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Introduction: On the Imperative, Challenges, and Prospects of Decolonizing Comparative Methodologies



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Coloniality and colonialism

To reflect on coloniality is not to study the history of colonialism from the safety of a “postcolonial” present. Rather, it requires one to interrogate ongoing legacies of colonialism, not only in parts of the world that were once, or continue to be, dominated and ruled by Western European nations, including the United States, but also in elements of discourse such as “the West” and “modernity,” which were and are constituted through colonial practices of subjugation, derogation, and dehumanization. In his contribution to this special issue, David Kim asks, “Who can seriously doubt that global Western imperialism occurred and did so with enduring consequences, [and] that Eurocentrism continues to distort the epistemic landscape of Western culture, politics, and philosophy...?” Postcolonial and decolonial studies, broadly defined, aim to make this contemporary condition of coloniality theoretically and empirically visible. The terms “postcolonial” and “decolonial” indicate an ongoing critical engagement with coloniality, a legacy that modern colonial empires inaugurated that has proven to endure far beyond the ostensible end of European colonial history.

“Modern colonialism” may usefully be defined as a political system of economic exploitation either in which resources are extracted from one territory and transported for the benefit of another, or in which a foreign population “settles” a territory that was previously occupied by indigenous peoples, who are subsequently excluded from or incorporated into the settler-colony. Two forms of extraction are noteworthy here. There is the familiar extraction of raw materials for manufacture elsewhere, but then there is also the extraction of labor from colonized human

beings in the form of slavery or indentured servitude. Within modern colonial structures, formal and informal institutions and laws are established to administer economic extraction and political dominance over native subjects. The tendency of these administrative mechanisms is to preserve the superior status of the colonizer over the colonized and thus to reproduce the colonial relationship.

As decolonial philosophers Quijano (2000) and Lugones (2007) contend, material and discursive mechanisms operate within contemporary coloniality to situate the foreigner over the native—namely, mechanisms of race, gender, and capital. And these mechanisms distinguish it from other instances of systematic inter-territorial economic exploitation. Colonialism is surely not a new phenomenon, but using race, gender, and capitalism to transform and shape human interactions—including conditions of recognition and survival—in ways that systematically reproduce the dominance of one group across diverse regions and fields surely is. A specific condition of coloniality differently colors, genders, and ranks heterogeneous contemporary persons and cultures. These mechanisms continue to operate in ostensibly “postcolonial” contexts according to what Edward Said called “flexible positional superiority” (Said 1979, 7), preserving positions of dominance and subservience across a range of historical and spatial contexts.

If this notion of “coloniality” seems as wide as “modernity,” then perhaps this is fitting, for the latter’s history is, as Quijano contends, largely co-terminus with “discoveries” of the Americas and West Africa in the fifteenth century and the expansion of European empires and trans-Atlantic slave routes from the sixteenth century on. Coloniality is inextricable not only from the experience of modernity, but also, as contributors to this issue argue, from discursive contexts that shaped modern Western philosophy and retroactively constructed a distinctive “Western” civilization.

Postcolonial and decolonial studies seek to make colonial dimensions of “modernity” and “the West” visible and intelligible to audiences who think of Western modernity and coloniality as separate phenomena. These fields of study show that thinking of modernity without accounting for coloniality betrays a convenient historical amnesia about germinal colonial violences and foundational inequalities that make the modern world today. Postcolonial and decolonial writers from diverse regions and eras, such as Mohandas K. Gandhi, Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, Jose Mariátegui, and Sylvia Wynter, have made it their task to relate such foundational historical violence to conditions that shape global modernity.

To better grasp this interrelationship, it may help to consider how modernity, which trades on ideals such as self-determination, individual equality, and progress, might *benefit* from coloniality, which dominates, derogates, and dehumanizes “others.”

Given the outright domination by one group of people over others in the colonies and the dominant group’s concurrent espousal of Enlightenment ideals of freedom and civilization, the situation indeed required—and requires—strategies of ideological accommodation. For example, these strategies range from rationalizations of social and political inequalities at certain times to frank denials or “sanctioned ignorance” of these injustices at others. Ambivalence marks such strategies of

colonial mediation. Whereas at the advent of the modern era in Europe abstract notions of political equality and individual freedom were being inscribed in philosophical treatises and socio-legal orders, the very same notions of equality and freedom were explicitly denied to natives in the colonies. Emergent modern notions were the basis of “consensual” governance in European countries, whereas in the colonies the prevailing assumption was that no consent was necessary from the natives. The latter were deemed to lack rational individual agency; they were too irrational, primitive, or despotic to participate in “enlightened” impersonal governance.

