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CHANGING THEORY

Thinking Concepts from the Global South

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Euro-American theory provides our existing academic interpretations of the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change them. The impulse toward theorizing anew has always arisen within the urgency of historical conjunctures. Historically, decolonization provided an impetus within the Global South to imagine new relations to the past, present, and future; free of the political and intellectual teleologies imposed by the civilizational hierarchies of a colonial epistemology. There arose the necessity to look back, neither with nostalgia, nor anger. Rather, it was imperative to recover from the paradigm imposed by colonial rule that had allowed for an engagement with native pasts only as irrelevant, outmoded, or mired in forms of imagination unsuited to the idea of the modern. Colonialism had inculcated an amnesia toward local forms of intellection with their own long histories. More important, it gave a determinate geographical location to the provenance and genealogy of thought (philosophy as originating in Greece, or in the European Enlightenment). This occluded the history of the circulation of conceptions and culminated in the lethargic as much as learned habit of making distinctions between ‘western’ and ‘eastern’ ideas. Finally, in now colonized spaces, it only allowed for the consolation of a distant golden age when there had been the efflorescence of thought; a body of thought that was now deemed irrelevant for the present condition of modernity. Suddipto Kaviraj theorizes the emergence of a *Euronormality*: an implicit reorienting of the social sciences everywhere toward European conceptualizations that were mere universalizations of its own parochial histories (Kaviraj 2017). The universalization of European particularism, needless to add, was the result of violence: wars, conquest, and the imposition of new structures of pedagogy.

The idea of modernity itself was not only a temporal concept. It was also a political one, based on the self-regard of the former colonizing powers that allowed them to hold themselves up as models for emulation. Addressing amnesia

in its various manifestations drove the exigent impulse to theorize; to recover from the loss of self and of an indigenous imagination under alien rule (Devy 1995). One could have used the metaphor of the compass oriented toward the North to characterize intellectual production in the former colonized world. However, this image itself is a normalized one, reflecting amnesia. The Chinese, as we know, created their compasses to point to the true South which was their cardinal direction: geographical as much as ethical (in the sense in which we use the phrase moral compass). The orientation to the 'South' was not only about physical direction but about metaphysical balance. The users of early Chinese compasses were as much concerned with orientation as an ethical and metaphysical imperative – in line with the compass's primary geomantic purpose – as they were about finding physical directions in the physical universe.

This chapter concerns itself programmatically and polemically with the politics of knowledge in the academic space and addresses primarily the question of an insularity that projects itself as universality i.e., the globalization of theoretical production arising from a limited geographical space and its particular trajectories of development. It asks that we broaden our archive of concepts not only through engaging in transdisciplinary conversations, but also through moving away from Euro-American formulations to a conversation across regions, that is also necessarily multilingual. The project of finding new ways of conceptualizing needs to be done not under the sign of a commensurability that establishes a meretricious and falsely transparent translation of ideas across spaces. It is not about rendering visible words and ways of thinking across the Global South through mere translation within a monolingual space, which entrenches the politics of English as a universal language of rendition (Mizumura 2014; Mufti 2018). A true conversation must engage with the nuances and hardness of multilingualism as much as the possible quiddity of concepts. All political locutions arise from a sense of place; existing, constructed, and imagined. This chapter imagines a speaking from the Global South, a space that bears the wound of former colonization, and therefore the loss of ways of thinking, imagining, and living. As de Sousa Santos puts it, this is an 'epistemological rather than a geographical south' from which an 'alternative thinking of alternatives' can be carried forward (Santos and Meneses 2019).

As I have argued elsewhere, I believe that thinking about the Global South (its traditions of intellection and its conceptual categories, as much as their imbrication with the miscegenated genealogies of Western ideas) is a project that we need to embark on (Menon 2018). We have been through the enterprise of thinking *from* the Global South, which has meant, as in the case of postcolonial theory, the reiteration of a European episteme, but merely from our location. This does not mean a nativist rejection of European theory or an insistence that we work only on our spaces. The 'space' that comprises Africa, Asia and Latin America, and the Caribbean cannot be thought without considering international relations of power and capital. We cannot also be unreflective of the interpellation of the Global South in the period of the Cold War and the fact that we live in the

time of the continuing ‘decomposition’ of its political and intellectual structures (Prashad 2013; Kwon 2006; Whitfield 1998). As Ann Laura Stoler has recently argued, ‘we live in a temporal and affective space in which colonial inequities endure’ and there is the imperative to think of the (post)colonial skeptically and insist on ‘imperial durabilities in our times’ (Stoler 2016). This means too that we cannot think about the South as a *merely* theoretical space, leading us to verbal prestidigitation like North of the South, South of the North, and so on – Detroit as South in the United States, Johannesburg as North in Africa.

Theorizing from the South

If we are to frame the temporality of theorizing from the Global South, Partha Chatterjee’s formulation of the moments of departure, maneuver, and arrival within Indian nationalist discourse is a compelling heuristic device to think with (Chatterjee 1986). Chatterjee characterizes the intellection of anticolonialists in India as moving through three moments: *departure*: the moment of a break from tradition and the consequent desire for Europe (in the works of the nineteenth-century Bengali litterateur Bankim Chandra Chatterjee); *maneuver*: a reconstitution and reimagining of indigenous thought as against an idea of Europe (Gandhi); and *arrival*: the confident assertion, with its compromises, of an independent nation (Jawaharlal Nehru). I adopt the triad of concepts but invest a different set of meanings to these moments.

The long conjuncture of decolonization, as countries in Asia and Africa achieved independence from the end of the Second World War to the 1980s, had already created an impulse to decolonize the mind. This *moment of departure* with its staggered temporality was accompanied by the making of nations, the creation of pedagogical and economic infrastructure, and the emergence of a new generation of intellectuals. The emergent new native elite may have been rooted in nationalism. However, they had been schooled in structures of pedagogy that were governed by knowledge in thrall to a Euro-American idea of the University and a replication of its disciplinary formations. The very idea of national being was governed by a split consciousness. The reality of the postcolonial nation was seen in empirical terms: thick descriptions of social and economic inequalities, as much as visions of science and technology-driven futures that were governed by the sign of self-reliance. However, when it came to theorizing, intellectuals drew upon inherited social science paradigms – what Tagore called histories from elsewhere – rather than on indigenous traditions of intellection about self, community, politics, and ethics.

Ashis Nandy and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o were among the first to address the colonial wound of amnesia, as it were, dredging language as much as psychoanalytic frames to think about resources of thought that had not been hijacked by a conception of singular trajectories of development toward a Western state of being (Nandy 1983; wa Thiong’o 1981). Fanon was the penumbral presence in their thought, the idea of the psychic devastation inflicted by colonialism and

the need to heal were the dominant themes. Nandy looked at the implicated selves of colonizer and colonized and in a characteristically innovative juxtaposition, studied the early works of Kipling and the oeuvre of the Hindu mystic Vivekananda as contending with the discourses of hypermasculinity generated by colonialism. He was clear that there were other psychic resources within Indic traditions that allowed for a recovery of self, particularly in Gandhi's invocation of the 'feminine', of passive resistance, and of the notion of care and love as central to politics. Ngugi, in a parallel move, asked for a decolonization of the mind against the biggest weapon unleashed against the native mind. He called this the 'cultural bomb' that annihilated a people's belief in their languages, their heritages of struggle, and 'ultimately in themselves', which made them see 'their past as one wasteland of non-achievement' (wa Thiong'o 1981, 3). Both Nandy and Ngugi departed from the idea of the postindependence moonshot to the modern by addressing the amnesia toward what lay at hand; the intellectual resources and categories that would allow for the restitution of damaged selves.

