if they were deemed to be unworthy or incompetent. This practice of slavery, as Diop points out, was not as destructive and traumatic as the Atlantic slave trade, which is estimated to have "swallowed up one hundred to three hundred million individuals, dead or shipped to America."[6]

Diop writes, "the ennobling of a slave, even by the king, was impossible in Africa, in contrast to the customs of European courts."[7] Again, this seems most improbable. Oshodi Landuji Tapa (c. 1800–1868), originally from the Nupe kingdom, was a slave who, by dint of his considerable intelligence and military expertise, was able to rise to the apex of the Lagos monarchical establishment during the reign of Oba Kosoko. In addition, Oshodi Tapa became a very wealthy man as a result of tributes paid to him though international trade transactions.

One of the central arguments Diop advances for the non-revolutionary disposition of slaves in Africa is that under polygamy, slaves belonging to a mother were more integrated into the family than those working under a father. Due to social integration, a slave was usually seen as being part of the family, and hence, would have no reason to revolt. A slave belonging to a father, on the other hand, was viewed as "the scapegoat for the society,"[8] enjoying no special privileges or allegiance from anyone. As such, the slave could be disposed of at any time without any consequences. In spite of the relative state of abjection of the slave of a father in relation to the slave of a mother, Diop writes that the existential conditions of such a slave were better than "the plebian of ancient Rome, the thete of Athens, or the sudra of India."[9] Slaves of a father's household were said to be unable to enter the full revolutionary phase because of the isolated nature of African villages. In terms of the social structure, Diop claims Africa did not possess a feudal system. These two principal conditions, the absence of a feudal

6 Diop 1987, 142.
7 Ibid., 4.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid., 5.

system and the isolation of African villages, made it impossible for revolutionaries intent on overthrowing the social structure to emerge.

Truths of Graeco-Roman Culture

In Graeco-Roman society, plebs, the general body of free Roman citizens who were not patricians, were said to be responsible for radical transformations of society, since they had no real allegiance to the established order. The established order, made up of patricians, observed strict religious injunctions handed down from one generation to the other; priests were charged with maintaining the prescribed religious observances and could be killed if they departed from accepted codes of conduct. Under such rigid social conditions, innovation, deviance, and heresy were prohibited. The order sought only to maintain the status quo, together with its beliefs and ideologies. Only plebs and foreigners could not be bothered with the values and aspirations of the established order, and it was within their midst that seeds of dissent could be found. Diop writes that state-formation processes originated in the south, in ancient Egypt in particular, and that this innovative political development later found its way into the transformations that led to establishment of the Greek city-states. At this juncture, he introduces a perspective frequently advanced in Afrocentric discourse.

During the seventh century BCE, the power structure of ancient Rome comprised the king and the aristocracy, made up of the Eupatridae. The king's powers were largely symbolic and confined to the religious sphere, while the aristocracy held on to political power. To subvert this defined power structure, a series of kings started to side with and empower the plebs, thereby upsetting the relations of power between the royalty and aristocracy. Eventually, a system largely attributed to Lycurgus of Sparta was established, in which the powers of kings were subordinate to the senate. Diop also provides accounts of the emergence of tyrants as rulers, the progressive weakening of the powers of the aristocracy, and the rise of plebs as they acquired financial capital and hence political strength. The plebs were not intent on doing away entirely with aristocratic traditions. In many instances, they reproduced the very institutions of the socio-political class that had previously oppressed them. The plebs and aristocrats still formed alliances in marriages that were intended to store up the latter's financial fortunes. A wide range of transformative socio-political contestations led to the formation of Graeco-Roman democracy. It is important to note that the journey toward democracy was never smooth and was, in fact, characterised by reversals, upheavals, and violence. The plebs had to fight every inch of the way to acquire and establish

what they deemed to be their rights. Of course, aristocrats responded by attempting to protect their privileges and waning powers.

At the level of ideas, Anaxagoras, Socrates, Plato, and Zeno of Citium all contributed to the broadening and consolidation of Athenian democratic traditions. Socrates in particular "contributed to freeing morals from religions, placing justice above the law, and making conscience the guide of man."[10] It has been suggested that Zeno, considered to be the founder of the Stoic school of philosophy, propounded the idea of a universal God in conjunction with a deeper notion of democracy.[11] However, introducing another Afrocentric perspective, Diop writes that the concept of universalism stems from ancient Egypt, which promoted the belief in the existence of a universal God whose omniscience transcends tribe, city, and nation. Christianity, which was originally a religion of the Jews, God's chosen tribe, would later adopt this creed of universalism.

Christianity 's entrenchment stemmed from the persecution its earlier adherents suffered in Rome.[12] Thrown to wild beasts to be devoured, they became martyrs. The canonisation of the Christian faith became possible after this singular period of tribulation and sacrifice. Diop points to the influence of the cult of Isis on the evolution of Christianity as a religion. The emergent religion also borrowed many of its organisational structures from Rome in terms of the adoption of bishoprics and dioceses as key units.

Diop claims that the West stagnated in the fields of culture, science, and technology until the seventh century CE, when Arabs started to spread the latest and most advanced ideas in those fields. During the Middle Ages, Islam and Catholicism became the principal vehicles through which knowledge was disseminated, paving the way toward modernity. In Europe, Spain attained technological preeminence due to the Arabian influence upon the prevailing paradigm in science and technology. However, the growth of both knowledge and culture was disrupted when barbarian hordes, namely Normans (the Norman conquest of England in 1066) and Hungarians (during the ninth and tenth centuries CE), invaded Europe and reversed broad civilisational trends. Life and property became unsafe, with

10 Diop 1987, 30–31.

11 Ovid 1961; Oakley 1981; Orrells, Bhambra, and Roynon 2011; Pierris 2005; Plato 1962; Plato 1975a; Plato 1975b; Rashidi, 1988; Rattray 1927.

12 Apollodorus of Athens 1970; Kimball 1978; Bakalis 2005; Barnes 1979; Barnett 1953; Bernal 2001; Budge 1973; Burnet 1934; Dodds 1951; Durkheim and Mauss 1970; Edwards 1985; Eliade 1954; Ellis 1887; Ellis 1894; Emery 1961; Empedocles 1908; Fairbanks 1898; Fairman 1935; Fairman 1965; Falconer 1797; Faulkner 1994; Feldmann 1963; Forsdyke 1957; Frankfort 1948; Frankfort 1957; Frazer 1898; Frazer 1919; Frazer 1914; Freeman 2008; Gardiner 1916; Gardiner 1932; Gardiner 1944; Gimbutas 1992; Gimbutas 1991; Goneim 1956.

most monarchies unable to guarantee peace and stability. Diop writes that this state of generalised insecurity led to the emergence of feudalism, which arose out of the widespread breakdown of law and order. Vulnerable groups flocked to lords, who were able to provide security against marauding intruders. In return for their protection, the lords demanded material rewards, which strengthened their positions politically and militarily. Within a few generations, a system of vassalage involving nobles, on the one hand, and the lower social classes (serfs) on the other, was formed. In time, the conditions of the dependent classes worsened, while the lords further entrenched themselves.

After tracing major historical developments in the West, Diop turns his attention to the central political features prominent in Africa "from the first to the nineteenth century"[13] In this period, a notable paradigmatic development was the conversion to Islam – first introduced into Africa as early as the eighth century – of the African states of Ghana, Mali, and Songhai "in the tenth century, under the influence of the Almoravid movement."[14]

The Great West African Empires

Diop begins with an explication of ancient Ghana's political organisational structure, although he does not provide much information about its constitution. Ghana was eventually drained by constant attacks by the Sussu (Sosso), capitalised upon by Sundiata Keita, the founder of the Mali Empire, which replaced Ghana as the preeminent regional power. After the collapse of Ghana, the region was plunged into political turmoil and instability, during which procedures of succession pertaining to rulership were disrupted.[15]

Power operates along two principal nodes: the visible and the invisible. Both realms are governed by a vitalist force, which dictates the nature and extent of an individual's power. If, for instance, a tooth or claw of a lion served as a monarch's talisman, then it was believed that, to defeat the monarch, a force stronger than both the monarch and a lion had to be summoned. In battles between kings, such vitalist dimensions were said to play a crucial role in the determination of victory or defeat. The belief in this phenomenon survived the widespread incursion of Islam in sub-Saharan

13 Diop 1987, 43.
14 Ibid.
15 Van Binsbergen 2003; van Binsbergen 2005; van Binsbergen 2007; van Binsbergen 2010; van Binsbergen 2011; Van Sertima 1976; Van Sertima 1985; Wiredu 1980; Wiredu 1983; Wiredu 1993; Wiredu 1994; Wiredu 1996.

Africa, through which kings, instead of enlisting the services of indigenous priests and diviners, sought the assistance of marabouts and other messengers of Islam in accessing the esoteric arts.[16] Diop writes, "metaphysics, far from constituting a minor fact in African historical sociology, was a predominant trait."[17]

Vitalism determined the vibrancy and quality of existence; it separated life from death, in which life was all that mattered in between the natural rhythms of night and day. The forces and dynamics that established the equilibrium within this plane of ontology were respected. If and when this order was destabilised, then it was perceived as contrary to nature; a rude violation that carried severe consequences. This was the case when the rites of succession within a monarchial tradition were violated or discarded. Order had to be re-established; otherwise, "all of nature will be sterile, drought will overtake the fields, women will no longer bear children, epidemics will strike the people."[18]

In ancient Egypt, it was believed that, when a king's inner drive significantly decreased, he was losing his life force and had to be replaced to ensure the continuity of the community and the ontological rhythms and constants associated with existence. The practice of deposing a symbolically enervated king was known in both black Africa and ancient Egypt and in the following peoples, "the Yoruba, Dagomba, Tchamba, Djukon, Igara, Songhai, Wuadai, Haussa of the Gobir, Katsena, and Daoura, the Shillucks, among the Mbum, in Uganda-Ruanda."[19] Kings were associated with divinity; they were supposed to exist on a higher metaphysical plane than mere mortals. As such, the king was "truly guarantor of the ontological, and therefore the terrestrial and social, order."[20]

Diop dwells extensively on the Songhai Empire, much more than he did on Ghana and Mali. Sonni Ali, the lukewarm Muslim and the renowned ruler of Songhai, comes up a few times for mention. But Askia Mohammad (aka Askia), former lieutenant of Sonni Ali and the founder of the monarchial dynasty that bears his name gets more in-depth treatment. Askia Mohammed met the fourteenth Abasside caliph of Egypt in 1479, and was conferred with the title, 'Caliph of the Black Nationalities. He is also legendary for the enormous wealth he displayed and expended during his visit to the holy city of Mecca when he took with him 1,500 men and 300,000 pieces of gold, a large portion of which he dispensed with in the city and at Medina. Askia Mohammed was a staunch Muslim and

16 Davidson 1959.
17 Diop 1987, 60.
18 Ibid., 61.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid., 62.

waged holy wars meant to entrench the reign of Islam, unlike Sonni Ali, whose governance was not linked to Islamic principles. On the contrary he was more restrained in his religious fervour. In history, notably in Abd al-Sadi's *Tarikh es-Soudan* (The history of the Sudan) (1898/1964), Sonni Ali is portrayed as an uncontrollable tyrant who murdered distinguished scholars and pious men of God alike.

Diop then traces the gradual Islamisation of large parts of present-day West Africa, after which he identifies what he considers to the indigenous structures of rulership:

> Africans [...] never experienced a lay republic, even though the regimes were almost everywhere democratic, with a balance of powers. That is why every African is at heart a hidden aristocrat, just as every French bourgeois was before the Revolution. The deeper reflexes of the present-day African are more closely tied to a monarchial regime than to a republican one. Rich or poor, peasant or urbanite, all dream of being a small or great lord rather than a small or great bourgeois. The quality of their gestures and attitudes, their manner of seeing things, whatever their caste, is lordly and aristocratic in contrast to bourgeois "pettiness."[21]

In the next line, Diop writes, "there is still one revolution's distance between African and Western consciences, in terms of instinctive behavior," a remark with heavy négritudist tones in its essentialising intents. Diop states that aristocratism was the predominant mode of rulership in Africa generally, and not even its encounter with the West, beginning in the sixteenth century, did much to alter this political characteristic. On the other hand, the encounter with Western civilisation leading to eventual colonisation halted the internal evolutionary trajectory of African societies, thereby impeding dynamic political initiatives. In places where detribalisation had begun to take effect, the trend was reversed, thereby truncating the movement toward political growth and maturity.

Aristocratism and clanism characterised socio-political existence in precolonial Africa. After the introduction of modernity, analysts aver that aristocratism and clanism soon became the primordial civic dichotomy. So, a bifurcation of the public domain has continued to endure in one form or another. Diop typifies the African as being "an aristocratic collectivist,"[22] which prevents Africans from attaining a state of "socialist evolution." Further, Diop writes, "the ceremonial of court life was very strict and seemed, give or take a few variants, to have been the

21 Diop 1987, 72.
22 Ibid., 74.

same throughout black Africa."[23] When in the presence of a monarch, subjects had to sprinkle their heads with dust as a "sign of humility."[24]

In Songhai, during the reign of Askia, the monarchial institution had become thoroughly Islamised. The insignia of the ruler consisted of a seal, a sword, and the Koran, claimed to have been granted by the Umayyad of Spain. Scholars of ancient history have attested to Ghana's enormous wealth. The king's headgear was bedecked with gold and other materials of the finest quality; his throne was located inside a pavilion surrounded by horses decorated with gold; his entire entourage was arrayed with the same level of visual splendour, consisting of gold and impressive royal paraphernalia.

When Ibn Battuta, a Moroccan explorer famously known for his world travels, visited Mali during the reign of Mansa Soleiman from 1351 to 1353, he found a significant degree of monarchial opulence. In addition, mention is made of "a handkerchief with Egyptian designs,"[25] which immediately emphasises the Kemetic links with black Africa.

In examining the ancient monarchies of Ghana, Songhai, and Mali, Diop establishes the presence of powerful territorial kingdoms in Africa, all of which had a significant measure of international standing. In addition, these kingdoms had considerable material wealth, which was displayed and dispensed with internationally. Islam became the predominant religion of the ruling class and the socio-political conditions were such that this did not fuel the need for social revolution.

All of these ideas debunk the standard Eurocentric notion of an Africa without history, culture, or civilisation. Taken together, these accounts of the ancient kingdom of precolonial Africa constitute Diop's work of rebuttal as a classic Afrocentric corpus, an oeuvre of affirmation and agency, of significant and noteworthy black presence, and a rebuttal of severe exclusionary Eurocentrism, which, as a substitute for a genuine Africanity, would rather proclaim Africa as, at best, a negation of "universal humanity," and at worst, a cipher. This Diopian articulation of Afrocentricity, which I have termed classical, had to take place between the two polarities – Eurocentrism and extreme Afrocentricity – to be able to make sense of and confront its most obvious discursive challenges.

Between the tenth and twelfth centuries, the Ghana Empire, which predated the rule of Charlemagne by five hundred years, was the dominant kingdom on the African continent despite significant Berber and Arab presence, and all and

23 Diop. 1987, 79.
24 Ibid.
25 Diop 1987, 84.

sundry paid homage and offered tributes to a black emperor. Diop is quite insistent on this point.

Diop makes another significant point regarding the difference in historical trajectories between Western Europe and Africa. Political consciousness and organisation in Europe passed through three major stages: the period of the Hellenic city-states, the universality established under the influence of the Church during the Middle Ages, and the construction of modern nation-states, which, it is suggested, became the seedbed of ultra-nationalism and chauvinism. Africa, on the other hand, before its encounter with the West, fostered and maintained "universal consciousness" through a commonality of ethics, culture, and material development. Diop also supports the view that African socio-political and cultural development did not come from Aryan and Semitic Mediterranean influence, itself a stance of classic Afrocentricity.

Africa is said to have experienced no mass invasions as Europe did in the tenth century.[26] Instead, what occurred in Africa was the forceful seizure of North Africa by Arabs. They entered other parts of the continent, notably East Africa, peacefully, becoming religious leaders and advisors. By virtue of these interactions, collective consciousness was forged and consolidated. This laid the groundwork for continuities in African cultures and traditions. Similarly, there are etymological similarities between the Wolof language and ancient Egyptian, which would explain the connections between the traces of Kemetic modes of rulership in black Africa. This specific claim is crucial to Afrocentric thought.

Another angle central to Afrocentric epistemology is the area of inquiry relating to African cultures of antiquity. The prevailing Eurocentric idea was that Africa was without cultural traditions worth mentioning. However, if literacy is a signifier of cultural development, then it is wrong to assume that Africa had no cultural traditions deserving of notice. Al-Sadi (1898/1964) reported that writing had become an established practice during the Songhai Empire. Askia Musa (second Songhai ruler, 1528–1531), on assuming the reins of power, wrote two letters, one to his mother and the other to his brother. He also wrote about the use of written registers and documents in the Songhai legal system.

Diop makes a telling argument regarding the emergence of capitalism as a world system. He states that, for capitalism to develop, there had to be a separation between domestic industry and agriculture. After feudalism reached a crisis, provoking widespread unemployment, discontent, and mass migrations from rural to urban areas in Europe, capitalism became the only logical alternative.

26 Griffiths 1851; Hamilton 1954; Harding 1991; Harding 1993; Harding 1997; Hegel 1977; Hendricks 2002; Herbert 1993.

But capitalism being what it is soon exceeded the bounds of its origins, seeking new markets and captives, one of which was Africa. As Diop writes, "expropriation of the sort seen in sixteenth-century Europe was unthinkable in the history of precolonial Africa"[27] He further writes that "[t]he end of the Middle Ages and the whole of the Renaissance in Europe were characterized by a degree of slavery as intense as more detestable than what Africa had known."[28]

According to Diop, an erroneous impression persists concerning the question of slavery as a purely African practice. He argues instead that its European manifestation was more entrenched and virulent than what existed in Africa in any form. Slavery was not peculiar to any single race and was practiced generally. However, slavery in Africa worsened progressively after contact with Europe, which abandoned its modes of domestic enslavement and transferred the practice abroad, aided by its mastery of more advanced weapons of destruction. Before the encounter with the West, the economy in Africa was characterised by its subsistence nature, in which production never exceeded necessity, and hence, could not create a material culture that radically transformed human existence. Within this context, capitalism was unlikely.

In the religious realm, Diop argues that Islamisation in precolonial Africa was not only inevitable but guided by rationality. Until the reign of the Askias, between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries (and obviously well after), the practices of libation, offering of sacrifices, geomancy, belief in the Kabbala, and a wide range of manifestations of animism, were prevalent in Africa. However, the introduction of Islam is said to have curbed these 'un-Islamic' practices and standardised the application of religion in everyday life. The processes by which the conversion to Islam occurred involved persuasion, negotiation, and warfare when necessary. Diop states that Islam was more suited to the metaphysical and rational needs of Africa, unlike Christianity, which, in the hands of European invaders, was largely a handmaiden of an overt imperial quest.

Maraboutism is deeply enshrined in Islamic worship in Africa, particular in the western region. The term 'Marabout' stems from the Arabic *el Morabbatin*, which means to dwell in a monastery. Within this context, God and his Prophet are not approached or consulted without an intermediary in the figure of the marabout. The marabout acts as a go-between between the Almighty and human beings, and is consequently revered by the ordinary faithful, who entrust their lives to him. Having an intermediary between human beings and God dates back to indigenous African modes of worship, in which below God is a pantheon of

27 Diop 1987, 150.
28 Ibid., 152.

lesser divinities – symbolised by specific cosmic attributes such as the sky, fire, water, and earth – to whom mortals address their entreaties and prayers. These lesser deities also have shrines and priests dedicated to them, unlike, for instance Olorun, as the Almighty is known in Yoruba culture. The faithful within Islam were kept in check by, on the one hand, the promise of Paradise in reward for an exemplary life, and, on the other, the spectre of Hell, if they deviated from the path of righteousness and religion.

Islam was a great source of culture and civilisation, as there are great institutions of learning and a long tradition of Islamic scholarship in Africa. But there was also a pronounced tendency to discard parts of the African past deemed to be un-Islamic. As such, large tracts of African collective and institutional memory were lost. Christianity, in contrast, did not institute measures to erase its pre-Christian heritage; it is therefore easier to trace the continuities between non-Christian and Christian epochs. Islam classified any non-Islamic inheritance as idolatrous, and so the blacks of Khartoum, said to be 'the Ethiopia of black Africa,'[29] – a central claim Diop reiterates throughout his work – viewed their previous links with ancient Meroe (Nubia) with ignominy. Similarly:

> [T]he ruins from that period, the eighty-four pyramids still standing in the ancient capital, the temple of Senna, Meroitic writing, the remains of the astronomical observatories, the vestiges of the metal industry which made the Sudan the Birmingham of antiquity, all this is of no interest because it is tainted with a pagan tradition.[30]

Apart from Maraboutism, Sherifism is another prominent feature of Islam in Africa. Sherifism is the proclivity of Muslim leaders to link their biological ancestry to the Holy Prophet Muhammad. In making these connections, local history, often altered, becomes subordinate to the overriding conceptual objective. The Muslim faithful who cast doubt over these far-fetched manoeuvres were pronounced heretical. From the dynasties of Ghana, Bornu, Wadia, and Kordofan, there have been claims tracing religious ancestry and heritage to Yemen in Arabia, all carrying heavy political overtones. Finally, Diop argues:

> Mohammedan black Africa in the Middle Ages was no less original than Christian Europe at the close of antiquity. Both continents were invaded in the same way by alien monotheistic religions which ended up being at the foundation of the entire sociopolitical organization,

29 This is one of the central claims Diop makes in *Precolonial Black Africa* and is also a major tenet of Afrocentric scholarship.
30 Diop 1987, 171–72.

> ruling philosophical thought, and carrying forward intellectual moral values during this whole period.[31]

Here, in making his assertion, Diop exercises a degree of caution. Afrocentricity at this juncture does not make cheap triumphalism its major objective: instead, there is muted yet eloquent call to acknowledge the accomplishments and dignity of Africanity, which within the overriding Eurocentric project are completely ignored, so that Africa becomes a cipher solemnly awaiting its inscription. Here, Afrocentricity is not the bogeyman that it is often labelled to be. Its detractors, without considering its arguments, announce it as myth or failing, by which it becomes a narrow terroristic discourse unworthy of decent intellectual engagement.

However, in spite of the tendency for Muslims in Africa to downplay and ignore their non-Islamic heritage, Arab chroniclers have done a marvellous job of preserving large tracts of the African past, which are always available for further scrutiny and analysis. This past had been erected on solid foundations of Islamic scholarship, in which the Trivium (the study of grammar, Aristotelian logic, and logic) and the Quadrivium (the study of arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music) prevailed. Dialecticians, rhetoricians, and jurists all formed part of the general intellectual culture.

In *Primitive Mentality* (1923), Lucien Lévy-Bruhl described primitive peoples as possessing a pre-logical mentality, but one in which illustrious intellectual traditions had been established.[32] During the seventh century, the Arabs, who introduced Islamic traditions of scholarship to Africa, were said to be more advanced than the West in the natural sciences. Nonetheless, the Arabo-African regions regressed in certain respects while the West continued to develop its intellectual foundations. Consequently, as Islamic traditions of learning atrophied, the people in the West became *ahlu kitab* (believers in books), which accounts for a sharp rupture in Arabo-African and Western traditions of scholarship. Some accounts mention that the regression of scholarship in black Africa was particularly noticeable between the sixteenth and seveteenth centuries.