Yet colonialism and modernity were not as inimical as one might expect. Colonizers often sought to justify violent denials of freedom and equality, including genocidal campaigns, through modern ideals such as “progress” and “humanity” that explicitly appealed to colonial racialized and gendered oppositions. European colonizers imagined themselves bearing a “white man’s burden” to serve as history’s vanguard in regions they imagined to be historically dormant before their arrival. As the term “white man’s burden” indicates, these ideals of civilization and progress depended on contrasts between historically novel European bourgeois norms of race and sex, and images of hyper-sexualized and hyper-racialized non-Western others. As Lugones observes:

The characterization of white European women as fragile and sexually passive opposed them to nonwhite, colonized women, including female slaves, who were characterized along a gamut of sexual aggression and perversion, and as strong enough to do any sort of labor. (Lugones 2007, 203)

Entire geographic regions were also marked as feminine, bestial, and non-white, and therefore as open for ravishment. As Anne McClintock remarks in *Imperial Leather*:

For centuries, the uncertain continents—Africa, the Americas, Asia—were figured in European lore as libidinally eroticized. Travelers’ tales abounded with visions of the monstrous sexuality of far-off lands, where, as legend had it, men sported gigantic penises and women consorted with apes, feminized men’s breasts flowed with milk and militarized women lopped theirs off... Within this porno tropic tradition, women figured as the epitome of sexual aberration and excess. Folklore saw them, even more than men, as given to a lascivious venery so promiscuous as to border on the bestial. (Quoted in Lugones 2007, 203–4)

Discourses casting non-Western peoples and regions to bestial, perverse, and savage anterior stages of human history facilitated contrasts that enabled modern Europeans to imagine that provincial Enlightenment ideals were universal and that an emerging class of Europeans epitomized their realization. In turn, these ideals were used by modern Europeans to situate themselves in incontestably asymmetric epistemological relations with those they colonized, despite clear contradictions between colonial practices and modern rhetoric of consensual governance.

For white Europeans, there was very little to learn from the natives and their cultures that might have altered their epistemological, ethnocentric, and chauvinistic assumptions. However, the reality of the situation is quite the opposite. As the colonial narrative went, over time the natives might learn enough about rational and

civilized (read: “modern European”) ways of life to become the latter’s equal in impersonal and responsible liberal governance. But this colonial pedagogy had its limits. For it was also part of the structure of coloniality that such pedagogical development must be endlessly deferred—any formal equality achieved between natives and Europeans in the colony would threaten the very logic of the colonial enterprise. Partha Chatterjee terms this structural limit of modern Enlightenment ideals “the rule of colonial difference” (Chatterjee 1993, 16–18). An essential, structural difference between colonizer and colonized had to be continuously reproduced within discourses of modernity. Military excursions in places such as Afghanistan, Iraq, and Gaza purportedly in the name of democracy and equality show that these deep contradictions and interconnections continue to haunt coloniality today.

Directly encountering the structural contradictions of coloniality in everyday life, native subjects may both internalize and resist, ambivalently and sometimes violently, the dominant mythologies of Western dominance and superiority. In *Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon harrowingly describes how coloniality’s alienating yet simultaneously enchanting violences arouse an incipient militancy amongst the colonized:

But it so happens that when the native hears a speech about Western culture he pulls out his knife—or at least he makes sure it is within reach. The violence with which the supremacy of white values is affirmed and the aggressiveness which has permeated the victory of these values over the ways of life and of thought of the native mean that, in revenge, the native laughs in mockery when Western values are mentioned in front of him. In the colonial context the settler only ends his work of breaking in the native when the latter admits loudly and intelligibly the supremacy of the white man’s values. In the period of decolonization, the colonized masses mock at these very values, insult them, and vomit them up. (Fanon 1963, 43)

Fanon’s visceral description of violent bodily reactions to the contradictions of “Western culture” reminds us of the deeply affective dimensions of coloniality. Intertwined alienation, enchantment, and violence haunt the structurally estranged relationship between colonizer and colonized.