The theorizing of the next generation represented the *moment of maneuver*. It reflected the presence within Euro-American academe of a postcolonial elite that bristled against the condescending characterization of the spaces that they came from as being not-yet-modern (Dirlik 1997). Dipesh Chakrabarty in his broadside against existing descriptions of decolonized societies, spoke of a reckoning of lack, a dispiriting accounting of absences – of capitalism, modernity, or of real democracy (Chakrabarty 2000). However, he was also conscious of the 'conceptual gifts', as he called them, of historicism and of politics, from nineteenth century Europe which allowed for reflection on the way forward. Postcolonial theorists like Chakrabarty, Spivak, and Bhabha challenged the imposition of singular trajectories of the future, deploying European epistemology with verve and skill, and denying derivativeness through adroit categories like *hybridity*, *interstitiality*, *strategic essentialism*, and *provincialization* (Gandhi 1998; Loomba 1998). These categories are revealing of the strategy of maneuver; one had to position oneself within an already determined field. If one were being uncharitable, mimicry as theorized by Bhabha, was seen as the way forward; like-yet-not-like, the unreadability of imitation as repetition or difference. However, postcolonial theory was characterized by a distinct forgetfulness toward indigenous systems of intellection; the theorists have been schooled in a paradigm framed by Euromerican social theory and its internal dissensions and critiques.

We stand now at the threshold of a *moment of arrival*, with theorizations that start with the idea of intellection from the Global South as their premise. In one sense, it is a taking up of the standard again, a theorizing from where we are, continuing a resistance to what Ngugi had called the method of 'Europhone Theory' and 'African fact'. A slew of recent work that engages with forms of thinking in Africa, Asia, South America, and the Arab world has allowed us to question the Eurocentricity of postcolonial theory and to engage with indigenous landscapes, epistemologies, and temporalities (Chen 2010; Cusicanqui 2020; Eze 1998; Escobar 2018; Elshakry, M 2014; Elshakry, O 2020; Santos 2018). There are

many distinct intellectual trajectories here pointing to different futures of interpretation. What is very clear in these works is an engagement with long histories of intellection and debate in the Global South. Euro-American epistemologies were transformed by their commensuration with already existing fields of interpretation. The act of reading Darwin or Freud in Egypt, for example, is not one of startled discovery but a negotiated and careful process of translation, situating within existing paradigms, and a questioning of the universalist assumptions of historical and psychological evolution. The South American thinkers rethink the temporality of the modern by displacing the Enlightenment as the *fons et origo*. They put the violent Spanish conquest and the genocide of native peoples by Europeans at the beginning of European engagement with the world at large. Modernity is inaugurated less by the cogitations of the *philosophes* than by the genocide perpetrated by the *conquistadores*.

Modernity and coloniality therefore are the dyad with which the world must be thought, which results in the idea of the pluriverse and of pluriversality rather than the emergence of any singular set of ideas that then are disseminated by Euro-America as the markers of civilization (Mignolo and Walsh 2018; Escobar 2020). These works engage at one level with the frictions encountered by intellectual paradigms and concepts from Europe as intellectuals in the Global South grapple with them or deploy them strategically. At another, they work with indigenous ideas that do not merely mirror European categories but have a purchase in local imaginations and ways of being which are distinctive and rooted. Most important, they restore, each in different ways, Euro-American violence – physical and epistemic – to its central place in the making of the world that we inhabit.

Word Making and World Making

In this moment of *arrival*, we need to think with questions of inheritance as much as a rejection of a colonial patrimony. The concepts we think with – from modernity to secularism and democracy – have embedded in them both an implicit ideal trajectory as much as a hierarchical politics of spaces (Kaviraj 2005). Words must arise from their worlds. For too long we have thought with the trajectories of a European history and its self-regarding nativist epistemology that was rendered universal largely through the violence of conquest and empire. As the aphorism goes, a language is a dialect backed by an army. Benedict Anderson has argued that colonialism generated a double consciousness of the world: the connection between colony and metropole – London and Delhi; Jakarta and Amsterdam; Hanoi and Paris (Anderson 1998). This seems to suggest that the geography generated by empire exhausted the possibility of other worlds and connections. However, existing networks before the onset of colonialism were never severed entirely as Engsang Ho shows in his magnificent study of the uninterrupted flow of people, ideas, and commerce over half a millennium from the Hadramawt to South East Asia (Ho 2006).

Moreover, empire created what I have called new ‘geographies of affinity’ which exceeded the incarcerative and schematic maps that reflected merely the imperial hubris of control (Menon 2012). Rebecca Karl, in her work on late nineteenth-century Chinese nationalists shows how they drew on the historical experiences of the resistance in the Philippines to American imperialism; the Boer resistance to the British; and going back in time, to the partition of Poland in the eighteenth century that sparked off nationalism (Karl 2002). Such alternative geographies of resistance generated their own vocabularies and concepts like that of *swadeshi* – of one’s world – in the early twentieth century in India. Much of this new work has alerted us to the parallel and emergent maps of a ‘colored cosmopolitanism’, of ‘entanglements’ beside the map of empire, and of the world of oceanic movements that laughed to scorn the inscribing of imperial borders and shadow lines in the dust (Manjapra 2014, 2020; Mawani 2018; Slate 2017).

In this volume, there are 20 chapters by scholars, across generations, and from a variety of disciplines: from history, anthropology, and philosophy to literature and political theory. Each chapter is on a word in a particular language, and the chapters cover words in 16 languages from Asia, Africa, the Arab world, and South America. They explore the entailments of a word while suggesting that these have conceptual implications for the humanities and social sciences everywhere. A summary of the implications of these words is offered in this chapter, weaving these through some general considerations on what it may mean to think with a vocabulary from the Global South.

Guanxi/ubuntu Jay Schutte elaborates on the idea of cultural translations in everyday interactions through an engagement with the experience of African students in China, who are at the same time teachers of English as a foreign language. Their very presence in China is the outcome of deeper histories of visions of Third-World solidarity and the military and financial aid provided under Mao to African countries in their wars of liberation. In many senses, it reflects both the detritus of earlier imaginations of geographies of affinity, as well as those presently under construction as China sees a new role for itself on the African continent as an economic and political power. An emerging language of negotiation of power, identity, and intersubjectivity emerges from the presence of these sedimented and proleptic histories, and the key terms are *guanxi* and *ubuntu*. The Mandarin word refers to the cultivation of networks of social relationships and influence, built through affect as much as the vectors of power and wealth. The Nguni Bantu term speaks to the idea of dividuality, that humans become persons within networks of relations and obligations. It is in the translation of these terms into everyday interactions – veering between ‘cosmopolitanism and cultural inscrutability’ – that a kind of commensurability emerges with the always present possibility of misunderstandings as much as creative misrecognitions. Since the working out of *guanxi/ubuntu* happens within relationships rather than in the elaboration of an abstract principle, instrumentality poses a constant friction: the giving of gifts can grade into corruption, friendship can appear as an attempt to forge a relation of patronage. This requires a constant working at affinities

and negotiation of cultural difference and what Schutte terms as ‘intersubjective contingencies’ may be seen as a ‘transnationally portable resource’, to understand a world characterized by movement, migration, and increasingly, people ‘out of place’ (Stonebridge 2018).

Tarbiyya Relations between humans and animals are seen within histories of violence, domestication, and companionate love. These appear to be distinct categories, for after all can one kill that which one loves? Noha Fikry, in her study of the rearing of animals on the rooftops of Cairo, looks at the inherent ambiguity of, and the segueing between these categories. Through a series of layered anecdotes involving the gendered labor of women rearing animals for family consumption, Fikry details the landscape of affective bonds between humans and animals that are deeply bound up with questions of nutrition in countries of the Global South. *Tarbiyya* encompasses a range of meanings from ownership, friendship, and control to improving the essence and ‘thickening’ of an object of nurture. While the trajectory of *tarbiyya* is toward consumption of the animal reared, eating is about an intimate knowledge of what one eats. The maternal care imparted to the animals – hens, rabbits, and goats – involves a balancing of many sentiments, discipline as much as love. It is opposed to industrial farming in which the animals are separated from the human as objects, and in ingesting them, one eats ‘histories of violence’. Fikry stresses the need to engage with the landscapes of affect in the Global South, where the human and animal live in proximity and are implicated in economies of gentleness, passion, and blood shedding. This chapter explores the humanimal relation as it were in the Global South where the end result of eating an animal is implicated in prior histories of care and nurture.