Diop believes that future Afrocentric projects should include the recovery of scripts and texts of African antiquity in various vaults in "North Africa, Spain, Portugal, Egypt, Baghdad, and perhaps even, Chinese annals."[33] This effort of recovery would serve to corroborate the astonishing variedness of African civili-

31 Ibid., 173.

32 Levy-Bruhl cited in Diop 1987, 30–31. His racist presuppositions were immediately debunked by numerous scholars.

33 Ibid., 182.

sation prior to colonisation and lead to the "resuscitation" as well as "the defossilization of African history."[34] Apart from the noted accomplishments of Islamic scholarship in Africa, it is also worthy of note that there was a hieroglyphic script in Cameroon, which, though of recent historical manifestation, may have a much older origin. There is also the syllabic script of the Vai in Sierra Leone and the Nsibidi alphabetical system of notation. In the realm of art, the brilliance of Ife and Benin sculpture is well known, and their classicism has been compared to that of sixth century Greek art.

In Afrocentric epistemology, the word is believed to possess magical properties. In ancient Egypt, the Book of Thoth is believed to contain magical incantatory power capable of altering the world. This belief is said to have found its way into Islamic thought and ritual practices, and so:

> [T]he recitation of a given verse would allow one to find lost objects, another verse would protect one from his enemies, or from bad luck, and so forth, because the Prophet was supposed to have uttered them in identical circumstances.[35]

In making talismans, "the theoretically prohibited subject of the Kabbala"[36] and passages from the Koran are often employed.

More tangible aspects of Afrocentricity are involved in the validation of claims regarding the prehistoric trappings of African material culture. Accordingly, the ruins of the ancient capital of Meroe (Nubia) have been found, based largely on the accounts provided by Herodotus and Diodorus Siculus. Within the architectural ruins of Nilotic Sudan, Carl Richard Lepsius is noted to have found fragments of an astronomical observatory. Also present among the discovered ruins are eighty-four pyramids, which served as royal sepulchres similar those of ancient Egypt. Other notable discovered ruins are the Dzata in Zimbabwe. Strong Eurocentric claims have asserted that these ruins were probably left by non-Bantu groups such as Persians, Arabs, Phoenicians, or Israelites, but the archaeological excavations made on the sites have produced only Bantoid skeletons.

According to written testimonies of Muslim geographer and historian Al-Bakri (c. 1014–1094), Muslim geographer, cartographer, and Egyptologist Muhammad al-Idrisi (1099–1166), and Moroccan traveller Ibn Battuta, the architectural traditions of precolonial black Africa were also quite developed, with buildings decorated with cupolas and arabesques. The same can also be said of indigenous

34 Ibid., 185.
35 Levy-Bruhl cited in Diop 1987, 186.
36 Ibid., 190.

technologies of bronze-casting, made especially famous by the remarkable Benin produced artworks, which share commonalities with those of the Gulf of Guinea and ancient Meroe. Precolonial African navigational technology has often been debated, with some authors commenting favourably upon it. There were a few notable disastrous attempts to explore the Atlantic venturing westwards. The Emperor of Mali, Kankan Mussa's predecessor, sent an expedition of two hundred ships into the Atlantic from which only one vessel returned. A second expedition was attempted with a contingent of two thousand ships, none of which is said to have returned. Some conjecture advances the view that the ships may have reached America. Leo Weiner noted that Christopher Columbus's journal describes his naval contingent encountering "black skinned people [who] had come from the south-east in boats, trading in gold-tipped spears."[37] There was said to be no remarkable antagonism between black Africans and indigenous Americans during this period.[38] In Diop's words, "relations between Africa and pre-Columbian America were relatively constant."[39]

Having established the characteristics and achievements of precolonial African material culture, Diop then makes some noteworthy claims regarding blacks of antiquity. First, he mentions that Egyptians regarded themselves as coming from the south, specifically Nubia. Also, employing linguistic, ethnological, and toponymic data, he is able deduce that "after the drying of the Sahara (700 BCE), black mankind first lived in bunches in the Nile Basin before swarming out in successive spurts toward the interior of the continent."[40] Applying these research methods, it is possible to trace the origins of nationalities such as the Yoruba, Agni, Serer, and other groups the Ga, the Gula, the Chari, the Kara, the Kare, the Kipsigi, the Kissi, the Kundu, the Laka, the Nuer, the Sara, the Maka, the Sango, and the Sumba.[41] What all these African ethnicities share is a common origin in the Nile Valley as "the primitive cradle of all the black peoples today living dispersed at the various points of the continent."[42] Jonathan Olumide Lucas, in his *The Religion of the Yorubas* (1948), claims that the Yoruba of prehistory lived in ancient Egypt, after which they migrated southward, employing similarities in language, religion, and "names of persons, places, and things"[43] Exploring this particular trajectory, Lucas establishes that ancient Egyp-

37 Levy-Bruhl cited in Diop 1987, 190.
38 Chenqu 2014.
39 Diop 1987, 209.
40 Ibid., 213.
41 Ibid., 213–14.
42 Ibid., 214.
43 Cited in Diop 1987, 216.

tian deities namely, Osiris, Isis, Horus, Shu, Sut, Thoth, Khepera, Amon, Anu, Khonsu, Khnum, Khopri, Hathor, Sokaris, Ra, and Seb have survived in one form or the other within the Yoruba cultural context. In addition, "[Lucas] reminds us that the ontological notions of ancient Egyptian, such as Ka, Akhu, Ku, Saku, and Ba, are to be found in Yoruba."[44] Similarly, there is a relation between the Egyptian Osiris and Oni, the spiritual and temporal ruler of the ancient Yoruban town of Ile-Ife, which has a nearby hill called Kuse, etymologically similar at least, to Kush in ancient Nubia.

Diop's righteous and appropriate reaction to Eurocentrism led to a most improbable intellectual itinerary; it produced a disciplinary formation that could only have emerged as a response to scientific racism. But having confronted such a pervasive structure of racism, some may argue that his discourse becomes unwittingly tainted by the same brush of racism it so fervently seeks to cast off. In attempting to stamp out an evident evil, his detractors may say that his discourse neglects it because it has to wend its way through a fenced arena of academic language and modes of enunciation. His detractors would be tempted to mention that historical research is often discarded in favour of an ideology of anti-racism. In not reading Diop's project with the great care that it deserves, detractors may say that Afrocentric discourse in his handling substitutes genuine historical research with a mythological African past, which then serves as basis for the present. In this sense, Diop's work connects with and is similar to the Senghorian concept of négritude, from which it strives to distance itself.

Detractors (for example Paulin Hountondji[45]) may argue that it is never clear in Diop's numerous generalisations which historical period or part of the continent he is addressing at any particular point in his writing. As such, his methodological assumptions are always suspect. They could say that the coupling of ideology with methodology, in this case, undermines the rigour that his work desperately needs. Afrocentricity serves as a bulwark against Eurocentric racism, which provides it with its *raison d'être*, after which, when subjected to more rigorous scrutiny, it begins to falter.

Eurocentric critics may argue that Diop's research methodology is often inadequate, if not obsolete. They may say he begins his analysis of black Africa round 1000 CE, in ancient Ghana, relying mainly on Arab scholars, geographers, and explorers, and that these sources are not subjected to scrutiny along with other similar accounts for accuracy – possibly because the supporting documents do not exist.

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44 Cited in Diop 1987, 217.

45 Houtondji 2002.

It may be said that Diop has the tendency to essentialise black Africa, a trait often found in ideologies of blackness, such as négritude. In addition, Diop's narrative often alludes to the influence of Arabs and Islam in shaping the mores and customs of black Africa, thereby imbuing Afrocentric discourse with undeniable transcontinental attributes.

Could it be said that Diop would rather have us believe that black Africa's modes of political organisation were entirely indigenous? This would be generally acceptable, by some Eurocentric accounts. Diop himself continually stresses the significance of Arab priests and ambassadors in precolonial black African life, which may grant credence to views that West African divination systems, for instance, bear an evident Islamic derivation. In addition, Africa's modes of indigenous rulership, by certain accounts, display a Buddhist or East Asian derivation, again testifying to a notion of transcontinentality – aligning Africa with other continents – rather than strict autochthony.

In portraying the political, military, economic, and administrative capabilities of black Africa, Diop draws primarily from the ancient empires of Ghana, Mali, and Songhai ; his account of Ghana, in some respects, is not as copious as one would have liked it be, but it gets richer as he gets to Songhai, the most recent of the great African empires. This can only mean one thing; reliable knowledge about the other two empires is scarce, with Abd al-Sadi's renowned text, *Tarikh es-Soudan*, supplying much of the information.

Diop invariably finds it necessary to compare African achievements with those of European and Mediterranean regions, which raises an all-too-familiar epistemological issue: the question of the severely racialised Other seeking some existential validation from the dominant category of the Same. This would be the most obvious way to attempt to read this equation. However, Diop is merely attempting to force a conversation that most often does not occur: the improbable dialogue between Afrocentricity and Eurocentrism. The challenge before Afrocentricity, then, is to transcend the seemingly implacable divide constructed by race that prevents a much-needed conversation while at the same time fostering a dialectic that reproduces a self-perpetuating violence.

A Radical Historiography

A conference was organised by UNESCO in 1974 in Cairo, Egypt that pitted Eurocentric against Afrocentric Egyptologists. Diop represented the latter and it was an important occasion for him to present his ideas before an august international audience.

In the famous paper published in the UNESCO *General History of Africa* (GHA) Volume 2, Diop's then counter-paradigmatic intervention elicits immediate and incredulous reactions from the academy. First of all, he supports Leakey's thesis that "the earliest men were ethnically homogeneous and negroid."[46] According to Diop, the Nile Valley was originally peopled by dark-pigmented humans, beginning from the Upper Palaeolithic to the dynastic period. In his view, ancient Mediterraneans should not be regarded as 'white,' but rather classified as being of the 'brown race' or 'Eurafrican,' and ultimately classified of being of the negroid genetic family.

Diop central aim, at this juncture, is to debunk the notion that the ancient Egyptians were white. Not only was this historical truth ignored but it was also actively suppressed. If there was some concession to the idea of ancient Egyptian blackness it came in the form of descriptions of 'red-skinned and black-skinned whites,' which is of course preposterous. Even the Greek conflation of Africa with Libya is a misnomer because Africa was populated by several dark pigmented peoples.

According to Diop, the Pharaohs of Kemet were of negroid constitution, beginning with king Ka of the first dynasty, as was Narmer, who is also of the first dynasty and was the primogenitor of the Pharaonic lineage. So was Zoser of the third dynasty, whose reign witnessed the flourishing of Egyptian technological innovations. The same applies to Cheops, credited with the construction of the Great Pyramid and Queen Nefertari, Amenhophis I, all of whom belong to the negroid genetic tree.

Diop identifies two central branches of the Tedda, all of whom are heavily melanated. He also mentions the kinky-haired and deeply pigmented humans of the Equatorial regions. Accordingly, these two distinct groups of people arguably constituted the ancient Kemetic population.

Herodotus, often regarded as the Grecian 'father of history,' refers in several instances to the melanated characteristics of the Kemetians. Aristotle, renowned Greek philosopher and Lucian, famous author, both confirm Herodotus's assertions concerning the pigmented nature of ancient Ethiopians and Egyptians.

Diop supplies a plethora of evidence provided by Greek authors and other literature testifying to the negroid character of ancient Kemet, just as he demonstrates that the basis of Egyptology as a branch of Eurocentric science was fallacious. In other words, in spite of numerous proofs attesting to the melanated constitution of Kemet, some proponents of Egyptology still proceeded to ascribe a non-negroid origin to Egypt. Indeed, the erroneous view that "being black from

46 Diop 1981, 27.

head to foot and having kinky-hair is not enough to make a man a negro"[47] says it all.

Nonetheless, blackness, in ancient Egypt is associated with divinity and, instructively, deities such as Osiris, Hathor, Apis, Min, Horus, Thoth and Isis were all deeply pigmented. On the other hand, malevolence is associated with the colour red.

Diop then compares the languages of Walaf, a Senegalese language spoken in the western extremities of the region, to Egyptian and Coptic, unearthing a significant number of linguistic correlations between the languages. Diop then concludes with an argument for the reconstitution of the humanities in Africa. If western culture derives its primary inspiration from Graeco-Roman civilisation, Africa should also, in essence, derive its *raison d'être* from Egyptian antiquity. Indeed, the implications of this conclusion are profoundly radical and beyond decolonial.

Conclusion

A decolonising perspective is one that shows the falsity of notions of African invisibility, marginality, and inferiority. Those who uphold it are constantly seeking to wrest agency and intellectual integrity from a context that is riddled and fractured by hegemony, brutalisation, and denigration. Afrocentricity stems from an ingrained reaction to centuries of racial abuse, so, it is sometimes difficult for Eurocentrists to fully comprehend the whys and wherefores of its articulation. In order for Afrocentric discourse to continue to be effective and relevant, the skilful presentation of research findings is paramount. Such material must be carefully assembled and deployed against the corrosive backdrop attesting to centuries of racial violence, which Afrocentricity addresses.

Diop's decolonial discourse and positionality were shaped by a specific colonial and racial moment that had to be confronted by a determined set of responses: the affirmation of the black subject within the continuum of universal history. This is the least Afrocentricity seeks to accomplish. But in the discursive affirmation of an Africanist viewpoint, Diop had to be the spokesman of an entire continent and its diasporas, a task that is almost impossible to avoid, just as négritudists were compelled to speak for an Africa effectively concealed from the West. It was within this milieu of contestation and acrimony that classical Afro-

47 Diop 1981, 40.

centricity took shape; it was a whole-hearted response to a gargantuan existential and intellectual lie, a lie that sought to reduce life to death, a death without boundaries and barriers, in which the black subject had been thrust in perpetuity. Conceptual decolonisation, then, becomes redemption, freedom, and the release of the imaginative spirit. Where silence reigned, repressed African subjectivity responded in song and speech; where there was rigor mortis, the same subjectivity rebounds with unrestrained movement. African subjectivity had to become the antithesis of every category of falsehood and deception that had been pronounced in its name, before it, and in spite of it.

Diop's work operates on at least two significant levels. The employment of written Islamic texts to corroborate black life and achievement confers a transcendence that is difficult to ignore the African ontological realm. It also serves as the basis upon which to launch a full-fledged Afrocentric agenda that continues to resonate within the contemporary moment.

The immediate argument emerging from Diop's work is that the relationship between, principally, West Africa, ancient Egypt, and Nubia cannot be regarded as tenuous, given the evidence of numerous linguistic correlations. Diop is able to demonstrate these connections by tracing the etymologies of common words, names, and corresponding surviving evidence of material culture. Rather than causing doubt and misplaced curiosity, these provide what ought to be satisfying illumination. Ancient Egypt looms as a site of universal civilisation, complete and fully formed. But the role of black Africans in this process is never ambiguous and cannot be said to be marginal. Indeed, black Africans cannot be said to be the spectral recipients or passive witnesses of culture, who are to bear testimony to long lost traditions of a dominant cultural configuration. Black Africans were central to the dynamics of cultural development and their processes of dispersal. Indeed, this conclusion is quite prominent in Diop's work.

In an era of divergent epistemological traditions in which there is an increasing acceptance of decolonial thought and conceptual categories, and the affirmation of African epistemic agency, the work of Diop is pivotal. There are many aspects of Diop's oeuvre that relate to the deconstruction of western epistemological hegemony. First, he posits the primacy of Kemetian culture and philosophy to world culture. He also offers an anti-colonialist reading of African history and cultural achievement. This argument has immediate implications not only to the study of ancient African history but also the common understanding of philosophy as a universal discipline. As such, his work has powerful liberatory as well as important conceptual implications for scholars intent on viewing precolonial African intellectual contributions in a balanced, salutary and decolonial manner.

In addition, in circles still preoccupied with focusing on Afro-pessimist dogma and bigotry, Diop's thought provides a credible conceptual antidote. And

within the African continent, any serious decolonial critique would be remiss without a concerted engagement with Diop's anti-colonial analyses. As such, his work is copiously employed by Afrocentric scholars of various persuasions.

Acknowledgement
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Roman Seidel

Decentring the Grand Narrative of the Enlightenment

The Transregional Micronarrative of Mīrzā Āqā Khān Kermānī's Writings in Global Intellectual History

Introduction

In Tabriz, on 17 July 1896, Iranian national Mīrzā Āqā Khān Kermānī, together with two of his companions, was executed, charged with the murder of Nasir ad-Din Shah. On the surface, the murder charge was based on circumstantial evidence: the bullet that killed the Shah in Teheran on 1 May the same year was fired by a follower of Jalal ad-Din al Afghani, who, like Afghani, had interacted with Mīrzā Āqā Khān in the early 1890s in Istanbul. But it was his sharp pen rather than any alleged assassination plot that eventually sealed his fate. Mīrzā Āqā Khān, who lived and worked in exile in Istanbul from 1886 until 1895, when he was arrested by Ottoman officials and sent to Trebizond, is known to anyone familiar with the history of modern Iran. He was a highly prolific essayist, poet, columnist, journalist, translator, and political activist who, after his death at the age of forty-two, left behind an ambivalent oeuvre which, in historical narratives depicting the rise of the constitutional movement in Iran at the turn of the twentieth century, is usually described as highly influential.[1] Mīrzā Āqā Khān's creative engagement with central themes of eighteenth-century Enlightenment discourse and their nineteenth-century reception in Europe and beyond comprises topics such as a critique of religious dogmatism, reflections on the idea of religious pluralism, and a discussion of the concept of 'the nation' and its relation to history, as well as anti-Semitic racist ideas. Given this broad range of ideas he engaged with one might ask whether it is legitimate to ask whether he can be labelled an

1 For biographical accounts on Mīrzā Āqā Khān Kermānī, see the Foreword of Afżal al-Molk Kermānī, in Kermānī 1950, d-yh; Ādamiyat 1967, 13–47; Gurney 1993; Gurney 1998. Given Kermānī's prominence in modern Iranian intellectual history, it is striking that very few works focus closely on Kermānī's life and writing. With few exceptions, most studies that make reference to his writings and ideas largely rely on the only monograph, written in Persian, that has so far been published about him (Ādamiyat 1967). Some of Kermānī's works have never been published. For more about the state of research about his life and works, see below.

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Iranian protagonist of Enlightenment discourse. Yet how might we understand such a claim? Is he a transmitter of Enlightenment thought, introducing it to the Iranian intellectual discourse? Might this role, as relevant as it may be for modern Iranian intellectual history, not merely be derivative and largely tangential, if we set out to understand the history of the Enlightenment as a whole? How does the micronarrative of Mīrzā Āqā Khān relate to the grand narrative of the Enlightenment? To address this question, this paper first reflects on theoretical issues regarding the role of grand narratives, the Enlightenment as a concept and historical phenomenon, its relation to Middle Eastern intellectual history in general, the problem of epistemic asymmetries, and the purpose of micronarratives. The second part of the paper elucidates transregional dimensions of Enlightenment discourse through the lens of the roughly sketched micronarrative of Mīrzā Āqā Khān. All in all, the paper proposes an approach to the enlightenment that neither reiterates its Eurocentric narrative nor dismisses the notion of Enlightenment as an inescapably Eurocentric phenomenon. It rather suggests the alternative of a decentred take on both the history and the idea of the Enlightenment, which may open up pathways to re-think the history of Enlightenment also as a means for a decolonial perspective towards multiple entanglements in intellectual history.[2]

Questioning the Grand Narrative's Eurocentric Bias

The idea of the Enlightenment, both as an intellectual phenomenon and as a historical period, is still perennially employed as a symbol of an exclusively European or more generally 'Western' cultural heritage. Moreover, this 'grand narrative' of the Enlightenment is usually associated with the seemingly evolutionary progress from superstition and despotism towards rationalism and liberalism that is understood as a generic characteristic of the intellectual history of the Global North, whereas, despite every effort to introduce it to other regions of the world, it remained largely alien to cultural contexts outside its alleged origin. This paper evaluates the methodological potentials of transregional non-European micronarratives about thinkers from the Global South – reconstructed from a hermeneutical vantage point of decolonial knowledge-production as a means to overcome the grand narrative's Eurocentric bias.

2 This chapter reflects some methodological considerations of my current research project "TransIranIdea"funded by the BMBF (Federal Ministry of Education and Research, Germany) within the funding line "Kleine Fächer – Große Potentiale."

Before we can pursue this path, we will have to elaborate what the notion of the 'grand narrative of the Enlightenment' actually comprises, and how it relates to micronarratives. This already is no easy task, as 'grand narratives' are elusive by their very nature, incorporating as they do a variety of different historical narratives, sociological accounts and intellectual concepts, and therefore usually not explicitly unfolded in any detail themselves. Hence, grand narratives, also labelled metanarratives or master narratives, are not the work of one single author or a group of writers, unlike explicit master narratives (Meistererzählung) written by universal historians. Rather, they are the product of dominant discourses that govern the understanding of past, current and future events within society/ies. The fact that they are not canonised works, for one thing, makes them hard to grasp and to criticise, yet for another always leaves them receptive to change, or to being changed. The grand narrative of the Enlightenment in focus here is a narrative about certain intellectual developments in eighteenth century Europe, briefly characterised above, that are claimed to define the nature of European societies and separate them from non-European ones.

In contrast to such a notion of grand narratives, I use the idea of micronarratives as denoting concrete studies in intellectual history that focus on the interrelation between (possible) situational conditions of thought, development in the doctrines of a specific intellectual or group of intellectuals, and the temporality of concepts and ideas on a transregional scale. The attribute 'micro' is, here, not employed in a categorical, but rather relational way; it does not entail a fundamental rejection of macro-, meta- or grand narratives as such, which are always present in both public discourses as well as studies in intellectual history; nor is the goal to replace them entirely with micrological investigations for the purpose of particularly detailed individual case studies only. Micronarratives, in the way I see them, should instead constantly relate critically to meta-narratives, such as the European Enlightenment, to reshape and decentre them. This is done by way of discovering hitherto insufficiently considered intellectual traces and submerged or seemingly marginal, transcultural, or trans-areal intellectual entanglements, and discussing their relation to the respective grand narrative. To identify such possible resonant thoughtscapes, it is necessary to constantly shift perspective, zooming back and forth between the micro- and macro-levels, in order to follow the trail of biographical and concrete textual genealogies and their ruptures, as well as considering, in a heuristic sense, more general historical, political, or intellectual contexts as possible conditions for concrete developments in the thought of the persons studied, their possible repercussions on these very contexts, and their resonance with larger-scale discourses.