From the writings of Fanon and others, we can locate the condition of coloniality as a structurally estranged relationship between colonizer and colonized that persists during and after modern colonialism. Yet the colonial problematic also includes the imperative to think the process of decolonization. As we might already surmise, such a process cannot be as simple as merely ending formal colonial relationships, getting rid of European colonizers, and beginning anew. Mimicking, mocking, insulting, and vomiting up Western values, for example through militant anti-colonial nationalist movements, will not eliminate coloniality, nor dampen the alienation, enchantment, and violence that it produces.

Fanon for his part was presciently aware of the potential pitfalls of anti-colonial nationalism. He argued that these shortcomings could be traced to the very origins of the colonial encounter. In his earlier work *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon provocatively defines the colonized as “every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality” (Fanon 1967, 18). This unceremonious death and burial inaugurates the condition

of coloniality. For Fanon, the inferiority complex that results from the extermination of “local cultural originality” becomes productive of a larger social pathology amongst the colonized. In the desire to reverse this inferiority complex, respectable native subjects try to emulate or mimic their colonial masters. Yet this desire for equal recognition through colonial mimicry is confounded by the “rule of colonial difference” elaborated above. Even ostensibly anti-colonial discourses that seek to rescue “local cultural originality” from colonial stigmatization or erasure become intelligible only insofar as they re-articulate this local culture in ways that resonate, in harmony or discord, with the prevailing values and categories of the West. Atavistic nationalist and fundamentalist movements are effects of colonial modernity much more than they are expressions of “authentic” pre-colonial traditions. In the colonies and in contemporary postcolonial contexts, discourses of nationalism, regionalism, and religious fundamentalism often incorporate many themes of Western civilization into local culture—such as monotheism, rationalism, individualism, and heteronormative patriarchy—that were initially deemed by colonizers to be missing from the local culture!

Fanon saw this ambivalence clearly, and wrote about it in *The Wretched of the Earth*. Mohandas K. Gandhi wrote about the same phenomena half a century earlier in his *Hind Swaraj (Indian Self-Rule)*. Gandhi admonishes India’s existing anti-colonial nationalist elites for wanting independence from the British without breaking habits of thought and culture that the British had implanted within Indian society. “You want English rule without the English man,” Gandhi wrote (Parel 1997, 28). True self-rule, for Gandhi, meant resisting the temptations of the modern West and turning to a more spiritual path of self-restraint and self-discipline that he argued was foundational to Indian civilization. As Partha Chatterjee and others have demonstrated, however, even Gandhi’s conceptions of “Indian civilization” and of India’s essentially spiritual character were shaped by modernity and the rule of colonial difference.

Decolonial thinkers such as Fanon and Gandhi understood coloniality as a condition in which the ruled were constantly tempted to fight their rulers within psychological and discursive limits set by the latter. Both understood that this condition threatened to persist even after formal independence was won; unless, that is, true decolonization (for Gandhi, true self-rule, for Fanon, a class-based anti-colonial revolution) could be achieved. The question they wrestled with remains timely today—what does “true” decolonization mean, and how can it be achieved?

Many formal colonial institutions were disassembled during the second half of the twentieth century. Yet even in these “postcolonial” contexts, discourses and categories of colonialism survive in the condition of coloniality. They constitute, as indicated earlier, what David Kim calls the “epistemic landscape of Western culture, politics and philosophy,” which has survived the transition from colonial to postcolonial states largely intact. This provincial landscape continues to appear global. The task for the critical decolonial scholar thus has to do with locating this epistemic landscape and understanding its role in reproducing global coloniality. But it also has to do with theorizing what exactly it might mean to “decolonize” the epistemic landscape of a world that coloniality continues to shape.

The essays in this volume address in various ways the condition of coloniality as it obtains in one realm of this epistemic landscape: academic disciplines that engage and represent non-Western thought. The imperative to decolonize comparative methodologies within this particular realm concerns first of all the ongoing struggle to make visible and intelligible how coloniality operates within these disciplines. We will address some symptoms of coloniality within these fields in the next section.

Symptoms of coloniality within the study of non-Western thought

The articles collected in this issue identify multiple ways that coloniality affects contemporary fields of non-Western philosophical and theoretical scholarship. In general, contributors note the following three symptoms of coloniality: (1) comparative philosophy's "East-West" focus and skepticism even within comparative philosophy about the possibility of articulating subjects such as "Latin American philosophy" and "African philosophy," (2) tendencies among scholars across fields of non-Western philosophical and theoretical scholarship to privilege Western Europe as a cardinal point of reference, even in critiques of Eurocentrism, and (3) a lack of dialogue between different fields of non-Western philosophical/theoretical scholarship. We will examine these in turn.