There are clusters of ideas that we can think together when reflecting on words and worlds. The first is of the ineluctable relation between language and life worlds. This is usually overlooked when we engage with the act of theorizing as opposed to description. We could indeed ask of the elite postcolonial theorists from the decolonized world – who present themselves as the resistant underdogs of the academic hierarchies of knowledge production – can they, as subalterns, speak? Or does a theoretical production from Europe speak through them? To go back to Chakrabarty’s idea of the gift of the Enlightenment, one is reminded of Derrida’s reading of the idea of the *pharmakon* as both remedy and poison (Derrida 1981). If life worlds must provide the infrastructure for thinking, raising questions of acquiring, and working with the knowledge of languages other than English, French, etc., as much as situating oneself within existing traditions of intellection in Asia and Africa is important. Overcoming amnesia and developing a sense of thinking from a place is central to the work of theory. We need to move away from merely critiquing the shortcomings, prejudices, and occlusions of a theory that comes from elsewhere and move robustly toward recognizing its possible obsolescence or irrelevance for our concerns. A critique of Kant for his ‘proto-racism’, as the philosopher Bernasconi termed it, was necessary and timely when it was done. In the moment of arrival, we must ask ourselves, does

Kant have anything to contribute at all to the enterprise of theorizing from the Global South? (Park 2013; Vial 2016). *This is not about a retreat into nativism but of choosing our conversations after arriving at a true recognition of what we have to say.*

The second question is that of intelligibility and translation of ideas. We do need to converse across intellectual traditions even as we recover from what Maria Lugones has termed the ‘colonial wound’ (Lugones 2010) and begin to think with Confucianism, or Buddhist philosophy, or African ways of being in the world. This makes the question of language as much as conceptualizing important, while recognizing that the issue is not of producing one-to-one commensurability. We need not swing from asking misplaced questions of whether there are ideas of individualism or secularism in African and Indian languages to the equally ill-conceived venture of assuming that concepts in the languages of the Global South have exact and resonant equivalents in English and European languages. What we need is the beginning of a conversation in a space which has been dominated by a monologue, as much as monolingualism. In Werner Herzog’s film *Where the Green Ants Dream* (1984), set in Australia in a landscape of contest between white settlers and Aboriginal people, there is a scene in which a white judge arbitrates claims for land. Aboriginals and their interpreters present demands based on existing indigenous occupation of territory as well as ancient claims to ancestral dreaming spaces. Decisions are made till a lone Aboriginal appears and speaks eloquently and for long about a claim. The judge asks for an interpreter and on enquiry is told that the man is dumb. Nonplussed, the judge asks what this means since the man is so obviously voluble. He is told that the man is the last speaker of his language so no one understands him; he may as well be ‘dumb’. In the end, the act of theorizing is a speaking to the world and this anecdote serves as a parable of the limits of communication. While untranslatability may be an exigent issue, we must also see it as a conjunctural and temporal one. Given time and engagement, meaning may emerge. Or not.

Three chapters raise the questions of approximation, commensurability, and the anxieties raised by the imperative to translation in intercultural conversation.

Andāj Arjun Appadurai in his study of understandings of measurement in a village in Maharashtra, India, emphasizes the contextual nature of understandings, stressing both local variations and the ubiquity of approximation. The idea of *andāj* (Marathi, Urdu, Hindustani) or estimation is central to an idea of measurement mediated by social and ecological variability as much as context. ‘All measurement is opinion, and all valuation is negotiable’, and as Appadurai expresses it pithily, ‘to be accurate is to be approximate’. This is not to suggest that there is a distinct peasant, or South Asian peasant mentality, in the manner of exploring the primitive mind, but rather that ideas such as measurement are socially and culturally located and are not always context-free universals. In the conduct of agricultural production, management, and considerations of the future within a zone of contingency, governed by nature, and the boundaries between technical, ritual, and everyday activity blur. Meanings are rooted in local, oral contexts and do not draw upon textual prescriptions of precision.

Within a cognitive landscape with its multiple registers of lunar and solar calendars, seasons, agricultural temporalities, and different measures for different crops, the idea of ‘imprecision’ becomes a symptom of the contingency of circumstance. Within this landscape of proliferation and circumstance, even in the resolution of disputes, compromise and negotiation become the standard rather than the mere abstraction of a ‘just’ decision. An idea such as *andāj* works along the fault lines of the relations between people and contexts in exploring a seeming abstraction such as the idea of measurement and is thus more open to the possibilities of a world of motion such as we live in.

Logic Edwin Etieyibo attempts to move away from a Eurocentric universalism and the presumption of prescriptive logic to suggest the relativity of logic in African societies (particularly among the Acholi people of Uganda). Within academic philosophy, logic, reasoning, and rationality segue into each other as concepts and are seen as the benchmarks of modernity as opposed to traditional societies. The presence of these modes of thinking then becomes the basis for distinctions between primitive and civilized mentalities. Etieyibo contests the idea of universal rules of logic – the binaries of true and false – and suggests that in African philosophies and ways of being we must reckon with trivalent or polyvalent logics. Since human beings are seen as belonging to two worlds, relating to visible and invisible beings, the imagination is not governed by binaries such as human/nonhuman, sacred/secular which are indeed being called into question of late within the social sciences. Etieyibo stresses the ‘contextuality, rationality, and relativity of logic’. In contrast to a ‘western’ ontology,

it is not the case that African ontology is idealism or realism; rather, one might say that it is idealism, realism and both. Also, it is not the case that African ontology is spiritualism or materialism; rather, one might say that it is spiritualism, materialism and both.

Here again, the stress is on the possibilities of multiplicities in the reckoning of the world, not governed by the separations introduced by a certain trajectory of post-Enlightenment thinking, that has been unsettled of late, for instance, by the perspectivism of philosophical anthropology (de Castro 2016).

Izithunguthu John Wright and Cynthia Kros consider James Stuart, an official in the Natal Colonial Civil Service and a Zulu linguist, who began to compile an English-Zulu dictionary in South Africa. Between 1897 and 1900 he engaged in discussion with over 50 individuals about ideas of self, community, history, and politics to arrive at equivalences between English and Zulu words. Word had got around of the enterprise and an elderly man, Gcabashe, associated with Zulu royalty, decided to take the newly introduced train service to the city to meet with Stuart. Given the immediate circumstance of a rebellion, and tensions in the area, Stuart had his own agenda in what became less a conversation, and more an enquiry of Gcabashe. At some point, Gcabashe tells Stuart, ‘You can write and remember; for our part, we are merely *izithunguthu*’. As John Wright and Cynthia

Kros point out in their chapter, this one word encompasses many meanings, ranging from Gcabashe's sense of personal discomfiture to a more general sense of the disequilibrium in the conversation. That Stuart is asking questions that are not those of Gcabashe's and that the latter has no answers to give that accord with the paradigm of Stuart's enquiries is also encompassed by the word. The word gestures toward the incommensurability inherent in the colonial encounter. If colonialism is a process of establishing equivalences and absorbing histories and cultures into a singular and hierarchical narrative, *izithunguthu* represents the recalcitrance of the particular that exceeds the enterprise of empire. It is what surfaces as the unease that never goes away and creates a politics of incommensurability. Truly a word that creates an archipelago of similar experience through the colonized world, the encounter between power and the principled obduracy of the colonized.

A third and related question is one of time. What is lost when one reflects with the social theory of modernity, and its abbreviated sense of time, that creates a timeline from the Enlightenment in Europe? The idea of time here is a judgment on societies that are present at the same time as Euro-America but inhabit their own temporality, rather than the putative common time of the modern (Fabian 1983). How far back then, does one have to go to write a history of the present? This is not merely an empirical question of deciding whether one wants to work with hundred-year stretches of time or go back a few hundred, perhaps thousand years, to establish the *longue durèe* of processes. One of the consequences of periodization (ancient, medieval, modern) is the establishment of a caesura between these periods at the same time as assuming a continuity within (Davis 2017). There is a further complication arising in colonized spaces that the time of the modern, which also is the time of the colonial, is seen as distinct and separate from the earlier periods which are not just temporal segments but also involve judgments of lack i.e. the lack of political stability, rationality, or traditions of thinking equality. While Confucius or the Buddha may have been sages, they are not seen as thinkers or philosophers in a modern sense, since 'philosophy' is seen as invoking a set of questions that trace their genealogy to Greece (van Norden 2017; Adamson 2016–20). As Derrida has observed,

philosophy has never been the unfolding responsible for a unique, originary assignation linked to a unique language or to the place of a sole people. Philosophy does not have one sole memory. Under its Greek name and in its European memory, it has always been bastard, hybrid, grafted, multilinear and polyglot. We must adjust our practice of the history of philosophy, our practice of history and of philosophy, to this reality which was also a chance, and which more than ever remains a chance

(Derrida 1994).

