

COMPARATIVE POLITICAL THEORY: CONTEXTS, PLURALITY AND POLITICAL ACTION

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DECLARATION

I declare that the dissertation entitled "COMPARATIVE POLITICAL THEORY: CONTEXTS, PLURALITY AND POLITICAL ACTION" submitted by me in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of **Master of Philosophy** is my original work. It has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this University or any other university.


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INTRODUCTION

This is a study on Comparative Political Theory (CPT), a new subfield within political theory. Through this dissertation I attempt first, to contextualize CPT within the discourses internal to political theory, secondly, to take stock of its critique of the limitations of the existing canon, categories and approaches to textual interpretation in political theory, and finally, illustrate how CPT scholarship is enriching the existing understandings and scope of the concept of political action.

Comparative Political Theory (CPT) is an emerging subfield within the academic discipline of political theory which calls for inclusion of the non-Western political thought in the study of political theory. It demands normative claims emanating from political theory to be sensitive to non-Western contexts and, aspires for genuinely universal theories. CPT is predicated on the claim that political theory though global and universal in its self-presentations, privileges the West in its practices and hence parochial in its conduct. The claim is that the moral, social and political imaginaries that underlie mainstream political theory is built on the Euro-American historical and intellectual experience (which the category of West denote), at the expense of the non-Western political realities. The term ‘West’ used in this work to denote primarily Europe, United States, Canada, and Australia. CPT scholars are aware that the terminological distinctions, the West and non-West, harbor essentializing tendencies and elide the porosity and fluidity of the categories. Nevertheless, CPT scholars use them for heuristic purposes. The usage of the terminology of ‘West’ and the ‘non-West’, “turns less on an understanding of traditions as bounded by geography or culture, but upon patterns of privilege and exclusion”.¹

Introducing the special volume of *The Review of Politics* which inaugurated the field of CPT, Fred Dallmayr who is considered as the intellectual godfather of CPT defined it as a systematic reflection on the “status and meaning of political life” across the globe.²

¹ Farah Godrej, "Towards a Cosmopolitan Political Thought: The Hermeneutics of Interpreting the Other," *Polity* 41, no. 2 (2008): 139.

² Fred Dallmayr, "Introduction: Toward a Comparative Political Theory," *The Review of Politics* 59, no.3 (1997): 421.

Roxanne Euben who coined the term ‘comparative political theory’ defined CPT as a project that “introduces non-Western perspectives into familiar debates about the problems of living together , thus ensuring that political theory is about human and not merely Western dilemmas”.³The question what CPT should strive for has elicited modest as well as ambitious responses. The modest purposes attributed to CPT include striving for genuine universalism by inclusion of non-Western political thinkers and themes (Fred Dallmayr), better explanations and understanding of existing political concepts and political phenomena (Roxanne Euben, Michael Freeden and Andrew Vincent) and enhanced self-reflexivity on the parochialism in political theory (Farah Godrej). Leigh Jenco envisions an ambitious as well as a radical purpose for CPT by proposing the “non-West” as a site for creative political theorizing as well as a means for re-centering the “constitutive terms” and methods that characterize the political theory. For Anthony Parel, the co-editor of “*Comparative Political Philosophy: Studies Under the Upas Tree*”, which is considered as an *avant la lettre* of CPT, the emerging subfield denoted an approach that seriously engage with “the validity of cultural and philosophical pluralism” without falling into the trap of cultural incommensurability and moral relativism.⁴ For Parel, comparison has to entail not only explorations of the difference between cultures but also similarities or “equivalences”, in the sense Eric Voegelin uses the term.

One feature of early CPT was the methodological absent-mindedness with regard to the moniker “comparative”. The term “comparative” is a misnomer to describe CPT as it was used more as a geo-cultural signifier for the non-Western and less of a methodological tool that privileged comparison. The term comparative is used in CPT in the same sense as it is used in ‘comparative politics’: as a “study of units other than ones traditionally studied”.⁵ The label has come under severe critique.⁶ Despite the continuing debates on the appropriateness of the term “comparative”, as Farah Godrej says “the name has stuck

³ Roxanne L. Euben, “Comparative Political Theory: An Islamic Fundamentalist Critique of Rationalism,” *The Journal of Politics*, 59, no.1 (1997):32.

⁴ Anthony J. Parel, “The Comparative Study of Political Philosophy,” in *Comparative Political Philosophy: Studies Under the Upas Tree*, eds. Anthony J. Parel and Ronald C. Keith (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1992),14.

⁵ Farah Godrej, *Cosmopolitan Political Thought: Method, Practice, Discipline* (New York: Oxford University Press,2011), 7

⁶ Andrew F. March, “What is Comparative Political Theory?,” *The Review of Politics* 71 (2009) :531-565.

and CPT continues to be associated with a general inclusivity, openness towards and a deep curiosity about otherness”.⁷

A major preoccupation of the early CPT was to refute Samuel Huntington’s prognosis of “clash of civilization” thesis and prevent it from transforming into a self-fulfilling prophecy. Fred Dallmayr responded with a call for a “dialogue among the civilizations” and provided normative primacy to dialogue as the mode of cross-cultural engagement. Dallmayr builds his idea of intercultural communication on an appropriation of the Gadamerian hermeneutics. In his work, “*Beyond Orientalism: Essays on Cross-Cultural Encounter*”, Dallmayr contemplates on the mode of cross-cultural encounter appropriate for the contemporary world and finds his answer in dialogue which can stay clear of the demands of uniformity and radical fragmentation.⁸As Dallmayr remarks in the introduction,

“Dialogue...does not mean the enactment of a ready-made consensus (the subsumption of particulars under a universalist umbrella) nor the conduct of random chatter...dialogical exchange means an effort at bridge building across a vast abyss, an effort which does not erase the abyss nor domesticate the “other shore”. In terms of self-other relations, dialogue means exposure to an otherness which lies far beyond the self (without being totally incommensurable); it signals an alternative both to imperialist absorption or domination and to pliant self-annihilation (a surrender to an “essentialized” other”).⁹

Dallmayr finds in Gadamer’s hermeneutics a succor to strike a balance between self and the other. The theme of dialogue as the preferred mode of cross-cultural encounter is dealt in detail in Dallmayr’s subsequent work “*Dialogue among Civilizations: Some Exemplary Voices*”.

The first book length work that invoked the term ‘comparative political theory’, “*Enemy in the Mirror: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Limits of Modern Rationalism. A Work of Comparative Political Theory*” was published in 1999 by Roxanne Euben. The broader concerns of book also reflect the major preoccupations of early CPT: the critique of extant orientalism plaguing social sciences, the critique of subdiscipline of comparative

⁷ Godrej, *Political Thought*, 7.

⁸ Fred Dallmayr, *Beyond Orientalism : Essays on Cross-Cultural Encounter*, (Albany, SUNY Press, 1996)

⁹ Dallmayr, *Beyond Orientalism*, xviii.

politics for subjecting the developing countries to standardized concepts and models in the West and the discreditation of the Huntingtonian thesis. Euben contested the constructions and representations of Islamist Jihad in the social science literature as an irrational phenomenon which was understood to be an epiphenomenon of modernity. Euben focusses on the writings of Sayyid Qutb to deconstruct scholarly narratives that explain the rise of Islamist fundamentalism. She points out to the intrinsic appeal of Sayyid's critique of Western rationalist epistemology. She blurs the distinctions between the West and Islamist fundamentalism by finding parallels of Qutb's critique of Western rationalism in the internal critique of modernity in the Western tradition as represented in the writings of Hannah Arendt, Charles Taylor and Alasdair MacIntyre. Euben's work shows that Islamist Fundamentalism is not as alien as is constructed to be and it shares some of the concerns with the Western tradition.

The early CPT viewed civilizations stemming from disparate geographies and cultural entities as the fount of distinct theoretical traditions. For instance, in "*Comparative Political Theory: An Introduction*", an edited volume that introduces CPT, the intellectual explorations are systematized under the units "Islamic Political Thought", "Indian Political Thought" and "East Asian Political Thought". Here the study of non-Western traditions is guided by texts and thinkers which constitute the canon of that tradition. For e.g. under the unit "Indian Political thought" essays on thinkers M.K Gandhi, Rammohun Roy and Nehru as well as on the text "*Arthashastra*" are included.

For heuristic purposes, one could say that CPT is driven by broadly two methodological approaches namely the normative paradigm and the interpretive paradigm. The normative CPT research is driven by the objective to achieve certain moral ends – intercultural or inter-civilizational communication (as exemplified in the dialogic paradigm of Fred Dallmayr), global publics (Melissa Williams and Mark Warren) cosmopolitan political thought (Farah Godrej) etc.¹⁰ The interpretive paradigm focus on textual exegesis. The concern of the interpretive CPT is to understand and decode a particular text, concept, thinker or a political phenomenon. The works of Roxanne Euben and Diego von Vacano fall into this paradigm.

¹⁰ I discuss these visions of CPT in detail in Chapter 1.

Limitations of Comparative Political Theory

The vision, mission, and the methodological absent-mindedness regarding comparison as a method that characterized the early scholarship (as represented in the works of Fred Dallmayr and Roxanne Euben) in the CPT project has courted criticism. Critics have also pointed out inability of CPT to escape the trap of orientalism and Eurocentrism despite exit from orientalism (as understood in the Saidian sense) being given as one of the reasons for the very creation of the subfield. Those scholars who are supportive of comparison as a method (Andrew March and Chris Goto-Jones) have pointed out the inadequacy of East-West as the axis of comparison. CPT scholarship also maintains a silence on those concepts which are understood as Western in conception but have non-Western origins. An engagement with the strand of scholarship on decolonizing social sciences would radically reformulate its existing stance on desirability of universality of certain political ideas.

The “unifying prescriptive and ethical drive” of Comparative Political Theory as exemplified in the writings of Fred Dallmayr who is considered as one of the pioneers of the subfield has been an easy target of criticism.¹¹ Dallmayr envisions a dialogic paradigm for CPT. It entails a creation of a global network of mutual comprehension of disparate civilizations through dialogue. But dialogue as a mode of cross-cultural encounter glosses over two factors. Firstly, it overlooks the difficulty in gaining comprehension of alien cultures. Secondly, it glosses over the asymmetries of power that operates among the parties involved in dialogue. Thirdly, Dallmayr has been criticized for presenting an optimistic and idealistic view of the world. Anthony Black remarks that while reading Dallmayr, one might forget about the problems that haunt humanity as a whole- resource constraints, global warming, and global organized crime. Black reminds us of the existence of groups which are just not into dialogue” and the climate of

¹¹ Michael Freeden and Andrew Vincent, “Introduction: The Study of Comparative Political Thought,” in *Comparative Political Thought: Theorizing Practices*, ed. Michael Freeden and Andrew Vincent (New York: Routledge), 7.

irrationality and fanaticism that plagues some regimes and communities.¹² Michael Freeden and Andrew Vincent criticizes the efforts to formulate a universalist discourse through a dialogue across civilizations as “not merely utopian exercises in impossibility but underplay the desirable diversity of the human mind, its languages and practices”.¹³

The most trenchant criticism for the mission of CPT practiced as the study of non-Western political ideas, concepts and texts has come from Andrew March. March argues that political theory has been inherently comparative and non-comparativist scholarly work that is being done by CPT scholars can easily be accommodated within Political Theory itself and the study of non-western political thought per se is not a strong justification for the creation of a subfield. March charges that CPT evolved with no “intellectual investment” in comparison as a method. He is dissatisfied with the moniker ‘comparative’ in CPT for being reduced by many of the CPT scholars to function as a synonym for non-Western political thought. For March,

“Comparison must be, in the first place, a method, not just an expedient term vaguely suggesting the focus of one's research interests (e.g., non-Western texts) or substantive concerns and commitments (e.g. critiquing Western hegemony). Those foci and substantive concerns may be legitimate and important, but they need not amount to a distinctively comparative method. Indeed, comparison might be exactly the wrong way to open up political theorizing to global - democratic, counter -hegemonic purposes”.¹⁴

Though CPT scholars are successful to some extent in exposing and combating the 21st century manifestations of Saidian orientalism in political theory, some of their commissions and omissions entrench them in eighteenth and nineteenth century orientalism. Megan Thomas points out that CPT has inherited from orientalism, the emphases on the authority of the text and textual interpretation.¹⁵ In its focus on textual authority, “comparative political theory has largely reproduced - though perhaps unwittingly - what Rudolph and Rudolph have called orientalism’s ‘civilizational eye’, which distinguished pluralities of human societies in terms of coherent cultural wholes

¹² Anthony Black, “The Way Forward in Comparative Political Thought,” *Journal of International Political Theory* 7 no.2, (2011): 224.

¹³ Freeden and Vincent, “Introduction”, 7.

¹⁴ March, “Comparative Political Theory”, 537.