In his contribution, Gabriel Soldatenko observes that European colonialisms functioned differently across the globe. He argues that these differences help to explain both why comparative philosophy is primarily constituted along an East-West axis and why fields such as Latin American philosophy and African philosophy struggle, even in comparison with Asian traditions, to be recognized as "philosophies" in their own right. According to Soldatenko, both circumstances are symptoms of coloniality. As a result of divergent colonial articulations of cultural difference from emergent universal (European) norms, Latin American philosophers and philosophers and theorists from regions such as Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific Islands, are now "neither indigenous nor European" and consequently rarely have uninterrupted access to indigenous cultural traditions of "their own" to philosophize through. For example, due to colonial legacies of genocide and cultural erasure, Latin American philosophies struggle existentially with the possibility of Latin American identity. In contrast, he suggests that the study of Asian philosophies has been motivated more by a desire to contest colonial European constructions of these traditions as simultaneously inferior and essentially other. While these effects of coloniality on non-Western philosophical scholarship are different, he concludes that comparative philosophy's East-West focus and skepticism about "Latin American philosophy" and "African philosophy" are nonetheless intertwined consequences of European colonialism.

Contributors call attention to a second symptom of coloniality—the peculiarity that, even though Western Europe as a material, geopolitical entity has faded in global relevance in recent decades as a discursive and hyperreal phenomenon, this Europe still remains the cardinal point of reference across diverse fields of non-Western philosophy. Kim addresses "surreptitious or second-order Eurocentrism" in decolonial and postcolonial theory. He writes:

There seems to be a pattern of (1) first-order rejection of Eurocentric perspectives, which is (2) based on an implicit, and sometimes explicit, second-order European-derived theory, with (3) a general absence of first-order or second-order discourse from non-Western traditions. The upshot is a second-order re-linking with Eurocentrism.

Postcolonial and decolonial critiques of Eurocentrism draw significantly from philosophies of Western European figures such as Marx, Derrida, Nietzsche, and Foucault, while they largely eschew categories and methods derived from philosophies of non-Western figures such as Zhuangzi, Mencius, Dharmakīrti, and Gaṅgeśa.

Postcolonial and decolonial studies are, of course, not the only fields of non-Western theoretical scholarship that may be susceptible to charges of second-order Eurocentrism. In his contribution, Nikolay Karkov notes that twentieth century Eastern European intellectuals, such as members of the Praxis movement, may have seemed to eschew primary reference to Western Europe. Nonetheless, he argues, Praxis remained invested in coloniality, as his analyses of their philosophies of humanism and their indifference to Caribbean humanist philosophies aims to illustrate. Karkov shows that members of Praxis had numerous opportunities to collaborate with Caribbean decolonial theories and theorists, and may well have been expected to do so, given their shared interest in humanism and Marxism, and Western European Continental philosophy's decisive turn in the twentieth century in anti-humanist directions. However, Karkov argues, Praxis members neglected other non-Western European Marxist humanist philosophies and philosophers because they remained uncritically invested in racialized and gendered ideologies of human progress. Their philosophies of a fully realized human (or "man") as one "who freely and consciously transforms his own life" were constructed through opposition to notions of "primitive" humanity. Caribbean decolonial theorists such as Sylvia Wynter, Aimé Césaire, and Nelson Maldonado-Torres, in contrast, sought to articulate Marxist humanist philosophies that would include these "others" whose humanity European humanist philosophies denied. "The philosophy of Praxis never manages to free itself from its colonial(ist) dispositions," writes Karkov, "from the developmentalist fallacy that pits its own humanism against the presumed inhumanity of others, and from the 'White Man's burden' conveniently applied to those abject others permanently stuck 'at the low level of development....'" Because their analyses of capitalism and socialism excluded coloniality and experiences of colonized others from consideration, Praxis members remained entrenched within a Eurocentric theoretical framework. This implicit cardinal commitment to the West, Karkov suggests, was later made explicit when, in the 1990s, many Praxis members abandoned Marxism and aligned themselves with conservative neo-liberal capitalist and/or Serbian ethno-nationalist political programs.