Yet, prior to any attempt at reshaping the grand narrative of the Enlightenment, one might ask whether it is reasonable to stick to it in the first place. There

are many reasons to doubt the general value of grand narratives as a whole. The most prominent objections were put forward by postmodern/post-structuralist and postcolonial theoreticians and scholars, who all, in one way or another, criticised the narratives' most characteristic features, among them (1) their universality, (2) their tendency to provide a totalising scheme of explanation, and (3) their teleological mindset.[3] Most prominently, Jean-François Lyotard, in his influential work *La condition postmoderne: Rapport sur le savoir*, argued that 'grand narratives' by their very nature instantiate modernity's totalising knowledge-production based on the idea of universal truth. From a postmodern perspective, he is convinced, such forms of 'narrative knowledge' are no longer tenable, as they serve to legitimise power and authority, rather than generating reliable knowledge. Therefore, knowledge-production must shift from a single *grand récit* to multiple *petits récits*.[4] Foucault's investigations of the relationship between power and knowledge-production, as well as his reflections on the inner functionalities of discourses and their procedures of exclusion, such as the 'will to truth,' have further fostered the deconstruction of grand narratives.[5] Finally, a large number of studies within postcolonial theory, often informed by the Foucauldian critique, have sufficiently highlighted the problems such narratives entail – particularly the suppression or assimilation of various local narratives, generated by Eurocentrism and its centre-periphery paradigm, which is present in all grand narratives, such as those of Progress, Democracy, Liberalism, Marxism, and, of course, that of the Enlightenment itself.[6]

Hence, there are very good reasons to avoid grand narratives in historiographical, political, and philosophical reasoning, and to concentrate instead on alternative mindsets as guiding modes of inquiry – modes that focus on practices and cultural phenomena, as well as on their meanings in local contexts, rather than on universal causes and chains of historical events; on the examination of "small segments of time," rather than a study of broad developments over large periods of time; on detailed observations or "thick descriptions"[7] of events, manners, texts, or other material artefacts – in order to understand them on their own terms, and avoid the tendency to homogenise differences and erase nuances. This shift in focus – away from grand old explanatory narratives dealing with

3 For different perspectives and discussions on the characteristics of grand narratives and their problematisation, see, for instance, Ahonen 2017; Khoury 2017; Weinstein 2005.

4 Lyotard 1979 [1984].

5 Foucault 2009 [2017]. For Foucault's take on Immanuel Kant's Essay on the Idea of Enlightenment – see below – see Foucault's Essay "What is Enlightenment" in Foucault 1984.

6 For example, Said 2003; Spivak 1988; Chakrabarty 2008.

7 Geertz 1973, 3–30.

origins, causes, and final effects, and towards micronarratives – is generating a growing body of invaluable knowledge. While once largely marginalised, these aspects of this body of knowledge have gradually become increasingly visible and meaningful across disciplines, including some that have only recently been established.[8] Yet, despite these encouraging developments, the grand narratives are still in place, and the work of dislodging them has in some ways just begun.

The Enlightenment: Both Narrative and Concept

One of the main reasons grand narratives remain powerful is that they are not merely popular historical accounts or prevalent frame stories one might choose to listen to or disregard; rather, they are always attached to key intellectual ideas and concepts. In fact, they emerged as the dominant – and at the same time oversimplifying and universalising – representations of complex discourses relating to certain concepts or ideas, like democracy or liberalism. Consequently, since they are so persistent, whenever one sets out to examine these concepts – systematically or with a historical purpose – the grand narrative sneaks into the discourse by the back door. Moreover, although the author of an essay, a speech, or a study on, say, the concept of liberty, might be well aware of this, their audience might not be. Hence, the clarification of how one defines or wants to approach a particular major concept also serves to distinguish it from the grand narrative, or versions thereof, attached to it.

Turning to the Enlightenment as a universal concept, it appears that the grand narrative of an exclusively *European* Enlightenment is ill-conceived both from a systematic/philosophical and a historical perspective. From a systematic perspective, the idea of 'the Enlightenment' – confined to a specific period of European history in the eighteenth century – as the great triumph of reason over superstition, uniquely initiated by a number of European geniuses, is clearly at odds with its universal, self-critical, and emancipatory claim. In order to understand this claim and achieve a reasonable, albeit preliminary, understanding of 'the Enlightenment' as a concept, one conventional yet reasonable choice might be to turn to a figure who certainly belongs to the gallery of the grand narrative's geniuses of the Enlightenment, namely Immanuel Kant. In the famous essay *Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?* (Answering the Question: What Is Enlightenment?), Kant not only rejects the idea of an 'Age of Enlighten-

8 For example, gender studies, postcolonial studies, subaltern studies, critical race studies etc.

ment' defined as an intellectual stage reached at a certain point in history by a specific society (*aufgeklärtes Zeitalter*), but particularly connects this label with the enduring self-reflexive task of intellectual emancipation to be undertaken by every rational individual. In his words Enlightenment is "*der Ausgang des Menschen aus seiner selbstverschuldeten Unmündigkeit*" (human being's emergence from their self-imposed immaturity).[9] Hence, if we understand the very idea of the Enlightenment in terms of Kant's definition, it is essentially a call for permanent self-criticism, rather than the lofty task of selling one's own allegedly enlightened wisdom to others.[10] This doesn't mean that one has to keep one's insights to oneself: on the contrary, Kant's essay is clearly about the obligation of speaking truth to power or, in Kantian terms, about the "public use of reason" (*öffentlicher Vernunftgebrauch*). Yet, I would argue, based on the imperative of self-criticism, the idea of Enlightenment and the public use of reason always goes along with the obligation to explore not only the intrinsic limits and boundaries of human reason in general / on a transcendental scale, but also the more external limits of one's own knowledge of any actual object of inquiry – limits resulting from one's

9 See Kant 1999.

10 At this point some points of clarification may be useful. For one thing it should be mentioned that Kant's notion of "Aufklärung" in his famous article is by no means the only influential definition of the concept put forward by intellectuals trying to make sense of this idea. A more thorough reflection of the conceptual dimensions would certainly require references to many more sources than Kant's Essay alone. Beyond that, also a problematisation of the inner argument and the distinction between public and private use of reason and Kant's Critique of revolutions would also be a necessary part of such a discussion. One problem, for instance, is the fact that the distinction between public and private uses of reason is not always so easily to be made and may also depend on those in power. In authoritarian political systems, the official would rather declare any sort of critical political thinking as instances of the private use of reason by subordinates, which can be suppressed for the sake of maintaining political order, which throws a different light on Kant's dismission of Revolution. However, this discussion is beyond the scope of the present article. For another, Kant's notion of Enlightenment and his Critical Philosophy doesn't necessarily rule out the possibility that he himself may have been trapped in stereotypical preconceptions with regards to anthropological categories prevalent at his time. This also includes the issue of racism. This fact triggered a whole debate on racist thought in Kant from which, broadly speaking, three positions can be traced. Some question the value of his philosophy and his authority as a thinker, because of statements in his writings that clearly fall into a racist paradigm; others acknowledge this criticism but stress a development in his thought from racism towards anti-colonialism; yet another group in the debate prefers to differentiate between Kant's critical philosophy and his private opinions. Although also this debate is an important facet of decolonial approaches to the history of enlightenment, it is again beyond the scope of this article and it's prime argument. For some exemplary insight into this debate, see Eberl 2019.

own positionality and the available or preferred archives of knowledge on which one relies.

Enlightenment in Global Intellectual History

One will also have to admit that the notion of 'the Enlightenment' and the various discourses connected to it are phenomena that emerged and developed over time. Yet, having in mind a preliminary concept of the Enlightenment such as the one sketched out above might help to clarify its historical dimension, showing that the Eurocentric bias inevitably leads to a distorted picture of the Enlightenment in history. The Kantian definition suggests that the notion of the Enlightenment, and the term itself, which no doubt gained specific momentum in eighteenth-century Europe, does not signify a historical singularity completed at a certain period in European history and independent of previous (or later) intellectual developments. Since it is, rather, a perennial task for individuals and societies, it is very likely that the core idea of enlightenment, the self-critical and self-emancipatory use of reason, will be encountered – to various degrees and under varying conditions – on a global scale throughout all human history.

In other words, even if we decide to stick to the narrower idea of the Enlightenment as an historical entity comprising a cluster of phenomena in eighteenth century European history, it will turn out to be historically inconsistent as, for instance, Sebastian Conrad has argued in his highly illuminating essay "Enlightenment in Global History."[11] Assessing various approaches to Enlightenment historiography, Conrad argued for the acknowledgement of three crucial analytical hypotheses, which are worth citing here:

> First, the eighteenth-century cultural dynamics conventionally rendered as "Enlightenment" cannot be understood as the sovereign and autonomous accomplishment of European intellectuals alone; it had many authors in many places. Second, Enlightenment ideas need to be understood as a response to cross-border interaction and global integration. Beyond the conventional Europe-bound notions of the progress of "reason," engaging with Enlightenment has always been a way to think comparatively and globally. And third, the Enlightenment did not end with romanticism: it continued throughout the nineteenth century and beyond. Crucially, this was not merely a history of diffusion; the Enlightenment's global impact was not energised solely by the ideas of the Parisian *philosophes*. Rather, it was the work of historical actors around the world – in places such as Cairo, Calcutta, and Shanghai – who invoked the term, and what they saw as its most important claims, for their own

11 Conrad 2012.

> specific purposes. Enlightenment, in other words, has a history – and this history matters; it is not an entity, a "thing" that was invented and then disseminated.[12]

Whereas the first point captures the critique of the grand narrative's Eurocentric bias, briefly discussed in the previous paragraphs, the second and third points underscore the argument that it is crucial to acknowledge the historical entanglements and interdependencies of the eighteenth-century intellectual phenomenon known as the European Enlightenment with phenomena taking place before and after this time period, and beyond the regional scope of what is now called Europe. Hence, widening the scope in terms of time and space is not merely a requirement for comprehending these 'other' intellectual developments for their own sake and on their own terms, but for the understanding of the very idea of 'the Enlightenment' in history itself. Acknowledging the assumed 'before' and 'after' of the Enlightenment is of equal importance in both respects, as it may encourage scholars to present either alternative or complementary historical narratives of the Enlightenment or – and this is the intention of this author – attempt to decentre the history of the Enlightenment in a global frame.

As far as the 'before' of Enlightenment discourse is concerned, based on overwhelming textual evidence, one can argue for the presence of an independent and perhaps even multiple 'Age(s) of Enlightenment' in the Middle East or the Islamic World – the transregional perspective covered in this chapter – in its own right.[13] Likewise, one can uncover countless traces of intellectual engagement by European thinkers with non-European thought that, in various ways, fed into the eighteenth-century Enlightenment discourse that would subsequently emerge in Europe. With regards to the entanglements of European Enlightenment thought with Islamicate strands of thought, one may point to various examples of Islamic philosophers, Averroes and Avicenna being the most evident examples, who decisively influenced the course of Medieval European philosophy and, hence, successive intellectual developments in the Renaissance and Early Modern Europe.[14] In other words, not 'merely' in the Middle Ages, but throughout the entangled intellectual history of Europe and the Islamic World up until the Age of eighteenth century Enlightenment in Europe, we find evidence of European thinkers engaging with a broad variety of Middle Eastern thought – a fact that has not yet been sufficiently recognised as an important, perhaps even essential,

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12 Conrad 2012, 1001.

13 For an example of such a narrative, in this case on the 'Central Asian Enlightenment,' see Starr 2013.

14 Ulrich and Seidel 2019; Akasoy and Giglioni 2012.

condition for the rise of the European Enlightenment.[15] To uncover these traces and introduce them as integral to any attempt to reconstruct a comprehensive global intellectual history of the Enlightenment or perhaps rather a global perspective towards multiple entangled histories of Enlightenment(s) remains a crucial task, one that requires a larger collective effort across multiple disciplines with a wide range of regional expertise. This effort is also essential to decentring the Enlightenment's grand narrative.

A similar collective effort is required to reconsider the period often thought to have come 'after' the Enlightenment, where we also find sufficient evidence to argue, for example, for the existence of a flourishing Islamic Enlightenment in the nineteenth century, as Islamic thinkers adapted the work of European Enlightenment writers to a variety of contexts.[16] Likewise, we may understand this late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century phenomenon of Middle Eastern intellectual history, i.e. the appropriation or adaptation of mostly European ideas in the ambivalent context of colonialism, as a phenomenon which, following Conrad's third point, equally belongs to a global and entangled history of the Enlightenment.

There is nothing new about the discovery that, in the course of the nineteenth century, we encounter vigorous intellectual debates taking up and modifying eighteenth-century Enlightenment discourse inside *as well as* outside the area which we nowadays refer to as Europe. Taking these extra-European intellectual debates properly into account means acknowledging that many of their protagonists – like many of their European contemporaries – are far more than uninspired epigones, uncritically imitating eminent Enlightenment thinkers such as Voltaire, Rousseau, John Stuart Mill, David Hume, or Immanuel Kant. Not only were these thinkers influenced by their predecessors, it is precisely because these allegedly secondary thinkers picked up their ideas and 'retweeted,' criticised, or adopted them that the ideas and texts of the 'Enlightenment geniuses' lived on. Hence, the writings, activities, and networks of these nineteenth-century thinkers are *essentially part* of the intellectual enterprise called 'the Enlightenment.' Since this understanding does not fit into the 'grand narrative,' and we will not easily be able to abandon it all together, we will have to reshape and decentre it.

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15 This is despite that fact that a number of studies focus on theses influences in different ways. See Noel 2019; Bevilacqua 2018. For an account of the reception of Andalusian philosopher Ibn Tufail and his philosophical novel *Ḥayy Ibn Yaqẓān* from the perspective of comparative literature rather than of intellectual history, see Attar 2007.
16 See De Bellaigue 2018.

Enlightenment Discourse and Its Discontents

To be sure, the Enlightenment discourse of the eighteenth century was itself multifaceted, yet, in the nineteenth century, following further political, social and intellectual developments,[17] the ambiguities of the discourses relating to the Enlightenment became even more apparent, a fact that has already been examined in various critical assessments. From the 1980s onwards, this 'dialectic of Enlightenment' was highlighted by historiographical studies that, providing sociocultural contexts for the emergence of certain ideas, show that actual intellectual developments were much more ambiguous than the grand narrative of progress might suggest. Critical evaluations pointed to the dehumanising tendencies attendant to the notion of reason, conceived as the ability to govern nature and reality. In other words, the grand narrative is far from being unequivocally accepted due to an awareness of the multifaceted character of European history, while, at the same time, as soon as Europe – itself a grand narrative – is juxtaposed with an alleged instance of the 'other,' such as 'the Islamic World,' the same grand narrative, resuscitated, comes back into force.

This dialectic ambiguity of the phenomenon of 'the Enlightenment' was already prevalent in the nineteenth-century Middle East; it did not go unseen by the intellectuals that engaged with it. Enlightenment thought was undoubtedly foundational in the emergence of debates about major ideas such as 'the nation,' 'liberalism,' 'secularism,' or 'the sovereignty of the people.' Furthermore, one may identify a number of essential intellectual paradigm shifts characteristic of the Enlightenment discourse in general. Among them is the critique of religious dogmatism – though not necessarily of religion in itself – a departure from classical metaphysics, and an orientation towards empiricism and the natural sciences. All of this culminated in a confidence in the power of human reason to achieve true knowledge of the world (nature), and determine the proper guidelines of morality. Yet Middle Eastern intellectuals, experiencing the increasing influence of the European colonialist powers, were also faced at the same time with the flip side of the unfolding of Enlightenment rationalism – for instance, the intellectual justification of natural or cultural inequality among different social or ethnic groups, i.e., racism and nationalism based on the idea of ethnic homogeneity. These ideas, already part of nineteenth-century discourse in Europe, were both critiqued and implemented within the multifaceted intellectual discourse in the Middle East.

17 Romanticism, nationalism, racisms, the 'victory' of natural sciences.

Intellectual History of the Middle East, the Enlightenment, and the Problem of Epistemic Asymmetries

I am certainly not arguing that knowledge about these intellectual developments in the Middle East of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is generally lacking: on the contrary, we have witnessed, particularly in recent decades, an increasing interest in modern Middle Eastern intellectual history, especially among scholars from disciplines such as Middle Eastern and African Studies, Islamic Studies, and social and cultural anthropology.

While, in the 1960s, Albert Hourani's *Arab Thought in the Liberal Age 1798–1939* was one of the few works that clearly focused on modern Middle Eastern intellectual history,[18] in recent years a considerable number of monographs, articles, and edited volumes have been published that discuss the role of intellectuals and activists in various Middle Eastern metropolises (Cairo, Istanbul, Teheran, Calcutta, Tbilisi, etc.). At times connected with each other over wide regional areas, these thinkers began to engage the political thought of the Enlightenment, discussing the idea of the nation, as well as issues in positivist philosophy oriented toward the natural sciences. In large part, however, such studies are concerned with either the Arab, the Iranian, or the Ottoman Turkish context, and less with the interactions between these contexts.[19] Studies exist on the reception of particular strands of thought or particular thinkers (such as Voltaire, Rousseau, Mirabeau, John Stuart Mill, Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, and Charles Darwin, as well as Ibn Rušd, Ibn Ḫaldūn, and Mollā Ṣadrā, among others), either with a focus on their significance for Middle Eastern (Arab, Iranian, Ottoman/Turkish, etc.) intellectual history,[20] or as contributions to (mostly edited volumes about) the global reception of a particular thinker, work, or strand of thought.[21] Others examine specific Middle Eastern thinkers and their interaction with varying intellectual traditions.[22] There are also larger-scale projects involving many experts in

18 Hourani 1962.

19 Hanssen and Weiss 2016; Hourani 1983; Peter 2020; Gheissari 1998; Hendrich 2004; Herzog 2010; von Kügelgen 2020; Kassab 2010; Kassab 2019; Kersten 2019; Saritoprak 2018; Cole 1996; Seidel 2016; Seidel 2019.

20 Elshakry, 2014; von Kügelgen 1994; Nassār 1967; Rizvi 2007; Moser, Gösken, and Hayes 2019; Hildebrandt 2007; Seidel 2014; Ventura 2018; Paya and Ghaneirad 2006; Paya and Ghaneirad 2007.

21 Lightman 2016; Schmitt-Maaß, Stockhorst, and Ahn 2014.

22 Frey 2019; Riecken 2016; Riecken 2019; Hashas and al-Khatib 2020.

the field that not only approach nineteenth and twentieth century Middle Eastern thinkers as part of the history of Islamic Philosophy but also value Islamic Philosophy as an essential part of the history of philosophy in general.[23]

Many scholars also address the question of how to deal with Middle Eastern/ Arab intellectual history and – one major objective of the present volume – reflect on the problem of the absence of theories from thinkers of the Global South in mainstream intellectual history, and the fact that studies that do engage Middle Eastern intellectual history are more often 'about' Middle Eastern thinkers as objects of study rather than as subjects producing theories.[24]

Although this scholarly output has made available a constantly growing archive of knowledge on modern Middle Eastern intellectual history, in terms of the actual use of this knowledge there is still a good deal of imbalance and a lack of interaction between the realms of European and Middle Eastern intellectual history. Most scholars of European history and philosophy, depending on their situatedness in varying disciplinary discourses, seem reluctant to engage with, or are ignorant of this scholarship. Here, it seems that the Foucauldian meaning of 'discipline' as a procedure of exclusion materialises through scholars who are convinced that the findings and studies in, for instance, Middle Eastern intellectual history are irrelevant or at least marginal to their own historical, literary, or philosophical research.[25] Though this may be legitimate for practical reasons – one always has to narrow down the material one can master – this might also turn into a rather problematic habit. Critical attempts to question a discipline's established canon can even provoke severe defensive reactions of a highly polemical and apologetic nature.[26] On the other hand, among specialists in Middle Eastern intellectual history, the tendency to withdraw into one's own intellectual safe space, focusing on a specialised area and interacting almost entirely with scholars in the same field of expertise, is also not uncommon. This may be a reasonable move, and it often establishes the nucleus for new research fields or entire disciplines. Yet, despite the many scholarly initiatives by various academic institutions and research funding organisations to foster interdisciplinary and inter-

23 In particular the series "Philosophie in der Islamischen Welt der Moderne" edited by Ulrich Rudolph, which appears in 4 volumes as part of the major German Series of reference works on the history of Philosophy "Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie," also known as the "Ueberweg" has to be mentioned here. The fourth volume edited by Anke von Kügelgen dedicates over 1000 pages to the history of Philosophy in the nineteenth and twentieth century in the Arab World, Turkey, Iran and Muslim South Asia. Von Kügelgen 2021.

24 El Shakry 2021.

25 Foucault 2009.

26 For instance, the debate triggered in Garfield and Van Norden 2016. See also Garfield 2017.

sectional research, interacting with long-established disciplines in the attempt to decentre their grand narratives and diminish the dominance of Eurocentric scholarship still requires a lot of effort.

Providing transregional narratives that reach out toward 'mainstream' archives of knowledge and their manufacturers can be a means to address intellectual barriers I term 'epistemic asymmetries.' These asymmetries emerge from the fact that much of the historical context and the ever-shifting development of concepts within Middle Eastern intellectual history lies beyond the research horizon of many scholars outside these disciplines and, although it may well be relevant to their own objects of study, remains beyond their threshold of perception.

The problem of *epistemic asymmetries* bears some resemblance to the notion of *epistemic injustice* coined by the British philosopher Miranda Fricker.[27] In her theory, which operates at the intersection of epistemology and ethics, *epistemic injustice* is a kind of iniquity toward someone specifically in his/her capacity as a knower, a subject of knowledge. Fricker differentiates between two types of *epistemic injustice*: *testimonial* and *hermeneutic injustice*. Whereas *testimonial injustice* can be defined as an unfairness related to not trusting someone's word – someone is ignored, or not believed, because of their gender presentation, ethnic background, or, more generally, because of their identity – *hermeneutical injustice* is more fundamental:

> [It] occurs at a prior stage, when a gap in collective interpretive resources puts someone at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of their social experiences. An example of the first [testimonial injustice] might be that the police do not believe you because you are black; an example of the second might be that you suffer sexual harassment in a culture that still lacks that critical concept.[28]

Hermeneutical injustice is therefore generated by the structure and constitution of collective hermeneutical resources in a specific discursive context. What I, in a heuristic manner, would like to label *epistemic asymmetry* is closer to this hermeneutical imbalance, yet it is less concerned with its ethical aspect, which focuses on the subject of knowledge, than with its epistemological dimension, which is concerned with the object of knowledge and the conditions of its proper representation. Epistemic asymmetries – according to my preliminary abstract definition – arise from unrecognised or trivialised ignorance with respect to an integral component of an object of knowledge, thereby limiting or obstructing

27 Fricker 2009.
28 Ibid., 1.

the possibility for adequate perception or cognition. Such ignorance leads to an imbalance with respect to various fields of knowledge. This imbalance of knowledge between two (or more) fields of scholarship is asymmetrical if in one discipline knowledge of the state of the art in the other field(s) is disregarded or simply absent, although this knowledge is related to objects of this very discipline. It is epistemic, because it does not merely concern the willingness of the subject of knowledge to properly engage with the object of knowledge; this aspect of 'invested ignorance' no doubt plays a decisive role in the political sphere of knowledge-production. At the root, to put it in more neutral epistemological terms, lies a fundamental epistemic problem arising from the practice and conditions of knowledge-production and ultimately related to the conditions for acquiring proper knowledge about a concept or a historical entity: ignoring an aspect of an entity means not knowing it properly.

Epistemic asymmetries occur at different levels of intellectual discourses as well as scholarly and public debates. I shall only briefly allude to three such levels and give short examples and explanation, without providing a full account of the debates.

Epistemic asymmetries may be caused by a lack of (1) concrete 'discussion contexts,' and lead to a reduced capacity to judge the significance of a specific textual tradition, unfamiliar to a scholar enunciating a value judgement, in relation to another textual canon, the scholar is more familiar with. This case is not uncommon within the scholarship of, for instance, European History of Philosophy regarding the significance of 'non-European' textual traditions of philosophy. To give a brief example, within the discussion context of proofs for the existence of God and their development in the history of philosophy, a historian of philosophy who is largely unfamiliar with the numerous and diverse traditions of philosophical debates on that discussion in the Islamic tradition, will not be able to judge the significance of this textual tradition in relation to European discussions of the issue. As a result of this unfamiliarity, the tradition is often marginalised despite its immense importance both for the history of European Philosophy and for the development of the argument as such. Not knowing a textual tradition doesn't give a reason for disregarding its significance.