¹⁵ Megan C. Thomas, “Orientalism and Comparative Political Theory,” *The Review of Politics* 72 (2010): 653-655.

defined by great languages and their classic texts, in contrast to an ‘ethnographic eye’ that saw pluralities in terms of customs defined by oral traditions”.¹⁶ The privileging of texts by CPT is at the expense of non-textual sources of political thinking.¹⁷ Also the compartmentalization of ‘comparative’ in CPT into an assortment of civilizations like Indian, Islamic, Confucian etc. “mimics the partial categories, geographical divisions and ontological presumptions of an earlier European discourse of “world religions”.¹⁸

The assumption of the divide between the West and the non-West which informs much of CPT work is critiqued on the ground that it reifies and essentializes categories like West and the east resulting in “crude generalization”.¹⁹ Presenting “East” and “West” as monolithic obscure the internal diversity and complexity that characterize such traditions. Also, the assumption of an East-West divide precludes the debate on the politics that entail in drawing boundaries. The categories like the West and the non-West are “discursive objects and effects of power to be analyzed, not prior to or a precondition of analysis. They are not outside history but, emerge out of provisional systems of representation and the histories of political thought and power”. Many scholars have pointed out that CPT need not privilege “East” and “West” as the axis of comparison as comparison can be of many dimensions. Chris Goto-Jones emphasize on “discontinuities” as the axis of comparison while Loubna El Amine privileges a modern/pre-modern axis.²⁰

Another corollary of assuming a boundary between the West and the non-Western is that it engenders a further assumption that knowledge resources that are understood to be Western emerged independently in the West without any interaction with the non-Western parts of the globe. There is a silence in CPT regarding the debates concerning the non-Western pedigree of concepts. CPT has so far not engaged in the scholarship which demonstrates the non-western roots of European concepts. CPT is silent on that strand of decolonizing scholarship that shows the non-Western pedigree of European

¹⁶Thomas, “Comparative Political Theory,” 671.

¹⁷ Leigh Jenco is an early exception to CPT scholarship which generally emphasize on texts as sole sources of knowledge.

¹⁸ Murad Idris, “Political Theory and the Politics of Comparison,” *Political Theory* (2016):2. doi.org/10.1177/0090591716659812.

¹⁹ Freedden and Vincent, “Introduction”, 9.

²⁰ I elaborate this in Chapter 2.

concepts. Laura Marks, for instance, has argued that Deleuze's concept of the *univocity of being* has its source in Abu Ali al-Husayn ibn Sina, the great Persian philosopher and this history was erased when Philosophy, "underwent an ethnic cleansing".²¹ CPT scholars need to engage those works like that of Martin Bernal's *Black Athena* that demonstrate how the historiography of philosophy eradicated the Middle Eastern and North African contributions to modern European thought. An engagement with those strands of Eurocentrism that has appropriated the intellectual contributions of the non-European world has the potential to rattle some of the basic assumptions of the subfield as well as might throw light on the need to rethink on the reluctance of CPT scholars to accept the universality of certain political ideas.

Research Questions

1. How do we contextualize the rise of Comparative Political Theory (CPT) within Political Theory?
2. What are the various ways in which CPT scholars critique and suggest alternatives for the existing canon, categories and approaches in political theory?
3. How does CPT scholarship expand the existing understandings of the concept of political action? Given the significance of conceptual revision for political change, what are the possibilities which the CPT scholarship on the concept of political action offer for political change?

Methodology

This is a qualitative research and I relied on secondary literature to look at debates around the emerging field of Comparative Political Theory.

²¹ Laura U. Marks, "A Deleuzian Ijtihad: Unfolding Deleuze's Islamic Sources Occulted in the Ethnic Cleansing of Spain" In *Deleuze and Race* (ed.) Arun Saldanha and Jason Michael Adams, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 51.

Significance of the Research

One of the central points of this research is the contextualization of CPT in light of the earlier critiques on political theory, an aspect which existing accounts of the emergence of the subfield fails to discuss. The present dissertation also examines the contributions of CPT to political theory in terms of pluralizing the canon, categories and approaches in political theory. Another central point of this research is the focus on treatment of the concept of political action in CPT scholarship and its potential to inaugurate new possibilities for political transformation.

Chapterization

Chapter 1 titled '**Contextualizing Comparative Political Theory**' is a reminder that the emergence of Comparative Political Theory (CPT) should be seen in the light of the inability of political theory to live up to its promise and hopes for political life. Therefore, Chapter 1 begins with a discussion on the self-understandings of political theory about its nature, task and significance as reflected in the writing of political philosophers ranging from Leo Strauss to John Rawls. These self-understandings offer rich resources for illuminating the gap that exists between how political theory has been conceived and how it has been practiced. In Chapter 1, I situate (CPT) in the context of the two internal critiques of political theory that preceded its emergence. An explication of CPT in the backdrop of the internal critiques in political theory is significant for two reasons. Firstly, an internal contextualization addresses its omission in the existing accounts of the intellectual history of CPT. Secondly, it shows that CPT as an immanent critique in political theory builds on the legacies of the two internal critiques. The first internal critique of political theory emerged in the aftermath of the Behavioralist movement in political science. The second critique unfolded in the 1990s and is comprised of two strands. One strand of the second critique levelled charges of Eurocentrism at the discipline as a whole. I discuss two seminal essays of Jeffrey Isaac and Bhikhu Parekh to illuminate this strand. The target of critique of the other strand was confined to Eurocentrism of certain concepts like secularism and modernity. Unlike the first strand, the second strand did not critique the academic discipline of political theory per se but

confined the criticisms to concepts. To illuminate this strand, I turn my lens on the debates surrounding the idea of “multiple Modernities” exemplified in the writings of Charles Taylor, S.N. Eisenstadt, Sudipta Kaviraj, Rajeev Bhargava, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam. I end the first chapter by explaining the various justifications for the creation and endorsement of CPT.

The second chapter, **‘Plurality:Categories and Approaches’** discusses the ways in which CPT scholars critique and suggest alternatives for the existing canon, categories and approaches in political theory. In this chapter I describe three contributions of CPT in pushing the academic discipline of political theory towards plurality. Firstly, the scholarship emanating from the field of CPT advances the democratic and existing methodological critique against the canon of the history of political thought by pointing out mainly the persistent Eurocentrism manifested in the omission of non-Western political thinkers and texts, the imperial and racial dimensions of the canon, and the strategies to exclude non-Western political thought from the canon. Secondly, CPT scholars are problematizing the use of western categories in the study of non-Western political constellations and are proposing new categories to better understand non-Western political life. I illustrate this by focusing on the work of Stuart Gray who demonstrates the limitations of Western conceptions like state of nature and secularism in decoding aspects of ancient Indian political thought and has proposed a new category of the ‘rajanical’ in lieu of ‘the political’ for understanding ancient Indian conceptions of kingly rule. Through this, I examine the case for and against the use of new categories in understanding nonwestern political thought. Thirdly, alternative ways of interpreting non-western political texts are emerging in CPT. After a critical review of the Straussian and Skinnerian approaches to textual interpretation, I discuss new ways of interpreting non-Western texts as proposed by Sudipta Kaviraj, Stuart Gray, Farah Godrej and Leigh Jenco.

Chapter 3 titled **‘The Concept of Political Action’** examines how CPT scholarship is expanding the concept of political action. The chapter takes off with a brief review of the theorization of the concept of political action in political theory with an emphasis on Hannah Arendt’s conception of political action. Arendt is being discussed in the chapter

as all the three works under analysis invokes her especially Roxanne Euben and Leigh Jenco whose formulations question some of Arendt's central arguments. Given the link between conceptual revision and possibilities of political change, I look at the work of three comparative political theorists Leigh Jenco, Roxanne Euben and Farah Godrej and argue how the conceptual innovations implied in their work hold possibilities for inaugurating political change. Leigh Jenco's monograph "*Making the Political: Founding and Action in the Political Theory of Zhang Shizhao*" examines the Chinese thinker, Zhang Shizhao's theory of political action. While for many political theorists especially Arendt, political action is always 'acting together in concert', Zhang reconceptualizes political action by delinking the public from the scope of political action and gives importance to uncoordinated individual actions performed privately for effecting political change. In the essay, "*Killing (For) Politics: Jihad, Martyrdom and Political Action*" Euben interprets jihad as political action and juxtaposes jihad with certain episodes in European history to illuminate how death and violence are indispensable for political founding. Euben's demystification of jihad and her analysis of Jihad as political action if translated into policy circles could inaugurate possibilities for political diagnosis of the problem and warrant political solutions rather than knee-jerk responses that escalates violence. After discussing Jenco and Euben, I move on to Farah Godrej's work which gives an interesting twist to Gandhian principle of non-violence by suggesting a new application: arbitration of competing moral truth claims. The **Conclusion** shall seek to explore further areas of research in Comparative Political Theory.

CHAPTER ONE

CONTEXTUALIZING COMPARATIVE POLITICAL THEORY

Political Theory is shimmering in a new light. If creation of subfields within a discipline or subdiscipline is taken as an indication of the development of the field rather than its demise, then the academic sub-discipline of Political Theory is expanding and glowing in a new light, thanks to the creation of a sub-field called Comparative Political Theory (CPT) in the mid-nineties. Within two decades of its existence, CPT has generated scholarship that illuminates what has been hitherto obscured by political theorists. The works under the rubric of CPT is a reminder that there are still songs to be sung by Political Theory beyond the West lest what Political Theory would singing be a dirge; a funeral song for non-western political concepts, categories and canon.

Political theory has been subjected to broadly three major critiques in the twentieth century. The first critique broadly emerged in the 1950s and 1960s from the behaviorist school as well as from the political theorists who found the practice of political theory to be on a decline. The second critique was fragmented and internal to the discipline. It focused on the Western European and American centrism of Political Theory as exemplified in the writings of John Gunnell, Jeffrey Isaac and Bhikhu Parekh. The second critique was fragmented as dominant understandings of disparate concepts received flak from different parts of the globe. The concepts that came under scrutiny were modernity, liberalism and universal human rights. Comparative Political Theory should be seen as the third critique of political theory and is a collective and systematic effort to fight the Eurocentrism in political theory in various ways primarily with a heavy emphasis on rethinking the existing categories and concepts and inclusion of themes and thinkers, cultural peculiarities from the non-Western societies.

In an essay that attempts to chart the scope of comparative political theory, Diego von Vacano explains the emergence of CPT in terms of certain ‘critical disciplinary’ and

geopolitical factors.²² The first disciplinary contextual factor is constituted by the various perspectives that critique the negative aspects of Western modernity. These critical perspectives stem from Western Marxism's critical theory, genealogical method employed by Michael Foucault, Edward Said's Orientalism and the subaltern school which questioned the Western paradigms of modernization.²³ The second factor is the dissatisfaction with some of the formal explanatory paradigms employed in the subfield of comparative politics. The third disciplinary context unfolds in the backdrop of the end of the Cold War and contemporary globalization. The liberal triumphalism that marks Francis Fukuyama's work *"The End of History and the Last Man"* and the pessimistic prognosis of the post-Cold War by Huntington's clash of civilization thesis provided the third disciplinary context for the rise of CPT.

What gets obliterated in Vacano's account are the histories of the critiques internal to the discipline of political theory and their legacies. One important legacy of the Behavioralist movement in Political Science is that it triggered intense self-reflection in political theory. The seminal essays by Isaiah Berlin, Sheldon Wolin and John Plamenatz are examples of the self-reflective writings in the discipline. In this chapter, I focus on the self-understanding of political theory that emerges out in the writing of various political theorists and political philosophers when they define their field and discuss its goals and significance.

The second section deals with what I call the first and the second critique in political theory. If the first critique of political theory examined its apparent decline in the wake of Behavioralist movement in political science, the second critique pointed out the provincialism and ethnocentrism in political theory. Two seminal essays by Bhikhu Parekh and Jeffrey Isaac captures one important strand of the second critique. It is this particular strand that gets completely erased in Vacano's intellectual history of comparative political theory. The primary aim of this chapter is to address this omission in explaining the context of comparative political theory. Also illustrated in this section is the second strand of the second critique within political theory that questioned the

²² Diego Von Vacano, "The Scope of Comparative Political Theory," *Annual Review of Political Science* 18 (2015): 467.

²³ Vacano, "Comparative Political Theory," 467.

generality of concept of modernity by highlighting its myriad careers and manifestations in the non-western world.

Comparative Political theory becomes the third critique of political theory and builds on the previous two critiques within political theory as well as critical perspectives from outside the discipline. It attempts to bridge the gap between what political theory should be and what it is. The final section 'Need for Comparative Political Theory' describes various motivations that led to the establishment of the subfield and its endorsement.