Derrida raises the significant questions of special origin that is always already corrupted by miscegenation and what he calls chance, or mere contingency.

From the Global South, we might perhaps prefer to term contingency as conquest and conscious erasure.

This introduces another set of problems. A page of contemporary Western philosophy may have references to Plato as much as Augustine, Spinoza, and Levinas, from different spaces and times. The invented genealogy with Greece (Bernal 1987, 2001) and years of commentary as much as political and intellectual consolidation in Western Europe (inflected by empire and the demand for a 'European canon') has made Plato a contemporary of Foucault, so to speak. On the other hand, in Indian philosophy, the idea of the hermetic spaces of 'ancient' and 'medieval' India has entailed that those who work on 'modern' India do not look back to engage with reflections on aesthetics, political economy, or jurisprudence. The colonial caesura has meant that to work with the abbreviated time of the modern, there is a resort to theorizing from Europe. Those who work on 'ancient' India are misperceived as Indologists, whose work is of little relevance for theorizing the present. The iniquitous imperial shadow of the division into Hindu, Muslim, and British (not Christian!) periods is reflected, for example, in seeing the texts and thinkers of the 'medieval' period as unavailable for thinking the modern. This reflects an inability to think with connected histories and the circulation of ideas. Moreover, it freezes the idea of provenance thus generating an inability to think about miscegenated genealogies. There is a general suspicion about the availability of ideas of freedom, equality, and emancipation within Asian and African traditions of thinking; resulting from centuries of condescending imperial rhetoric on the rescue of the native from the sleep of reason (Mahbubani 2009; Dabashi 2015). Just as the thought of Aristotle and Plato has had to be recuperated from their uncritical location in a slave society; or Kant from his anti-blackness and misogyny; (Eze 1997; Bernasconi and Cook 2003) there is much theoretical work to be done in recovering political philosophy and thinking about freedom from Asian, African, and South American traditions of thought.

Four chapters take up the questions of freedom, nation, history, and politics; concept words that are seen as signs of a unique Western tradition of conceiving the individual, collectivities, and the record of collective action over time. These constitute ways of thinking the political, but also raise questions on what, indeed, is the political. Prathama Banerjee raises the problem of 'what is it that becomes political and in modern times assumes a kind of constitutive priority' (Banerjee 2020), thus historicizing the very idea of the political. To this, we may add the further complication of the constitution of the political in different spaces each with their own particularities.

Eddembe Edgar Taylor's chapter takes up the idea of freedom in the decolonizing world and its appropriation and renditions by the populace as against the definitions offered by the colonial state as much as liberation movements in waiting. In the context of 'patriotism and a protean public', meanings proliferate and the anchoring of the idea of freedom in the nation-state gets unmoored. Even as an idea of freedom rooted in a particular trajectory of the emergence of

ideas of the individual and nation circulates between Europe, Africa, and Asia, and within the emergent public spheres of Africa and Asia, words acquire layers of meaning in a field of indigenous ways of thinking the self. As the Luganda word *eddembe* becomes the rallying cry for freedom, as *uhuru* does in Kiswahili, it accretes to itself ideas such as *wiathi* – self-mastery, and *ekitiibwa* – honor, which are at one level ways of reconstituting self after the wound of colonialism. To this implication of freedom from a prior bonded self, is added a breaking away from traditional authority, in which the idea of reciprocity and community had been the way of containing the aspirations of individuals. For some freedom may have meant the overthrow of colonialism, for others it was the overthrow of traditional authorities, and yet others saw real freedom as a return to customary forms of rule as against bourgeois politicians. There is a strong understanding of the coercive elements and exclusions of freedom, and *eddembe* addresses the tension between power and consent. It is a word that does not imagine freedom as a breaking away from the bonds of mutuality and has a nuanced appreciation of power amidst the presence of necessary hierarchies. Taylor provides a nuanced social and historical approach that militates against a Hegelian idea of the diffusion of an idea of freedom from the West to spaces that lacked the concept.

Minzu Saul Thomas asks the question of whether the idea of the nation arises from an indigenous context or whether it is situated in emergent and ever-changing conceptual frameworks. The word enters Mandarin through a late nineteenth-century borrowing of the Japanese neologism for nation/*volk* and acquires meanings within two distinct domains: the idea of *minzuxing* or national character, and *minzu jiefang* or national liberation. The first carries connotations of blood and common ancestry, as much as a sense of hierarchy, with darker-skinned nations at the bottom. This, as Thomas argues, was not surprising since the emergence of the idea of *minzu* was consequent on and coeval with European imperialism. The European idea of nation was both hierarchical and racist (in the sense that Europe was presented as already having the idea of the nation; other parts of the world, less civilized, had yet to acquire the idea). As he puts it, ‘this baggage was the inheritance of modernity and the embracing of it’. The idea of *minzu jiefang* emerges under Mao and imagined an affinity with the darker-skinned nations of the world, a truly decolonizing notion. The idea of *minzuxing* – a looking inwards – was submerged in Maoist China. Instead, there was an emphasis on a comity of nations that had an affinity because they faced the common predicament of imperialist domination. Post-Mao, with the reappraisal of China’s relation to the West, there is a resurfacing of racism and a loss of the idea of a geography of emancipation that was associated with *minzu jiefang*. Moreover, China acquires a new role in the world as we have seen earlier in Schutte’s chapter on the transformation of the idea of Third-World solidarity with the burgeoning interest of the Chinese state and capital in the continent of Africa. As Thomas points out, the Maoist idea of *minzi jiefang* represented an emergent concept from the Global South which saw the idea of nation as a relational one with an implicit idea of a common emancipatory project.

Kavi Some nations have a history, in others, there is the sleep of reason and therefore no awakening to historical consciousness. Hegel's philosophy of history has thrown a long shadow over the spaces of Asia and Africa, and even indigenous scholarship has labored under the sign of absence; history being another item in the long reckoning of lack. Shonaleeka Kaul explores the Sanskrit idea of *kavya* and the intimate relation between the poet (*kavi*) and the historian. The capacity of the poet for deep vision and description means that when one separates poetry from history questions of intuition and symbolism get lost. Objectivity, that obscure object of desire, and the product of the nineteenth-century romance with the state, engendered a distrust of what James Mill saw as the 'ungoverned imaginings' of the South Asian muddle of history and poetry. Kaul attempts to bring together language, emotion, and narration – the poet and the historian – and shows the inseparability of the didactic from the aesthetic in the writing of history in India in the ancient and early medieval period. History was an ethicized commentary that evaluated kingship and governance according to moral principles: good conduct, righteousness, and generating order from chaos. Monarchy, like all political forms, was seen as a contingent form, 'a fickle institution' subject to the whims of fate as much as the character of kings. Since the idea of history was about serving purposes and values, it had to stand above, or besides, the transience of humans and their institutions. Kaul argues that 'Sanskrit poetry's preference is not for linearity or synchronicity alone but for a recursivity and synchronicity of a fashion alongside', and a 'purposive cultivated transhistoricity' was cultivated. Here again, we see that to render the historical imagination of the Global South in terms of that of Western notions of linear historicity leads to an impoverished understanding of the nature of both times as much as history.