At another level, related to the first example, epistemic asymmetries may be caused by (2) a lack of knowledge of concrete conceptual meanings/terminologies prevalent in these textual traditions, resulting in a reduced ability to differentiate conceptual nuances. Consider a historian of philosophy who is less ignorant of the Islamic tradition of philosophical proofs for god. She may know, for instance, of the contributions Avicenna or Molla Ṣadrā made in this field. Still, because of either limited language skill or in case translations are available, because of only rudimentary familiarity of the original discussion, she will be not prepared to

differentiate conceptual or terminological distinctions these two thinkers (and many others in the Islamic traditions before and after them) have discussed with regard to existence, so that she may end up barely considering them in her own discussion of arguments on God's existence although they may be highly relevant for her argument, either from a historical or systematic perspective.

On yet another level epistemic asymmetries may arise from (3) a lack of knowledge of concrete discursive contexts. Other than the discussion contexts, which are referring to the textual traditions and the arguments themselves, discursive contexts refer to the circumstances and the (political, ideological, social) conditions of their emergences. An unfamiliarity with these contexts will lead to an inability to identify specific social, religious or political conditions of a public or scholarly discourse or to differentiate political or ideological connotations, which also involves avoiding specific topic, words or critical reflections openly. This will result in the inability to understand metaphors and rhetorical allusions shared implicitly by the participants of the discourse.

Zooming in and Zooming out: On the Multifocal Purposes of Micronarratives

As a means of compensating for epistemic asymmetries, this chapter intends to highlight micronarratives as a tool of intellectual history, as briefly sketched above. Moving towards transregional narratives that, in a sophisticated manner, integrate shifting focuses of micronarratives into a broader historical frame has at least two strategic objectives: First, micronarratives' multifocality aims to integrate the object of a detailed case study into a variety of scholarly discourses in the fields, broadening these at times barely connected fields into a larger discourse. Second, presupposing the general openness of scholars from long-established disciplines such as history or philosophy towards archives of knowledge from specialised fields of learning with which they are less familiar, micronarratives intend to decentre these disciplines and liberate them from the burden of (Euro) centrism.

Our case represents an attempt to integrate research in Iranian Studies, Persian literature, Ottoman history, Global Intellectual History, Religious Studies, and Islamic Studies, in particular, Islamicate intellectual history, into a transregional and transcultural perspective – in order to decentre the focus of intellectual histories of the Enlightenment. Such an attempt integrates a diachronic focus on what one might call 'travelling' texts and narratives with a synchronic focus on a particular micronarrative which represents a specific moment within

a larger frame. The case study sketched below looks diachronically at the various ways that the writings of the eighteenth-century protagonists of the Enlightenment, as well as works from further textual traditions, were transmitted, in order to evaluate how common (or uncommon) it was for a particular text, concept, or narrative to be present at a specific historical moment in history. The synchronic aspect of the transregional narrative, I am proposing, zooms in more closely on and investigates the appropriation of the transmitted text(s) or ideas in a concrete intellectual setting or 'thoughtscape' (*Denkraum*).

This micronarrative focuses on the writings and activities of Mīrzā Āqā Khān Kermānī in the last ten years of his life, which he spent in Istanbul and finally in Trabzon before he was executed. The travelling text and ideas are of different kinds and belong to the following categories: (1) seminal text and ideas from the eighteenth-century Enlightenment tradition and their continuation and transformations in the nineteenth century; (2) texts, teachings, and doctrines from the Bābī tradition, a religious movement which split from Twelver Shiism in nineteenth-century Iran; and (3) texts from classical and post-classical Islamic philosophy and Persian poetry. The thoughtscape is constituted by the people Kermānī interacted with, either in person in Istanbul or via mail correspondence, as well as through contemporary debates, particularly in journals that appeared in his time, which he read and to which he partly contributed. Taken as a whole, this 'intellectual constellation' may elucidate not only the ideas with which he experimented within different types of literary genres, such as polemical essays, philosophical treatises, journalistic articles, and intellectual fiction, but also their situatedness in and significance for their particular discursive contexts, as well as the transregional context of the Enlightenment discourse in general.[29]

This micronarrative, therefore, serves various purposes. It adds a facet to modern Iranian intellectual history, as well as to histories of the Ottoman intellectual discourse of the late nineteenth century, the Islamic reform movement, Pan-Islamism, and the Bābī movement, and to the history of Iranian nationalist thought. It also contributes to the history of Islamic thought and to the history of Enlightenment in general.

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29 An intellectual philosophical constellation is a dense nexus of mutually interacting persons, ideas, theories, problems, and documents. Only the analysis of this context, but not of its isolated elements, can make possible an understanding of the philosophical achievement and development of the individual persons, ideas, and theories. The presumption of a constellation arises when several persons are in close communication, refer to a shared set of theories, concepts, and texts, start from an identical or similar problem situation, and when creative ideas result from this communication. See Mulsow and Stamm 2005.

Ideas, Texts, Contexts: Situating Mīrzā Āqā Khān Kermānī in Trans-Iranian Intellectual History

To begin the narrative, let us first zoom out from Mīrzā Āqā Khān Kermānī's intellectual activities in his ten-year exile in the Ottoman Empire and briefly set the stage for his personal and intellectual biography, which was marked by certain crucial aspects of Iranian history. In the year he was born, 1853, Nasir ad-Din Shah, whose assassination would eventually also bring Kermānī's own life to an end, was already the emperor of the Qajar Dynasty. A characteristic of the Qajar period was that, from early on, Iran was faced with at least two major challenges, one external and the other internal. The external challenge was related to the growing influence of competing colonial powers (Russia, France, Britain), which constantly threatened Iran's sovereignty.[30] This challenge is hence related to the flipside of the Enlightenment narrative, namely colonialism and domination. The internal challenge, by contrast, involved the rise of oppositional socio-religious movements inside the country, and can hence be associated with a heroic aspect of Enlightnement narratives, namely the struggle for emancipation and resistance against absolutism. Of central relevance here was the Bābī movement, initially a Shīʿi sect evolving from Shaykhism, which turned into an independent religious denomination out of which the Bahai religion would later emerge.[31] Around the year of his birth, a number of historical events must be mentioned that were crucial, both for the history of Iran in general and for Kermānī's biography and intellectual career in particular. For instance, just one year before his birth, the Shah had ordered the assassination of his own reform-minded prime minister, Amīr Kabīr, who, as part of a bundle of measures to reform the educational system in Iran, established the Dar al-Fonūn (the Polytechnical College) in Teheran, an act that would initiate a substantial change in the landscape of higher learning in Iran.[32] Ironically, it was also Amīr Kabīr who supported other decisive events that were critical to the history of modern Iran. He resolutely saw the Bābī movement as a severe threat to the government, and it was he who urged the Shah to take the life of the spiritual figure, the Bāb, Seyyed ʿAlī Muḥammad Širāzī, who was exe-

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30 For Qajar history, see Keddie 1999.

31 For the development of the Bābī-Movement, see MacEoin 2009; MacEoin and Ahdieh 2020.

32 For a brief account of the significance of Amīr Kabīr and the reform of the educational system, see Pistor-Hatam 1992. For a more detailed study, see Ādamiyyat 1969. On the history of the Dār al-Funūn, see Ringer 2001; Gurney and Nabavi 1999; Ekhtiar 1999; Ekhtiar 2001; Maḥbūbī-Ardakānī 1997.

cuted by firing squad in July 1850. Eventually, the Shah crushed the Bābī uprising and forced the new religious movement underground or into exile.

In the Province of Kerman where Kermānī grew up, resentments against the Qajars were widespread, as they had been since the early days of the Qajar dynasty. After Āqā Moḥammad Qājār's defeat of Lotf Ali Khan Zand in the final siege of the city of Kerman, thousands of the male inhabitants were either killed or blinded, an act that left an irreparable mark on the collective memory of the people and increased their antipathies against the Qajars – antipathies which Kermānī also shared his entire life.[33] In other words, the study of Qājār history, already influenced by colonialism as well as by oppositional social movements in Iran, constitutes a vital source of knowledge for our micronarrative.

Another crucial context, closely linked to the mentioned social movements, is the plurality of newly emerging religious strands in Iran. Kermānī grew up in an intellectual environment, completed a traditional education in Islamic law and Persian and Arabic literature, along with mathematics and philosophy. Beyond that, he is said to have acquired some knowledge of Avestan as well as Old and Middle Persian, and learned some English and French. In matters of religion, he was influenced by various currents present in Kerman, such as the Zoroastrian religion and Christianity, as well as various tendencies from a broader Shīʿite context (Twelver Shīʿism, the Ismāʿīliyya, and, in particular, the Bābī movement).[34] In particular, his role as a Bābī-thinker and the religious discourse he used in the last decade of his life play a decisive role in the understanding of the micronarrative suggested here.

At least during the early years of his stay in the Ottoman capital Istanbul, where he had found asylum in 1303/1886, he remained attracted to the Azalī branch of Bābism, together with his lifelong companion and friend from Kerman, Shaykh Aḥmad Rūḥī, who joined him in Istanbul shortly after his arrival. He even travelled to Cyprus, where the Azali-Bābī community, led by Mīrzā Yaḥyā Nūrī Ṣobḥ-e Azal, had previously been sent by the Ottoman authorities in 1285/1868. In Cyprus, he and Rūḥī each married one of Ṣobḥ-e Azal's daughters. Nothing in particular is known about the fate of these marriages, and very little about Kermānī and Rūḥī's further connections to the Bābī-Community in Cyprus. What

33 For the History of Kerman in the Qajar-Period, see Gustafson 2017.
34 Little is known about Kermānī's life in Kermān, for a brief account written by the brother of Shaykh Aḥmad Rūḥī Afżal al-Molk Kermānī, see the Foreword of Afżal al-Molk Kermānī, in Kermānī 1950, d-h; see also Ādamiyat 1967, 14–18.

is known, however, is that Kermānī and Rūḥī contributed to the exegetical literature of the Bābīs with their voluminous work *Hasht Behesht*.[35]

The Trans-Ottoman Context

In Istanbul, Kermānī entered a thoughtscape constituted by multiple interrelated intellectual contexts. Zooming out to an transregional perspective, we perceive that he was connected with the wider network of expatriate intellectual Iranian dissident circles. These circles, based in different regions in Europe, the Ottoman Empire (Istanbul), the Caucasus, Tbilisi, and South Asia (Calcutta), were interconnected to some extent. Their publications were circulated between these regions and also sneaked into Iran. These thinkers, journalists and also diplomats not only discussed the fate of Iranian politics and culture, as well as religious reform projects, they also were among the most prominent mediators introducing modern European philosophy and political thought to Iran. They closely followed intellectual discourses in their host countries and related them to the Islamic intellectual tradition as well as to recent political developments in the Muslim world.[36]

Most influential for Kermānī were the writings of Mirzā Fatḥ ʿAlī Akẖūndzāde (d. 1295/1878), who lived and worked in Tbilisi under Russian hegemony.[37] He also interacted with Mirzā Malkom Khān, a mostly London-based Iranian diplomat who, after falling into disgrace after a diplomatic scandal, turned into a highly influential critic of Nasir ad-Dīn Shah.[38] Kermānī never met him in person, but corresponded with him, acting as a kind of interlocutor for Malkom's journal *Qānūn* in Istanbul.[39] The correspondence was partly mediated by British Iranologist Edward G. Browne (d. 1926), who had a keen interest in the Bābī religion, and for whom Kermānī had copied his most voluminous Bābī work, *Hasht Behesht*.[40]

35 For the significance of *hasht behesht*, see below.

36 Ādamiyat 1984; Gheissari 1998; Vahdat 2002; Pasinejad 2003; Seidel 2019; Heydari 2003.

37 On Akhundzade, see Ādamiyat 1970.

38 For the correspondence, see Kermānī 1989.

39 On Malcolm Khān see Seidel 2019, 329–31.

40 Edward Granville Browne (1862–1926), Sir Thomas Adams Professor of Arabic at the University of Cambridge, was an outstanding scholar of Oriental Studies and, in his day, the chief proponent of Persian Studies in Europe. He moved decisively away from the study of linguistics toward the study of cultural, religious and literary history and contemporary politics and, in doing so, took active part in the making and shaping of the histories of Iran, Britain, and the Ottoman Empire in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. On his only journey to Iran (1887/1888) he

Mention should also be made, of course, of Sayyed Jamāl al-Dīn Asadābādī, known as Afghānī (d. 1314/1897), who propagated the idea of Pan-Islamism and who was active in almost the entire Islamic world of the time, from India to Iran, from the Ottoman Empire to Egypt. He also engaged in a dispute with French Orientalist Ernest Renan over the issue of the capability of Arabs to engage in philosophy. Although Kermānī was initially critical of Afghānī, he later supported his Pan-Islamic ambitions, whilst Afghānī was in Istanbul. It was these activities that increased the suspicions harboured against him, and when in 1313/1896 the dissident Mīrzā Reżā Kermānī, who also sympathised with Afghānī's Pan-Islamic ideas and was associated with the Bābī movement, shot Nāṣir al-Dīn Shāh, Kermānī, already under house arrest together with Rūḥī some time before the Shah's assassination, was finally extradited to Iran by the Ottoman officials and executed in Tabriz the same year.

Defining the Thoughtscape: Transmission, Translation, Transformation

Kermānī's more concrete sphere of social and intellectual interaction was the large expatriate Iranian community in the Ottoman capital, of which he himself became an important yet non-conformist protagonist.[41] He contributed on a regular basis to the exilee journal Akhtar, in which he had his own column for some years, until a disagreement with the editor ended this relationship.[42] Besides the fees he got for the articles he wrote for Akhtar, he earned a living

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travelled to almost all the major cities, constantly interacting and engaging with locals, intellectuals, and common people alike, and later published his travel account in his well-known book *A Year Amongst the Persians* (Browne 1893). Back in Cambridge, he retained strong ties with many of the acquaintances he had made in Iran as well as a continuously increasing number of expatriate Iranians, particularly in Istanbul, via prolific correspondence in Persian. In Cambridge, he also built one of the most renowned collections of oriental manuscripts. His collection of Bābī manuscripts counts as one of the most comprehensive, and, to my knowledge, the most complete MS corpus of Mirzā Āqā Khāns writings is also to be found in the Browne Collection. For E. G. Browne and his Iranian Ottoman connection, see Chelkowski 1986; Gurney 1993; Gurney 1998; for the Browne Collection, see Browne 1932; Browne 1892.

41 Detailed studies on the Iranian Exile Communities in Istanbul and the Ottoman Empire are still very rare, let alone studies that take a 'trans-ottoman' perspective and incorporate research on Ottoman intellectual history. For some account of the Iranian exile community, see Zarcone and Zarinebaf-Shahr 1993. For a more detailed account, see Lawrence 2018.

42 On the journal *Akhtar*, see Lawrence 2015; Pistor-Hatam 1999.

by teaching Persian and Arabic in Istanbul, including to some scholars of Oriental Studies. A large number of dissident intellectuals and diplomats present in Istanbul while he was there also featured in Kermānī's thoughtscape. Beyond that, however, it is also important to look at the texts and ideas that circulated. The Ottoman capital was a vibrant intellectual magnet. Both thinkers and texts from all over the Islamic World and Europe came together there. This points to another layer of the Ottoman context, as the Iranian exile community in Istanbul was itself embedded in the Empire's growing public sphere, where people discussed a huge variety of intellectual influences of not only Islamic, but increasingly, European origin, in particular debates about the natural sciences as well as literature of European Enlightenment authors. Kermānī absorbed these discussions and participated in this adaptation process. Although it is difficult to say exactly which books he actually had at his disposal, it is evident that he was at least engaged with the ideas of Descartes, Rousseau, Voltaire, Montesquieu, Spencer, and Darwin. He also acquired some knowledge of socialist, Marxist, and anarchist ideas. Furthermore, translation was a vigorous activity in the Ottoman Empire; a vast number of European texts were rendered into Ottoman-Turkish, Arabic and Persian.[43] Kermānī himself contributed to this activity by rendering European texts into Persian. Kermānī's translations can also be situated as part of the Persian translation movement, which was even promoted, in part, by state officials. The movement was responsible for rendering, in particular, historical literature as well as intellectual fiction into Persian, which also dealt in large part with philosophical questions, especially those connected with the issue of good governance and ethics. Noteworthy here are works by Voltaire, for instance.[44]

One popular example of these translation activities both in the Ottoman capital and in Iran is the translation of a text that was highly popular at the time in the Middle East and beyond: a novel by François de Salignac de La Mothe-Fénelon (d. 1715) entitled *Les aventures de Télémaque, fils d'Ulysse*. This didactic novel narrates the educational travels of Telemachus, son of Ulysses, accompanied by his tutor, Mentor, who, at the end of the story, is revealed to be the goddess of wisdom, Minerva, in disguise. This novel, said to have influenced Jean-Jacques Rousseau, reflects a number of political ideas in a philosophical vein. It advocates, for instance, a parliamentary governmental system and a kind of federa-

43 For a brief overview of Ottoman translation activity, see Strauss 2019 and Meral 2013; Meral 2014.

44 Works by Voltaire translated into Persian in that period include *Histoire de Charles XII* and *Histoire de l'Empire de Russie sous Pierre le Grand*. On these translations, see Kīyānfar 1989.

tion of nations intended to resolve disputes in a peaceful way.[45] Many translations of this novel were produced around the globe in what can hence be regarded as an outstanding example of a "travelling text."[46] The first Ottoman Turkish and Arabic translations were produced in the 1850s. There is some evidence that the first Persian translation was produced even earlier than this: namely, in the eighteenth century.[47] Beyond that, prior to Kermānī's arrival in Istanbul, the exile journal *Akhtar* published a Persian version of it in consecutive instalments in the years 1879/1880. Hence, Kermānī, who is reported to have himself produced an unfinished translation of this novel, did not have to start from scratch.[48] He was in a position to deal with a text that was already important in his discursive environment. It would thus be an intriguing task to evaluate Kermānī's version in the light of his other works as well as the various translations available in his time, in order to elucidate his specific intellectual contribution to the narrative of Télémaque.

Con-Texts: Kermānīs Writings and Ideas in a Transregional Enlightenment Discourse

Almost all Kermānī's oeuvre was written during the ten years he spent in the Ottoman Empire and in this short period he turned out to be a prolific writer.[49] With regard to the topics and ideas he engaged with, vividly debated in his times, the following are representative: the priority and benefits of natural science, the idea of the 'nation,' and the construction of a national identity for Iran. Equally important were debates about the nature of religion and the critique of religious dogmatism and religious authorities. In what follows, I shall briefly explore two

45 On the significance of Fénelon's Télémaque, see, for instance, Kapp 1982.

46 See Schmitt-Maaß, Stockhorst and Ahn 2014.

47 See Meral 2014 and Hill 2018. For a concise overview of literary receptions in the Ottoman empire, see also Strauss 2003.

48 That Kermānī indeed produced such a translation is mentioned by Ādamiyyat (1967), 66–67. I have seen the manuscripts mentioned by Ādamiyyat (Mellī 397). The ascription of this incomplete MS to Kermānī is plausible, although a more detailed investigation is necessary.

49 For a provisional descriptive inventory of his works, see Ādamiyyat 1967, 49–70. See also Bayat-Philipp 1974. In the context of his current research project "TransIranIdea", I am currently preparing a comprehensive annotated inventory of Mīrzā Āqā Khān Kermnānī's writings, comprising extent manuscripts and editions, for a project description and successive updated see https://transiranidea.net/.

topics in order to show the plurality and highly ambiguous nature of Kermānī's oeuvre, in which various strands of his thought appear to contradict each other.

The Dialectics of the Reception of Enlightenment: Kermānī's Racist Proto-Nationalism

The idea of the Nation and of national identity was no doubt a hot topic in eighteenth century Enlightenment discourse, in which the various unifying characteristics required for a single nation, such as shared history, language, culture, ethnicity or race were debated. Kermānī's approach to the idea of the 'nation' was decisively essentialist. A large number of his writings are therefore devoted to various periods of Iranian history as features of an Iranian identity.[50] He discussed these ideas in different types of literary genres, in epic poetry modelled on Firdousi's *Shahnahme*,[51] in historiographical writings,[52] and in polemical essays.[53] Besides the emphasis on the Iranians' glorious past, invoking the Akhamenids, the Sassanids, and Zoroastrianism, he builds his idea of Iranian identity on racial terms, in particular, contrasting Iranians with the Arabs. He argued that the difference between Arabs and Iranians is fundamental, since the two peoples are of different 'types.' For him, the Arabs belonged to the Semitic (inferior) race and the Iranians to the Aryan (superior) race – a distinction he underlined by referring to phrenological 'evidence' in order to prove the difference 'scientifically.'[54] He interpreted the phenomenon of the miscegenation of these two races after the Islamic conquest of Iran as the beginning of the Aryan race's decline, and as the cause of the Iranians' cultural degeneration. This per-

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50 These writings include the following *Nāma-ye bāstān* (The Book of Ancient Times), *Āʾīna-ye Sekandarī yā Īrān-e bāstān* (The Alexandrian Mirror or Ancient Iran), *Tārīkh-e Īrān az Islām tā saljūqiyān* (History of Iran form Islam to the Seljuqs), *Tārīkh-i shānzhmān-i Īrān* (History of Iran's Development) and *Tārīkh-i Qajariyya u sabab-i taraqqī u tanazzol-i ān* (History of the Qajars and the Reasons for Its Progress and Decline).

51 These writings include the following: *Nāme-ye bāstān* (The Book of Ancient Times), *Āʾīna-ye Sekandarī yā Īrān-e bāstān* (The Alexandrian Mirror or Ancient Iran).

52 These writings include the following: *Tārīḫ-e Īrān az Islām tā saljūqiyān* (History of Iran from Islam to the Seljuqs), probably lost; *Tārīkh-i shānzhmān-e Īrān* (History of Iran's Development), only a fragment, specify and Ref. to MS; and *Tārīkh-i Qajariyya u sabab-i taraqqī u tanazzol-i ān* (History of the Qajars and the Reasons for Its Progress and Decline), probably lost].

53 *Se maktūb; sad khatābe; Inshāʾllā māshāʾllā* (God Willing, God Blessing), for an edition of this work, see Kermānī 2007, for a German translation, see von Kügelgen 2017, 208–28.

54 See Vahdat, 2002, 39.

spective allowed him to explain their perceived backwardness vis-à-vis Europe, and to suggest a way out of this cultural crisis. The solution, Kermānī argued, was a return to the pre-Islamic history and culture of Iran, and to the ancient religion, Zoroastrianism. Consequently, he asserted the need to develop a historical consciousness as a precondition for the development of a national identity, and hence a strong and independent nation. Kermānī was convinced that revoking Iran's 'glorious' pre-Islamic history would be one means to achieve this goal. It is particularly in the context of these writings that he also commences his racist and anti-Arab discourse, which was to become highly influential in Iran, and paved the way for the 're-importation' of the Aryan myth.[55] These ideas, which also loom large in other of his writings, are, from a philosophical perspective, clearly at odds with his emphasis on employing reason and the idea of pluralism.