The Idea of Political Theory

In this section, I review some of the debates on the changing nature of political theory. It is interesting to note that while the early writings on the need for comparative political theory is "marked by the ashes of the cold War"²⁴, many of the seminal reflections on the vocation of political theory were written when Second World War and the cold War was on full swing. While Leo Strauss' pertinent essays on political theory straddles both the periods, the writings of Isaiah Berlin, John Plamenatz and Sheldon Wolin were necessitated by the rise of behaviouralist movement in political science which coincided with the first two decades of the cold War. Alasdair MacIntyre and John Rawls also contributed to the self-reflection of political theory through their meditation on the significance of political philosophy. What illuminates all these writings is the hope and promise that political theory offers for political life. The self-understanding of political theory about the nature, task and significance of political theorizing as reflected in the writing of political theorists/philosophers ranging from Leo Strauss to John Rawls offers rich resources for illuminating the gap that exists between how political theory has been conceived and how it has been practiced.

For Leo Strauss, the definitive goal of political philosophy is to "acquire knowledge of the good life and of the good society".²⁵ He differentiates between opinion about political things and knowledge about things political. The latter, political knowledge is the fruit of

²⁴ Vacano, "Comparative Political Theory," 468.

²⁵ Leo Strauss, "What is Political Philosophy?," *The Journal of Politics* 19, no. 3 (1957): 343.

engaging in political philosophy. Political philosophy entails the “critical and coherent” examination of the assumptions undergirding the nature of political things. Leo Strauss writes,

“Political philosophy is the attempt truly to know both the nature of political things and the right, or the good, political order.... All knowledge of political things implies assumptions concerning the nature of political things i.e. assumptions which concern not merely the given political situation but political life or human life as such. The assumptions concerning the nature of political things which are implied in all knowledge of political things, have the character of opinions. It is only when these assumptions are made the theme of critical and coherent analysis that a philosophic or scientific approach to politics emerges.”²⁶

However, reaping the fruits of political philosophy especially that of texts written in the premodern ages requires “reading between the lines” as in Strauss’ observation, and many writers of antiquity cultivated a certain style (esoteric in content but exoteric in form) to veil the message they wanted to convey lest they might face persecution.²⁷ In short, the hermeneutic of esoteric style of writing Strauss suggests, holds the key to understand certain thinkers in the history of political thought.

George H Sabine defines political philosophy as “whatever political philosophers have thought about civil society and called by that name”.²⁸ According to George H. Sabine, political theories are “secreted....in the interstices of political and social crisis”.²⁹ He illustrates it by the political theories that have emerged during the tumultuous years in Athens and England. For Sabine, a great political theorizing is characterized by excellence in the twin aspects of “analysis of a present situation and in suggestiveness for other situations”.³⁰ He also states that political theory comprises of three kinds of statements namely the empirical, explanatory and the normative.³¹

²⁶ Strauss, “Political Philosophy,” 345.

²⁷ Leo Strauss, “Persecution and the Art of Writing,” *Social Research* (1941): 488-504.

²⁸ George H. Sabine, “What is Political Theory?” *The Journal of Politics* 1, no. 1 (1939): 2.

²⁹ Sabine, “Political Theory,” 3.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

³¹ To quote, “A political theory, then, as thus far analyzed, covers three kinds of factors: it includes factual statements about the posture of affairs that gave rise to it; it contains statements of what may be roughly called a causal nature, to the effect that one kind of thing is more likely to happen, or may be more easily

Sheldon Wolin views political philosophy as a “special tradition of discourse” the general characteristics of which are “most clearly revealed over time”.³² Like Leo Strauss he derives an explication of political philosophy by first defining what philosophy is. Philosophy, Wolin says, “claims to deal with truths publicly arrived at and publicly demonstrable”.³³ And political philosophy “as a continuing form of discourse concerning what is political” is strongly related to ‘public’. Political philosophers reflect on the close links between political institutions and public concerns. Political philosophy, for Wolin, is a systematic reflection of concerns of the whole community and political philosophers reflect on the close links between political institutions and public concerns.³⁴

Mapping the political field and its boundaries itself is an outcome of the historical enterprise of political philosophy. The labelling of certain actions and arrangements as political, contemplations on the political, and the employment of concepts as a means for communication are not naturally available but a legacy that is bequeathed by political philosophers through their ‘historical activity’.³⁵

Sheldon Wolin approaches political theory as a historical process. Political theory is a tradition as it “displays the working out of an inherited form”.³⁶ Its traditional form which lends it rich resources makes it suitable for offering visions of collective political life. The knowledge that stems from political theory “tends to be suggestive and illuminative rather than explicit and determinate”. Wolin borrows from Karl Polanyi and calls this type of knowledge to be “tacit political knowledge”. To quote Wolin, “Theoretical truth-its foundation in tacit political knowledge shapes it towards what is politically appropriate rather than towards what is scientifically operational”.³⁷ Political theory in the perspective

brought about, than another; and it contains statements that something ought to happen or is the right and desirable thing to have happen.” Ibid.,5-6.

³² Sheldon S. Wolin, “Political Philosophy and Philosophy,” in *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 3.

³³ Ibid., 4.

³⁴ Ibid., 4.

³⁵ Ibid.,6.

³⁶ Sheldon S. Wolin, "Political Theory as a Vocation," *American Political Science Review* 63, no. 4 (1969): 1070.

³⁷ Wolin, “Vocation,” 1071.

of Wolin should offer “significant choice or critical analysis of the quality, direction or fate of public life”.³⁸

Wolin highlights an important aspect of political philosophy: vision. He discusses two distinct but related meanings of vision. One is the common meaning of vision as an act of perceiving things. This implies description and dispassionate reportage which scientific knowledge privileges. The second is the element of imagination which is crucial in the construction of political theories as it helps the theorist in rendering “political phenomena intellectually manageable”.³⁹ Wolin explains that imagination has more roles than merely constructing models. Imagination serves as a conduit for the expression of a theorist’s fundamental values and is instrumental in helping him or her transcend history.⁴⁰ The vision embodied in political philosophy helps transcend the present by inspiring action towards a desirable future. According to Wolin, “the essential element present in political philosophy is the ideal of an order subject to human control and one that could be transfigured through a combination of thought and action”.⁴¹ What makes political philosophy “political” stems from its “commitment to lessening the gap between the possibilities grasped through political imagination and the actualities of political existence”.⁴²

The tradition of political philosophy is a tradition of “meanings extended over time” as opposed to tradition of discovery that characterizes scientific fields. Wolin delineates how a “continuous tradition of political thought” is advantageous to political theorists as well as political actors.⁴³ It gives them a sense of journeying into a world that is familiar as the landscape is revealed through previous explorations. The tradition offers a lingua franca in terms of its concepts and categories, which makes possible for the contemporaries to communicate.⁴⁴ It weaves new political experiences into the existing fabric. Finally, the common political vocabulary of political philosophy that has come into existence as a result of continuous systematization of words and concepts of political

³⁸Ibid.,1063.

³⁹Wolin, *Politics and Vision* ,19.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.,20.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.,22.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

discourse spanning over more than two millennia, “provides a connecting link between the past and the present”.⁴⁵

Isaiah Berlin elaborates his idea of what entails the practice of political philosophy and why is it necessary in the essay “Does Political Theory Still Exist?”.⁴⁶ Written in an atmosphere when pundits have been pronouncing Political Theory to be either dead or on a decline, the essay is a defense as well as a delineation of the practice of political theory. The themes discussed in the essay takes off from an earlier essay “The Purpose of Philosophy”.⁴⁷ In “The Purpose of Philosophy” he distinguishes the philosophical questions from the empirical and formal questions. The subject matter of philosophy is “to a large degree not the items of experience, but the ways in which they are viewed ,the permanent or semi-permanent categories in terms of which experience is conceived and classified”.⁴⁸ Berlin describes philosophy’s task to be “painful and difficult”.⁴⁹ It entails extracting and revealing hidden categories and models of human thought (embedded in speech, images and symbols),illuminating its obscurities and contradictions and figuring out its internal conflicts that hinder construction of proper ways to organize, describe and explain experience.⁵⁰ Also included in this task is a higher level activity which is to “examine the nature of this activity itself (epistemology, philosophical logic, linguistic analysis) and to bring to light the concealed models that operate in this second-order ,philosophical activity itself”.⁵¹

Value judgements constitute the essence of political philosophy. Collision of ends and objectives and lack of consensus on some of the concepts make value judgements inevitable in a pluralist society.Berlin notes that the efforts by the philosophes of the eighteenth-century to turn philosophy ,especially moral and political philosophy into an empirical science could not succeed because the answer to the question “what is to be

⁴⁵ Ibid.,23.

⁴⁶Isaiah Berlin, “Does Political Theory Still Exist?” in *Concepts and Categories: Philosophical Essays*, ed. Henry Hardy, et.al. (Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1996), 143-172.

⁴⁷Isaiah Berlin, “The Purpose of Philosophy,” in *Concepts and Categories: Philosophical Essays*, ed. Henry Hardy, et.al. (Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 1996), 1-12.

⁴⁸Berlin, “The Purpose of Philosophy,” 9.

⁴⁹ Ibid.,10.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

human” is philosophical and it cannot be bracketed into an empirical or formal question.⁵²The conception of the very idea of man is predicated on a differentiation from nonhuman and inhuman, and this entails deployment of some basic categories that help in the perception, ordering and interpretation of data. Thus, a philosophical analysis of the “concept of man” invariably entails these categories and the realization that human beings themselves cannot be “subjects for scientific hypotheses about the data which they order”.⁵³

The essay by John Plamenatz “The uses of political theory” is an important intervention in the debates surrounding the relevance of political theory in the 1950s.⁵⁴ Plamenatz offers a concise definition of political theory and his conception of political theory as a form of practical philosophy, enables him to strongly pitch for its need in the modern world. He begins the essay by taking on those declarations of the death of political theory and its diminishing importance by arguing that political theory is and would be alive “as long as man continues to be a speculative and enterprising animal”.⁵⁵

Plamenatz defines political theory as the “systematic thinking about the purposes of government”.⁵⁶Political theory as a source of “practical philosophy” in the modern society can fulfill the need of human beings for a “station” which was earlier provided by religion and metaphysics.⁵⁷ As Plamenatz says,

“The more men live in societies which change quickly,the more mobile they are in those societies, and the more accustomed to the idea that they can, by taking thought, change their social environment to come closer to their ideals, the greater the part of social and political thought in practical philosophy. Its business is to relate a coherent body of principles to government; its business is to tell us what government should do to realize those principles and how it should be organized to do it ”.⁵⁸

⁵² Berlin, “Does Political Theory,”162-163.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴John Plamenatz, "The Use of Political Theory," *Political Studies* 8, no. 1 (1960): 37-47.

⁵⁵ Plamenatz, “Use of Political Theory,” 37.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 44.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 46.

The intellectual activity that characterizes political theory is a necessity that can “neither be destroyed nor met by science and analytical philosophy”.⁵⁹ Political theory is a form of “practical philosophy” because it “not merely examine and compare the principles, showing where they are incompatible and explaining their consequences” but “produce a hierarchy of principles and try to explain how men should use them to make their choices”.⁶⁰

In a remarkable essay “The Indispensability of Political Theory”, Alasdair MacIntyre suggests that “political theories are, by and large, articulate, systematic, and explicit versions of the unarticulated, more or less systematic and implicit interpretations, through which plain men and women understand this experience of the actions of others in a way that enables them to respond to it in their own actions”.⁶¹ He uses the metaphor of a map to suggest that political theory illuminates the political landscape thus helping people to navigate their social and political world. Political theory never diminishes in significance despite its lack of comprehensiveness just as a grossly inaccurate map holds some utility.⁶² Just as a grossly inaccurate map can still be a “rational resource available” to help navigate the terrain, political theories however flawed and limiting they are, could guide in navigating the political landscape.⁶³ The indispensability of political theory according to MacIntyre stems from the unique capacity of human beings to theorize.⁶⁴

In his work, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement* John Rawls describes four roles that political philosophy has in a society.⁶⁵ The first is a practical role of acquiring social cooperation and order in deeply divisive societies. In such societies, political philosophy comes to aid in finding grounds for reasoned political agreement. The second role of political philosophy consists of orienting the members of a political community (in the modern era, the citizens in a nation-state) to the body politic. Political philosophy can enable citizens to contemplate on what does it mean to be a member of such community

⁵⁹ Ibid., 47.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 45.

⁶¹ Alasdair MacIntyre, "The Indispensability of Political Theory," in *The Nature of Political Theory*, ed. David Miller and Larry Siedentop. (New York: Clarendon Press, 1983), 23.

⁶² MacIntyre, “Indispensability of Political Theory,” 32.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 33.

⁶⁵ John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2001), 1-4.

and what are the ends, the collectivity of which they are a part should pursue. Reconciliation is the third role of political philosophy. As Rawls put it, “political philosophy may try to calm our frustration and rage against our society and its history by showing us the way in which its institutions, when properly understood from a philosophical point of view, are rational, and developed over time as they did to attain their present, rational form”.⁶⁶The fourth role is to probe the “limits of practical political possibility”.⁶⁷ Political philosophy delineates the feasible political arrangements suited to the social world.