Contributors to this volume also note tendencies to privilege Western Europe as a cardinal point of reference within comparative philosophy. Such observations are not new. Comparative philosophers have frequently critiqued Eurocentric tendencies within the field. Gerald Larson, Eliot Deutsch, Raimundo Panizza, and others directly addressed these tendencies within comparative philosophy in the 1980s. Jay Garfield more recently wrote that he prefers to describe his work as "cross-cultural philosophy" because his "goal is not so much to juxtapose texts

from distinct traditions to notice similarities and differences as it is to do philosophy, with lots of texts, lots of perspectives, and lots of hermeneutical traditions” (Garfield 2001, viii). Methodologies that juxtapose texts and traditions, he suggests, tend to objectify and appropriate non-hegemonic traditions:

Given a powerful scholarly tradition practiced by the members of a politically and economically powerful group, it is indeed possible to come to know another culture by bringing it as an object under the lens of one’s own intellectual microscope. In doing so, however, one transforms that body of knowledge in fundamental ways. Indeed, the transformation is so complete that if it is successful, the alien culture becomes relegated to a merely historical phenomenon. The authority as readers and interpreters of texts is shifted from those within the tradition to the alien experts. Alien commentaries gain ascendancy over traditional commentaries. The hermeneutic method of the conqueror becomes the standard means of reading the vanquished, and the vanquished tradition becomes, as the Ven. Geshe Ngawang Samten put it in conversation, “the domain of curators.” (Garfield 2001, 244)

In her contribution, Leah Kalmanson attends to lingering Eurocentrism within the field of comparative or cross-cultural philosophy but also suggests that since coloniality pervades even basic categories of analysis within the discipline, including the notion of “cultural difference” itself, the tendency to objectify and appropriate non-Western traditions according to Eurocentric models may be extremely difficult to dislodge from cross-cultural or comparative philosophical teaching and research. She pays particular attention to decolonial scholar Walter D. Mignolo’s contention that “all cultural difference is colonial difference.” If the notion of “culture” is itself suffused by coloniality, she asks, then how can any cross-cultural philosophical project avoid at least implicitly privileging Western Europe as its cardinal point of reference? We might extend her point beyond Mignolo’s assertion and note that many other basic categories of philosophical analysis, such as “epistemology” and “ethics,” retain primary reference to Western European discourse.



Finally, contributors to this issue note a general dearth of dialogue between fields of non-Western philosophical and theoretical research. As Soldatenko suggests, different existential interests may account for the lack of sustained dialogue between comparative philosophy and Latin American philosophy. Nonetheless, he contends, like Latin American philosophy, comparative philosophy wrestles, consciously or not, with a colonial legacy and may therefore benefit from “a critical awareness of the relationship between philosophy and coloniality” of the sort that “Latin American philosophy urges us to consider.” Much like Praxis’s disinterest in Caribbean Marxist humanist philosophies, it could be that a lack of substantive engagement in comparative philosophy with decolonial and postcolonial scholarship is itself a symptom of coloniality. David Kim, conversely, highlights early decolonial theorist José Mariátegui’s attempts to incorporate Confucianism within his philosophy. Kim notes that other decolonial theorists generally have not followed Mariátegui’s lead in exploring pre-colonial non-Western philosophies and suggests Mariátegui himself would have benefited from exposure to more hermeneutically vigilant primary text-based comparative methodologies. Just as few comparative philosophers have demonstrated substantive interest in decolonial theory, decolonial



theorists have demonstrated scant interest in comparative philosophy. Regardless of the specific roots of each field's disinterest, the separation of non-Western theoretical and philosophical scholarship into isolated fields despite a shared interest in disrupting the material and discursive hegemony of the West is itself a further legacy of colonialism.

We have highlighted some ways in which coloniality conditions fields of scholarship that engage non-Western thought, but what might existing work within the fields of comparative philosophy and postcolonial and decolonial studies have to offer each other? The next two sections will address these questions.

Decolonizing decolonial and postcolonial methodologies

The essays collected here suggest that comparative philosophy can push postcolonial and decolonial studies to do what they arguably do not do enough: engage with pre-colonial non-Western traditions of thought to critique the modern. Postcolonial and decolonial theories have done much to establish this critique by foregrounding the inextricably colonial foundations of modernity and the condition of coloniality as explicated above. Yet these approaches rarely engage with primary source materials that might outline a non-Western thought tradition or practice of decolonial knowledge production that is not discursively and politically circumscribed by the West.