Yet this ambiguity is by no means untypical of nineteenth-century Enlightenment discourse. It is obvious that, in his nationalist arguments and his use of the idea of the Iranians' 'Aryan' origin, Kermānī drew heavily on the racist discourse that was on the rise in late nineteenth-century Europe.[56] The emergence of the Aryan myth first began as a linguistic argument that identified common roots for Greek, Latin, Sanskrit, and Persian. This discovery is usually associated with British orientalist Sir William Jones (d. 1794).[57] Initially used with reference to a linguistic family, the idea of an Aryan origin gradually turned from a linguistic into an ethnic or racial category, advocated, though with different emphases, by European thinkers such as Arthur Comte de Gobineau, Friedrich Max Müller (1823–1900), George Rawlinson (1812–1902), and Ernest Renan (1823–1892). Out of this notion of an Aryan race, a whole discipline of racial anthropology developed, accompanied by (pseudo)methods of natural science, such as the construction of biological taxonomies of the human race. This idea also served to interpret the history of mankind as a history of miscegenation and cultural decline. In a further step, the idea of racial purification and eugenics was also introduced as a means to re-establish the 'glorious' origin of the pure Aryan race, an idea that eventually culminated in the extremist racist ideology of national socialism.

All of these topics can be found in Kermānī's arguments as well. He might even have been the first Iranian to adopt this nineteenth-century racist discourse, in a sense 'reimporting' the term – together with the notion of the 'Aryan' – into

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55 Asgharzadeh 2007; Motadel 2014; Zia-Ebrahimi 2011; Zia-Ebrahimi 2014.

56 For a detailed discussion of the emergence of the Aryan myth and its appropriation by Iranian thinkers, see Zia-Ebrahimi 2014.

57 See Zia-Ebrahimi 2011, 448.

modern Persian, and the Aryan myth into the nationalist discourse of Iran.[58] It is not clear, though, whether the later Persian 'Aryan' discourse of the twentieth century was directly influenced by Kermānī, or developed through later adaptations of European models.[59] Further elaborations, however, appeared in the Pahlavi era, by authors such as Ḥasan Pīrniyā,[60] constituting an essential component of the invented tradition of the Pahlavi dynasty, which traced its lineage back to the ancient kings.

This short survey on Kermānī's discussions of national identity demonstrates that the ambivalence of his intellectual discourse is deeply entangled with the ambivalence of the unfolding of Enlightenment discourse in general. In both cases, debates on national identity incorporate the dialectics of emancipation and exclusion. Whereas Kermānī's repercussions of classical literature to highlight an Iranian identity contributed a great deal to both the development of modern Persian literature and the emergence of the constitutional movement, his racist and anti-Arab doctrines, similar to colonial discourses of exclusion in Europe, recurrently resurface in Iranian intellectual discourses. It is hence the task of a more elaborate composition of a micronarrative on Kermānī, to uncover these dialectic relations to European, Iranian and Islamic discourses.

Kermānī's Ambiguous Relation to Religion

Kermānī's writings on religion were even more ambiguous than his writings on the nation: at various times eclectic and agnostic, and sometimes even anti-religious. In one of his religio-philosophical treatises, *Hasht Behesht*, his most voluminous and systematic work, he clearly took the side of a particular religious community, though not an orthodox one – namely, the Azalī branch of Bābism.[61]

58 That it was indeed a reimportation is indicated by Zia-Ebrahimi, who points out that Kirmānī transliterated the term *āriyān* as an equivalent of the English *aryan* or French *arien*. In the same way, for the Semitic languages, he wrote *semetīk* instead of *sāmī*. Zia-Ebrahami does not, however, identify any specific sources Kirmānī might have used. See Zia-Ebrahimi 2011, 454.
59 See Ibid., 455. Zia-Ebrahimi does not clarify this issue, merely saying that "it took some time for other Iranian authors to catch up with Kirmānī's racialist enthusiasm." Yet this lack of information is not surprising, given the absence of studies on Iranian receptions of Kirmānī.
60 For more on Pīrniyā and his idea of an Iranian nation rooted in ancient Iranian history, see Rust 2014.
61 Probably his most significant and elaborate writings in terms of philosophical argumentation are *Falsafe-ye Bayān* ("The Philosophy of the Bayān," in most studies this work is often referred to as *Ḥekmat-e naẓarī* [Theoretical Philosophy] and *Hasht Behesht* [Eight Paradises], both co-

This religious perspective was thus critical towards and departed from both Sunni and Shīʿī doctrines and yet was part of the broader Shīʿī /Shaykhī cosmos. In this work, Kermānī engages with questions concerning knowledge, metaphysics, and ethics, with reference to both classical and modern as well as Western and Islamic traditions. In doing so, he relates the discourse of moral philosophical issues to the main teachings of the Persian Bayān, Bābism's most important scripture and eventually provides a rather free interpretation of it.

Other works, like his *Takwīn va tashrīʿ*, *Se maktūb va ṣad kheṭābe* (Three Letters and a Hundred Lectures) and *Inshāʾ Allāh, Mashāʾ Allāh* (God Willing, God Blessing) appear to be of a more polemical kind, critiquing either religious superstition in general, or Sunnī and Shīʿī religious doctrines in particular. *Takwīn u Tashrīʿ* (Creation and Lawgiving) is an essay that argues for the epistemological primacy of the natural sciences and positive philosophy over metaphysical or religious reasoning. It is thus paradigmatic of a broad tendency among Middle Eastern intellectuals of the nineteenth century to engage with positivism à la August Comte.

The other two are both highly polemical essays devoted to a social critique of Iranian society and religious dogmatism. *Inshāʾ Allāh, Mashāʾ Allāh* is basically a polemic against the dogmatism and hypocrisy of both Sunnī and Shīʿī religious scholars of his time.[62] Written in the form of an intellectual dispute between reform-minded and more conservative Muslim thinkers, this text has as one of its protagonists Al-Afghānī, whom Kermānī met in Istanbul.

Apart from his polemic against religious dogmatism, Kermānī also reflects upon the phenomenon of religiosity (*dīyānat*) from a more sociological perspective. He describes the development of human religiosity following a pattern reminiscent of Herbert Spencer's doctrine of the evolutionary process in human societies, which he also applies to the history of religion as an attempt by human beings to understand the inexplicable. In primitive societies, people wanted to make sense of natural phenomena they did not understand and were afraid of. The belief in supernatural entities such as demons made these phenomena comprehensible, and ways to seek to influence them through worship and cultic acts evolved. This religiosity then developed further into higher and more sophisti-

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authored with Shaykh Aḥmad Rūḥī). Present evidence suggests that *Ḥekmat-e naẓarī* is actually the first part of *Hasht Bihisht* and identical with *Falsafe-ye Bayān*. Whereas the work usually referred to as *Hasht Behesht*, is entitled *Shariʿat-e Bayān* (The Divine Law of the Bayān). There are two manuscripts in the Browne Collection of Oriental MS at Cambridge University Library (F 53/F54) listed under the title "Hasht Behesht," each comprising two volumes, that have this titles for part one and two, see Browne 1892, 680–97; Browne 1932, 76.

62 For a recent partial German translation, see von Kügelgen 2017, 208–28.

cated systems of belief, until it reached monotheism, in which the supernatural is transferred to a transcendent sphere. This idea of God serves the purpose of explaining things that are beyond human comprehension, and has at least the potential to fill human life with meaning and hope.

According to Kermānī, this goal basically shared by all religions, could even play a positive role in a society's enhancement, and in the peaceful coexistence of different societies, as long as the principle of tolerance is regarded as integral. However, the fact that religious communities tend in the end to claim exclusive access to the truth results in violence and despotism·

Reframing Narratives, Reshaping Texts: Zooming in on Mīrzā Āqā Khān Kermānī's Adaptation of *Le Café de Surate*

The topic of religious pluralism is elaborated in one of Kermānī's most popular works. His *Haftād o do mellat*, a hybrid text, merges translations, adaptations of other authors and fragments of his own pen, into a new narrative. His principal materials are two short stories by French writer Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre (1737–1814). Bernardin, a follower of the later Rousseau, was the author of the novel *Paul et Virginie*, which criticised social-class division and became a bestseller at the end of the eighteenth century.[63] Appearing in 1790, the two stories – *La Chaumière indienne*[64] and *Le Café de Surate* – deal with questions such as the disposition of wisdom, God and religion, and nature. About one hundred years later, *Le Café de Surate* was not only adapted by Leo Tolstoy and circulated in English, German, and Spanish, but also found its way to the Ottoman capital. It is not quite clear which versions of both texts Kermānī had at his disposal. In contrast to Tolstoy, for instance, who in his Russian version largely followed the French original, he made free use of the material, which he translated into Persian and rearranged, thereby reshaping the story in line with his own ideas, without mentioning Bernardin de Saint-Pierre as the two stories' author. The story, like the original, described a fictitious dispute between representatives of various religious communities and *Weltanschauung* relating to the

63 This book, translated into Persian by Ibrahim Neshat around 1906, was first meant to be an appendix to the third edition of Bernardin's *Études de la Nature*. See R. F. Muhammad in Masroori 2007, 548.
64 Runte 1980.

nature of God and his perceptibility. It seems that Kermānī chose to alter the title to *Haftād o do mellat* to situate the narrative about competing religious groups, the theme of both the original story and Kermānī's version, into a more Iran-related and contemporary discursive frame, with a subliminal emphasis on Azalī and Pan-Islamic arguments. Kermānī's title references a *ghazal* by Hafez (again pointing to the popular Islamic topos) based on a hadith that, later reiterated in theological literature, particularly Islamic heresiological texts, speaks of the split of the Islamic *umma* into seventy-two sects.[65] At the same time, there is some evidence that he might have intended his version as a preface to his appropriation of Bābi Bayan, since it appeared as such at least in one extent manuscript of his *Falsafe-ye Bayan*. Kermānīs *Haftād o do mellat*, does not, as we shall see, contradict this idea. Kermānī uses *Le Café de Surate* as the frame story and inserts further material into it. For instance, he added a heated debate among adherents of various religious sects who were active in Iran in his time, such as Shaikhis, Ni'matullāhīs, and Bahā'is. Furthermore, he introduced a new main character to the story: an Iranian cosmopolitan who not only sets out to reconcile all the religious and ideological parties present in the debate but also seems to be close to the Azali Faith, as his name and rather sharp criticism of Bahā'i scholars indicate. Yet he doesn't openly advocate Azali doctrines. He even praises materialists, atheists, and socialists for critiquing superstition. Moreover, using a narration-within-a-narration, he lets the new character narrate Bernardin's other short story, *La chaumière indienne*. After this narration ends, Kermānī goes on to change punch line of the original story. While Bernardin focused on the romantic devotion to nature and a critique of natural science and rationalism, Kermānī portrays his new protagonist as an advocate of natural science and reason as the only pathways to truth, and on these grounds highlights ideas of religious pluralism. Yet it was precisely adherence to natural science that Bernadin critiqued in both stories. Finally, towards the end of the story, Kermānī praises 'real' Islam as the essence of all religions. For Kermānī's interest in the narration was not as a romantic reorientation towards nature, a counter-Enlightenment manoeuvre, or the maintenance of a personal belief in God in the face of religious unrest between various religio-political groups in Iran; rather, it was the idea of peaceful coexistence achieved through the use of reason and civil rights.[66] Kermānī's Haftād-o-do

65 On the issue of heresiological literature in the Islamic tradition on general and its connection to the Ḥadīth of the seventy-two sects, see van Ess 2011.

66 For an edition, see Kermānī 1924. For a description of Kermānī's approach to religion, see Ādamiyyat 1967, 131–48. For a discussion of Kermanī's appropriation of Bernandin de Saint Pierre, see Sarrāj 1998 and Masroori 2007, 551–56.

mellat, although partly a translation closely following the original, is a work of his own creation that incorporates multi-layered Enlightenment discourse on religion from Voltaire to Rousseau, enriching it with examples and arguments from Islamic and Bābī intellectual contexts.

This experimental and creative literary adaptation of European sources is one of the most intriguing forms of intellectual engagement with Enlightenment literature and philosophy found among Persian writers. It not only shows that one has to also look for translations and relevant examples of translated works in texts that, at first glance, do not seem to be translated works at all; it also implies that the translation process of European philosophy in the Middle East and beyond is often deeply entangled with an innovative intellectual engagement with the ideas of Enlightenment thought by Iranian thinkers of the Qajar era.

A closer analysis of works like *Haftād o do mellat*, briefly characterised above, enables us to understand how this Iranian thinker re-read and rearranged various arguments from both traditions of thought and struggled to find his own position. Moreover, such an analysis, which would also draw on the original writings to which Kermānī referred, and on their contexts, would not only represent a piece of Iranian intellectual history, but also add a small yet significant piece to the transregional and entangled intellectual history of the Enlightenment(s).

Conclusion

Let me conclude by reconsidering some of the issues raised above and sum up with two sets of questions. First: As a thinker in his own right, is it adequate to label Kermānī an Iranian, Middle Eastern, transregional or global protagonist of the Enlightenment? To which discourses did he contribute, and what was his own understanding of his own contribution? Second: How does this brief micronarrative of Kermānī's engagement with various Middle Eastern religious debates and with discourses of European Enlightenment thought and its nineteenth-century aftermath help to reshape and decentre the grand narrative of 'the Enlightenment'? Do we still need this grand narrative in postcolonial and decolonial theory and debates? What is gained by introducing the idea of micronarratives as relational multifocal representations of under-represented archives of knowledge?

The discussion has shown that our protagonist shared many features with thinkers associated with the Age of Enlightenment, including its dialectics and ambiguities; yet what makes him an original thinker are neither these similarities nor any forced argument that his ideas as such had or have any impact on current theory in the global north. To take that as a condition for originality would mean

to be trapped in the circle of Eurocentric frames of theorising. Kermānī played an important role as a thinker, offering literary, intellectual, political and religious interventions into a trans-Iranian discourse in which writings of European protagonists of the Enlightenment played an important, but, as has been shown, not exclusive role. He is original in the way he re-read, re-arranged and re-shaped the various textual traditions he engaged with, including his ambiguous approaches to identity and religion. He contributed a great deal to Iranian, Ottoman, and, more generally Middle Eastern, literary and intellectual history, and that was his purpose and struggle. It is not and never has been his obligation or task to decentre the grand narrative of the Enlightenment or to decolonise theory. This – to address my second set of questions – is *our* task as intellectual historians, to be taken up from a hermeneutical perspective of decolonial theory. This perspective also includes the problematisation of the ambiguity in Kermānī's thought which on the one hand reproduces racist stereotypes and on the other way addresses the issue of pluralism. Micronarratives in the way outlined above and the critical reflection of such ambiguities are not meant to merely produce knowledge about Middle Eastern thinkers; they are likewise aimed at addressing and ideally compensating the problem of epistemic asymmetries. By way of highlighting intellectual relations and historical entanglements, they thus have the potential to make a case for a revision of European intellectual history. On the one hand, I argued that the concept of the Enlightenment as an eighteenth century phenomenon is obviously problematic as it disregards the essential non-European share in even the intellectual phenomena that refer to the very achievements of eighteenth-century European thinkers. Then again, the very notion of the Enlightenment, its Grand Narrative, is linked so strongly with European thought and its colonial aftermath, that it remains a matter of debate whether any decolonial attempt to decentre its Grand Narrative can be achieved. On the other hand, it is also obvious that, in order to achieve such a comprehensive transregional, transcultural historiography of the Enlightenment or multiple Enlightenments, one micronarrative alone won't do the job. A collective transregional and transdisciplinary effort is needed in which micronarratives of Middle Eastern, or, more comprehensively, Global Southern, thinkers and discourses like the one briefly outlined in this chapter constitute nodes in a web of narratives which unfold a transregional or transcultural global intellectual history. Such a web of micronarratives provides a means for a decentred intellectual history in which south-south intellectual relations become equally important and must not necessarily take the detour via the Centre (Europe/the North). They may provide a decolonial means for questioning the alleged centricity of the "Centre." Micronarratives of the Enlightenment may thus, in the long run, help to decentre the grand narrative

in such a way that the mere mention of the term would not necessarily invoke the idea of the Enlightenment as an exclusively European phenomenon.

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Rakesh Pandey

The *Pūrva-Pakṣa* of Modern Indian Thought

Plurality of Universals and Humanistic Knowledge

> The "crisis of European existence," talked about so much today and documented in innumerable symptoms of the breakdown of life, is not an obscure fate, an impenetrable destiny; rather, it becomes understandable and transparent against the background of the teleology of European history that can be discovered philosophically. The condition for this understanding, however, is that the phenomenon "Europe" be grasped in its central, essential nucleus. In order to be able to comprehend the disarray of the present "crisis," we had to work out the concept of Europe as the historical teleology of the infinite goals of reason; we had to show how the European "world" was born out of ideas of reason, i.e., out of the spirit of philosophy. The "crisis" could then become distinguishable as the apparent failure of rationalism. The reason for the failure of a rational culture, however, as we said, lies not in the essence of rationalism itself but solely in its being rendered superficial, in its entanglement in "naturalism" and "objectivism." – Edmund Husserl[1]

> When I speak of cultural subjection, I do not mean the assimilation of an alien culture. That assimilation need not be an evil; it may be positively necessary for healthy progress and in any case it does not mean a lapse of freedom. There is cultural subjection only when one's traditional cast of ideas and sentiments is superseded without comparison or competition by a new cast representing an alien culture which possesses one like a ghost. This subjection is slavery of the spirit; when a person can shake himself free from it, he feels as though the scales fell from his eyes. He experiences a rebirth, and that is what I call Svaraj in Ideas. – Krishna Chandra Bhattacharaya[2]

Introduction

Our contemporary concern towards intellectual resources beyond the Eurocentric traditions is a reflection of the state of modern thought. One may feel intrigued, considering the claims of vast progress achieved in the fields of modern humanistic and scientific knowledge and a corresponding narrowness of its intellectual base. Compared to the intellectual map of the premodern era, the world of modern knowledge appears to be a story of the singular triumph of the Western mind. For what could have been a rich ensemble of intellectual traditions – with distinct pursuits of knowledge-systems, styles of thought, and the languages of

1 Husserl 1970, 299.
2 Bhattacharya 1984, 383.

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conceptualisation – is as much a story of denial, erasure, and, at best, of the survival of vestigial traditions for large parts of the world. In what ways would explorations into "non-Western" or "other" traditions of thought redress this insularity? On what grounds would they claim contemporary relevance? How would one counter the claims that such traditions are not merely representing some residual pre-forms of Western thought or desiderata of their own past? While scholastic interest in the larger non-Western traditions still thrives for historical and comparative purposes, such traditions have hardly any stakes in the grand hall of "philosophy" or "theory," as any claim to legitimate human thought is guarded by the canons of Eurocentric knowledge.

However, it is still not hard to acknowledge that these other traditions have never been dead and they continue to be living forces for a variety of intellectual systems and the life-worlds. It is well-known that with the rise of European imperialism the institutions of colonial dominance played a central role in classifying, controlling, and transforming the world of modern knowledge. In its longer intellectual evolution, from the tradition of Renaissance humanities to the Enlightenment philosophies and modern sciences, Europe has also inscribed a story of its "other" as a palimpsest of modern knowledge.[3] In a rich and insightful account of Europe's discovery of the world and its modes of understanding and classification of other societies, Mary Louis Pratt has described the rise of a "European 'planetary consciousness'" between the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. Pratt draws our attention to the "other genealogies" of Enlightenment, which laid the foundations of Eurocentric knowledge and were part of larger imperial systems.[4] As some recent appraisals of Enlightenment history show, contrary to much common belief, the Enlightenment was not only internally diverse, but also carried a keen sense of the societies beyond the West as a foil.[5] In the last several decades, the histories of imperial cultures have shown how Europe created its intellectual and cultural other through the imposition of a system of representations. This way it was able to project certain cultural, social, and religious stereotypes of the people outside Europe.[6]

By the end of eighteenth century, ideas emerging from Europe's view of the larger world were so widely shared in the European intellectual culture that it

3 For representative studies on the rise of European imperialism and modern knowledge systems, see Pagden 1993; and Subrahmanyam 2017. For an influential and programmatic study on colonialism and the creation of modern knowledge, Cohn 1996.

4 Pratt 2008 [1992], 11, 35–36.

5 Israel 2006; Pocock 2005.

6 Greenblatt 1992; Mitter 1977.

could even colour the opinions of thinkers like Voltaire, Immanuel Kant, J. G. Herder, the Schlegel brothers, and G. W. F. Hegel, among others.[7] By the first quarter of the nineteenth century, a variety of intellectual currents – including Orientalism, Utilitarianism, and Christian evangelicalism – flowing from the West, had shaped new ideas of history, science, religion, literature, arts, and philosophy of India. While there was a move towards the discovery of Indian systems of thought, it was as much an act of reordering and reinterpretation. These developments signal how the deepening structures of Eurocentrism, together with the rapid entrenchment of imperial power, shaped the world of modern knowledge through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[8]

Almost a century after the establishment of European views of the Eastern and larger non-European world, in his rather sombre ruminations, German philosopher Edmund Husserl wondered at the intellectual crisis of Europe. He saw an imminent danger of the dissolution of the philosophical and spiritual unity once begun through Europe's teleological progress with the Greek thought and its wider sources of inheritance. However, at the back of Husserl's mind was a firm belief that, while other civilisations would have reasons to "Europeanise themselves even in their unbroken will to spiritual self-preservation," Europe would hardly need to "Indianise" itself.[9] It is not a coincidence that, a century after Husserl's philosophical reflections on the fate of Europe, and several decades of thinking over the idea of decolonisation, the challenges of Eurocentrism have taken a new turn. In an increasingly globalised world there is much concern being expressed about the planetary crisis. The call for decolonisation is now being heard, once again, in the pleas for rehabilitation of native artefacts and the destruction of the emblems of colonial conquest. Overall, what we are witnessing in this new decolonising move is an impassioned plea for the reparation of life-worlds lost in the long European dominance. While the decolonisation thinking has shown deep concern towards the issues around cultural memory and human heritage, a major challenge still lies for the diverse traditions of thought and humanistic

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7 The representative philosophical voices are Immanuel Kant, with his lesser-known late writings on non-European societies, G. W. F. Hegel, and the German Romantic thinkers Herder and the Schlegel brothers; for a praiseworthy and influential Enlightenment voice about the Eastern cultures, Voltaire.

8 This has been demonstrated in the history of European discovery of India from the late eighteenth century onwards (Marshall 1970; Mukherjee 1968; Kejariwal 1988). The unique cultural and intellectual history of Orientalist intellectual enterprise as the second Renaissance has been shown by Schwab 1984; for a more recent account, see App 2010.

9 Husserl 1970, 15–16, 274. Husserl articulates the idea of crisis more poignantly in his Vienna Lectures. See Husserl 1970, 269–99.

knowledge. It is a challenge towards reimagining the visions of the world and the shape of knowledge through the lens of non-Western traditions of thought.

This essay offers some critical reflections on these issues, with reference to modern Indian thought and its linkages to premodern traditions and the European encounter. It suggests that one of the major tasks of intellectual decolonisation or achieving the self-rule and autonomy of ideas is to rethink the presuppositions, or *pūrva-pakṣa*, of modern thought and humanistic knowledge.[10] It tries to explore how the shape of modern thought might be reconsidered by making

10 In the Indian *pramāṇa* epistemology, the idea of *pūrva-pakṣa* forms how the idea of locus (*pakṣa*) is fixed in logic. The term *pakṣa* (place, case, or "subject-locus"), literally meaning wings, side, plank, is used to trace the idea of *sa-pakṣa* (similar place, case, or "homologue"), *vi-pakṣa* (contrasting place, case, or, "heterologue'), and *pūrva-pakṣa* (prior place or case). As a logical category, *pūrva-pakṣa* is further used as the existing set of positions or arguments one tends to engage with in establishing one's own position. See Matilal 1998, 6–7. Conceived in a dialogical mode, *pūrva-pakṣa* consists of one's interlocutors, who could help build the theses or arguments. According to *Nyāyakośa* (a modern authoritative compendium of Indian philosophical and logical terms), *pūrva-pakṣa* is a short treatise meant to dispel scholastic doubts in the form of a query (*śāstrīya-saṃśaya-nirāsārtha-praśna-rūpā phakkikā*) or that which stands in oppositions to the thesis that has been established (*siddhānta-viruddha-koṭiḥ*). See Jhalakikar 1928, 506.