Bhikhu Parekh finds political theory to be a “worthwhile form of inquiry” as it “makes a society intelligible to itself and offers it the great gifts of self-consciousness and critical self-understanding.”⁶⁸The practical value of Political theory stems from its role of clarifying “the range of choices open to a society” , elucidating “ the limits and possibilities of political life ” and in explaining “what demands may or may not legitimately be made of it”.⁶⁹ He points out the three-dimensionality of political theory. Parekh writes,

“Minimally it is concerned to offer a coherent and systematic understanding of political life and is three-dimensional. It is conceptual in the sense that it defines, analyses and distinguishes concepts, and develops a conceptual framework capable of comprehending political life. It is also explanatory in the sense that it seeks to make sense of political life, and to explain why it is constituted and conducted in a particular manner and how its different parts are related. Finally, it is normative in the sense that it either justifies the way a society is currently constituted or criticizes and offers a well-considered alternative to it”.⁷⁰

While many scholars use the term political theory and political philosophy interchangeably for heuristic purposes, political theory can be differentiated from political thought and political philosophy in terms of what it emphasizes. David Miller and Larry Siedentop point out that political theory has developed out of two pre-existing

⁶⁶ Rawls, *Justice*, 3.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁶⁸ Bhikhu Parekh, “The Poverty of Indian Political Theory,” *History of Political Thought*, no.3, 13 (1992) :536.

⁶⁹ Parekh, “Indian Political Theory,” 536.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

academic traditions namely political thought and political philosophy and differs from both. As Miller and Siedentop say, “It differs from ‘political thought’ chiefly by being less historical in focus, less given up to examining the development of political ideas through time. Political theory differs from ‘political philosophy’, on the other hand, because it is less formal and atomistic, less concerned to establish logical relationships between individual political concepts.”⁷¹

Then what does political theory entail?

“It does not, indeed, restrict itself what are now often called ‘second-order’ questions, questions about the definition and use of the central terms of political argument—terms such as ‘authority’, ‘liberty’, and ‘justice’. It can (and often does) undertake the revision or extension of purely normative theory, as well as exploring the links between political concepts on the one hand and the changing structure of society on the other.”⁷²

Miller and Siedentop arrive at an explanation of what constitutes political theory that echoes John Plamenatz.

“Political theory is therefore an essentially mixed mode of thought. It not only embraces deductive argument and empirical theory but combines these with normative concerns (in a way that we shall try to elucidate), so acquiring a practical, action-guiding character.”⁷³

Mark E. Warren uses a pre-positivist distinction between theoretical and philosophical problems to distinguish the enterprise of political theory from political philosophy.⁷⁴ For Warren, the term political theory is reserved for “those dimensions of conceptual schemes that select and organize information about the political world for explanatory purposes”.⁷⁵ And political philosophy primarily deals with questions that pertain to “conceptual presuppositions of theoretical orientations, as well as questions of judgement about truth and value”.⁷⁶ He points out that problems of political philosophy broadly falls under the category of normative, ontological and epistemological questions. Raising

⁷¹ David Miller and Larry Siedentop, “Introduction,” in *The Nature of Political Theory*, ed. David Miller and Larry Siedentop (New York: Clarendon Press, 1983), 1.

⁷² Miller and Siedentop, “Introduction,” 1.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Mark E. Warren, “What Is Political Theory/Philosophy?” *Political Science & Politics* 22, no. 3 (1989): 606-612.

⁷⁵ Warren, “Political Theory/Philosophy”, 607.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 609.

normative questions is the well-recognized task of political philosophy and political science is according to Warren , “unique among the social sciences in that its domain is preconstituted by normative questions”.⁷⁷This is so because “individuals act politically when they are normatively oriented toward collective problems” and the role of political philosophy is to articulate the normative dimension of political discourse.⁷⁸ Ontological questions deal with the assumptions about the nature of reality. Ontological assumptions are “logically prior to any explanation and serve as its conditions of possibility”.⁷⁹ Epistemological questions examines the “authority of theories with respect to the world they purport to explain”.⁸⁰

The self-understanding of political theory about the nature, task and significance of political theorizing as reflected in the writing of political theorists/philosophers ranging from Leo Strauss to John Rawls offers rich resources for illuminating the gap that exists between how political theory has been conceived and how it has been practiced. Political Theory as an academic discipline has not been able to fulfill its potential due to a parochialism that either limits or omits non-Western political constellations and concerns. An indispensable task of political theorizing is to contemplate on the desirable and feasible political arrangements that could ensure good life of people. But what if the proposed political arrangements are predicated on assumptions that privileges a particular part of the globe by obliterating dimensions of race and imperialism.⁸¹ When Samuel Huntington wrote about the clash of civilizations or Fukuyama’s celebration of the triumph of liberalism, however biased they be, they were in fact performing what Sabine regarded as a crucial function of political theory: analysis of the present and providing suggestions for the future. If political theorists have to be successful in carrying out what Leo Strauss termed as the “explicit goal” of political philosophy, they cannot ignore the ideas and perceptions of good life in non-Western societies. When Wolin conceptualizes political theory as a tradition embodying an ‘inherited form’, he is thinking about a rich

⁷⁷ Ibid.,611.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.,609.

⁸⁰ Ibid.,610.

⁸¹For instance, the assumptions that undergird the principles constituting the Rawlsian theory of justice overlooks the fact of colonialism.

inheritance which is definitively Western.⁸² The gulf between the lofty visions of political theory and its exclusive character upset many a political theorist which led to what I call the second critique of political theory.

The Three Critiques on Political Theory

The early 1950s and early 1960s were the decades in which political theory / philosophy courted trenchant criticism from scholars who endorsed logical positivism and its avatars in political science; Behaviouralism. Even some of the political theorists mourned that political theory is indeed on a decline and its decline was caused not so much out of behaviouralism but out of its non-engagement with practical issues. One proclaimed political philosophy to be dead.⁸³ Another aired his concern in an essay titled “Does Political theory still exist ?”.⁸⁴ A political theorist who recalls the postwar period of debate, at the dawn of the millennium thus:

“When a form of inquiry lacks a consensus on its nature and aims, its practitioners have no shared standards of judgment and disagree deeply about their assessments of each other's work, whether their discipline is in good or bad health and even whether it is alive or dead. Such a situation bordering at times on disciplinary hypochondria has characterised political theory' since the end of World War II ”.⁸⁵

The attack on Political Theory whether it was warranted or not was a blessing in disguise as it necessitated a self-reflection on what is political theory or political philosophy and what should be its task. The exposition of the task of the political theory and its indispensability was delineated in various essays by Leo Strauss, Isaiah Berlin, John Plamenatz and Sheldon Wolin. The writings of Alasdair Macintyre, John Rawls and Mark Warren that appeared in 1970s and 1980s also contributed to the self-understanding of political theory. In fact, many believe that political theory which was lifeless in the 1950s and 1960s was resuscitated with the publication of *A Theory of Justice* by John Rawls. Those who contest this narrative points out to the works of Hannah Arendt, Leo

⁸² Wolin, “Vocation,” 1070.

⁸³ Peter Laslett, “Introduction,” in *Philosophy, Politics and Society*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell (1956): vii-xv.

⁸⁴ Berlin, “Does Political Theory,” 143-172.

⁸⁵ Bhikhu Parekh, “Theorising Political Theory,” *Political Theory*, 27, No. 3 (1999): 398.

Strauss, Althusser, Herbert Marcuse etc. that emerged in that period when political theory was said to be dead. The historiography of political theory since second world war is thus a bone of contention among scholars.⁸⁶ Nevertheless one could broadly agree with Jonathan Wolff when he says that political philosophy was in a crisis in the years following the second world war. The crisis was contributed by the legacy of logical positivism, the World War II which demonstrated the limited impact political philosophy have on human behavior and the rise of Marxism, which reduced political philosophy to an ideology.⁸⁷ The editor of a seminal volume on twentieth century political philosophers published in 2011 made the following statement in the introduction :“Why, then, has political philosophy seemed to be such a highly questionable, if not moribund, endeavor to many observers? The answer to that question can be given briefly in two words: science and history”.⁸⁸

Three years before Peter Laslett made the proclamation “Political Philosophy is Dead” emblematic of the perceived crisis in political philosophy, an essay appeared in Political Science Quarterly titled “The Decline of Political Theory”.⁸⁹ The essay lamented that political philosophy was on a decline and examined factors that is causing its decline. Drawing parallels to the decline of political theory during the rise of Roman Empire, Alfred Cobban argued that political theory severed its connection with practical issues and became fettered to scientific and historical approaches to the study of politics which had a “fatal effect on its ethical content”.⁹⁰ He points out that “political ideas need periodical recoining if they are to retain their value” and illustrates with the example of the concept of democracy which has become in his time “ a sort of incantation”. Political theory is expected to supply to human minds “a sense of direction or a feeling of purpose”. Else, Cobban warns: “In the absence of a more or less rational theory to justify its sense of political obligation and the rightful powers of government, it will fall victim

⁸⁶ Parekh, “Theorising Political Theory,” 398-399. Dana R. Villa, “Hannah Arendt: From Philosophy to Politics” in *Political Philosophy in the Twentieth Century: Authors and Arguments*, ed. Catherine Zuckert (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 108-128.

⁸⁷ Jonathan Wolff, “The best books on Political Philosophy,” accessed December 2, 2017, <https://fivebooks.com/best-books/jonathan-wolff-on-political-philosophy/>.

⁸⁸ Catherine Zuckert, “Introduction” in *Political Philosophy in the Twentieth Century: Authors and Arguments*, ed. Catherine Zuckert (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 3.

⁸⁹ Alfred Cobban “The Decline of Political Theory,” *Political Science Quarterly* 68 (1953): 321-337.

⁹⁰ Cobban, “Decline of Political Theory,” 333.

to an irrational one. If it cannot have, say, Locke on Toleration, it will have, say, Hitler on *Mein Kampf*. That is what the decline of political theory means in practice”.⁹¹ Political theory has to engage with political realities as well as political principles to arrest its decline and Cobban tasks political theory with the re-introduction of a telos in political thinking.⁹²

Isaiah Berlin believed that the lack of a commanding work of political philosophy pointed out by many scholars for its alleged decline in the 1950s is hardly any “conclusive evidence” for its death.⁹³ Because, for Berlin, the only “two good reasons” that could certify a discipline’s demise are the unacceptability of its central presuppositions and the appearance of new disciplines that displace the older disciplines either by inheriting or usurping its functions.⁹⁴

The early 1990s saw the emergence of a critique that pointed to the ethnocentrism in the academic discipline of political theory. There are two strands in the critique. One strand that was also the earliest, took on the western understandings of certain concepts but did not attack Political Theory as a whole but limited the critique to certain concepts and categories. For instance, the scholarship that emerged mainly from India examined the western understandings of secularism, and modernity, pointed out its inadequacy in understanding the non-western social and political worlds. Also, under attack was liberalism and its progeny liberal -democracy from political theorists as well as statesmen. The debates surrounding the Asian Values vs Human Rights questioned the universality of liberal democratic values. The second strand of the second critique levelled charges at the discipline as a whole as exemplified in the writings of Jeffrey Isaac and Bhikhu Parekh.

The essay “The Strange Silence of Political Theory” by Jeffrey Isaac is a strong indictment of the professionalization of the academic subdiscipline of political theory

⁹¹ Ibid., 336-337.

⁹² In the words of Cobban “And if political theory revives, if the idea of purpose is re-introduced into political thinking, we may take up again the tradition of Western political thought and in doing so resume that continuous transformation of morals into politics, which still remains politics, in which according to Croce, lies the real ethical progress of mankind”. Ibid., 337.

⁹³ Berlin, “Does Political Theory,” 143.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

which has become imprisoned by a certain tradition which despite constituting a “secure reference point for our political thinking” engenders “intellectual conformity”.⁹⁵ The essay is triggered by the reluctance of American political theorists to contemplate on the revolutions in Russia and Central Europe. He laments that endless possibilities for political theorization presented by the “events of 1989” was greeted by American political theorists with a “deafening silence”.⁹⁶ There is an echo of Alfred Cobban in Isaac when he states that “ there is a striking discrepancy between the passionate engagement in current events that characterized most of the foundational writers of contemporary political theory and the disconnection of contemporary political theorists themselves”.⁹⁷ Isaac goes even further. He boldly states that “political theory today is, after all, principally a Western European idiom.”⁹⁸ The reluctance of the American political theorists to engage first-order questions is another part of the critique.