As mentioned in the preceding section, David Kim outlines this problem within postcolonial and decolonial studies very clearly. His article points to the problem of epistemic Eurocentrism particularly with  the internationally renowned Subaltern Studies collective, but also in the works of  others that fall into the broad category of postcolonial and decolonial studies. What is striking about these works is that though they are deeply critical of “the West” as both historical actor (perpetrator of colonialism's crimes) and as the cardinal reference point for ostensibly “universal” philosophies of history and politics, they nevertheless draw heavily on European thinkers to perform this critique. Simultaneously, postcolonial approaches often do not scrutinize or draw theoretical and political insights from diverse pre-colonial non-Western traditions. As noted earlier, Kim terms this phenomenon “second-order Eurocentrism.”

A good example of this type of second-order Eurocentrism might be found in the work of someone who is otherwise widely hailed within the emerging canon of post-colonial theory. In Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe*, the author argues that European traditions of thought in the form of “Western philosophy” are inadequate, yet also indispensable  for understanding the history and politics of the non-Western or postcolonial  world. Following up on this argument, Chakrabarty engages two thinkers who are central to the history of philosophy in the modern West, Karl Marx and Martin Heidegger, to create an interpretive framework apposite to the analysis of what he calls “historical difference” within colonial India. Marx's conceptual analysis of the history of capitalism and its encounter with different social and cultural worlds and Heidegger's pluralized notion of “being-in-the-world” thus become tools for a postcolonial analysis of subaltern histories. Particularly in the second half of *Provincializing Europe*, Chakrabarty is able to creatively excavate indigenous concepts of sociality and femininity, for instance,

within the archive of colonial Bengal. Yet he is only able to theorize their historical and political significance through reference to Marx and Heidegger. This is second-order Eurocentrism even within the work of a postcolonial scholar who is critically aware of the problems of Eurocentrism. The “non-West” provides the archival material for theoretical analysis, but never the conceptual or philosophical framework itself.

Thus Kim suggests that comparative or cross-cultural philosophy, which often seeks to understand non-Western traditions of thought without reference to Western conceptual frameworks and philosophical assumptions, can potentially help postcolonial and decolonial studies to better “provincialize” the Europe it so often takes as an implicit or explicit object of critique.

A different, but related, strategy for engaging both comparative philosophy and postcolonial studies in a mutually enriching fashion is suggested by Gabriel Soldatenko. Drawing on Nietzsche’s critique of Western philosophy and its underlying “will to truth,” as well as Nietzsche’s affirmation of a “diversity of alternative truths,” Soldatenko provocatively asks, what is the “will to truth” behind comparative philosophy? This is the familiar argument of the implicit or explicit epistemological privileging of Western concepts and thought categories, or what we might call, following Kim above, a “first-order” Eurocentrism. Yet, from Soldatenko’s perspective, we might also ask a different kind of question: are there any comparative philosophical concepts, theories or methods that have *not* been willed through modernity and coloniality? Are there “alternative truths” to be discovered in cross-cultural philosophical engagement that need not implicitly or explicitly reproduce Eurocentric categories and practices of knowledge production?

Here we come to a difficulty that is not so easily resolved. For even if we were able to access an alternative West (qua Nietzsche), this would not mean we would have un-mediated access to an alternative non-West. For, as Kalmanson argues, the modern world that colonialism created has in many ways created the very “cultural differences” that comparative or cross-cultural philosophy takes as given, including the basic distinction between “the West” and “the non-West.”

Now we can return to the provocations offered by Kim above, and push back, as he does, on the claim that postcolonial studies has ignored non-Western traditions of thought in favor of a “second-order Eurocentrism.” We might suggest that given the globality of “the West” following the history of colonialism and the condition of coloniality that persists in the present, the adequate response is not to ignore this globality, but to make a subtle yet key distinction between the globality of the West and the assumed universality of the West. This is the crucial insight of the interventions offered by postcolonial scholars like Spivak and Chakrabarty, but also Said, Fanon, Wynter and others. In the gap between the globality of the West, which is evident in the condition of coloniality today on a global-scale, and its ostensible universality, which has been and continues to be challenged in myriad ways by postcolonial and decolonial scholars and political actors, lies a range of potential responses. The essays collected in this issue of *Comparative and Continental Philosophy* outline several such responses in the hope of sparking an ongoing conversation regarding the decolonization of methodologies across fields of contemporary non-Western theoretical and philosophical scholarship.