Some scholars treat *pūrva-pakṣa* as the *prima facie* view, which in its actual uses is always much more complex in the texts and commentaries. Phillips, while calling it *prima facie*, also hints at possibilities where one may find the "*pūrva-pakṣa* within *pūrva-pakṣa*" and even beyond. He notes: "A *pūrva-pakṣa* is a topically unified exposition, complete with supporting arguments, of an opposed position or of an attack relative to a *siddhānta*, which is itself unified exposition of an accepted position, complete with supporting arguments and/or correlate responses" (2011, 105). Staal reminds us of the complex genealogy of the concept of *pakṣa* in Indian logic and philosophical thought through its earliest uses in the ritual context (1988, Chapters 5 and 7). *Pakṣa*, literally meaning "a wing," is used to denote the sides of the shape of the bird used in the agni-cayan ritual.

Staal notes: "The word *pakṣa* means primarily 'wing' and has come to denote 'alternative,' and, hence, in general view, 'hypothesis.' Frequent uses are *pakṣe*, 'on the other hand' ('on the other wing'), *pakṣāntara*, 'in the other case.' In Sanskrit scholarly literature it has become the commentator's custom to interpret any given text in three successive stages: the first interpretation is the *pūrva-pakṣa*, '*prima facie* view;' the second is the reply to this: *uttara-pakṣa*; and the third and final interpretation is the *siddhānta*, 'final and established view.' This practice is found since Śabara (Vth century A. D.) but may be older."

"The terms *pūrva-pakṣa* and *uttara-pakṣa* can also mean Eastern and Northern wing, respectively, or first and second half of the lunar month. It seems probable that the earliest technical or semi-technical use of the term *pakṣa* originated in the Vedic ritual. The *Taittirīya-saṃhitā* had identified the sacrificial fire with a bird, *vayas* or *pakṣin* (i.e., 'winged') […] Moreover, each wing is further enlarged into the direction it points to, for the longer the wings, the stronger the bird and the wider its flight. The idea is, that the bird thus carries the sacrificer to heaven. Similarly do the strong wings *pūrva* and *uttara-pakṣa* carry the philosopher to his final view, while *sapakṣa* and *vipakṣa* cases lead the logician to his final proof" (106–07).

sense of the three interlinked realms of human intellection, speech, and sociality. These realms, it further suggests, are crucial to the modes of worldmaking in relation to which systems of thought evolve.[11]

It is not hard to see how decolonised thought is linked to the twin tasks of intellectual self-discovery and of reimagining a world of knowledge. By making sense of the *pūrva-pakṣa* of modern thought, we could rethink the plurality of the forms of intellection and their specific notions of universals. Only such a plurality of thought and the world, it is argued, with deep reflexivity into the colonial makings of self and mind, could help draw the new paths. The essay also aims to address some of the quandaries linked to such an exploration and suggests a move from the long decolonising *moment of critique* to a phase of *constructive theory*. For this purpose, it mainly draws upon the Indian traditions of thought and considers three key *pūrva-pakṣa-s* of decolonised thought in relation to the ideas of veridical knowledge (*pramāṇa-śāstra*), linguistic meaning (*śābda-bodha*), and social imaginary (*loka-kalpa*). The terms *pramāṇa*, *śabda*, and *loka* are not merely replacements for the given Eurocentric conceptual vocabulary, but an exploration into what we have called the interlinked realm of human intellection, speech and sociality, which could be both a ground for plurality of universals and a humanistic knowledge beyond the Eurocentric traditions.[12]

11 Goodman (1978) takes cues from Ernst Cassirer's idea of the symbol and the plurality of worlds, and defines worldmaking as "working with the world at hand." To Goodman, knowing is similar to worldmaking and is both "remaking" and "reporting" (6–7). Goodman's ideas, offered in an analytical scheme, resonate with Gadamer's notions of context and the hermeneutic principles of culture (2013), out of which the human sciences would acquire their own method. However, language plays a central role in Gadamer's elaboration of the hermeneutic philosophy for the humanities.

A comparable picture can be built of worldmaking on the basis of Indian hermeneutic epistemology and ritual action in *Mīmāṃsā* philosophy and the rich tradition of philosophy of language and meaning. The world, both in its concrete and phenomenal form, plays a central role in the ideas of human thought, language, and meaning in Indian intellectual traditions. On plurality of the world, see Jaina metaphysics and epistemology of *anekānta* or manifoldness of the views. See Mookerjee 1978 [1944], Sanghavi, 1977.

12 The three terms *pramāṇa*, *śabda*, and *loka* refer to the ways in which they become the ground for thinking and worldmaking in Indian intellectual traditions. The theories of *pramāṇa-śāstra* or *vidyā*, *śabda-pramāṇa* or *śābda-bodha*, and a variety of ways in which the idea of *loka* denoting the physical, social, and phenomenal world provide a rich gamut of concepts. I have tried to use the term *loka-kalpa* as the closest possible translation for the idea of social imaginary.

Cultures of Intellection

Presuppositions of Modern Indian Thought: Defining the *Pūrva-pakṣa*

Human thought has usually been characterised with its universal claims in the Eurocentric tradition, despite its own evolution from the Greco-Roman lineage. Such universalism has mostly been denied to the traditions of thought beyond Europe, which are seen to be largely determined by the ethnic and cultural origins of the people. The idea of universal thought is supposed to be the possession of certain kind of cultural mind, with an innate mentalist feature and peculiar human faculty. While this view is countered by positing an embodied sense of the emergence of thought, which normally upholds externalist and holistic notions of the rise of knowledge, the divide between the culturalist origin of non-Western thought and the universal notion of the Western thought still persists. In important ways, the rise of modern thought in its Eurocentric view has also been determined by the two key perspectives of scientism and historicism. While thinking of non-Western traditions, it is crucial to keep in view the way scientism bolsters a strong positivist idea of the real world and historicism makes a case of progression through time.[13]

In this context, our suggestion to rethink the *pūrva-pakṣa* of modern thought is both a methodological and a hermeneutic move.[14] The term *pūrva-pakṣa* is drawn from the Indian philosophical method of argumentation, or *vāda-śāstra*, where it denotes the available views under consideration from one's own or rival traditions. In debating manuals and the Nyāya system of philosophical reasoning, *pūrva-pakṣa* is part of a comprehensive mode of forming one's own views by tracing the grounds of one's addressee. An opponent or an interlocutor could be

13 I use the phrase "cultures of intellection" to suggest the possibility of covering a wide range of modes, forms, and practices of human intellection, which make knowledge and understanding possible. In recent decades, historians and philosophers of science have developed some suggestive ways of thinking about how theories and systems of knowledge function. These are very distinct from the conventional treatment of epistemology as a major branch of philosophy dealing with issues of knowledge, beyond its context of generation and use. Two important examples in this tradition are Karin Knorr Cetina's use of the method of "epistemic culture" (1999) and Lorraine Daston and others' use of "historical epistemology."

14 In the tradition of philosophical debate, or *vāda-śāstra*, in which *pūrva-pakṣa* is the position of the real or assumed opponent, or the existing set of arguments, the opponent is an ally in a certain dialogue. Once turned into a creative interlocutor, the opponent is contiguous rather than standing solely in opposition.

both a real or imaginary partner in dialogue, where his or her ideas become props for the refutation and reconstruction of a position. *Pūrva-pakṣa* institutes a mode of thinking in which one is accountable to one's critical addressee. In this mode, thinking is a systematic mode of intellection, in which one builds up a hermeneutic context with a community of people holding shared presuppositions. One creates one's own views (*uttara-pakṣa*) in a dialogic tradition of reflection and interlocution on a shared foundation of reasoning. *Pūrva-pakṣa* can be treated as creating the grounds for self-reflexivity and is premised on the acknowledgement of shared, conflicting, and even alien elements in a conversation. As a method, *pūrva-pakṣa* allows us to ask how premodern and colonial systems determine the conditions of the rise of modern thought. At the same time, a variety of forms of intellection and systems of thought – specific to diverse linguistic, cultural, and social traditions – could be the grounds for raising such issues. *Pūrva-pakṣa* is hardly a search for foundational views; rather, it is recognition of the various existing positions to which one could relate to as an interlocutor in creating one's own. Largely known as the central method of argumentation in Indian intellectual traditions, actual instances of its operation in the philosophical (*darśana*) and knowledge systems (*śāstra*) illustrate what can be called the method of *dialectical hermeneutics*.[15]

The challenges of imagining the *pūrva-pakṣa* of modern Indian thought could be various, including how the colonial encounter led to specific interpretations of Indian knowledge traditions, the rise of India as a cultural and civilisational entity, and the historical evolution of its own traditions of thought. The three major contexts for rethinking the presuppositions are linked to the very idea of "premodern" or "classical" Indian thought; the "medieval" encounter with the Perso-Arabic and European traditions; and the long vernacular renaissance of Indian languages, well into modern times.[16] Some of the key issues pertaining

15 In defining *pūrva-pakṣa* as the non-foundational ground, which helps generate the rise of the systems of thought, we may compare it with the views of Hans-Georg Gadamer (2013), Donald Davidson (1973–1974), and John McDowell (2002), where a coherent and holistic theory of knowledge, language, and the world is argued. In such views, a certain form of dialectic and dialogue go together in the act of knowing and making sense of things, and a non-instrumental view of language plays a central role. In this sense, Indian grammarian philosopher Bhartṛhari sees the world as linguistically pervaded, and Mīmāṃsā philosophers create a theory of action and linguistic meaning. Several insights from Nyāya, Buddhist, and Jaina epistemology can help us rethink the issues around intellection and worldmaking.

16 Modern studies of Indian philosophy, mainly inspired by the comparative method, have tried to engage with the foundational structure and presuppositions of Indian thought. Most of such efforts have seen Indian thought as grounded in certain key religio-ethical and soteriological

to the rise of Indian thought in the modern period have been linked to the larger idea of Indian intellectual traditions with the rise of Western disciplinary knowledge, the role of English language, and the modern vernaculars in the colonial era. However, one of the least explored aspects is the variety of lived, performative, and practical forms of knowledge traditions, which seem to lie beyond the canonical textual systems of thought. These raise a series of questions regarding the very idea and nature of "Indian thought" and its traditions as seen through Eurocentric frames. While these questions take us to the deeper issue of the rise of non-Western thought, much decolonial thinking is limited to the use of indigenous terms as a possible counter to Eurocentrism.[17]

Despite the variety of Indian intellectual traditions and knowledge practices, most Eurocentric views have understood them as pale imitations of supposedly universal Western concepts. In this context, it is difficult to imagine the quotidian, aesthetic, and skill or craft-based traditions of intellection to be part of modern humanistic knowledge. Even for the most generous accounts of performative traditions, aesthetic creation, and philosophical anthropology, it has not been easy to lay claim to systems of thought arising out of lived forms of life or human creativity. While there has been much to reflect upon Indian theories around these traditions – both in canonical and vernacular forms – colonial or Western conceptuality seem to restrict their search to authentic textual forms of thinking or show scepticism towards such ideas. Scholars and critics have shared various opinions towards the very idea of "Indian thought" in the long colonial era and its contemporary invocations. While some have shown extreme pessimism about the recuperation of any such idea, some have accepted the inevitability of the absolute hegemony of Western knowledge. A strand of deep scepticism has always seen the lurking dangers of indigeneity, nativism, and uncritical glorification of the high tradition, which the idea of "India" may

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goals based in the ideals of *puruṣārtha* (aims of man) related to the four areas of *dharma* (larger order and ethical law), *artha* (wealth and prosperity), *kāma* (desire and pleasure), *mokṣa* (liberation or summum-bonum). See Karl Potter 1999 [1991] for an older but still a comprehensive account of presuppositions of Indian philosophical thought.

17 Given the immense diversity of India as a cultural and social unit, some find the use of "Indian thought" exclusionary. In my view, such uses of the epithet "India" serve a heuristic purpose. Two insightful examples of dealing with the idea of "Indian thought" can be found in Halbfass (1990) and Ramanujan (1989), which cover both its richness and complexity. While Halbfass mainly looks into the ancient and classical philosophical thought in its long history of encounter with Europe, Ramanujan offers some highly suggestive puzzles in characterising "Indian thought" and its "contexts-sensitive" plurality through cultural and literary sources, in their varied classical, vernacular, and folkloric forms.

succumb to while characterising its diverse intellectual traditions. I suggest that the colonial history of loss, continuity, and transformation in the world of ideas is a complex spectrum to be explored in view of the long history of various traditions of thought evident in its scholastic, vernacular, and performative traditions in the Indian sub-continent. If the rich testimony of the history of Indian thought is to be told, then it should begin by tracing the *pūrva-pakṣa* of various modes of intellection and their systems.

The Epistemic Culture of *Pramāṇa*

In India, an elaborate system of knowledge classification has thrived in the compendia of grammar, arts, rhetoric, economy, polity, and medicine. As an illustration we can have a view of how means of ascertaining human knowledge, that is *pramāṇa*, have been central to the traditions of Indian thought. This has been evident in the evolution of various traditions of scholastic philosophy, knowledge systems, and performative arts. With the rise of Sanskrit as the main scholastic language, grammar, as a major branch of knowledge, acquired special significance. With its systematisation of the linguistic usages and reflections on the relations between language and the world, from very early on Sanskrit grammatical thinking has been central to understanding the role of conception and meaning. Most importantly, philosophical thought, known as *darśana* (envisioning or true perception) or *ānvīkṣikī* (analytical and rational exploration), saw the emergence of *pramāṇa* epistemology as the chief tool to fix the criteria for valid cognition or knowledge. While the *pramāṇa* system was accepted by all philosophical and knowledge traditions, the larger moral and soteriological goals of thinking were linked to the respective spiritual or religious visions for the cessation of human suffering and attainment of a morally good life. Together with *pramāṇa-s* (the means of knowledge), it is *prameya-s* (the objects of knowledge), which create the main edifice for devising epistemic methods. Knowledge is acquired through four key *pramāṇa-s* of perception (*pratyakṣa*), inference (*anumāna*), analogy (*upamāna*), and testimony (*śabda*), together with, in some cases, postulation (*arthāpatti*), and non-apprehension (*anupalabdhi*). The modes of valid cognition range from mere perception and inference among the sceptic school of Buddhists to all the six tools of *pramāṇa-s* among the Vedāntins. The philosophical traditions of Nyāya (with its logical method and reasoning) and Vaiśeṣika (propounding a realist ontology shared by Nyāya) are examples of systems with great significance as sources for the categories that could make sense of the modern physical sciences and logical systems in Indian

terms.[18] While in general the *pramāṇa* theory of knowledge has been at the centre of claims that Indian philosophy could match the standards of Western epistemology and rational thought, the larger significance of *śabda-pramāṇa* (verbal cognition or testimony), together with *upamāna* (analogy), in the rise of humanistic knowledge has hardly been explored.[19]

In the *pramāṇa* system the establishment of valid cognition is linked to a variety of scholastic methods, modes of arguments, and the social milieu. As systems of knowledge, or *śāstras*, dealing with different realms of human and natural worlds are based on the epistemic edifice of the *pramāṇa-s*, they also lay out the schemes of classification and contexts of their use. There are social and moral prescriptions for those who could be initiated into these systems of knowledge and could also be upholders of a certain tradition. To attain the goals linked to these intellectual traditions, they are also supposed to follow certain rules prescribed for ritual functions and social roles.[20] However, the larger world of performative traditions related to dramaturgy (*nāṭya*), music (*saṅgīta*), arts (*kalā*), crafts (*śilpa*), rhetoric (*alaṅkāra*), and literature (*kāvya* or *sāhitya*) have their own disciplinary systems, which aim to realise the effective goals (*artha*) by putting systems into practice (*prayoga*) and human conduct (*vyavahāra*). Their larger context comprises what the Indian rhetoricians, following its initial suggestions in the Bharata's *Nāṭya-śāstra* (a foundational treatise on dramaturgy and other arts), called the *mārga* (established path or manner) and *deśī* (the realm of local

18 For the significance of the *pramāṇa* theory of knowledge and its larger import for the evolution of Indian intellectual traditions, see Mohanty 1992. For a condensed account of the Indian *pramāṇa* epistemology and its methods, with a comparison to western logic and analytical philosophy, see Matilal 1998; for a bold constructive endeavour to place *pramāṇa* theory as contemporaneous in terms of rigour and insight to modern Western epistemology, see Matilal 1986 and Phillips 2012. For a recent reappraisal of the larger rational aspect of Indian thought in its historical contextualisation, see Ganeri 2011. It is intriguing to note that while a huge literature in English and European languages, apart from the writings in Sanskrit and modern Indian languages, has highlighted the significance of the *pramāṇa* epistemology, it has hardly ever made inroads into the larger field of humanistic knowledge or contemporary thinking.

19 For a reflective suggestion to reappraise the verbal cognition, see Mohanty 1992, in particular, discussions of *śābda-bodha* (83–89) and *śabda-pramāṇa* (249–59). Independent studies on *śabda-pramāṇa* are few (see Billimoria 1988 for an important exception). See also Tatacharya's recent extensive study of *śābda-bodha* in Indian thought written in Sanskrit (2005).

20 Most of the key treatises on specific fields of knowledge lay out the systems' classification, modes of acquiring knowledge, and the goals. This is prominently evident in the *Artha-śāstra* (well-known treatise on economy and polity), *Caraka-saṃhitā* (a foundational treatise on the medicinal sciences), and in *Manu-saṃhitā* (a treatise on religious duties and moral conduct), among others.

conventions) modes of practice. Instead of carrying a strict boundary between the high and the low, this larger context formed a cultural world based on the dialectic of active forms of local practices and the creation of systematic modes. While the *mārga* tradition carries the burden of creating systems (*śāstra*) as quasi-normative paths, one of its chief sources of authority still lies in the protean and fluid world of local (*deśī*) practices. *Mārga* is the well-trodden or well-marked path, while *deśī*, bound to a locus or a region, keeps evolving. What is seen as the distinction between the two realms is more of a dialogue between the system-in-the-making (*mārga*) and the world of localised practices (*deśī*). While in their modern uses, the two terms have been reduced as easy ways to capture the notions of "classical" and "folk," their rich and chequered meanings are resonant of a peculiar cultural universe they create through mirroring each other.[21]

In the Indian culture of intellection the lived and phenomenal world carried significant authority, as the act of knowledge-creation was beholden to the realm of human and natural action. At the same time, the goals of knowledge were bound to larger ideas of cosmology and the normative structure of the social world. In this scheme, not only is thought tied to epistemic truths but it also leads to desired results (*phala* or *niṣpatti*). The process of acquiring knowledge is as much tied to inner mentalistic operations as to modes of understanding and the making of the world. Through their reflection on the means, processes, and goals of knowledge, Indian systems of knowledge are bound to the awareness of the limits and possibilities of human intellection. In their reflective core, Indian intellectual traditions tend to nurture a continuous meditation on the views of the world and the very act of the creation of knowledge. By the early modern era, with the thriving tradition of Navya-nyāya – the philosophical school of epistemology and logic – the *pramāṇa* system had attained a remarkable sophistication in defining both philosophical thought and other fields of knowledge. With the

21 While they have been occasionally noted as peculiar modes in which cultural practices have evolved in premodern India, it is hard to find a sustained treatment of the terms *mārga* and *deśī*. This is perhaps a result of their modern use as mirroring the distinction of the "classical" and "folk." But despite this surface resemblance, careful study of these terms hardly fits into this schema. The uses of *mārga* and *deśī* have been various in the treatises on rhetoric, poetics, and arts in general. They cover a range of meanings from established path, mode, style, and manner (rīti) to that which bears the true sense (*tattvārtha*) in texts like Bharata's *Nātya-śāstra*, Daṇḍin's *Kāvyadarśa*, Dhanañjaya's *Daśarūpaka*, Kuntaka's *Vakroktijīvita*, Bhoja's *Śṛṅgāra-prakāśa*, and Śārṅgadeva's *Saṅgīta-ratnākara*. For *mārga* broadly understood as style or manner (*rīti*), see Raghavan 1942, 172, 177. For a recent treatment of the concept of *mārga* and *deśi* as central to "vernacularisation" and "cosmopolitanism" in premodern literary culture of India, see Pollock 2006, 204–10, 220–24, 405–10.

onset of the modern era, such traditions not only maintained their scholastic conventions, but also played a central role in defining modern thought in India, once colonial knowledge and its disciplinary systems began taking root. However, what were gradually characterised as the "traditional" Indian and the "modern" Western systems of knowledge in the colonial period determined much of the story of Indian thought.[22]

It has not been easy to trace the ways in which modes of intellection and worldmaking are linked in the realms beyond the scholastic traditions. This has largely been the case because the canons of modern thought are beyond the expressive and quotidian realms of intellection and are mainly based on the propositional nature of thought. Despite their conceptual richness, the expressive forms of poems, novels, musical compositions, rhetorical speech, artisanal work, and everyday skills have not been treated as the resources of systems of thought. Perhaps it is due to the limits of modern thought – an inability to engage with the diverse modes of intellection and styles of thinking embedded in such diverse practices – that they could not be treated as the *pūrva-pakṣa*. While *pramāṇa* epistemology offers us a rich repertoire for determining the conditions of the rise of knowledge, the larger world of Indian knowledge systems (*śāstras*) and cultures of intellection offers a useful meeting point for such rethinking. The systems are not only based on the epistemic architecture of the *pramāṇa* system, but also offer a glimpse into how knowledge shapes the world.[23]

The colonial intellectual and institutional system fashioned a mode of plucking discrete Indian concepts from their intellectual contexts and tried to put them to uses they did not have in their own systems of thought. In different ways, the

22 It is increasingly important to place the study of modern Indian thought in relation to larger intellectual transformations and innovations taking place in the early modern to the colonial period, see Pollock 2011. For a much-cited work on thriving Indian knowledge and pedagogic traditions in pre-British India, Dharampal's account (1983) still remains a source to validate the story of decline during the colonial period. Such studies have often been used by Gandhian critics of colonialism and modern knowledge to paint an authoritative picture of the premodern Indian social world and its thriving intellectual culture.

23 The influence of the *pramāṇa* architecture of knowledge and its terminology in shaping the larger structure of Indian culture and thought and vernacular traditions is significant. An influential modern example is the way it was used for the creation of modern scientific knowledge and disciplines in the colonial period, as seen in the work of, among others, Brajendranath Seal, the pioneer of comparative philosophy and knowledge in modern India. A culmination of the long nineteenth century attempt to create modern European knowledge based on Indian conceptual resources, Seal's work (1915) was a telling example of the creation of a compendium of Western scientific categories from the stock of the terms of *pramāṇa* epistemology of Indian philosophy, largely of the realist and logical Nyāya and Vaiśeṣika systems and Sāṅkhya-Yoga cosmology.

life of these concepts was gradually turned into the comparative and translatory regime of categories in the colonial context. Apart from Orientalist interpretations of Indian knowledge, with their emphasis on philological reading, the new uses to which such concepts were put became equally evident in the systems of colonial pedagogy and in the vernacular traditions. Indian categories had a newfound purpose as carriers of Western knowledge. And while Indian concepts were supposed to facilitate the creation of Western disciplines of knowledge in the colony, they were granted no analytical power of their own.