Raj In a continuity with Kaul, William Pinch tries to explore the idea that under colonialism, Indian intellectuals turned to literature rather than theory to understand modernity. The idea of *raj* in Sanskrit is related to sovereignty – of self, intellection, as much as territory. It collapses the inner-outer distinction by relating asceticism, or forms of self-control, to secular power, or the control over others. This chapter thinks through an unusual range of thinkers from eighteenth-century historical poetry on warrior ascetics and Bankimchandra Chatterjee the nineteenth-century litterateur, through to Kipling and Gandhi. In each of these the relation between self-cultivation, knowledge, detachment, and action is seen as undergirding the project of sovereignty as opposed to the mere devotion to power among the European colonizers. Whether in the dyadic relation in Kipling's novel between Kim and the lama, the historical novels of Bankimchandra exploring the eruption of an ascetic insurgency, or Gandhi's relation between *satyagraha* (truth force) and *swaraj* (self-rule) the fundamental question is of the conceptualization of sovereignty in a dispersed terrain where the boundaries of the interior and exterior are miscible. In the story of Anupgiri *gosain*, the warrior ascetic, his religious practice, and martial prowess are not seen as incompatible or at odds. It represents the attempt to harmonize different

modes of existence and create a balance between the detached, the action-oriented, and inertia. The property of *raj* disposes one to restless and destabilizing action, and by itself, it compromises the quest to sovereignty. This chapter looks at the idea of the political through the idea of self-mastery as much as the mastery of the world and brings into a creative relation the tension between the binary of the inner and the outer.

How to Think with Words

How are we to think about generating concepts from the Global South? In one sense, this question is redundant since those studying Indian or African philosophy, or indeed forms of anthropology interested in the question of how ‘natives’ think, have always engaged with words and their entailments. The problem then would be merely one of transcending disciplines and bringing the work already done to bear on reflections on social theory from our parts of the world. This is a pragmatic answer and addresses the silos within which our academic work is done. There may be a more fundamental problem arising from the politics of academic publishing in the sense that establishing commensurability involves using already established disciplinary jargon. So, Ibn Khaldun’s idea of *asabiyya* may translate well in political theory or sociology journals on West Asia but to bring it into the realm of historical writing on spaces in Europe, South Asia, or Africa, it requires glossing. Or the use of *rasa* theory from South Asia (Pollock 2018), if extended beyond the aesthetic realm or into another geographical space it demands explanation in a way that the use of words like *jouissance*, *différance*, or *oikumene* do not. There is assumed to be a hard particularity, quiddity even, associated with words from the Global South. They do not seem to travel well, just as academics from these spaces at times encounter checks at borders and are often denied entry into Euromerican spaces.

Asabiyya Magid Shihade considers the concept of group solidarity, central to the thinking of the fourteenth-century Arab thinker known as ibn Khaldun, in the light of the devastation in the Arab world because of neoliberalism as much as the rise of Islamism. Arguably, these are resolutely modern phenomena which represent the impoverishment of an idea of the political – trapped in the either/or of market or religion – which urgently necessitates the need for another vision. Shihade asks the poignant question, which has been raised earlier in this introduction, of ‘why the knowledge of the global south is not available to the elites of the global south’ to think with. Texts such as that of ibn Khaldun are seen as belonging to an ancient past or to the space of the theological, therefore not relevant for modern times. This dilemma must be thought through within the conjuncture of the end of the decolonizing ideal (and the occlusion of the poignant question ‘is Palestine post-colonial as yet?’) and the demise of a larger politics of solidarity. Shihade considers the framing of the transition of early societies in ibn Khaldun who suggests that rather than the idea of moving from the state of nature to social contract, there are instead the logics that emerge from the move

from smaller groups to larger groups. What secures group solidarity is the secular spirit of guaranteeing a life of dignity, thought, and labor (the security of a fair wage so that people produce for the economy and do not migrate). The other entailments are the discouragement of monopolies, the light hand of the state, and the provision of education for all. Thinking afresh with the idea of *asabiyya* becomes part of the project of creating a political vocabulary of ‘political being in the global South’. This chapter too revisits the ideas of Third World solidarity and the spirit of Bandung as fragments of hope amidst the ruin of our times.

Dādan One of the imagined trajectories of the world is toward capitalism and the Global South has been seen as the space in waiting (not yet capitalist) or the space that is merely the stage (acted upon by capitalism). One of the ways in which the Persian word *dādan* (advance and a promise to deliver) has been understood is through equating it with the putting-out system that preceded the emergence of industrial capitalism in Europe. Kaveh Yazdani surveys the standard tropes of the transition story of merchant capital penetration in rural areas, the emergence of factories and the supersession of weavers, and the growing disjunction between urban and rural. The narrative that he contests is that of the consigning of whole spaces of endeavor of small producers to the teleological narrative of proto-industrialization, industrialization having been achieved only in Europe. He traces a continuity of advance money payments for production in South Asia in which *dādani* produced control over the producer but to a lesser degree than in Europe. Merchant control over production in many cases did not lead to the transformation of production, again in contrast to Europe (India produced more commodities than Europe until the early 19th c.). Yazdani rethinks the conventional narratives of mercantile capital and commercial capitalism within the space of South Asia and its connections with the other great landed empires of the Ottoman and Safavids. Words and forms circulated through this vibrant economic space.

In their book *Words in Motion*, Anna Tsing and Carol Gluck conceptualize a ‘global lexicon’ of words that travel, acquiring layers of meaning as it does so (Gluck and Tsing 2009). As they put it, ‘We have chosen words that do work in the world, whether organizing, mobilizing, inspiring, excluding, suppressing, or covering up ... [we] track these words as they cross cultural borders and become embedded in social and political practices...’ (Gluck and Tsing, 20). The chapters consider words like ‘*seguranza*/security’, ‘*komisyon*/commission’, ‘*aqalliyya*/minority’, ‘*saburaimu*/sublime’, and so on. It is a social, political, and ethnographic treatment that tends to follow the grain of academic politics. These are words with a history of theoretical exposition and practical governmentality from Europe that then come to be translated into thought and practice in the Global South. The direction of travel is predictable as it follows the trajectory of modernity eastwards into formerly colonized spaces that then engage in the task of what Pascale Casanova termed ‘intranslation’. In her work on the dissemination of the novel within the ‘world republic of letters’, Casanova argues that initial engagements with the form of the novel involved translating European novels into indigenous languages allowing for the artifact to be domesticated as it were within an

indigenous imaginary (Casanova 2007; Menon 2011). The direction is unilinear and the domestication of Western modernity and its concepts the desired outcome. There appears to be little ‘friction’ to use Tsing’s own conceptualization in the movement of Western concepts rooted in a particular history into another domain (Tsing 2005). It is the story of a romance; two concepts come together, overcome all obstacles, and meld together.

Travel, whether of migrant bodies or of theory, is governed by protocols of movement and their restriction. In the case of the popular uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa of 2011, they were swiftly named the Arab Spring, absorbing them into a European history and vocabulary of political dissent: the 1848 revolutions and the ‘springtime of the peoples’. The concept of *asabiyya* was too located in a dense history as also a contemporary perception of Islam as the space of unfreedom for it to travel well (Lacroix and Filiu 2018; Shihade 2020). The assiduous commentary that has allowed the fictive and continuous genealogy between ancient Greece and Europe has also rested on an occlusion of the Arab bridge. What allowed for the Renaissance in Europe and the turn to the ancient world was the remembering of figures like Ibn Rushd and Ibn Sina (Europeanized subsequently as Averroes and Avicenna) and their engagement with Greece in the age of classical Islam (Goody 2004). So, the question we must ask is what allowed the travel of European knowledge? There is the obvious answer of colonialism and power which allowed for the projection of European nativism as a universal. This becomes evident in the words that remain untranslated in the engagement with social theory around the world: *praxis*, *polis*, the Hegelian idea of *aufheben*; or the Lacanian idea of the *Imaginary*. If one were to think of words from the Global South that have acquired this status of untranslatedness/universality, it would be words like *fatwa*, *jihad*, *karma*, *dharma*, *yin*, *yang*, *ubuntu*, and so on. For instance, in Colin McCabe’s updating of Williams’s *Keywords*, *karma* finds mention as the only non-European word in the book! (McCabe 2018). These words become metonyms for the civilizations that they come from, seemingly encapsulating only the essence of their ways of being and thought. Other ideas do not travel well; they remain mired within their localism.