If the first critique of political theory occurred when its identity and its tasks were undergoing a crisis of confidence, the second critique stems from its identity being ossified in a certain way of doing political theory. To quote Isaac, “As I see it the problem with political theory today is exactly the opposite, not that it lacks its own identity, but that it is too wedded to its identity as a distinctive, profound enterprise, that it values theoretical ingenuity and philosophical declamation over empirical insight or historical relevance.”⁹⁹ Isaac ends his thoughtful and provocative essay by urging political theorists to brace themselves to engage in the “dramatic political experiences of our time”.¹⁰⁰

Isaac’s essay has courted endorsements as well as criticisms. In a balanced response, Elizabeth Kiss differentiates the critique of political theory by Isaac from the behaviorist attacks despite their superficial similarities.¹⁰¹ The former “ is a call for disciplinary self-reflection, self-critique, and change” while the voices that constituted the

⁹⁵ Jeffrey C. Isaac, "The Strange Silence of Political Theory," *Political Theory* 23, no. 4 (1995): 643.

⁹⁶ Isaac, "Silence of Political Theory," 637.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 638.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 649.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 650.

¹⁰¹ Elizabeth Kiss, "Response," *Political Theory* 23, no.4 (1995): 664-669.

latter “dismissed it as unscientific, unrigorous, obscure, or naively ideological”.¹⁰² She remarks that “political theory's silence about 1989 is neither unique nor uniquely important” as it pays scant attention to a range of striking events and problems. Finding Isaac’s essay to be ambiguous on the form of political theory, Kiss stresses the need of acknowledging the ‘internal complexity of political theory’.¹⁰³

Though sympathetic to the concerns raised by Isaac, Seyla Benhabib based on her experience of being the co-editor in chief of the Praxis International, pointed out that Isaac overlooks the difficulties in attaining historical knowledge and linguistic competence that is required for engaging the discourse of Eastern European intellectuals like Vaclav Havel, Adam Michnik, Jacek Kuron and George Konrad.¹⁰⁴

Other factor that is more significant in contributing to the difficulty in extracting meaning out of 1989 is the “non-contemporaneous contemporaneity of 1989”.¹⁰⁵ Benhabib describes Isaac’s observation that contemporary political theory is averse to first-order questions as “important and timely”.¹⁰⁶ She laments the unmooring of the subfield from the tradition of social theory and the flourishing of cultural studies and rational choice paradigms in its place.¹⁰⁷

Sheldon Wolin is not persuaded by the explanations that Isaac gave for American political theorists’ failure to contemplate on the events of 1989.¹⁰⁸ In Wolin’s reformulation the question of failure of political theory becomes failure of political sensibility.¹⁰⁹ By this Wolin means “an inability or refusal to articulate a conception of the political in the midst of wildly differing claims about it, some of them issuing from nontraditional claimants”.¹¹⁰ Wolin is interested in answering the question why political theorizing becomes difficult in the contemporary period. He picks on Isaac’s phrase “the dramatic experience of our time” and argues that a different sensibility opposes the

¹⁰²Kiss, "Response," 665.

¹⁰³Kiss, "Response," 666.

¹⁰⁴Seyla Benhabib, "Response," *Political Theory* 23, no. 4 (1995): 674-681.

¹⁰⁵Benhabib, "Response," 676.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*, 679.

¹⁰⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸Sheldon S. Wolin, "What Time is it?" *Theory & Event* 1, no. 1 (1997) accessed: 4 January 2018 <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/32440>.

¹⁰⁹*Ibid.*

¹¹⁰*Ibid.*

implication of “a homogeneous shared time.” He argues that “there is no single shared “political time” only culturally constituted different times and this makes theorizing the political life difficult as the pace of the political time is governed by necessity of deliberation.”¹¹¹

Bhikhu Parekh in one of his essays laments the absence in non-western societies of a well-considered critique of the central categories of the West, “its modes of inquiry and an original body of ideas capable of illuminating their political experiences by non-western societies”.¹¹² This is surprising as “non-Western societies have frequently and rightly complained that Western political theory is ethnocentric and has a limited explanatory power when applied outside the West.”¹¹³

In the essay “Decolonizing Liberalism”, Bhikhu Parekh examines how nineteenth century liberalism evolved hand-in-glove with imperialism.¹¹⁴ Its complicity with colonialism made liberalism especially Millian liberalism “missionary, ethnocentric and narrow dismissing non-liberal ways of life and thought as primitive and in need of the liberal civilizing mission”.¹¹⁵ Parekh observes that although liberalism, over the years, has become “less self-righteous”, its Millian legacy still animates some of the liberal political philosophers mainly Joseph Raz and Brian Barry.¹¹⁶ He argues that “liberalism stands to gain from a sympathetic dialogue with non-liberal ways of life and thought, and that such a dialogue is impossible unless it purges itself of the assumptions acquired during the colonial era.”¹¹⁷ Only a revision in liberalism, Parekh suggests, would help it to “come to terms with multicultural societies, which most contemporary societies are”.¹¹⁸

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Bhikhu Parekh, “The Poverty of Indian Political Theory,” *History of Political Thought* 13, no. 3 (1992) :535.

¹¹³ Bhikhu Parekh, “Indian Political Theory,” 535.

¹¹⁴ Bhikhu Parekh, “Decolonizing Liberalism” in, *The End of “Isms”? Reflections on the Fate of Ideological Politics After Communism’s Collapse*, ed. Alexander Shtromas (Blackwell Publishers, 1993), 85-104.

¹¹⁵ Parekh, “Decolonizing Liberalism,” 85.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 95.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 85.

¹¹⁸ Parekh suggests: “It needs to become more open-minded, more self-critical, more tolerant of its rivals and far more self-critical, more tolerant of its rivals, and far more sensitive to the diversity and complexity of human existence than it has been hitherto. It must reassess its Millian commitment to a single mode of human excellence and evolve a human view of the world in which different ways of life, including the non-liberal, can converse as equals and enrich both individual and collective existence.” Ibid., 103.

Multiple Modernities

The mid 1990s witnessed some key interventions by political theorists that have aided in understanding the various careers that modernity can embark in the non-western world. The works of Charles Taylor, Sudipta Kaviraj and Rajeev Bhargava have established the multiple trajectories and manifestations that modernity can assume in non-western world. *Daedalus* dedicated an issue for the theme “multiple modernities”. The discourse on modernity in the 1990s have inaugurated and since then normalized the use of adjectives “multiple” and “alternative” that denotes the plurality of the concept. It further inspired the discourses on “vernacular” and “regional modernities”. The ethnocentrism and the teleology embedded in the hitherto understandings on modernity have been brought forth by these writings.

Charles Taylor in his essay “Two theories of modernity” provides an outline of two different ways to understand the rise of modernity.¹¹⁹ It is buttressed on his understanding of modernity as “a movement from one constellation of background understandings to another, which repositions the self in relation to others and the good”.¹²⁰ A “cultural theory of modernity is one that characterizes the transformations that have issued in the modern West mainly in terms of the rise of a new culture”.¹²¹ An “acultural theory is one that describes these transformations in terms of some culture-neutral operation”.¹²² The dominant understandings of modernity are acultural and Taylor points out two disadvantages of such an understanding. One disadvantage is that it gives the wrong impression of inevitability of Western modernity.

Other disadvantage of an acultural understanding of modernity is that it fails to examine “certain facets of the modern constellation, closely interwoven with our understandings of science and religion, that don't strike us as being part of the transformation to modernity.”¹²³ Other grave consequences of solely relying on an acultural theory of

¹¹⁹ Charles Taylor, “Two Theories of Modernity,” *Hastings Center Report* 25, no. 2 (1995): 24-33.

¹²⁰ Taylor, “Theories of Modernity,” 24.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ Taylor, “Theories of Modernity,” 27.

modernity are ethnocentrism and the lack of awareness about the operation of ethnocentrism.

Charles Taylor's two theories of modernity has paved the way for appreciating the different trajectories that modernity can undertake in non-western worlds. Despite questioning the ethnocentrism of acultural theories of modernity, Taylor falls into the trap of Eurocentrism when he states "Western modernity is in part based on an original moral outlook".¹²⁴ The idea that modernity is western is being challenged by the notion of global histories that highlight the contribution of the non-western parts of the globe as well as notions like "connected histories" as formulated by Sanjay Subrahmanyam (which is discussed below) that among many things illuminate on workings of early modernity in non-western parts of the world.

The notion of "multiple modernities" developed by the Israeli sociologist S.N. Eisenstadt denotes the heterogeneity of experiencing the phenomenon of modernity across the globe. Eisenstadt explains the history of modernity as a tale of continuous formation and reformation of numerous cultural programs undertaken by various social actors.¹²⁵

The idea of "multiple modernities" go against the grain of the homogenizing and westernizing zeal embedded in the once widely held classical modernization theories and other acultural theories of modernity (to use the formulation of Charles Taylor). It delinks modernity from westernization and thus uniformity. Eisenstadt sees modernity as global but not necessarily universal in the sense that modernity is culturally appropriated in different ways.¹²⁶ Here modernity is global in its reach and spread but not global in its origins as Western Europe is considered as the fount of modernity. In Eisenstadt's formulation, the cultural and political programme of a single Axial Age civilization, a Christian-European civilization gives rise to a pattern of modernity which by virtue of its historical precedence becomes the "basic reference point for others".¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ S N. Eisenstadt, "Multiple Modernities," *Daedulus* 129 (2000): 2.

¹²⁶ Gerald Delanty, "Modernity and the escape from Eurocentrism" in *Handbook of Contemporary European Social Theory*, ed. Gerald Delanty (Routledge:2006),266-278.

¹²⁷ Eisenstadt, "Multiple Modernities", 3.

Though the notion of multiple modernities takes some steps away from Eurocentrism, it also takes a step closer to Eurocentrism as it regards modernity to be of solely European in origin, a notion which gets difficult to endorse in the light of new trends in historiography as illustrated in the “connected histories” methodology put forward by Sanjay Subrahmanyam. The sociologist Gerald Delanty also points out that “the idea of multiple modernities might reinforce a view of different modernities isolated from each other and being static, rather than processual, transformative and interpenetrating”.¹²⁸ A serious methodological implication of the notion of multiple modernities is that “modernity becomes the functional equivalent for nations”.¹²⁹ The numerical conditions that “multiple” entails infinite pluralizations that jeopardize the utility of “multiple modernities” as a heuristic device. The infinite pluralization of modernity and the comparisons it yields are “not much better off than we were with a comparison of different patterns of nation-state formation.”¹³⁰

Sudipta Kaviraj in his essay *Modernity and Politics in India* first published in *Daedalus* issue on “Multiple Modernities” pointed out the need for revising the conventional theoretical models of modernity by illustrating the trajectory of India’s modernity.¹³¹ He questions the understanding of modernity as “a single homogeneous process” emanating from “a single causal principle”. The causal principle that triggers modernity could be capitalism for Marx and rationalization of the world, for Weber. Kaviraj lists three reasons why the trajectory and impact of modernity cannot be homogeneous. The first reason is that “modern way of doing things is not written on a clean slate” but acts upon existing practices and institutions to produce a language that is modern but accented.¹³² Modernity can rupture but not completely obliterate ideas and institutions. Secondly, functionalist theories of modernity do not hold in light of historical evidence which leads him to endorse a sequential theory of modernity. For him, the sequence of the appearance of various processes also shapes the trajectory of modernity.

¹²⁸ Delanty, “Escape from Eurocentrism,” 273.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Sudipta Kaviraj, “Modernity and politics in India,” *Daedalus* 129, no. 1 (2000): 137-162.

¹³² Kaviraj, “Modernity and Politics,” 138.

The principle of reflexivity that marks the history of modernity is the third reason why modernity cannot be held to be homogeneous. Kaviraj examines the trajectory of political modernity through the career of its three most important aspects namely “the modern state, nationalism and democracy”.¹³³

In the essay “Are there Alternative Modernities?”, Rajeev Bhargava defends the idea that “alternative modernities have existed within and outside the western world” and forebode against confusing alternative modernities with “a patchwork of high-minded western modernity and an equally rigid indigenous tradition”.¹³⁴ The essay being ‘an exercise in analytical social theory’ elaborates Charles Taylor’s two theories of modernity namely acultural and cultural theories of modernity. Bhargava points out that acultural theories of modernity maintains a sharp distinction between culture and a “system of technology/economic and political institutions” and calls the latter which is aculturally defined “technology-institutional complex or IT-complex”.¹³⁵ He sheds light on three possible interpretations on acultural theories. The first interpretation is that modernity is constituted by the IT complex and has strict causal priority This interpretation offers no “casual efficacy” for culture and casts modernity as inevitable. The second interpretation offers modernity as an “original, existential choice”: “it has to either select or reject modernity. If a society opts for it, then it will have chosen the entire package; once it steps into it, there is no turning back, no escape.”¹³⁶ The third interpretation of acultural theory yields “a patchwork of modernity and tradition”.¹³⁷ All the three interpretations identify modernization with westernization.