This, in brief, is the summary of how Indian intellectual traditions and their rich conceptual vocabulary gradually lost significance during colonialism. Indian thought was largely relegated to the historical and comparative accounts based on the translations and interpretations of its ancient and traditional texts in the name of Orientalist or Indologcial knowledge. At the same time, two clearly identifiable new domains were created by Eurocentric colonial knowledge through the introduction of Western disciplinary forms and modern knowledge in the Indian vernaculars. If indeed, the Eurocentric knowledge facilitated the comparative validity and instrumental uses of Indian terms for the spread of different streams of modern Western knowledge, Eurocentrism could hardly be the ground for intellectual innovations based on Indian traditions of thought or be the much-vaunted *pūrva-pakṣa* it cherishes in an intellectual quest.[24]

The Other Universals

Perhaps this is the occasion to rethink the problem of the universality of human thought and the plurality of epistemic cultures arising from worlds of thought beyond Europe. In many ways, the legacy of colonial critique has been to probe the limits posed by the colonisation of knowledge traditions and the gradual irrelevance of indigenous concepts. However, the possibilities of constructive

24 The problem of comparative knowledge in Indian thought has largely been confined to the field of philosophy, which has seen it as a problem worth revisiting from time to time. Apart from the sub-disciplines of comparative or world literature, Indian social sciences and humanities have hardly paid attention to this problem. More striking is the way Indian vernaculars have been left out of such scrutiny, while shouldering the large burden of rendering Eurocentric knowledge forms and terms. On comparative philosophy, see Halbfass 1988; Chakrabarti and Weber 2016; Ganeri 2020. Ganeri tends to support his idea of pluralism in the light of Deweyan pragmatism, to go beyond relativism by grounding oneself in the wide philosophical vision of the Indian traditions.

thought require us to turn the colonial intellectual encounter into a *pūrva-pakṣa,* or the grounds of presuppositions, to be addressed. Modern humanistic knowledge faces this challenge because of the deep structural presence of Eurocentric frames of knowledge. When the interpretation of non-Western or indigenous traditions is thought to be inseparable from the claims for significance in the larger realm of human thought, the challenges become starkly apparent. It is ironic that Europe's own notion of universality is built upon a certain historical claim – one that orders the world of knowledge in light of its own tradition.

Let us consider a few recent examples of thinking through Indian traditions of thought as they speak to some of our concerns. In an ingenious example of thinking through Indian musical categories, Mukund Lath, a historian and musicologist, has shown how thought gives shape to concepts. Based on the analogy of the Indian musical system of initial improvisation (*ālāpa*) of the basic notes, and its further development into a fully developed musical creation (*rāga*) drawing upon a given structure, he offers an example of how a non-essentialist idea of identity takes shape. For Lath, the acts of thinking and conceptualisation mirror the coming-into-action of the building blocks of musical performance. It is through the process of *ālāpa* that one begins to draw the audience into a dialogue. As an initiatory act, *ālāpa* is the creation of a contract with the listener, preparing the ground from which grammar of music (*dhun*) and the larger body of creation (*rāga*) evolves. With his creative use of musical concepts, Lath sees thought as a process that is similar to *ālāpa* in music, which remains distinct from both the *dhun* and the *rāga*, but both eventually emerge from it.[25] In a different elaboration of these ideas, Lath emphasises the main aesthetic import of *rāga* through the rise of creative emotion (*rāga-bhāva*), which is a marker of the "individuality" and "identity" of *ālāpa*. He further shows how the whole process entails a notion of changing identity. Through *ālāpa*, the identity of a *rāga* is "nurtured in wilful change." *Rāga-bhāva* is thus the "felt-identity" of a *rāga*. Lath concludes with a formulation in which *ālāpa* is like thinking, and *rāga* is like the forming a concept. The process of improvisation, with the resulting plurality, turns the notion of identity into an evolving pattern. Lath suggests a theory of meaning and form as the ground for the essential plurality of all processes of creation. The process followed by thought, leading to the creation of concepts, is no different.[26]

The distinctiveness of Indian idea of thought as creative process can be further enriched by considering the way notions of imagination and reality play out. In a philosophically nuanced rereading of premodern Indian poetry and rhetorical

25 Lath 2007, 5–10, 29, 33–36.
26 Lath 2018, 6–23.

thought, drawn from Sanskrit and South Indian languages, David Shulman has argued for the rise of a distinct imaginary of the real. In contrast to the recent trend that has lamented the waning of Indian literary and intellectual achievements by the end of early modern era, Shulman takes us on a counter-intuitive intellectual journey, detailing the rise of new ideas of selfhood, autonomy, and the singularity of personal identity, all these being carved through the creation of a supple world of human imagination. Giving an account of a particular culture of controlling and projecting the imaginative process (*bhāvanā* or *kalpanā*) through various mentalist and linguistic devices, he foregrounds the ways the acts of imagining and effecting the real are not distinct. Shulman lays bare a world where, contrary to our preconceived notions, perception of the real becomes possible through an intensely attentive process of human imagination. As he suggests, in this world, our given modernist distinctions between the real and imagined tend to weaken. He is conscious of reminding us that, while in terms of a larger historical setting, it is indeed a world of thriving little kingdoms and polities, in which complex economic and social processes are at play. At the same time, distinct mental and imaginative cultures are being forged in a shared world of pan-Indian classical Sanskrit and regional vernacular traditions. Shulman illuminates a literary and aesthetic phenomenology that evolved in parallel to developments in the larger Western and Islamic worlds. What we learn not only counters the theory of mimetic representation that forms much of our common sense, but outlines a distinct trajectory of the 'modern' before the onset of colonialism in India.[27]

A reflection on the deeply ingrained modern duality of the mind and the world in contemporary Eurocentric knowledge opens up further directions to rethink the issues of experience and rationality. In a deeply reflective engagement with the possibilities of modern humanistic knowledge, Gananath Obeyesekere has dealt with the different modes of rationality borne of visionary experience on the margins of the mainstream traditions of modern Western thought. One may wonder in what ways dreams, visions, religious experiences, and states of spiritual or aesthetic rapture could be the ground for alternative Enlightenments or systems of rationality. Obeyesekere argues for the rehabilitation of such human experiences to treat them as distinct modes of human intellection. In one of his readings, he deals with the Buddhist notions of *jhāna* or *dhyāna* as legitimate grounds of cognition by going beyond the Cartesian duality of the atomistic human "I" and the world. Making the case for visionary experience as a source for a different kind of Enlightenment based on the idea of "It" consciousness, he brings the phenomenology of human visionary experience into the ambit

27 Shulman 2012, especially Chapters 1 and 3.

of modern epistemology and human sciences. Obeyesekere foregrounds such human conditions and experiences as possible resources for human knowledge. His is a profound plea to look into the bearing this could have upon other forms of Enlightenment and rationality, while we aim to rethink humanistic knowledge.[28]

We need to consider how the above examples of thinking musical elaboration through *ālāpa*, the aesthetic imagination of *bhāvanā* as phenomenology of the real, and the visionary experience of *jhāna* or *dhyāna* as alternate enlightenments open up the possibilities of a world of thought beyond Eurocentrism. In many ways, these suggest engagement with the larger idea of embodied thought linked to sound, imagination, and experience as ground of human knowledge. The worlds are made out of diverse forms of intellection and meaning, rather than being known through the sole instrumental powers of the human mind. In these schemes, the tools and methods of what has been seen as mind-based Eurocentric knowledge are, instead, part of the embedded linguistic, imaginative, and experiential processes of Indian cultures of intellection. We may ask if an appreciation of this view could help shape a new humanistic knowledge. But before we do, let us consider some of the key concerns which language poses in the shaping of this intellectual universe.

Language Habitations

Language and Thought: Ideas of Habitation

In our normal understanding, the relationship between thought and language seems to be modelled on the analogy of content and carrier. This offers us a picture where both, thought and language, are linked and yet belong to two distinct realms. But, treated as a habitation of its own kind, language challenges the ways we understand and operate in the world. From an abstract notion of language as a rather undefinable and ungraspable phenomenon, this view turns language into local and specific instances of its operations in worldmaking. Through their variety of interlinked functions, language, thought, and the world create patterns of knowledge and meaning of a certain regularity. They are part of a whole, rather than constituting distinct realms. Like epistemic culture, language in its specific function of sense-making through a regularised set of speech practices creates its own habitations.

28 Obeyesekere 2012, Book 1.

Notably, theories of language have been treated as models to understand human behaviour and the function of social and cultural institutions. This has been facilitated in large measure by the idea that language carries the basic grammar of human behaviour and institutions. Not surprisingly, language theories have been at the centre of the modern human sciences' effort to lay bare what lies behind apparent phenomena. The central issues informing such theorisation could be summarised as how language is seen to be linked to the mentalist faculty, embodied phenomena, and the power of the human imagination. These factors have broadly influenced the way the work of language and thought has been seen by the thinkers of European Romanticism, phenomenology, and conceptual analysis.[29]

Language poses a major challenge in terms of its role in creative imagination, where it is hard to uphold the notion of fixed meaning. On the one hand, if words are distinct carriers of meaning, the question of semantic power arises. On the other, if the sentence is the primary site of meaning, the added role of syntactical relations must be considered.[30] For some theories, linguistic meaning essentially lies in its power to generate action. Given the capacity of language to do things, widely known as "speech-act theory," the context becomes a key factor in the generation of meaning. It is not hard to imagine the kind of influence speech-act theory, together with structuralist theories of language, has acquired in the human and social sciences, for it offers a rich and dynamic theory not only of meaning but of the human action speech generates.[31] The expressive powers of language, as adumbrated by Romantic thinkers' early efforts and later those of phenomenologists, created a broad base for language as a realm of understanding. Such interpretations treat language as an embodied phenomenon bound to the contexts of meaning. Things happen *within* language, rather than merely through its uses as a medium or template of rules.[32]

While such theories straddle different understandings of "word," "sentence," "mind," "structure," and "action," their core concern is what linguistic meaning entails in terms of making sense of things. But what makes these activities so

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29 Charles Taylor's recent account (2016) covers both these grounds rather well, describing the positive reappraisal of the role language plays in our understanding of the world, through a re-reading of the German Romantics and phenomenological strands of thinking. Taylor offers two key models of the "constitutive" and "enframing" roles of language. Clearly informed by late eighteenth century German Romantics, he himself makes an argument in support of the "constitutive" model's possibilities.

30 Dummett 1973; Quine 2013 [1960].

31 Austin 1962.

32 Gadamer 2013, especially Part III, on language.

natural is the way language, through its capacity to describe, and by mapping the realm of meanings, creates pictures of objects, events, and the world. What emerges as the realm of meaning is a picture of the world itself; thus, one can surmise that thought is a picture of the sense of things, created by linguistic meaning.

At the core of the above-mentioned ideas of language, meaning, and thought is the distinctive role of translation. Theorists of translation deal with the puzzle of finding the exact words to correspond to the intended meaning, as well as their elusiveness. However, translation is also seen as central to the very act of generating meaning, whether in relation to a simple word, a document of everyday use, or a literary composition. An important aspect of translation and meaning is the significance of the world and its larger (and multiple) contexts. When seen not solely as an act of finding linguistic correspondences, but as the unleashing of meaning, translation poses the problem of the world's plurality in a most compelling way. If we treat culture as the broad term for such contexts of the generation of meaning, then translation emerges as closely linked to our efforts to wade through the series of meaning-contexts. The human sciences, mainly dealing with the issue of cultural interface – either through ethnography, cultural history, or literary criticism – have found translation in this sense to project one of the main issues arising from cultural encounters. The history of the colonial encounter, right from its beginning, bears testimony to such conditions. In colonial contexts, forms of linguistic imposition, control, and the errancy of translation not only institute their own forms of knowledge but also modes of worldmaking.

Translation played a key role in the creation of the meaning-contexts through which Eurocentrism of the colonial intellectual universe took shape. The problem of naming others and their worlds made translation a major concern of early modern European thinkers. As a challenge to making sense of other worlds, translation in such encounters created the idea of culture. In tandem with translation, at the heart of a systematic tracing of diverse human histories was the cognate enterprise of the search for linguistic origins and the comparative study of languages. As the science of language, philology became a template for European visions of how human societies and thought evolved. People and their worlds were to be deciphered through the nature of the languages they spoke.

Our interest in language as forming a habitation is to suggest how humans not only found themselves in a linguistic milieu but were capable of sense-making, as much as of creating worlds of their own. A habitation is not a given, and neither is it solely the result of human makings. Language is uniquely placed to be both a site and agent of worldmaking. Like epistemic cultures, where human practices of cognition and knowledge play a central role, language habitations are the practices of making sense.

Language and Meaning: *Śābda-bodha*

It is important to think how language habitations can be imagined as sites of modern thought with the possibility of conceptual innovation and humanistic knowledge. In this context, one should perhaps revisit the riches of Indian philosophies of language and meaning. One of the mainstays of Indian thought has been a sustained reflection on issues of linguistic cognition, meaning, and the art of literary creation. The science of language, *vyākaraṇa*, which lays out the workings of human speech in Indian tradition, has proverbially also been hailed to be the source of all knowledge. From linguistic behaviour to its metaphysical foundations, speech is seen as the source of knowledge and meaning. Known as *śābda-bodha* (verbal cognition) or *vākyārtha-jñāna* (sentential meaning), the philosophy of language in Indian tradition creates a key aspect of its own epistemic and semantic system. The term *śabda*, which literally connotes sound as well as verbal utterance in the widest sense, is also treated as one of chief sources of human cognition and meaning.[33] In its larger sense of linguistic meaning, the tradition of *śābda-bodha* is not only a source of a peculiar conception of human thought in relation to the world, but of the variety of modes of worldmaking and expressive forms.

Speech (*vāc*) is not only the primal utterance; it leads to a genealogy of contexts through which cognition and meaning arise. Believed to be non-originary, it creates sources of validity and authority beyond human control (*apauruṣeya*) by harking back to a sourceless tradition of utterances. From its indestructible nature (*akṣara*) to being a complex web of manifest and unmanifest sound, the expanse of speech ultimately becomes the source of different layers of meaning and action in the world.[34] In a suggestive example of the link between the language and the world, one of the foundational grammatical treatises, the *Mahābhāṣya* (Great Commentary) by Patañjali of the second century BCE, states that the word (*śabda*) is the sound or speech used in people's behaviour in the world (*loka-vyavahāra*). He elaborates *śabda* further in relation to its eternal (*nitya*) and destructible (*anitya*) qualities, and those of meaning (*artha*), through an analogy to the way one treats useful things, such as utensils. The *Mahābhāṣya* further states that, unlike the way one goes to a potter to ask for a useful pot, one never visits a grammarian to get words made for a specific purpose. Rather, as soon the desire to speak (*vivakṣā*) arises, one makes use of words. The story of the potter is suggestive of how language was seen as given and acquired through human

33 Deshpande 1979; Bronkhorst 2011.
34 Raja 1977 [1963].

uses.[35] In another foundational treatise on the philosophy of language, the fifth century *Vākyapadīya* (Concerning Sentences and Words) by Bhartṛhari, the link between language and the world is explored in its various uses as the source of cognition, meaning, and action. Bhartṛhari weaves together the grammatical and metaphysical aspects of language, and places speech as the prime mover of the world. The first treatise very suggestively states that no cognition of the world is unaccompanied by speech, as all knowledge is pierced or interwoven (*anuviddha*) by it. It is the eternal identity of knowledge and speech that makes all cognition possible. And thus, it is speech which binds all knowledge of sciences, arts, and crafts, and makes their classification possible.[36]

What is notable in these examples from two foundational treatises of Indian thinking on language is the constant evocation of the world (*loka*), in relation to which speech cultures evolve. Language emerges in different meaning-contexts and shapes human knowledge and understanding of the world. The capacity of language to create sense is inalienable from the world to which it is linked. In their long evolution, speech patterns and meanings stand as hinge to the fundamental structure of the world of Indian thought. The function of linguistic meaning, *śābda-bodha*, ranges from the emergence of human cognition, systems of knowledge, religious belief, ritual actions, and the rhetorical and visual arts to the physical, medicinal, and architectural sciences.

Whether the word or sentence is the chief bearer of meaning is respectively a function of designation (*abhihit*) and relation (*anvit*) brought forth by the way syntactical relations are played out in language. The generation of meaning also follows certain semantic conditions of expectancy (*akānkṣā*), competency (*yogyatā*), proximity (*āsatti*), and intentionality (*tātparya*). In many ways, the distinction between a word's independent power to carry meaning and its emergence through the syntactical relations in a sentence shows how the internal functioning of language determines atomicity or the context-based aspect of meaning. The Sanskrit term *padārtha* means both an object and the meaning of a word. Thus, things of the world are the sense they designate. If objects are embodied meanings, then further explanation would be sought to explain language's role in worldmaking. Indian theorists of language were not oblivious of this factor as they considered the linkages between the word and the world. More specifically, how language shapes ideas of the natural and social world had been carefully observed. In the same *Mahābhāṣya*, Patañjali argues that it is according to the

35 For the example of the potter and uses of language, see Shastri 1995 [1962], 4, 28–29.
36 Pillai 1971, 28.

śiṣṭa (disciplined or noble) people and *sādhu* (proper or correct) uses that speech acquires valid form.[37]

After nearly a millennium, a prominent treatise on Indian poetics and rhetoric, the *Kāvya-mīmāṃsā* (Analysis of Poetry or Literature) of Rājaśekhara laid out an elaborate typology of how language, and more importantly, its rhetorical and poetic inflections, is socially marked. It also showed how the world of *śāstra*, the system of knowledge, followed the conventions of linguistic uses. Writing in the learned tradition of Sanskrit rhetoricians in the tenth century, Rājaśekhara laid out the way metaphysical and divine manifestations of speech bring out the rhetorical beauty in the social world. Rājaśekhara had clear notions of how speech was embodied socially, and how poetic embellishments were marked by distinctions of region, time, and people's customs. In the ensuing centuries, Indian thought witnessed a kind of renaissance in the fields of philosophy and rhetoric, as well as in various other areas of knowledge, with the theory of linguistic meaning (*śābda-bodha*) playing a central role. It was greatly evident in the rise of new epistemology (*navya-nyāya*), rhetoric and poetics (*alaṅkāra* and *kāvya-śāstra*), commentarial tradition (*bhāṣya*), and the devotional (*bhakti*) literature and aesthetics.[38]

Language and World: Beyond Colonial Lingualisms

While ideas of language and theories of meaning played a central role in the evolution of Indian thought till the early modern period in the eighteenth century, it would be important to see the way it got transformed through colonial mediation. The colonial beginnings of engagement with Indian languages also paved the way a new world of ideas got reshaped. In a terse formulation, historical anthropologist Bernard S. Cohn characterised the colonial treatment of Indian languages as creating both the "command of language" and the "language of command."[39] This gave rise to what we can call a system of colonial lingualism, which sees language as an empirical code of human culture in the wake of philology as its science. Language was treated as a course for deciphering the foundational structure of an extremely diverse Indian society and its culture. If Sanskrit, because

37 The first part of the *Mahābhāṣya* presents a curious mode of establishing the norms of linguistic usages, in which, while uses in the world are primary, a model of standard speaker (*śiṣṭa*) and the correct language (*sādhu*) are treated as the norm to be followed. See Shastri 1995 [1962].
38 Rājaśekhara, trans. Sarasvat 2000. In particular, see Chapters 1, 2, 17 and 18.
39 Cohn 1996, 16–56.

of its long pedigree and rich textual tradition, became the putative classical language of India, the large variety of vernaculars (*bhāṣā-s*) made India an ideal Babelesque world. For several decades in the early colonial period, there was a fervent excitement among the Orientalists and European scholars about how comparative philology could establish the common origins and linked histories of Oriental and European societies. What was crucial was the way philology was able to put words at the centre of the function of language and offered clues to the historical evolution of humans and their institutions.

By a dominant section of colonial educators and administrators, Indian languages were not seen as ideal vehicles for the new knowledge coming from Europe. By the first quarter of the nineteenth century, the British scholarly views regarding Indian languages had gradually divided into two camps: those who saw them as legitimate clothing for the new ideas and those who hardly found them fit for the purpose. Thus English, a language of Western knowledge, was at the centre of how colonial lingualism took shape. This marked a radical shift for the earlier culture of Indian languages and the rich tradition of thinking on grammatical and philosophical issues. Seen through the lens of comparative philology, Indian languages were a thing of the past, rather than carriers of a lived world of meanings and intellectual innovation.[40]

We see that, during colonialism, the world of Indian languages was explored in the three registers of philology, comparison, and translation. Turned into more of a cultural object with its peculiar history told in terms of India's past, Indian languages became a source for historical origins and evolving identities. From Orientalist constructions to nationalist counter-claims, language was increasingly turned into a new cultural and social habitation. The gradual coming together of a theory of the origin of language and of peoples at once valorised and museumised languages. Unlike that of Renaissance Europe, Orientalist "classicisation" was not a source of cultural innovation. At the same time, Indian vernaculars, despite their long precolonial traditions of literary efflorescence, were treated by the colonial educators as more of a channel to transmit European knowledge to the common masses.

As recent accounts of early modern intellectual history have shown, the onset of colonialism was preceded by the decline of Sanskrit intellectual tradition as a creative source. The idea of Sanskrit's demise has not merely been metaphorical in the sense of its innovative potentialities' shrinking as compared to early

40 Das 2005; Dasgupta 1993; Alam 1998; Pollock 2003. For a reflection on history, language, and literature from a contemporary perspective, see Mukherjee 1975.

centuries.[41] It has been argued that the millennium-long Renaissance of Indian languages and literatures went through a rapid change once India became part of the colonial empire. It is through the long reign of what we have characterised as colonial lingualism that European knowledge got inscribed onto the intellectual map of India. For it was colonial lingualism's aim to render Indian languages into mere carriers, rather than vital agents, of intellectual and creative power of the natives. At the same time, the story of Indian languages in the colonial period, whether in the interpretations of "classical" or "vernacular" traditions or the introduction of the English or Western languages, gave rise to a rich culture of encounter, preservation, and creativity. This new language habitation shaped the world, as much as it created the grounds for new forms of intellection and sociality.

The Social Imaginary and Worldmaking

The Social Body, Life-World, and the Social Imaginary

We shall consider now how the *pūrva-pakṣa* of human intellection and linguistic meaning relate to the idea of human sociality. Through the three realms of the social body, the life-world, and the social imaginary, which respectively cover the embodied, lived, and affective and theoretic forms, the human social arises. The way thought and language relate to human sociality gives us the most concrete expression of the modes of worldmaking. And the ways of imagining sociality make explicit one of the fundamental human capacities to address the other. They are a function of the elemental modes through which humans find themselves in the world as a zone of meaning and action in relation to other fellow humans. Sociality allows us to think of the plurality of worlds and modes of worldmaking as communal activities. The social imaginary emerges from the forms of the social body and of the life-world as the realm of generality. It is the realm of expressive forms and theoretic conscience, where thought and language take shape.[42] The life-world is the realm of practice and shared domains in which

41 Pollock 2001. In Bronner, Cox, and McCrea 2001, see particularly Parimal Patil's chapter regarding the continuity of Sanskrit knowledge traditions during the colonial period, which offers a corrective to Pollock's theory of the death of the system (293–314).