Marumakkattāyam Mahmood Kooria reflects on social formations that travel and words that do not in his chapter on matrilineal forms of kinship in South and South East Asia. *Marumakkattāyam* is a Malayalam word that connotes the idea of inheritance through the female children of an original female ancestor, but the word itself encompasses a range of meanings, indeed confusions. The word *marumakkal* may connote nieces and nephews as much as sons and daughters in law and the suffix *tāyam* means a line of descent. The geography of matrilineal forms extends across the Indian Ocean and is found among both Hindus and Muslims in South and South East Asia as well as in eastern and western coasts of Africa. Apart from the diversity of terminology, there is also the symbolic role that matriliney plays in anthropology as reflecting an earlier form prior to the emergence of patriliney/patriarchy. Engels’s characterization of the end of matriliney as reflecting the world historical defeat of the female sex is picked up by the

feminist movements of the late twentieth century, further adding to misperceptions of form and content. Ideas of historical transition, nostalgia, and a politics of emancipation come together around an extremely protean form and a cluster of meanings that are untranslatable across regions. Kooria looks at the rendering of meanings of the word within Malayalam dictionaries of the nineteenth century when colonial law was trying to come to terms with what it saw as an aberrant form. There is little clarity to be found amidst the profusion of contradictory meanings on offer. It is almost as if the need for consistency was overridden by a belief that this form of kinship too would pass. However, the form has remained resilient in South East Asia and this allows us to think about the phenomenon of forms that travel and words that do not.

A *locus classicus* for thinking with concepts is Raymond Williams's *Keywords*. It is presented neither as a dictionary (implying a completeness within a language) nor as a glossary (implying completeness within a specified field) but as an 'inquiry into a vocabulary' (Williams 1985). There is a suggestion of arbitrariness that is intellectually appealing; an insight into a personal choice of words that are a point of entry into a changing landscape. They are 'elements of problems' a phrase that implies connections and entanglements between words as they are deployed and extrapolated in different contexts and times. Fundamental to such an enterprise is the faith that certain words are not transparent and need working and worrying with; one must chart their itineraries within a landscape to comprehend them less as indicative of one meaning but rather as embodying potentialities. Questions must be asked of words, other than establishing a correspondence and equivalence with another word yielding merely a deceptive clarity. Williams says, 'in any major language, and especially in periods of change, a necessary confidence and concern for clarity can quickly become brittle, if the questions involved are not faced' (Williams 1985, xxviii). An enquiry into words demands both an economy of delineation as well as an openness to a proliferation of meanings. To step back from the timidity of a desire for precision would allow for an understanding that 'the variations and confusions of meaning are not just faults in a system, or errors of feedback, or deficiencies of education...they embody different experiences and readings of experience' (Williams 1985 xxxv). Williams opens the possibility of exploring words relationally as well as thinking about the problem of individual enunciations that are connected to experience. This is the work that needs to be done with the languages that we work with: of building words into concepts and establishing landscapes of meanings and connections. There is arguably a hermeticism in Williams's enterprise; that of a limited landscape of the space of the island and a forgetfulness of empire, that must be surmounted and critiqued.

Two chapters deal with the issue of travel and words of travel in largely stay-at-home societies. The experience of travel arises out of situations of exigency, economic opportunity, or political repression and leaves the traces of this movement to places elsewhere and occasional return. A third chapter looks at the travel of an idea within the space of a historical geography created by power, the

experience of colonialism, and slavery across the Atlantic Ocean that connects Africa and the Americas.

Rantau Saarah Jappie's chapter explores the meanings of the Indonesian *bahasa* word rantau, meaning to wander. The language is embedded with the idea of migration and has borrowings from other languages like Sanskrit and Dutch, pointing to longue durée histories of movement across 'a watery landscape'. The shoreline is both a noun and a process in this archipelagic geography; for an adult male, 'to shoreline' – to cross the horizon – is to grow. Jappie looks at groups like the Minangkabau of Western Sumatra and the Bugi-Makassar speakers whose lives are made in maritime movement as a rite of passage and whose experiences are sedimented in the language. The figure of the perantau, the person who has lived and learned elsewhere, reflects histories of movement and return, as also itineracy. Itineracy and tales of travel create for those who stay at home an 'imagined geography' and rantau creates a space of 'imagined familiarity' across the ocean, as for instance in the connection between Southern Sulawesi and Cape Town. The story of the sufi saint Shaikh Yusuf connects these two points in the ocean and generates a map of Islamic cosmopolitanism that creates its own spacetime. Between the shorter histories of empires and nations is this 'third space' that in many senses creates a para-time, a time that sits beside other times which also becomes the crucible of a vocabulary of restless travel.

Musafir Mahvish Ahmad thinks with a concept arising from exigent circumstances, where the idea of mobility is related to the very idea of life itself. The word musafir is found in Arabic, Swahili, Kurdish, Hindi, Urdu, and Balochi; the last named the language of Balochistan where the chapter is set. The presence of the word in so many languages also reflects a history of state formation, mercantile activity, labor migration, and political exile across a wide region. The ethnography is set in the immediate and ongoing context of the ongoing political conflict between Balochi young men and a repressive Pakistani state, a continuation of a longer attempt by states to control this region from the late nineteenth century onwards. The musafir or traveler becomes the metaphor of the region, rendering themselves illegible to the state through incessant movement through Iran, Afghanistan, and India, as also ideologically suffused landscapes like that of the USSR in earlier times. One travels not only for one's own safety, or carrying the message of dissension; one travels for others, so that they may be free. This movement – darbadar – from door to door, without a home – khanabadosh, happens within the space of the Global South; it is not a search for financial mobility or worldly possessions. It is horizontal travel within the space of dar ul Islam, the space of a righteous Islam; vertical travel toward enlightenment and dissolution of self, or *fana*; and travel inwards toward spiritual growth. The root of musafir from the word safar meaning travel has also the Quranic connotation of bringing light or unveiling; the musafirs as they travel expose themselves to revelation as much as they reveal the hidden workings of a transient secular power. As Ahmed points out, the word musafir, 'is already a concept', accreting meanings as it moves.

Feitiço/umbanda Iracema Dulley in her chapter studies a word that carries within itself a history of movement of people and ideas, as also the rendering of the world within a civilizational hierarchy during the age of colonialism. The word fetish (simply put, an object seen as having magical powers), which has a rich and varied life within Marxism and psychoanalysis is derived from the creole word *fetisso*, which in turn is derived from the Portuguese *feitiço* (from the Latin fictitious or false) and relates to the world of spells, charms, and incantations. The circulation of the word within the Lusophone Atlantic is related to the phenomenon of Portuguese colonialism in Africa and the creation of a linguistic and cultural space from Brazil to Angola. This is, as Dulley argues, ‘a space of commensuration and of creating alterity’, and the word surfaces as *feitiço* in Umbanda the Afro-Brazilian religion that is a mix of Catholicism, animism, spiritism, and indigenous American beliefs. This chain of dissemination across a wide spatial and temporal swathe and the ‘translational displacements’ resists the becoming fixed of meaning that is itself the fetish of language. Colonial Portuguese dictionaries and contemporary dictionaries of the Umbundu language in Angola refer back to each other in a recursive way, resisting the fetish of ‘the promise of equivalence’ and locating meaning in the space of undecidability. Dulley explores subtly the relation between the idea of translation and the fetish of commensurable meanings putting dissemination and ‘contagion’ at the heart of the permanent generation of meanings within movement.

The move from word to concept that we have yet to initiate comes with an attendant set of questions. Not all words are inherently open to conceptual exposition and if they are, they may relate to contexts of experience. Thus, one cannot move blithely from an Upanisadic, Buddhist, or Yoruba world of thinking to a universal one without doing violence to the potentialities of the word and its limits. We must engage with the idea of the untranslatable, that some words acquire conceptual entailments not only through the task of exposition, but perhaps only within distinct worlds. There might be something ineffable in cultural and historical terms about words from certain traditions that do not allow for an easy carrying over or *translatio*. Even as we think with the idea of conversation across traditions, this must be borne in mind. As Johannes Bronkhorst wrote recently, introducing the idea of *śabda* and reflecting on the relation between language and reality in classical Indian philosophy,

The most serious mistake a modern reader can make is to assume that Indian philosophers were just like modern philosophers, the main difference being that they lived many centuries ago, in India, and expressed themselves in different languages, mainly Sanskrit. This would be overlooking the fact that most human activities, including philosophizing, are profoundly embedded in the beliefs, presuppositions, and expectations that characterize the culture and period in which they take place

(Bronkhorst 2019, 3–7).