Cultural theories of modernity reject the distinction between culture and the IT-complex.¹³⁸ Bhargava emphasizes the distinction between alternative modernity and a patchwork of modernity and tradition. Alternative modernities differs from the script either tradition or western modernity prescribes. The examples of transformed character

¹³³ Ibid., 141.

¹³⁴ Rajeev Bhargava, “Alternative Modernities” in *What is Political Theory and Why Do We Need It?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 292-311.

¹³⁵ Bhargava, “Alternative Modernities,” 294.

¹³⁶ Bhargava, “Alternative Modernities,” 295.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

of castes in India and the Indian secularism are illustrated as instances of alternative modernities.

Interestingly, when political theorists were pointing out the Eurocentrism in the existing understandings of modernity and its attendant concepts, the academic discipline of history too became the stage where attempts to wrest modernity from the hegemonic understandings that privileges Europe. Sanjay Subrahmanyam whose notion of “connected histories” intends to correct the historiographic trends in comparative history, “early modern” European history and post-colonial history. The notion of “connected histories” picks up “fragile threads that connected the globe” mainly “ideas and mental constructs” which circulated transcending cultural and political boundaries.¹³⁹ Subrahmanyam writes:

"Speaking of supra-local connections in the early modern world, we tend to focus on such phenomena as world bullion flows and their impact, firearms and the so-called 'Military Revolution,' or the circulation of renegades and mercenaries. But ideas and mental constructs, too, flowed across political boundaries in that world, and—even if they found specific local expression—enable us to see that what we are dealing with are not separate and comparable, but connected histories".¹⁴⁰

The notion of “connected histories” in Subrahmanyam’s formulation helps to avoid the tropes of nationalism and methodological fragmentation that is inherent in the fields of comparative history and area studies. It also corrects the tendency to attribute the phenomena of “early modernity” exclusively to Europe. Subrahmanyam highlights the need to “delink the notion of modernity” from a uniquely European trajectory and urges to understand modernity as a global phenomenon with multiple sources, roots and meanings.¹⁴¹ The notion of connected histories thus expands the geographies where early modern is underway. It also avoids the mistake of viewing the modernity in non-western worlds as purely derivative. Subrahmanyam redefines the chronological coverage of the ‘early modern’ in Africa and Eurasia as extending from mid - fourteenth century to mid-eighteenth century “with a relatively great emphasis on the period after about

¹³⁹Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Notes Towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia”, *Modern Asian Studies* 31, no.3 (1997):748,762.

¹⁴⁰ Subrahmanyam, “Early Modern Eurasia,” 748.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 737.

1450".¹⁴² Early modern is seen as an age of voyages and discoveries and characterized by the heightened intensity of "long-term structural conflict that inhered in relations between settled agricultural and urban societies on the one hand, and nomadic groups (hunter gatherers, pastoralists, etc.)".¹⁴³ Subrahmanyam illustrates the global and connected character of early modern period through symbolic and ideological constructs specifically millenarianism and its different manifestations and functions which connected northern and southern coasts of the Mediterranean, Ottoman empire, North Africa, Iran, Southeast Asia and South Asia (for instance, "the eastern recensions of the Alexandrine legend").¹⁴⁴ Subrahmanyam's methodology of "connected histories" mounts serious challenges to Eurocentric historiographies and the "methodological fragmentation" that is implicit in them. It thus wrests 'early modern' from a singular association confined to Europe and makes it global.

In another essay titled "Hearing Voices: Vignettes of Early Modernity in South Asia, 1400-1750" Subrahmanyam challenges the notion that the commencement of "early modernity" in India began with the arrival of the British.¹⁴⁵ He gives numerous instances of processes and ideas that are characteristic of the early modern in an era that is conventionally periodized as "medieval". He finds in the rule of Nayakas in Tanjore, certain characteristics that echoes the processes that characterize the early modern in other societies. These include "the *mise en valeur* of fiscal resources through trade, the drive to seek new sources of legitimation, thus opening up new public spaces (the more or less permanent choultry or eating house that was also the site of the *annadana*, the annual space of the festival) where such claims could be articulated and defended".¹⁴⁶ In the essays discussed above and in his other works, the overarching argument of Subrahmanyam is that "modernity is historically a global and conjunctural phenomenon, not a virus that spreads from one place to another".¹⁴⁷ Modernity is "located in a series of historical processes that brought hitherto relatively isolated societies into contact" and its

¹⁴² Ibid., 736.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 738.

¹⁴⁴ Subrahmanyam, "Early Modern Eurasia," 755-757.

¹⁴⁵ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Hearing voices: Vignettes of Early Modernity in South Asia, 1400-1750," *Daedalus* 127, no. 3 (1998): 75-104.

¹⁴⁶ Subrahmanyam, "Early Modernity in South Asia," 83.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 99-100.

roots must be sought in diverse phenomena that could range from “the Mongol dream of world conquest” to the “globalization of microbes”.¹⁴⁸

The debate surrounding multiple modernities is significant as it not only brought into focus the provinciality of Western modernity but also paved the way for claims to appreciate non-Western particularities. The debate was crucial in debunking the ethnocentrism ensconced in false universalisms and to some extent in appreciating the occurrence of certain features of modernity in the non-West that preceded colonialism.

Need for a Comparative Political Theory

While reflecting on what constitutes political theory and its nature and task, Sheldon Wolin also dwelt on the limitations inherent in political theory. Political Theory despite its sophisticated categories can offer only a limited understanding of the political phenomena as there exists a ‘vast range of political experience’ that are inexhaustible by such categories.¹⁴⁹ Wolin reminds us, borrowing Cassirer’s phrase, that statements and propositions in political theory, after all, are ‘abbreviations of reality’.¹⁵⁰ He uses the metaphor of a net to indicate the abstractions that undergird the construction of concepts and categories. As Wolin writes,

“The concepts and categories of a political philosophy may be likened to a net that is cast out to capture political phenomena, which are then drawn in and sorted in a way that seems meaningful and relevant to the particular thinker. But in the whole procedure, he has selected a particular net and he has cast it in a chosen place”.¹⁵¹

Abstractions are indispensable for any good theory let alone political theory. Selections and assumptions are made in the construction of a theory. But the problem with mainstream political theory is that its ‘abbreviations’ are always based on Western experience. The abstractions are informed by the social and political imaginary of one part of the globe while ignoring the rest. Comparative Political Theory functions as the third critique in political theory by pointing out the inherent bias of ethnocentrism that besets the canon, concepts and approaches of political theory.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 100.

¹⁴⁹ Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, 21.

¹⁵⁰ Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, 21.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

The justification for the creation and endorsement of the new subfield Comparative Political Theory are made on several grounds namely a) exit from orientalism, b) epistemic c) decolonizing political theory d) globalization e) explanatory-interpretive f) democratic g) study of discontinuities and h) essential for cosmopolitan political thought.

a) Exit from Eurocentrism

Exit from Eurocentrism especially the exit from orientalism that beset the discipline of political theory has been one of the major motivating factor that led to the establishment of the new subfield devoted to cross-cultural political enquiry. Comparative Political Theory builds its critique of Eurocentrism in political theory from the general critique of Western universalism emerging from postcolonialism, feminism and subaltern studies.¹⁵² CPT was envisioned as an ‘antidote’ to the persistence of orientalism, the most recent avatar at the time of its creation being, Samuel Huntington’s “clash of civilizations” thesis.¹⁵³ Many early scholars interested in the cross-cultural enquiry and upset by Huntington’s pessimistic prognosis proposed the alternative of a “dialogue among the civilizations” and they believed it to be the primary task of CPT.¹⁵⁴ The articulation and critique of orientalism by Edward Said was taken seriously by the pioneers of CPT mainly Fred Dallmayr and Roxanne Euben. Fred Dallmayr titled a collection of his essays on cross-cultural understanding as *Beyond Orientalism: Essays on Cross-Cultural Encounter*. He defined orientalism as “the effort to dominate and ‘talk down’ the other, in such a manner that the Occident was never called into question (or never allowed itself to be questioned)”.¹⁵⁵ Dallmayr dismissed the idea of cultural incommensurability and sought to develop an approach to understand ‘alien life-forms’ without its assimilation into “our categories and beliefs”.¹⁵⁶ Dallmayr found an answer in Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics and Heidegger’s attempt to overcome metaphysics. Thus, for

¹⁵² CPT also builds on the broader critique of Eurocentrism in the social sciences by various scholars like Immanuel Wallerstein, Samir Amin, Syed- al Faritas and Walter D. Mignolo.

¹⁵³ Fred Dallmayr, “Comparative Political Theory: What is it Good for?” in *Western Political Thought in Dialogue with Asia*, ed. Takashi Shogimen and Cary J. Nederman. (Lanham MD: Lexington Books, 2009) 13.

¹⁵⁴ Fred Dallmayr, "Introduction: Toward a Comparative Political Theory," *The Review of Politics* 59, no.3 (1997): 421-427.

¹⁵⁵ Fred Dallmayr, *Dialogue Among Civilizations: Some Exemplary Voices*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 28.

¹⁵⁶ Fred Dallmayr, *Beyond Orientalism: Essays on Cross-Cultural Encounter*, (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1996), 89

Dallmayr, exit from orientalism can be achieved by adoption of a dialogic paradigm in cross-cultural understanding using philosophical hermeneutics. Taking cue from Said, Roxanne Euben's work on Islamic Fundamentalism views the stereotypes about Islamic fundamentalism reflected in both popular and scholarly accounts as an exercise of power and contests the distorted meanings of Islamic fundamentalism.¹⁵⁷ In her analysis, the distinction between the 'self' and the 'other' collapses as the 'other' is shown as less unfamiliar. Euben does so by juxtaposing the critique of modernity by Syed Qutub with that of the internal critiques of modernity within the Western philosophical tradition.

Exit from Eurocentrism has been and continues to be the primary justification for the case of comparative political theory. For instance, Leigh Jenco finds the working of eurocentrism in not just in denying the particularity of the non-Western but also in denying its 'generality'.¹⁵⁸ To de-parochialize political theory Jenco proposes the 're-centering' of the field. Re-centering entails reconceptualizing the 'local', "not as a cultural context that permanently conditions our understanding and argumentative claims, but as a particularized site for the circulation of knowledge".¹⁵⁹ Eurocentrism in political theory exists in the constitution and organization of the political theory canon and the privileging of certain categories and approaches in understanding the non-Western political constellations.¹⁶⁰ Farah Godrej's formulation of cosmopolitan political thought envisions to de-center political theory by reframing and answering "a series of questions about what resources are available in a tradition despite its pervasiveness, and how these resources may challenge Eurocentric modes of knowing".¹⁶¹

b) Epistemic

The epistemic justification for comparative political theory is primarily argued on the basis of the making the universalism professed by political theory, complete and genuine,

¹⁵⁷Roxanne Euben, *Enemy in the Mirror: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Limits of Modern Rationalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 22.

¹⁵⁸ Jenco defines Eurocentrism as the "cognitive hegemony of categories rooted in Western European and to a lesser extent American intellectual and historical experience". Leigh Jenco, "Recentring Political Theory: The Promise of Mobile Locality," *Cultural Critique* 79 (2011): 27.

¹⁵⁹ Jenco, "Political Theory," 28.

¹⁶⁰ This point has been elaborated in Chapter 2.

¹⁶¹Farah Godrej, *Cosmopolitan Political Thought: Method, Practice, Discipline* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 24.

with the inclusion of political thinking in non-Western societies. Fred Dallmayr remarks that “the point of comparative political theory, in my view, is precisely to move toward a more genuine universalism, and beyond the spurious 'universality' traditionally claimed by the Western canon and by some recent intellectual movements”.¹⁶² The learning endeavor characterized by cross-cultural political enquiry entails encountering the alien. Dallmayr says, “One of the main benefits of comparative study for political theory is the ability to rekindle the critical elan endemic to political philosophy since the time of Socrates and Plato but likely to be extinguished by canonization. Moving from the habitually familiar toward the unfamiliar will help to restore the sense of ‘wondering’ (*thaumazein*) that the ancients extolled as pivotal to philosophizing”.¹⁶³

By bringing non-Western perspectives on familiar debates about co-existence in a political unit, CPT serves as a reminder that political theory is ultimately about “human and not merely Western dilemmas”.¹⁶⁴ Thus the epistemic value for CPT as stated by Euben lies in the blurring of the distinction between the ‘self’ and the ‘other. For Leigh Jenco, engaging in non-Western traditions enhance the possibility of acquiring novel and pragmatic conceptual resources that could help in dealing with ‘unanticipated questions and answers’.¹⁶⁵ The study *about* and *in* ‘alternative traditions’ presents “new possibilities for thinking about politics”.¹⁶⁶ Michael Freeden believes that a mindful application of a comparative perspective to political theory could reduce the ‘epistemic gap’ between political theorists and empiricists.¹⁶⁷ For some scholars, the epistemic value of cross-cultural political theory lies in its potential to illuminate the moral and political imaginaries of diverse cultures, thus enhancing mutual intelligibility and facilitating intercultural communication across various constituencies to fight common challenges.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶²Fred Dallmayr, “Beyond Monologue: For a Comparative Political Theory,” *Perspectives on Politics*, 2, no. 2 (2004) :253.