42 Charles Taylor offers a fruitful definition of the social imaginary: "By social imaginary, I mean something much broader and deeper than the intellectual schemes people may entertain when

several social bodies, with their changing forms and interrelations, participate. The ideas and structures of the social imaginary permeate both the spheres of social body and the life-world and allow the collectives to negotiate and shape the world. The social imaginary also opens up the possibilities of normative reflexivity on notions of human sociality.

The social body is the concrete manifestation of a collective, with its given norms of function and rule. A large part of institutional structures and their functions are in fact carried out by the agency anchored in such collectives. This way social bodies are the bearers of social processes and larger historical transformations, from the development of agricultural cultivation and primitive technological advancement to feudalism and capitalism. Life-worlds, on the other hand, work at a different temporal rhythm, showing how social bodies enter into relationships with their worlds, to seek meaning through their lived orders. Social bodies enter into the quest to seek meaning in their lived reality in diverse ways. Most social and religious rituals, systems of beliefs, and cosmological visions shape life-worlds.

Much modern social thought based on Eurocentric categories has tried to figure out the ways in which social collectives are formed and become agents of transformation. Colonial knowledge and disciplinary systems have been major prisms through which modern ideas of the Indian social and its categories – from primitive, indigenous, and tribal, to caste, race, and religion – were constructed. Through colonial empiricism and enumerative practices of ethnography, survey, and census, the categories defining certain ideas of the social tend to become agents of the actual transformations of the new social bodies. At the same time, while the complex interplay of categories emerging from colonial knowledge and the modern human sciences creates a conceptual prism, changing notions of the social body enter into different trajectories of social, moral, and political change. There have also been periodic attempts at revisiting the methods of the studies in social and human sciences through a reflexive exercise and by retrieving the indigenous concepts and categories.[43]

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they think about social reality in a disengaged mode. I am thinking, rather, of the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations" (2004, 23).

43 The idea of the Indian social, both in colonial interpretations and in modern social scientific literature, has been dealt with in relation to forms of sociality and collectives, mainly created around caste, religion, and linked associational groupings. An influential study in sociology and social anthropology by Louis Dumont has long set the terms for such debates (1980). A representative critique of Dumont's structuralist essentialism has been advanced in the wake of historical

While such reflections on the Eurocentric ideas of human sociality begin with the promise of capturing the conceptual and practical efficacy of the changing forms of the social body, what is left out is the way this body functions and relates to life-worlds and social imaginary. The functioning of a social body is caught up in a more contentious nexus of its normative structures and the functioning of life-worlds. Through such a nexus, a social body defines its other and keeps things at its spatial and ritual boundary. However, in a life-world, through a series of apparent and hidden significations and symbolic systems, such boundaries are blurred, and the interaction of social bodies takes place. But, at a much deeper level of social imaginary, the abstraction of the human social arises through reflexive practices.

What we are trying to characterise as the social imaginary is the cognitive and affective world of generalisations in which humans participate. It is the creation of a possible world of theoretical reflexivity where ideas of a human social can arise. A social imaginary requires a sense of reflective and theoretic transcendence as a form of universalisation. If a variety of Indian terms for the social body, such as *sabhā* (assembly), *samiti* (council), *jana* (living being, people), *viśa (*settlement, people), *pura* (town), *grāma* (village), and *rāṣtra (*region, territory) invoke social, economic, and political units, it is the shared moments and spaces of ritual, work, play, worship, and festivity that bring them into the realm of life-worlds. At a different level of experience, such as the aesthetic, the state of becoming a *sahṛdaya* (person with taste), *sāmājika* (member of assembly), *rasika* (one who appreciates), and *bhāvaka* (one with aesthetic taste), the abstract human social emerges through the shared process of generalisation, or the universal aesthetic import, known as *sādhāraṇī-karaṇa*. We should be wary of treating this kind of generalised social experience as forming a utopian world, as it arises from the lived conjuncture of social body and life-worlds. However, at the same time, it carries the potential of an idealised collective, which could participate in a shared world of generalised or universal experiences of the human social.[44]

In many senses, all social bodies and life-worlds are in constant negotiation and, in real-life circumstances, run the risk of losing their boundaries and normative structures. That is where ideas of the "other" or "outsider" come into view. The outsider lives at the interface of the social imaginary and creates space for

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anthropology by Nicholas Dirks, and others, see Dirks 2001. Unlike caste, the category of religion has not been scrutinised as a form of sociality in Indian contexts.

44 Ingalls, Masson, and Patawardhan 1990, 113–19, 220–22; Shastri 1971, see particularly Abhinava's intricate commentary on Bharata's *rasa-sūtra* (maxims on the *rasa*) in Chapter Six of the *Nāṭya-śāstra*. For reflective modern interpretations of the idea of *sādhāraṇī-karaṇa*, see Hiriyanna 1954, 14; Chari 1993, 196–207.

critique, dissent, breakdowns, and, as much, the possibility of a new sociality. A variety of social and cultural antinomian currents in India, such as the Buddhist and Jaina *śramaṇa* (ascetic) traditions of thought and life, a vast array of Bhakti devotionalism and literature, and the tribal, peasant, and labouring class protests define the ways in which alternative social imaginaries, or what can be called *loka-kalpa* in Indian terms, come into existence. The long history of various ideas of sociality also forms the *pūrva-pakṣa* to rethink the Indian social beyond the Eurocentric categorical lens. We shall reflect upon this issue by looking into the career of the concept of *loka* through its wide uses and immense possibilities, characteristic of Indian forms of sociality and worldmaking.

The Social Imaginary of *Loka*

A variety of terms and current usages in Indian thought capture the sense of collective forms of sociality. With their long pedigree and rich uses in different contexts, terms like *loka* (people, world), *jana* (person, people), *samāj* (gathering, society), *samudāya* (group, collection), *pantha* (path, sect), and *sampradāya* (tradition), are obvious examples in our modern vocabulary. A more complex history of Indian sociality is known to exist around the terms like *varṇa* (lineage and status based social class) and *jāti* (caste or kinship based social groups), which are clearly marked by their scheme of differentiation and hierarchy. But a different set of terms like *sabhā* (assembly), *gaṇa* (series, group), *goṣthi* (group, meeting), *maṇḍala* (circle, collection), *samiti* (council), *paṅkti* (lineage), *varga* (group, class), *saṅgati* (company), *samāgam* (association), *saṅgha* (congregation) and *samaṣti* (collection) denote a variety of ways in which social collectives and associations are imagined. They are as much resonant of premodern literary and cultural meanings as of their modern uses in official and public contexts. Most of these terms are based on the idea of coming together and forming some kind of association on social, cultural, political, or religious lines. Here we can consider an important term like *loka*, simply meaning "the world," "sphere," or "the people" in its most general sense, drawn from the larger Indian traditions of thought and creative expression. *Loka*, with its rich repertoire of meaning, has been protean in nature, never losing its capacity for conceptual innovation. The corpus of knowledge, which goes into the making of Indian thought, carries markers of the social body, life-world, and social imaginary. What could be called the idea of the "human" is formed in relation to ideas of "sociality" as found in the above terms, invoking social, religious, and moral visions. A large variety of premodern treatises and compendia on religious and moral duty (*dharma*),

politics and economy (*artha*), and didactic literature (*nīti*) give us a view of what could be called social empiricism and forms of classification. Modern ideas of the Indian social are a product of classificatory and normative schemes emerging from premodern texts and the practices based on enumerative empiricism of modern Western forms of knowledge. Thus, our modern views of the social are extractions, informed by a composite picture of normative and empirical worlds, that is based on the long script of the making of three realms of the collective as social body, life-world, and social imaginary.[45]

In the Indian intellectual traditions, it was through many uses of the term *loka* that some of the main ideas of the world and worldmaking found expression. *Loka* is primarily the realm of the phenomenal world, which manifests itself in terrestrial, natural, and human social forms. It connotes a variety of meanings from space, realm, region, sphere, abode in their real and imaginary forms. It is also a term which gives the sense of any form of collective, which the humans or living beings create. On the one hand, *loka* is the division of the mundane and terrestrial realms or spaces and the natural or physical world; on the other, it connotes the most general idea of a collective whole of any kind. But what marks its distinctive meaning is its phenomenal quality, as that which is seen and is in the purview of humans or living beings. Thus, *loka* deals with the cosmic divisions, the natural and social spheres, and collectives of living and non-living beings, and it is the world which is out there and can be perceived with its objects, people, and their movements. *Loka* connotes a variety of ways in which the world exists and becomes available to humans. It is a term which captures the Indian idea of social imaginary, or *loka-kalpa*, as we have called it, in its most varied form.[46]

The concept of *loka* shall help us pose some of the questions to rethink the *pūrva-pakṣa* of the social world. As a manifestation of people's common behaviour and actions, in its modern uses *loka* has also covered the ideas of "folk" and "the people."[47] With a variety of meanings, where a fusion of the senses of the world and people's actions takes place, *loka* creates an important cluster of terms, like *loka-vārta* (popular account), *loka-yātra* (worldly affairs), *loka-dharma*

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45 In some Indological studies, the essential features of Indian civilisation have been seen as informing contemporary processes and conflicts, see Heesterman 1985. For a nuanced study of structural continuities across periods combining the textual and ethnographic studies, see Biardeau 2004.

46 The etymological roots of *loka* bring us the terms *ruc*, *luc*,and *lok*, which primarily connote a sense of seeing or perceiving.

47 For a comprehensive account of the uses of the term *loka* in the Vedic corpus, see Gonda 1966, 25–31. For an in-depth survey of the idea of *loka* in Indian intellectual traditions, see Misra and Sharma 1992, 110–56.

(worldly matter or popular religion), *loka-cāra* (worldly custom), *loka-kalpa* (worldly or social imaginary), *loka-vṛtti* (worldly custom or profession), *loka-pravṛtti* (worldly trends), *loka-śruti* (popular lore), and *loka-saṅgraha* (welfare of the world). *Loka* also carries the most generalised sense of the social collective, or the people's world, to be the locus of normative actions, or *loka-vyavahāra*. In the sense of the human collective, *loka* seems to transgress the boundary of the social body and speaks across the life-worlds. *Loka* is also the way worldly norms are manifested. The sheer plasticity of a term like *loka* makes it stand both within and above all imaginable concepts of collectives or whole and shows the potential to create new imaginaries. And perhaps, this gives it an immense capacity to make the idea of the whole ever flexible and malleable. It stores a rich notion of the ways in which the world can be continuously created, dissolved, and be transformed.

Loka offers us a ground to rethink ideas of the social imaginary because of its capacity to transgress the bounds of the social body and the life-worlds, and suggests a world beyond the available orders, the realm of *lokottara*. At the same time, in its most imaginative uses in Indian thought, *loka* is the sphere of the lived and the phenomenal, where the emergence of the abstract and generalised idea of the human social becomes possible. For Indian rhetoricians, it is the realm of aesthetic generalisation, where the creator, creation, and the audience can become one. In Indian aesthetic theory, this is the widely accepted goal of aesthetic appreciation, where, while re-enacting the world (*lokānukīrtana*), a certain generalised or universal affect (*sādhāraṇī-karaṇa*) is created. Thus, *loka* also makes possible the creation of a social imaginary through the world of aesthetic commons.[48]

Loka in its modern sense has been used to capture key social and political ideas, based on abstract notions of "the people." The idea of "the people" as a rights-bearing political entity and the source of modern notions of sovereignty becomes central to modern liberal ideas of representative democracy and citizenry. In modern Indian languages, both in its popular and official uses, "democracy" is known as *loka-tantra* and connotes the sense of "political rule" or "system" of the people. In its modern political uses, *loka* (together with *jana*) is the key term for forming ideas about the people and the public. In modern cultural uses, it predominantly captures the sense of the "popular." This way, in its modern uses, the term *loka* connotes a range of abstract secular and public con-

48 The term *loka* is variously used in treatises on different knowledge traditions pertaining to economy, society, polity, rhetoric, dramaturgy, religious and moral conduct, and in the sense of both the group of the people and the larger natural and phenomenal world.

cepts. However, its older premodern sense of the normative human collective still survives in contemporary social and religious uses. Seen in relation to some of the known categories of sociality in Indian thought, together with the modern idea of "society" and collectives such as *samāj*, *samudāya*, or *saṅgha*, *loka* creates an important spectrum of meaning. From the perspective of its longer genealogy in Indian thought to its vibrant currency in modern usage, *loka* invites us to think through it as the *pūrva-pakṣa* of the social imaginary.

The Human Social: A Decolonial Imaginary

Our concerns of rethinking humanistic knowledge is, needless to say, linked to ideas and practices of human sociality beyond Eurocentric conceptions. Such humanistic thinking would require us to explore the conceptual significance of the emergence of the human social in terms of the diverse forms of the social body and of life-worlds. The task is to treat the plurality of universals and modes of worldmaking of various social imaginaries as the *pūrva-pakṣa*. Beyond idealised notions of cosmology and systems of thought, a modern humanistic knowledge would look into the ways that Indian thought and sociality are not arcane cultural essences. While uses of such essentialisms in the name of things "Indian" pose the challenge of anachronistic valorisation of an idealist view of society and its past, it also creates the spectre of uncritical nativism, indigeneity, and unified ideologies. At the same time, the challenge remains to think beyond the universalist and modernist promise of Eurocentric thinking. A plethora of modern terms such as politics, democracy, caste, religion, nation, and progress are clear examples that not only emerged out of the long European encounter, but are also the results of their Indian uses. Such processes of conceptual redrawing have been evident in the rise of the key modern ideas of "human," "society," and "people" for humanistic knowledge. They have equally influenced the forms of institutionalisation and representation of the ideas of freedom, rights, and citizenship and their statist, vernacular, and everyday uses. These modern concepts, which capture diverse forms of human sociality, variously carry genealogies and translations across social, intellectual, and linguistic contexts.

The idea of the social imaginary is a useful heuristic tool for humanistic knowledge, once seen in relation to the various modes of worldmaking of which it is a part. The idea of "religion" as organised belief system and "caste" as a form of social hierarchy and division are a case in point. In their modern congealed notions, religion as *dharma* and caste as *jāti* are results of descriptions of certain forms of worldview, sociality, and institutionalisation. They challenge

our understanding of phenomena in relation to their precolonial forms and their colonial conceptualisation and to their quotidian and vernacular lives. How are such formations of the social to be understood beyond their Eurocentric conceptual descriptions? This is where the social imaginary as a form of worldmaking becomes crucial as a *pūrva-pakṣa* of modern thought. It seeks to look into the rise of these concepts and their forms of sociality – together with their systems, practices, and descriptions – under the shared genealogies of the indigenous precolonial and the Eurocentric colonial systems. The premodern conceptual script of these categories, and linked institutions, is hardly erased in the rise of a colonial episteme, neither does it evolve as a story of simple breaks or continuities, as neat divisions into historical periods and transformations tend to suggest. The goal of decolonising the social imaginary is to rethink the conceptual possibilities of rich Indian forms of sociality through the sieves of such histories and their power to speak through the quotidian and vernacular forms of social life.

Here we need to dwell upon the critique of Eurocentrism arising from colonial mediation and think of what we have called *constructive theory*. As we suggested at the beginning of this essay, the task of achieving autonomy of intellect, which modern Indian thinkers have very evocatively called the *svarāj* or *self-rule in ideas*, is not solely an act of breaking free of the shackles of colonial ideologies and their domination. The claim to freedom of mind or thought is the act of achieving a self-determining cultural self, too. For colonised minds, the creation of the sources of cultural self and theoretic conscience are not simple tasks of retrieval of lost origins or utopian pasts. They are at best some kind of proleptic fiction. The real task of achieving the *svarāj in ideas* begins by accepting the challenge of retracing the *pūrva-pakṣa* as the presuppositions and hermeneutic preconditions emerging from the above contexts. We have tried to think through this issue by treating cultures of intellection in relation to language habitations and the social imaginary to achieve the plurality of universals arising through the forms of worldmaking.

One of the achievements of decolonising thought in the latter half of the twentieth century was of mounting a strong critique of the lingering shadow of colonial ideologies in the realm of polity, economy, and culture. In societies like India, Western thought and knowledge traditions have continued to exert a deep sense of enchantment, even as they remain a form of alien heritage. Decolonisation this way became the moment of recognition of both the limits and possibilities of one's own intellectual traditions. As an exploration of the colonial psyche and cultural self, decolonisation thought has as much been a recognition of the moments of encounter, assimilation, and dissent between the Western

knowledge and indigenous traditions.[49] These facets of the decolonising era have been poignantly explored in terms of psychic depths, the retrieval of intellectual traditions, and the variety of life-worlds lost in colonialism.[50] It seems we are witnessing a turn from the moment of the decolonising critique and reflexivity to the task of reparation and restitution from colonial violence. The moment of critique now seeks a resolution in justice long due.[51] Such a plea takes one beyond the critique of historical legacies and seeks to address the spectre of lost heritage and memory in the present – memory which could hardly settle in a passive truce with the past, which brought with it violence and erasure.

The deep connections between the West's self-image and its long imperial subjugation of "others" are being forcefully addressed once again. In this way, the decolonising critique and Eurocentrist heritage are brought face to face in the postcolonial and global contemporary moment. By restituting memorials and monuments, the West enters into a gesture of recognition of historical loss. And by divesting itself of its imperial heritage, it enters into a restoration of the missing links between cultural memory and symbols of heritage in postcolonial societies. Two recent examples of getting past this long decolonising moment, stripping one's mind and self of the colonial veneer, became evident in the way the claims for the return of "imperial heritage" were made. They seem to address the deep influence of colonialism on cultural self and human thought.[52] While restitution of the symbols of a larger loss inflicted by colonial regimes may transform the realm of tangible heritage, how would an act of restitution work in the realm of thought, its conceptual resources, and the lived forms of life? One needs to think how to address the sense of death and loss of the cultures of intellection and world of ideas, and the possible modes of recovery and reconstruction. It

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49 We use 'decolonisation' here to indicate intellectual movements after the end of colonialism, when erstwhile colonial societies entered into an engagement to do away with colonialism, mainly in the intellectual and cultural sense. Such movements and debates in the colonial period were part of a larger anti-colonial struggle in politics, culture, and ideas. A major emphasis in the debates around decolonisation in the decades of fifties and sixties, just after the decline colonialism, was focused on the economic and political aspects.

50 Influential early critiques of colonial ideology and its impact on the cultural psyche of the native population have been central to the rise of calls for cultural and intellectual decolonisation, see Fanon 1963. Writers and poets like Leopold Senghor are now at the centre of some profound rethinking around decolonised aesthetics and philosophy, see Diagne 2012.

51 For some of the current rethinking on the idea of intellectual decolonisation, see Mbembe 2019; Mbembe 2021; Diagne and Amselle 2020; De Castro 2015.

52 Sarr 2019; Sarr and Savoy 2018; Hicks 2020. While scholars and conservationists debate the return of heritage and reparations, one cannot miss occasional reports about the return of heritage in India from different parts of the world.

would require us imagine how the rich legacies of modern humanistic knowledge could transform themselves through the larger non-Western traditions of thought. The claims for, or restitution of, non-Western traditions in the modern universal canon of thought could become a call for the unworking of the global hegemony of Eurocentric humanistic knowledge.[53]

Conclusion

In the above discussion, we have made an attempt to reflect upon the possible frame of decolonial thought by addressing the *pūrva-pakṣa* of the three realms of human intellection, speech, and sociality, drawing upon their diverse historical and cultural genealogies in Indian intellectual traditions. We have tried to understand the way the task of decolonising human thought and imagining new forms of humanistic knowledge would not solely reside in the rejection of the Western encounter of knowledge traditions and its wider impact; nor would harkening back to the lost golden ages of the premodern world or of native wisdom be of help. What decolonial thinking requires is to think through the given shapes of the human knowledge. It is hardly an ideal legacy to be cherished; rather, it is the only ground to tread in order to think anew. As we have understood, modern humanistic knowledge, beyond the given Eurocentric canons, can be created by treating different Western and the non-Western traditions, with their premodern and modern legacies, as a hermeneutic horizon. For this purpose, with the help of the *pūrva-pakṣa* mode of engaging with the available grounds or presuppositions of Indian intellectual traditions, we have tried to open up a method of dialectical hermeneutics.

We could see that this kind of hermeneutic appreciation would take us beyond the task of merely rehabilitating indigenous categories and their token uses for the possibility of a new theory or philosophy. While our illustrations are mainly concerned with the terms and concepts arising from the Sanskrit intellectual traditions, it is evident that they carry wider valence across different knowledge systems and practices, and shape the vernacular and contemporary uses too. However, we may look into the wider culture of intellection in Indian traditions by treating the world of practice, performance, and lived forms, both modern and premodern, for this purpose. In that case, one would need to trace the conceptual

53 Garfield and Van Norden 2016. For a book-length treatment of the above issues triggered by this op-ed debate, see Van Norden 2017.

significance of the created (*prayoga*) and lived (*vyavahāra*) traditions, instead of merely using the concepts of established knowledge traditions (*śāstra*).

While our goal has been to create a suggestive template of the ways to treat Indian concepts for humanistic thinking, it is also an exploration into the rich worlds of thought and creative forms beyond the regime of given Western universals. We have aimed at creating a frame of humanistic knowledge, which instead of seeking its sources in some pristine or foundational tradition takes into account mutually enriching hermeneutic encounters of human thought, both within and without. As we need modes of conceptual innovation to create newer descriptions thinking through non-Western forms of intellection, language habitations, and social imaginaries – it is, in fact, the life of the dead other of the West, which begins speaking to the present. This also makes possible our search for the plurality of universals and modes of worldmaking that lie beyond Eurocentric forms of thinking. Imagining decolonial humanistic knowledge is, thus, an invitation to consider the way various worlds of thought, speech, and sociality arise through a variety of conceptual schemes.[54]

As we have seen in the above discussion, colonialism was able to institute a radical ordering of these realms by bringing in European systems of knowledge and the English language as its key tools. These created a new habitation of Western concepts and social, moral, political practices as these acquired new lives in the colony. The colonial modern has given rise to contending historical and cultural notions of the premodern thought. Bound to the traditional and presentist views, such traditions have not only survived but have also been projected as idealised prehistories of the native intellectual heritage. At the same time, the idea of premodern thought being fully lost in the colonial encounter has been more of a myth than the full truth, as these traditions are as much a living realty. While the search for Archimedean points in any social universe is mostly about cultural myths, yet one cannot imagine a colonial or national history which is shorn of myths of origin and pristine cultural forms. The actual histories of such myth-making pose much tangled ideas of the past traditions, when we think of the world of Indian thought.

A theory of modern Indian thought, as we have tried to understand here, has to be created when the forms of *pramāṇa*, *śabda*, and *loka* become a connected ground of presuppositions, or *pūrva-pakṣa-s*, to be addressed, which in turn speaks to the kinds of worlds we seek to make. Such a conception of the *pūrva-pakṣa* of thought and the visions of worldmaking will be both a challenge to his-

54 For a subtle analysis of how concepts are not isolated mentalist and epistemic schemes, but part of “untouched mediation” with the world, see Davidson 1973–1974, 5–20.

torical understanding and philosophical vision, and it will not be distinct from our capacities to create new descriptions. If such descriptions are the grounds of the emergence of new thought, then their patterns and systems would create newer forms of intellection and epistemic cultures. It would be a realm beyond the imperious hold of Eurocentrism on various worlds of human thought. A template for decolonised thought, as we have tried to suggest here, has to aim at the practice of such newer cultures of thought. It is time Europe's other, which is the large part of humanity, claimed its *svarāj* in ideas. Perhaps, that is where our dream of a new humanistic knowledge lies too.

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