Decolonizing comparative philosophical methodologies

If coloniality conditions basic categories of comparative philosophical discourse such as “culture,” “epistemology,” and “ethics,” then we cannot be sanguine about our abilities to dislodge coloniality from contemporary comparative philosophical teaching and research. “The coloniality of culture thrives on invisibility,” Kalmanson writes, “and important voices in postcolonial theory warn us not to be naive about our prospects for seeing a clear path toward ‘decolonization.’” As she notes, Dipesh Chakrabarty questions whether decolonizing projects can avoid a double-bind of either leaving coloniality intact, for example by prescribing “Decolonial” projects that merely re-inscribe new Hegelian hierarchies of progress, or eviscerating modern ideals, institutions, and conceptions to degrees that collapse into cultural relativism. Such a bind is “necessarily inescapable,” Chakrabarty contends. Consequently, he proposes a “politics of despair” that would attempt “the impossible” task of looking “toward its own death” in the creation of as yet unimaginable academic fields that are “radically heterogeneous” yet not culturally relativistic.

Kalmanson is not content with Chakrabarty’s proposed politics of despair. Chakrabarty himself removed this proposal in the chapter of *Provincializing Europe* that otherwise reproduces the article that Kalmanson cites. Kalmanson remarks that, in terms of practical teaching and research, Chakrabarty’s strategy may appear to amount to a mere “scare quotes strategy” in which scholars admit their “choices of words are undeniably indebted to the logic of colonial difference, even while we continue to employ those words.”

Other contributors make proposals, however, that might show how we could develop comparative philosophical methodologies that neither inscribe old or new racial and gender hierarchies within the field, nor succumb to cultural relativism. Such a decolonizing movement could proceed, for example, in part by encouraging practices of what Kalmanson calls “subversive categorization” in formal and informal comparative philosophical contexts. “By ‘subversive categorization’” she writes, “I mean that scholars might strategically deploy categories from indigenous intellectual traditions as widely applicable terms of philosophical discourse.” Panels, publications, courses, conferences, or casual conversations in comparative philosophy might consider, for example, how the philosophical canon would be reconfigured if “philosophy” were primarily understood, not in an etymologically Greek sense as the development of practices and theories arising from a love of wisdom, but perhaps in a Buddhist sense as the development of paths leading to the cessation of *dukkha*, or suffering/unsatisfactoriness. Other courses, conversations, and publications might examine how philosophy would be configured if the term were understood with primary reference to *yoga*—say, as the cross-cultural study and practice of techniques that identify and yoke infelicitous cognitive, affective, and bodily tendencies. The goal of such practices of subversive categorization, according to Kalmanson, would be to subvert “the status of Western discourse in shaping the possibilities for scholarly inquiry.” By promoting practices of subversive categorization within formal and informal comparative philosophical contexts, we would aim to mitigate exclusions that fix the reference of “philosophy” to historically colonial constructions of the West. Moreover, there is reason to trust that such practices

could help to change the referent of “philosophy” within comparative philosophical institutions and societies in decolonial directions without either inscribing new modernist hierarchies or succumbing to cultural relativism. They would not restrict the range of non-Western and Western categories and concepts that could be used as widely applicable terms of philosophical discourse, and therefore would not reify new racial and gender hierarchies. Second, they would be practiced within contexts of ongoing comparative philosophical relations and rituals, and therefore would not descend into cultural relativism. Such practices of subversive categorization would not return us to Chakrabarty’s politics of despair, but would instead encourage the creation of novel yet critical comparative philosophical possibilities.

Other contributors to this collection propose practices that might also shift understandings of “comparative philosophy” in ways that broaden horizons of possibility within the field. Specifically, they propose comparative philosophical activities that would integrate South-South and East-West studies. Kim’s contribution, for example, highlights early efforts by Mariátegui to incorporate aspects of Confucian philosophy into his development of a philosophy of liberation. Kim writes that “The Chinese, not the *criollo*—and Confucianism, not liberal individualism—is the interpretative and generative instrument” that Mariátegui uses to develop his decolonial Incan philosophy. Although in hindsight, Mariátegui’s interpretations of Chinese culture and Confucianism were sometimes problematic, Kim contends that his scholarship provides a model that contemporary comparative philosophers could emulate to shift the meaning of “philosophy” in decolonial directions. Karkov’s contribution, meanwhile, illustrates how engagement with Caribbean decolonial humanist philosophies could have strengthened the humanist philosophies of the Praxis movement in ways that would have helped them to avoid reproducing coloniality. Similarly, contemporary scholarship that seeks, for example, to develop Confucian philosophies of humanism through comparison with the philosophies of figures such as Rawls or to develop Buddhist philosophies of language through comparison with philosophies of figures such as Quine or Carnap might be strengthened and avoid significant error by incorporating decolonial and postcolonial theories within their analyses. Incorporating South-South comparative considerations within East-West philosophical projects could facilitate a decolonial program that neither re-imposes modern hierarchies nor necessitates cultural relativism.