¹⁶³ Dallmayr, “Beyond Monologue,” 254.

¹⁶⁴Roxanne Euben, "Comparative Political Theory: An Islamic Fundamentalist Critique of Rationalism," *Journal of Politics* 59, no. 1 (1997) :32.

¹⁶⁵Leigh K. Jenco, *Making the Political: Founding and Action in the Political Theory of Zhang Shizhao* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 10.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷Michael Freeden, “The Comparative Study of Political Thinking,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 12 (2007) :4

¹⁶⁸Melissa Williams and Mark Warren, “A Democratic Case for Comparative Political Theory,” *Political Theory* 42, no.1 (2014): 26-57.

c) Decolonizing Political Theory

Decolonizing the discipline of political theory has been one of the major motivations for establishing CPT. One manifestation of exclusion in the field is the dissemination of the political theory tradition as a monologue of dead, white men. In the introductory essay in *The Review of Politics* inaugurating the subfield of comparative political theory, Fred Dallmayr remarked the following. “As practiced in most Western universities, the study of political theory or political philosophy revolves basically around the canon of Western political thought from Plato to Marx or Nietzsche-with occasional recent concessions to strands of feminism and multiculturalism as found in Western societies”.¹⁶⁹

The colonial mindset that only white lives matter is reflected in the organization of the canon. There is hardly any representation of non-Western thinkers or themes like race, colonialism and imperialism that are definitive of the shaping of non-Western destinies. CPT scholars have been vociferous in pointing out the exclusion of non-western thinkers in the political theory tradition. Their work illuminates the political thought of various thinkers like Mahatma Gandhi, Kyoto School philosophers etc. and a case for inclusion of such figures in the canon is clearly spelt out.¹⁷⁰ The burgeoning literature on the political theory of empire and imperialism has been parallel with and further advances the case for a new subfield of political theory that could transform the existing organization of the canon. The absence of anti-colonial and anti-racist tradition in the discourses on political philosophy is a “cognitive handicap”.¹⁷¹ The darker side of Western modernity is coloniality¹⁷² and the political theory tradition has been selectively constructed to obliterate this very aspect of history. As Charles W. Mills points out,

“So, there is a double mystification, which in complementary conceptual operations jointly obliterates the colonial past. It is not merely a matter of the non-inclusion of the anti-colonial and anti-racist voices of people of color (or the anticolonial and anti-racist

¹⁶⁹ Dallmayr, “Comparative Political Theory,” 421.

¹⁷⁰Chris Goto-Jones, “The Kyoto School, the Cambridge School, and the History of Political Philosophy in Wartime Japan,” *Positions* 17 no.1 (2009): 13-42. Farah Godrej, “Nonviolence and Gandhi’s Truth: A Method for Moral and Political Arbitration,” *The Review of Politics* (2006) : 287-317.

¹⁷¹Charles W. Mills, “Decolonizing Western Political Philosophy,” *New Political Science* 37, no.1 (2015) :10.

¹⁷²Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press,2011),162.

texts of white progressives), but also the sanitization, the deracialization, of the (generally) imperial political views of the officially included and canonized European theorists".¹⁷³

Another area that awaits decolonization is the ideological hegemony of liberalism. Liberalism at some point held a lot of emancipatory potential but once it began ossifying as a creed and the missionary zeal with which it has been utilized to wage wars on non-Western nation states, its sheen is on the decline. Comparative Political Theory as a subfield is essential in making intelligible the non-liberal traditions embedded in some non-Western cultures.

d) Globalization

For Fred Dallmayr, the unprecedented intensity of interaction among the hitherto segregated cultural spheres accelerated by contemporary globalization necessitates the need for an academic subfield called comparative political theory.¹⁷⁴ According to Dallmayr, globalization accentuates the need for a systematic reflection of the "status and meaning of political life" in a global arena.¹⁷⁵ An academic field devoted to cross-cultural political enquiry promotes cross-cultural understanding and peace. Opposing the Huntington's portrayal of post-cold War era scenario as a "clash of civilizations" Dallmayr envisions a world characterized by dialogue of civilizations and one significant purpose of a cross-cultural political enquiry is to facilitate a dialogue across disparate civilizations.

e) Explanatory-Interpretive¹⁷⁶

There exist many non-western phenomena which are not seriously dealt in the subfield of political theory but is treated in the framework of comparative politics resulting in inadequate understanding or misunderstanding of the phenomena under study. CPT scholarship addresses this issue by trying to understand the phenomenon under study either on its own terms or employing different concepts to illuminate the phenomenon.

¹⁷³ Mills, "Western Political Philosophy," 10.

¹⁷⁴ Dallmayr, "Beyond Monologue," 254.

¹⁷⁵ Dallmayr, "Comparative Political Theory," 421.

¹⁷⁶ I borrow "explanatory-interpretive" justification of CPT from Andrew March but I advance his description. See Andrew F. March, "What is Comparative Political Theory?," *The Review of Politics* 71 (2009): 541.

One of the first works under the rubric of political theory “*Enemy in the Mirror, Islamic Fundamentalism and the Limits of Modern Rationalism: A Work of Comparative Political Theory*” by Roxanne L. Euben attempts to understand and explain the phenomenon of Islamic Fundamentalism eschewing social-scientific models which reduces it as an epiphenomenon of modernity. Euben employs a hermeneutic method to reach the adherent’s own understanding of Islamic Fundamentalism. She analyses the texts by Sayyid Qutub to illustrate the logic underlying his critique of the modern state and his articulation of Islamist metaphysics. This enables her to show the inherent power in Islamic fundamentalism to woo constituencies regardless of their socio-economic conditions. Also, by portraying the work of Sayyid Qutub as a critique of the Western rationalist epistemology and juxtaposing with the internal Western critiques of modernity, Euben blurs the distinction between a Western self and a non-Western other’. A corollary of this is that Islamic fundamentalism appears to be less alien or hostile as one imagined to be.¹⁷⁷ Thus the explanatory-interpretive motivation for comparative political theory has the added advantage of rehabilitating a non-Western phenomenon or tradition “less alien or hostile than its crudest opponents charge”.¹⁷⁸

Nancy Hirschman’s work on Islamic veil points out the western biases in reading the practice.¹⁷⁹ I have argued elsewhere that the singular conceptual framework of rights is inadequate to comprehend the emancipatory potential in the concept of “Asian Values”.¹⁸⁰ What is suggested is a view of Asian values as envisioning an alternative modernity.

f) A Democratic case for CPT

¹⁷⁷ In another essay Euben uses Hannah Arendt’s concept of immortality to understand jihad as political action. See Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

¹⁷⁸ March, “Comparative Political Theory,” 542. For Andrew March, the “rehabilitative” function is a motivation in itself for the justification of comparative political theory. I treat the rehabilitating function of CPT as a natural outcome of the attempts by CPT scholars to escape Orientalism and explanatory social-scientific models.

¹⁷⁹ Nancy J. Hirschmann, “Eastern Veiling, Western Freedom?,” in *Border Crossings: Toward a Comparative Political Theory*, ed. Fred Dallmayr 39-60 (Lanham: Lexington Books, 1999), 39-60.

¹⁸⁰ Josey Tom, “The Singapore Grip: Asian Values and Political Theory,” Paper presented at *Singapore Studies from the Outside*, National University of Singapore, Singapore. October, 2015.

A very strong endorsement for the existence of CPT has been provided by Melissa Williams and Mark Warren.¹⁸¹ They argue the case for CPT from a democratic theory perspective. The erosion of democratic accountability in institutions located at the local and global level has inaugurated possibilities for democratic mobilization and deliberation through making the ground conducive for rise of the global publics woven around shared fates. CPT could facilitate intercultural communication by illuminating moral, social and political imaginaries of various traditions resulting in a common moral resource that could be utilized by various constituencies. By reconstituting and representing the ideational resources in diverse traditions, CPT becomes a repertoire of practical reason, effecting the strengthening of ‘social capacity for critical reflexivity’.¹⁸²

Williams and Warren endorse CPT on the basis of its potential to contribute to the “emergence of new global publics” that are engendered by globalization. CPT could function as a discourse, communicating to wider publics, the knowledge resources trapped in various traditions.¹⁸³ The knowledge resources might contain diverse ways of articulating and resisting common problems. By making these knowledge resources intelligible to foreign traditions, CPT could become an “architecture of translation” that foster “deliberative publics” across cultural boundaries.¹⁸⁴

g) CPT is ideal for the Study of ‘Discontinuities’

A strong case for the existence and enhancement of the field of Comparative Political Thought can be made without mooring the category of comparison to a spatial origination i.e. the non-Western. One advantage of a justification of the existence of a CPT that does not privilege an East-West dichotomy is that it could avoid the ethical dilemmas that are generated when an east-West formulation is employed. Another advantage is that an idea of CPT unrestrained by non-Western geographies could save the very enterprise of CPT from collapsing into a 21st century twin of area studies. The case for a non-geographical parameter for the study of comparative political thought is provided by Chris-Goto Jones.

¹⁸¹ Williams and Warren, “Comparative Political theory,” 26-57.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 36.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*,” 26.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 28.

For Chris Goto-Jones, the parameter that constitute the “comparative” should be a ‘politico-theoretical’ parameter rather than a ‘non-Western’ one.¹⁸⁵ Goto - Jones suggests that CPT should be examining the discontinuities that exist across political and philosophical spectrums rather than borders of sovereign-nation states or civilizations.¹⁸⁶ A CPT that privileges discontinuities function as ‘political thought’ while the strand of CPT that veers around a East-West binary function as a ‘genus of area studies’.¹⁸⁷ CPT contributes as political thought when it takes into consideration the cosmological and metaphysical issues within politics.¹⁸⁸ Such a formulation is inclusive as it does not discriminate on the basis of spatiality and does not pave the ground for a battle between ‘us’ and ‘them’. The case for CPT as the ideal enterprise for studying discontinuities assumes significance in light of the calls by eminent political philosophers and theorists to examine ‘discontinuity’ in the history of political thought along with the already existing scholarship on the continuities in the political theory tradition.¹⁸⁹

h) Essential for a ‘Cosmopolitan Political Thought’

Comparative Political Theory is conceived as an essential enterprise in reconceptualizing political theory as a ‘genuinely cosmopolitan field of political thought’.¹⁹⁰ Farah Godrej argues that “a clearer understanding of the scope and methods of comparative political theory is crucial to the development of a cosmopolitan political theory”.¹⁹¹ A cosmopolitan political thought arises out of the application of normative principles of cosmopolitanism on the very methods and practices in political theory. It aims to transcend the binaries like “self” and the “other” and questions the assumptions of boundedness and discrete character that informs monikers like “European Political Thought” or “Indian Political Thought”. Instead it pushes towards ‘webs of coeval

¹⁸⁵ Chris Goto-Jones, “A Cosmos beyond Space and Area Studies: Toward Comparative Political Thought as Political Thought,” *Boundary 2* 38, no.3 (2011): 89.

¹⁸⁶ Goto-Jones, “Comparative Political Thought,” 89.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 90.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 89.

¹⁸⁹ However, these seemingly well-intentions also fall into the trap of Eurocentrism. See Goto-Jones, “Wartime Japan,” 26-27.

¹⁹⁰ Farah Godrej, “Towards a Cosmopolitan Political Thought: The Hermeneutics of Interpreting the Other.” *Polity* 41, no. 2 (2008):161.

¹⁹¹ Godrej, *Cosmopolitan Political Thought*, 13.

engagement' of political thought in various traditions.¹⁹² A cosmopolitan political thought materializes only when the challenges posed by the otherness of the texts are confronted head-on while bracing oneself for self-dislocation, existential immersion in foreign traditions and self-relocation. The methodology for the refashioning of political thought as truly cosmopolitan can be provided by the subfield of CPT which engages seriously the political ideas and texts from disparate traditions. Only when the thematic explorations that motivate enquiry in comparative political thought takes place at the center rather than at the margins of political theory, the stage for a cosmopolitan political thought can be said to be set.

Conclusion

Comparative Political Theory is a new subfield within the academic discipline of political theory which primarily focusses on bringing the non-Western insights about political life into the mainstream scholarship in political theory. It points out the parochiality of political theory in its organization of canon, approaches to interpretation of non-Western texts and in constructing the career of concepts in the West as the reference point for the rest of the world ignoring their particularities. The call to create the subfield has been justified on many grounds including the need to exit Eurocentrism and decolonize political theory, epistemic and democratic reasons, context of globalization etc. Comparative Political Theory should be viewed as the third critique internal to political theory. The first critique of political theory emerged in the backdrop of the Behavioralist critique and it engendered the seminal reflections on the nature, scope, significance and tasks of political theory. The early 1990s saw the emergence of a critique that pointed to the ethnocentrism in the academic discipline of political theory. Constituted by two strands, the one strand of which took on the Western understandings of certain concepts but did not attack the conduct of the practitioners of the discipline but limited the critique to certain concepts and categories. But the second strand provided an indictment of the Eurocentrism in the very shaping of the agenda in political theory i.e. implicitly privileging the issues that are central to the Western political life as worthy of

¹⁹² Ibid., 16.

contemplation by political theorists. Comparative Political Theory as the third critique builds on from the two critiques internal to political theory and lends valence for pluralizing the existing canon, categories and approaches in political theory.