Two chapters consider this very problem of cultural embeddedness, words that do not travel, as they were. What are the larger conceptual implications for words rooted in specific contexts; do they still allow for their use as analogy, metaphor, or comparison?

Nongqayi Hlonipha Mokoena considers the phenomenon of the oddity of a black policeman within a racialized society where the black body is the subject of policing itself. Is the black policeman an anomaly, a race traitor, or just an aspiring body? Are they to be characterized as ‘ragtag, inauthentic’ as can be seen in one modern translation of the Zulu word *nongqayi* as ‘tinpot cops’? Words don’t, as Bakhtin observed, come to us out of dictionaries, they come from the mouths and minds of speakers from where we appropriate them. So, whether we approach this word through the missionary mediation of language, or the colonial official’s engagement with Zulu, or more contemporary renditions by historians (tinged by a Manichaean view of an apartheid past), words are not necessarily transparent. We see the word, as if through a glass darkly, within perceptions of the language itself. Dictionaries that place Zulu in a global world with the promise of transparency and equivalence, as also accounts that see the distinctive ‘eternal innovative possibilities’ of Zulu by virtue of it being an onomatopoeic language, each engage with contrasting paradigms of viewing ineffability and the surmounting of it. The simple question of the difficulty of rendering a word becomes the more complex one of its meanings across historical time, both in itself, as much as in the minds of those who translate it. Between language, dialect, dictionaries, and ideologies the landscape of meaning is vast. Thus, from a simple question – how does one translate the word that means black policeman? – we are led into the realms of particularity as much as ambiguity. We are left with the irony that the word *nongqayi* was the word chosen by white policemen when they started an in-house magazine in 1907. Within a contested etymology it encompassed a range of meanings from the more general ‘the moon watcher’, to the specific ‘night watchman’, to the more fanciful reading in the magazine as an enforcer of laws under King Shaka Zulu.

Naam Amy Niang unpacks the rootedness and the history of this word in Mooré, and its valence in the precolonial Voltaic region (Burkina Fasso, Ghana, Niger, and Mali) between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. *Naam* relates to a principle of authority as also customs and heritage and was central to the process of state making in the region. In many senses the meaning of *naam* was tautological, in that it meant, ‘that which allows someone to lead’. It arose within the history of migrations of people and the resulting distinction between powerful strangers and autochthons, with the need to create a balance of power as also a hegemonic ideology of rule. If *naam* was about state making and the rulers possessed it (leading to attempts to freeze the principles that underlay its possession and/or acquisition), opposed to it was *tenga*, ‘the religious domain’ of the first settlers. While *naam* was a political project of ‘totalization’, it could never aspire beyond mere authority, because *tenga* was related to a transcendental idea of cosmic balance. Moreover, *naam* was less

about an intrinsic Weberian charisma, a capacity as it were, and more about the dynamics of influencing outcomes. While Niang posits naam as belonging to a self-referential world – the tautology of naam being that which those with naam have – there are filiations here to ideas of the compromised nature of power and its necessary subordination to a cosmic moral principle. There is an opacity here that does not allow us to quickly segue into notions of dharma or the principles of a world before disenchantment. At the same time, the resonances of the perennial conflict between secular power and a transcendental ideology allow us to think with cultural embeddedness and ineffability in more supple ways.

There could be two ways of thinking about this problem. The first is the insistence of Edouard Glissant on what he calls the ‘right to opacity’, a refusal of the reduction of difference to mere transparency. As he asserts, his stance does not premise itself on obscurity or inhospitality. It is not about generating impenetrability but rather, insisting on ‘irreducible singularity’ (Glissant 1997, 190). Resisting an easy commensurability is an act of responsibility, that recognizes the possible opacity of the other in a twin gesture. Another way of conceiving the question of untranslatability is, as Barbara Cassin suggests, of apprehending it as not one of addressing the generation of meaning alone. It is also a question of temporality; that a word or concept is untranslatable for the moment and may in the future travel better. It points not only to questions of inadequacies of interpretation, or an inherent quiddity, but to potentialities: that time generates new contexts and conjunctures of receptivity (Cassin 2014; Apter 2013). Moreover, there is the question of interminability: that the work of translation is never really done or finished. This question is central to Koselleck’s method of seeing words in time, not only as prisoners of their temporal location, but that ‘new time’ creates concepts that arise to meet the challenge of history (Koselleck 2002). The birth of a new world generates the birth of new words to conceptually frame newness. Language remains fundamentally open and ambiguous rather than merely being the residue of all human experiences till then. Given the moment of arrival that we inhabit, and the search for a new conceptual vocabulary, we stand at the cusp of new historical redefinitions. Koselleck puts it thus:

A word can be unambiguous in use...The concept, on the other hand, must retain multiple meanings to be a concept. *The concept is tied to a word, but it is at the same time more than the word.* According to our method, a word becomes a concept, when the full richness of a social and political context of meaning, in which, and for which, a word is used is taken up by the word. Concepts are thus concentrations of multiple meanings [emphasis added]

(quoted in Olsen 2014, 172).

It is in the conversations between words, the insurrection of anecdotes, that a conceptual universe emerges.

When we speak about developing words into concepts and the work involved in doing so, there is always the drag of tradition. Intellection happens within a field of questions about provenance, genealogy, and exposition as much as hermetic ideas of African, Indian, or Chinese philosophy. There are certain protocols of thinking and regimes of concepts within which one deliberates, as we have seen with the work of Williams (an English glossary) or Koselleck (a European conceptual universe). Glissant brings to such ideas a bracing rejection of tradition in the name of a moment of thoughtful pause, of an extended, but not permanent impenetrability. Conceiving of thinking from the Global South (an imagined unity generated by political affinity) we are only too conscious of a layered and differentiated as much as a polyglot landscape of ideas and reflection (Menon 2018). Once one posits a plurality of traditions, there arises a plurality of ways of thinking and a more disparate set of objects. This can be alarming, in that we may be opening to the anarchy of diversity, and we become querulous of the object of our enquiry. However, if we imagine the departure we are making as the beginning of a set of conversations across traditions (which are themselves internally differentiated), then a more provisional approach becomes possible.

We can begin to think with the power of anecdotes in conversation as much as pedagogy through the introduction of analogy, disjuncture, and exemplarity. And above all to introduce the idea of a provisional thought rather than one informed by certitude. Walter Benjamin reflects on the idea of the anecdote thus:

Uprising of the anecdotes...The constructions of history are comparable to instructions that commandeer the true life and confine it to barracks. On the other hand: the street insurgence of the anecdote. The anecdote brings things near to us spatially, lets them enter our life. It represents the strict antithesis to the sort of history which demands 'empathy' which makes everything abstract. '*Empathy*': this is what newspaper reading terminates in. The true method of making things present is: to represent them in our space (not to represent ourselves in their space). Only anecdotes can do this for us'

(Benjamin 2002, 846).

Such an engagement works with the conversational mode and the 'insurgency' of the example offered in an anecdote. The anecdote is situated within a conversation but points beyond it to a field of possible connections and is based on indirection: a pointing to as much as a pointing away from. While anecdotes appear to be merely elements of a conversation, they gesture toward histories, practices, persons that are condensed in a story. Amlan Dasgupta in his study of musical practices and musical pedagogy within North Indian *gharanas* or lineage – schools of music – points to the centrality of anecdotes to instruction in musical evocations as much as carrying forward the distinctiveness of the style of a *gharana* (Dasgupta 2005, 2012).

If we think about the anecdote less through Schlegel's wonderful metaphor of the perfection and self-containment of the hedgehog, and more as rooted in conversation, reiteration, and contexts, we can see that words and concepts can be unmoored from the putative languages and worlds of meaning to which they 'belong'. They become part of conversations as people move across the globe, as states govern, and dictionaries and glossaries are compiled. The connectedness of territories and histories is both established and nurtured through these dialogic encounters. We encounter languages and therefore words and their subsequent transformation into anecdotes that are exchanged making for a porosity of the idea of language itself. Unmoored from the idea of nation and national and ethnic identities, we can imagine the travel of these words as they make connections – rantau and musafir; ubuntu and guanxi – resisting the fetish of monolingualism and of translation.