Soldatenko argues that projects to decolonize comparative philosophical methodologies require a shift in the social and institutional wills that shape the field’s reference. The field cannot dislodge an implicit orientation to the West and often explicit exclusions of many non-Western philosophical contributions unless it seeks to articulate diverse human responses to localized problems with no particular regional tradition laying claim to universal status. The goal would be to reconstitute the field in a way “that does not exclude any tradition or people because it is not premised on the modern distinction between West and non-West, and as a result [seeks] to create the conditions for a truly global dialogue where no particular regional tradition holds a universality claim, and indeed where universality is no longer the goal of philosophy.” Such a field would, for example, accommodate South-South comparative projects that make no reference to East-West comparisons. Again, the horizons of possibility within comparative philosophy would expand, rather than contract.

As discussed above, contemporary comparative philosophical methodologies and institutions developed in part through an imperative to contest colonial representations of the Orient. Soldatenko advises that by encouraging formal and informal institutional and social practices that shift “the frame of reference of comparative philosophy from an East-West *geographic* orientation to the *geo-political* distinction of ‘global north’ and ‘global south’” comparative philosophers would reaffirm these inaugural ambitions rather than restrict creative comparative philosophical possibilities in new yet equally problematic ways, or in no ways whatsoever.

As contributors to this issue show, changing the referent of “comparative philosophy” in ways that dislodge coloniality should not be seen as a perennially critical and despairing project. To see it only in this way would be to fail to recognize the creative possibilities and contestatory reconfigurations that a decolonial movement promises. It is coloniality that narrows possibilities of comparative philosophical scholarship along axes of gender, race, and capital. To resist colonial exclusions and divisions would be to invite opportunities to further invigorate comparative philosophical scholarship.

Conclusion

In this introduction, we have attempted to open up a critical space in which scholars who study non-Western traditions of thought can produce insights with cross-cultural relevance without reinstating coloniality. We began by highlighting a subtle, yet crucial distinction between “colonialism” and “coloniality” introduced by Latin American philosophers. Coloniality is a political and phenomenological condition that exceeds the history of colonialism that began in the fifteenth century and continues to shape the modern world as we know it today. Decolonial and postcolonial studies, in our estimation, seek to make this condition of coloniality visible and intelligible, and in so doing, generate more radically egalitarian responses to contemporary theoretical and practical problems arising from colonial constructions of difference.

There are various symptoms of coloniality that persist in studies of non-Western thought today. These include an almost exclusive focus on East-West comparisons in cross-cultural philosophical analysis, and consequent neglect of traditions and theoretical contributions from much of the world, such as Latin America and Africa. Another symptom persists outside of the ambit of comparative philosophy, where many postcolonial and decolonial theorists turn nearly exclusively to Western thinkers to critique a historically entrenched Eurocentrism. Such “second-order Eurocentrism” can facilitate the exclusion of indigenous and non-Western philosophies and modes of theoretical critique. Given comparative philosophy’s near exclusive East-West focus, and postcolonial and decolonial studies’ parallel privileging of the West as its cardinal reference point, there remains a lack of sustained South-South cross-cultural philosophical engagement. Several of the essays in this collection aim to rectify such exclusions, and consequently carry a critical acknowledgement of the condition of coloniality that continues to inform philosophical studies of and from different regions of the world.

If decolonial and postcolonial studies have much to offer cross-cultural and comparative philosophy, then the reverse is also true. We highlighted numerous ways in which postcolonial and decolonial studies could be critically enhanced through hermeneutically vigilant engagement with precolonial non-Western thinkers and thought traditions, and thereby avoid either first- or second-order Eurocentrisms.

Finally, we introduced some of the creative strategies that our contributors present in their essays to deal with these recurring symptoms of coloniality in contemporary academic practice. The work collected here encourages an ongoing if not interminable effort to decolonize methodologies in those disciplines that seek to study and articulate theories and traditions across historical and cultural difference. The contributions in this collection are neither intended to complete this task nor to be representative of all postcolonial or precolonial theorists, philosophers, or traditions of thought. Instead, we hope that they point toward some avenues for broader decolonial, postcolonial, and comparative research and critical discussion within and across our communities.

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