The idea of anecdotes that link different times and spaces and exceed the time present in a narration, can be thought through with Edouard Glissant's idea of archipelagic thinking. Non-contiguous and scattered islands are brought together through acts of imagination of affinity and thought itself is required to be flexible and limber to make the connections. As he puts it 'errant thought silently emerges from the destructuring of compact national entities...at the same time, from difficult, uncertain paths of identity that call to us' (Glissant 1997, 19). To exceed the idea of bounded space and internal connections to move to the idea of space as constructed and imagined by imagined connections, allows us to see anecdotes, fragments, and islands can be held together through the work of imagination, creating other narratives. The Caribbean itself becomes a narrative constructed of islands/anecdotes brought together through the ingenuity of imagining relation: 'the Caribbean is...a sea that explodes the scattered land into an arc. A sea that diffracts...the reality of archipelagos...a natural illustration of the thought of Relation' (Glissant 1997, 34).

Pajubā Caio Simões de Araújo's chapter looks at words emerging in conversations, secret and public, circulating through the Black Atlantic and bringing in African linguistic forms into a racialized Brazilian society. An exemplification of errant thought that explodes borders, to invoke Glissant. The word *pajubā* is of indeterminate linguistic origin, by itself referring to linguistic experimentation, and is believed to have Yoruba origins (derived from the word for secret or mystery). This etymology cannot be established with any certainty and Caio engages with the social history of the circulation of the word and its multiple locations in queer sociability, in Candomblé religion and gay spirituality, in street speak as an 'anti-language' of opposition, and through circulation in the media, making an appearance as a word to be parsed in the national high school examinations! The chapter explores the movement of the word in the world of dissident male masculinities, and the relation of marginal groups and argots within the larger queer space of the Global South. It contests the centering of Euro-American narratives as much as the representation of the Global South within the trope of homophobia alone. *Pajuba* also relates to

the group of travesti and the diverse performance of gender identities, positing queerness in the Global South as a living archive that generates a profusion of words, connections, and performativities.

Ardhanariswara David Szanton and Shalinee Kumari take up visual art in eastern India, the genre styled as Mithila painting, within which the idea of Ardhanariswara (the god who is half female) resists gender binaries. The fourteenth-century art form is customarily traced back to the legend of Ram and Sita's marriage in the Hindu epic Ramayana and used to be traditionally painted on the walls of the room in which the newly married couple lay. A drought in the region in the 1960s and the intervention of the government commoditizes this form which makes its way from the inner sanctum of homes to paper and begins to circulate as 'folk art'. Over the years and with the inflections of the caste of the painters, and the change of generations there are constant changes in iconography. As the paintings move out from the hermetic space of the village home the themes of the world begin to enter it as anecdotes that sit beside the religious iconography. Shalinee Kumari, who is herself an artist and an art historian, brings in the concerns of her generation regarding gender equality. The ardhnanariswara figure who represents the 'complementarity and interdependence of difference' becomes the ideal for the married couple, freeing them from the gendered performances imposed by patriarchy. In her paintings, Shalinee also shows how both men and women are affected by larger forces like capitalism, represented as the poison that the god Shiva must swallow to save the world. This dialogue between the religious and the secular, between the gendered expectations of different generations, and with the emergent ideologies of feminism and the environment make Mithila painting a living archive. No longer trapped in the trope of 'folk art', Shalinee's paintings deploy conventional iconography for unconventional ends and initiate a dialogue with the changing present.

Conclusion

Doing theory from the Global South stems from the exigent demand for decolonizing knowledge and developing a conceptual vocabulary from traditions of located intellection. We cannot go on as we are doing, Southern fact, Northern theory, as it were. The issue is not so much of producing concepts commensurable with those generated by Euromerican epistemology like the ideas of the sublime, or of reason, logic, etc. which we can see for example in the works of African thinkers within the tradition of analytical philosophy (Ikuenobe 2004). Questions like is there an idea of logic, mind, matter in Indian/Islamic/Chinese/African/Caribbean/American traditions of thinking are moot. How can we make our conceptual vocabulary without our effort being overdetermined by the anxiety of how it would translate or travel within a Euro-American conceptual world? The idea of translation lies at the heart of the social sciences, since it seeks to make visible worlds of thought, life, and material production. While we live in an interconnected world (through the histories of colonialism, migration,

and telecommunications) language is the threshold on which we stumble, as we try and enter spaces of thought other than ours.

English has emerged for contingent historical reasons as the hegemonic language of international communication whether in politics, academics, or tourism (Mufti 2018). However, the question of a universal language raises several theoretical issues. Postcolonial theory while it sought to make visible intellection from spaces that were once seen as mere recipients of Enlightenment from Europe, resolved this problem by rendering visible colonized spaces through an existing library of categories. Categories derived from a Euromerican historical experience have been used to render transparent processes in Asia, Africa, and elsewhere. Democracy, modernity, capitalism, class, history, ethics, and politics have been some of the universal categories that have been the prisms through which the diversity of the world has been refracted back into a singularity of concepts.

The search for commensurability and the tyranny of monolingualism has characterized academic practice whether in Europe or the spaces that it colonized. Concepts from a European history, such as secularism, individualism, and rationality in all their singular brightness have traveled well. Social sciences in the postcolony have assiduously found these categories to be in existence, waiting to come into being, or culturally absent without dwelling on whether indigenous concepts have related to time, history, and self differently. Societies and individuals are not commensurable in some absolute way, it is merely a heuristic hubris that assumes this. And of course, the sheer relief of there being equivalence which allows comparisons between Mongolia and Munich, Rotterdam, and Rajasthan. However, given the ways of power in the world, travel is a privilege as also an act of power. Concepts from Asia and Africa are seen as mired in particularism; the fact that the idea of universals is merely a European self-regarding nativism that was backed by armies is often forgotten.

A final chapter brings together the question of status and of time, and of changing relations of power. It is a fine way to complete the volume to think with a word that evaluates paradigms as transient, always allowing for the insurrection of subordinated knowledges and peoples.

Awqāt/aukāt A word that is used in Urdu in India to denote status, but which has a presence in Arabic, Hindi, and Persian with similar connotations. Francesca Orsini explores the genealogy of the word in dictionaries from colonial times and shows that the word *awqāt* has roots in the word *waqt* meaning time. Thus, the question of status comes to be connected at the hip to time; that status is changeable is inherent in the very word itself. In a hierarchical society such as India, governed by caste and multiple ineffable distinctions, the word *awqāt* is located in a landscape of inequality and right. The idea that everyone has a right to be someone or do something is not generally recognized. Thus, if persons aspire above their station to do or say something, the rebuke is, what is your *awqāt* that you dare to say/do this? What Orsini shows is that in the postindependence landscape of northern India, inequality has been challenged not only by policies

of affirmative action, but also by the emergence of movements among the dalits or the former untouchable castes, and a lower caste politics leading to the ascension of a dalit leader as Chief Minister of the state of Uttar Pradesh. *Awqat* has changed with *waqt* and the hierarchies have been unsettled. Now it is possible for a dalit to say, when challenged by an upper caste, ‘what is your *awqat* that you can speak like this to me?’ A word for our times of the questioning of hierarchies when lives considered dispensable are beginning to matter. A word that compresses the intimate connection of status and time and speaks across borders to spaces not only in the Global South but across the world. A word that embodies a conceptual possibility through its ‘concentration of multiple meanings’.

Within intellectual traditions in the Global South, there have been reflections on notions of self, community, and governance for several hundred years preceding the growth of a Euro-American conceptual vocabulary forged in the crucible of empire and Europe’s self-appointed role in the world. Recovering these categories of thought is not merely an act of sentimentality, it is rather, a stepping out beyond the glare of an ignorance created by Euro-American categories. It is an attempt to think of societies and politics on their own terms and from within their concepts. Some of these may be translatable into categories familiar to existing social science theory; some may sit beside known concepts as markers of alterity, and yet others may be distinctive to a locale of life and thought. Not all conceptions are translatable across cultures and this gives us occasion to think about the hubris of the universal assumptions of our academic practices.

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