CHAPTER 2

PLURALITY: CATEGORIES AND APPROACHES

In an essay that introduced a special issue of the journal *Political Theory* marking its thirtieth anniversary, its editor, Stephen K. White stressed on the commitment of political theory not to collapse the fact of pluralism into a platitude.¹⁹³ The scholarship emerging from the field of Comparative Political Theory (CPT) has turned the lens of pluralism into the very nature and practices of the discipline itself. CPT scholarship has been critical and constructive about the existing canon, categories and approaches to the interpretation of texts especially nonwestern texts. Through its immanent and constructive critique, the emerging CPT scholarship, I argue has unsettled the dominant canon, categories and approaches in political theory, making the ground conducive for plurality. The parochialism in the representation of the canon is being questioned and new categories and approaches are suggested by CPT scholars. This chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section, I discuss how the CPT scholars advance and amplify the democratic and methodological critique against the political theory canon. The second section problematizes the use of western categories in the study of non-Western political constellations and examines claims and counterclaims for inaugurating new categories. The third section analyses the contributions of various scholars to the interpretation of non-western texts. The contribution includes not only a critique of the dominant approaches like the Straussian approach and the Skinnerian approach exemplified in the Cambridge School but also include offering new ways of interpreting non-Western texts.

¹⁹³ It also marked another anniversary, the fortieth anniversary of Isaiah Berlin's classic essay "Does Political Theory Still Exist?". Stephen K. White, "Pluralism, Platitudes, and Paradoxes: Fifty years of Western Political Thought," *Political Theory* 30.4 (2002): 475.

Classics and Creating the Canon

The thinkers and ideas that constitute a canon in a field of study ensures its stability and adaptability.¹⁹⁴ Anthony J. Parel emphasizes the importance of political canon for a political culture in the following words. “No political culture can long survive without its canon. And no political canon can long continue without timely change. There is subtle but real connection between canon, stability and change. A political canon reflects stability, but to be relevant, it should also be willing to change”.¹⁹⁵

What Parel said of political culture also holds true for the discipline of political theory especially the field of history of political thought. The canon remains the “dominant reference point for understanding the history of political thought”.¹⁹⁶ For many years the canon of political thought that constituted the history of political thought have been ‘dead, white, Europeanmen’.¹⁹⁷ It is no longer so. As a political theorist puts it “the traditional history of political thought has lost its serene aura of finality”.¹⁹⁸ Ensclosed in the traditional political theory or history of political thought textbooks are Western thinkers from Plato to Mill (and Rawls) and a set of themes that culminates in liberal political theory. Siep Stuurman describes the canon of the history of political thought as follows.

“Its main contours are familiar: a select company of “great thinkers,” from Plato to Marx and Mill, occupies center stage, and the plot of the story turns on a few basic oppositions, such as freedom of worship and conscience versus theocracy and priestcraft, liberty versus tyranny, civil society versus statolatry, rule by popular consent versus absolutism, and finally, in the twentieth century, democracy versus totalitarianism”.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁴ According to Walter Mignolo, “one of the main functions of a canon formation (literary or non-literary) is to insure the stability and adaptability of a given community of believers.” Walter D. Mignolo, “Canons A(nd)Cross-Cultural Boundaries (Or, Whose Canon Are We talking About?),” *Poetics Today* 12 no.1 (1991): 1.

¹⁹⁵ Anthony J. Parel, “Gandhi and Modern Indian Political Thought,” in *Comparative Political Theory: An Introduction*, ed. Fred Dallmayr (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 152.

¹⁹⁶ Navid Hassanzadeh, “The Canon and Comparative Political Thought,” *Journal of International Political Theory* 11, no.2 (2014): 185.

¹⁹⁷ Siep Stuurman, “The Canon of the History of Political Thought: Its Critique and a Proposed Alternative,” *History and Theory* 39, no.2 (2000) :152.

¹⁹⁸ Stuurman, “Proposed Alternative,” 148.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 147.

The traditional canon of political thought and the timeless truths it provides is predicated on an Enlightenment view of history, which, swaying to the winds of progress, views history as the history of the concept of liberty and takes pride in its triumph and invincibility. This ‘invented tradition’ is a product of the nineteenth century Europe.²⁰⁰ However, over the years, the traditional canon of political thought has been subjected to a democratic and methodological critique.²⁰¹ The democratic critique questions the selectiveness and incompleteness of the canon and consider it as a reflection of the “history of the victors, mostly upper-class European white men, the famous dead White European Males (DWEMs)”.²⁰² Stuurman traces the democratic critique to a variety of constituencies like feminists, anti-imperialists and socialists.²⁰³ The feminists point to the absence of the women thinkers in the canon despite a continuous tradition of European feminism from Christine de Pizan to contemporary times.²⁰⁴ The anti-imperialists among other things point to the persistence of orientalist writings and the absence of narratives that contest them. Also unrepresented in the canon are those progressive voices of Europe that talked back to colonialism and slave trade.²⁰⁵ The methodological critique punctured the finality and sanctity of the canon. With the approaches to interpretation adopted by Cambridge School historians of political thought (associated mainly with Quentin Skinner and J.G.A. Pocock) and conceptual historians, canon was no longer seen as a museum of timeless truths but an outcome of a contested intellectual and political construction. For instance, the Cambridge School has engendered a “continuing stream of interpretations and reappraisals of the canon” and have broadened the themes of study to include areas like “political economy” and “conjectural history”.²⁰⁶ How does the invented tradition of political thought canon be made reflexive of history and present concerns? For a mainstream political theorist like Siep Stuurman, the construction of a

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 149. However, there are scholars like John Gunnell who argue that the “tradition” in the history of political thought is a myth and is a construction of twentieth century. John G. Gunnell, “The Myth of the Tradition,” *American Political Science Review* 72, no .1 (1978): 122-134.

²⁰¹ Stuurman, “Proposed Alternative,” 148.

²⁰² Ibid., 152.

²⁰³ Stuurman omits the critique from the emerging field of Comparative Political Theory which was still at its infancy at the time of the publication of Stuurman’s article.

²⁰⁴ Stuurman, “Proposed Alternative,” 153.

²⁰⁵ For an excellent article examining the latest literature exploring the imperial dimensions in the history of political thought, see Jennifer Pitts, “Political Theory of Empire and Imperialism,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 11 (2010): 211-235.

²⁰⁶ Stuurman, “Proposed Alternative,” 158.

new history of political thought should include “more and different ancients than we formerly believed”.²⁰⁷ But he leaves the readers wondering about the racial composition of the ancients he has in mind!

The scholars of comparative political thought advance the existing democratic and methodological critique. They do so by delineating the manifestations of Eurocentrism in the history of political thought and the strategies through which non-western thinkers and ideas are being excluded from the canon. Also pointed out by the CPT scholars is the Eurocentrism lurking the presentations of history of political thought and the supposedly inclusive and democratic visions for the transformation of the canon. Chris Goto-Jones highlights an obvious Eurocentrism: the labels of textbooks of political thought which discuss only European thinkers but nevertheless uses broad and universal titles.²⁰⁸ For instance, Goto-Jones point out how the classic work by Quentin Skinner’s “*The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*” or an edited volume devoted to discussing its influence and significance, “*Rethinking the Foundations of Modern Political Thought*” despite omitting non-European thinkers, “consciously identifies itself without a geo-cultural or spatial referent”, thus quietly claiming universalism.²⁰⁹ A further illustration of this appropriation of universalism by particularistic history is the Cambridge University Press “blue” series “Texts in the History of Political Thought” which at last count boasts 121 titles but do not have a single non-Western text in its entire series.²¹⁰ Charles W. Mills points out that in the “*Blackwell’s Companion to Contemporary Political Philosophy*”, Philip Petit paints a Eurocentric picture by arguing that the period from late nineteenth century to 1950s hardly yielded any political philosophy.²¹¹ Mills point out that this is precisely the period when anticolonial movements and struggles of the Black community in the United States were gathering momentum. The texts produced by intellectuals and leaders of these global struggles -Mahatma Gandhi, Frederick Douglass,

²⁰⁷Ibid., 166.

²⁰⁸ Chris Goto-Jones, “The Kyoto School, the Cambridge School, and the History of Political Philosophy in Wartime Japan,” *Positions* 17 no.1 (2009): 13-42. Chris Goto-Jones, “A Cosmos beyond Space and Area Studies: Toward Comparative Political Thought as *Political Thought*,” *Boundary 2* 38, no.3 (2011) :88-118.

²⁰⁹Goto-Jones, “*Political Thought*,” 95.

²¹⁰ The series of textbooks part of the “Texts in the History of Political Thought” can be found in the Cambridge website. “Politics” <http://www.cambridgeindia.org/academic/subjects/Politics>.

²¹¹ Charles W. Mills, “Decolonizing Western Political Philosophy,” *New Political Science*, 37, no.1 (2015): 1-24

Jose Marti, Sun Yat- Sen, W.E.B. Du Bois and Frantz Fanon - are overlooked in Petit's analysis.²¹²

Goto-Jones argues that the insights of the Cambridge School have been selectively and inconsistently applied to non-western contexts. Despite the potential of Cambridge school to open up new possibilities of inclusion of non-western political thought, the context remains limited to the geohistorical spaces of Europe and United States. Even the increasing tendency in the field to concentrate on the pre-war political thinkers is steeped in parochialism and Eurocentrism. Goto-Jones raises the point that if the historians of political thought can study Carl Schmitt despite his Nazi association, why do they omit the Kyoto School of philosophy that originated in pre-war Japan.²¹³ Goto-Jones makes a strong case for the inclusion of Kyoto School by illustrating it as a "discontinuity" that could offer rich sources of comparative political theorizing.²¹⁴ Discontinuities could be a theme, thinker, idea, or even actions that talk back to the dominant scheme of things but are rendered marginal in their original context and most likely tend to be neglected or erased from the reconstruction of the past by historians. In short, discontinuities are the unheard voices of the past that gets obliterated in the cacophony of continuities.

The calls by political philosophers like Charles Taylor and Chris Goto-Jones to recognize 'discontinuities' in the history of political thought are inspired by Michel Foucault. Foucault found the disciplines of history and philosophy to be beset by continuities which relies on teleological assumptions. He points out "a particular repugnance to conceiving of difference, to describing separations and dispersions, to dissociating the reassuring form of the identical".²¹⁵ For Foucault continuity and discontinuity together is a reflection of the flow of history. Focusing on 'discontinuities' as a way forward in the history of political thought, seemingly holds a lot of promise for the inclusion of non-western political thought as one expects the non-European and discontinuity to overlap. But the

²¹² Mills "Western Political Philosophy," 6.

²¹³ Goto- Jones argues that the wartime Kyoto School philosophy in Japan has been subjected to double marginalization namely ethnocentrism and association with World War II. See Goto-Jones, "Philosophy in Wartime Japan," 14-15.

²¹⁴ Goto-Jones, "Political Thought," 87-118 and "Philosophy in Wartime Japan," 13-42.

²¹⁵ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge (L'Archeology du savior)*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 12.

manner in which these discontinuities are articulated and interpreted by eminent thinkers preclude the possibility of discontinuity coinciding with the non-European.²¹⁶

The interpretation of discontinuities by Charles Taylor, David Runciman and Lorenz Kruger accentuates ethnocentrism. David Runciman recognizes that ‘discontinuities’ possess an instructive value.²¹⁷ He points out a form of discontinuity which he calls the ‘discarded options’ in political thought that are constituted by the “forgotten periods during which people whom we can recognize something of ourselves constructed the predicament in which they found themselves quite differently from the way we construe ours”.²¹⁸ In other words, Runciman gives a call to remember the illustrious thinkers from the past. But the problem with Runciman’s formulation is that the “we” whose past is being harked back to are Europeans and the past he refers to is European history. However, the non-Western is alluded to in the second form of discontinuity. In Runciman’s formulation, these are the “lessons to be learned from seeing *people clearly not ourselves* grappling with a predicament we can recognize”.²¹⁹ The problem here is that it implies a disregard for the predicament of non-western societies unless it affects the Western societies. In other words, the subtext is that the non-Western predicaments on its own merit, do not warrant political theorizing. Thus, Runciman’s account of discontinuities is steeped in parochialism.

For Charles Taylor and Lorenz Kruger, as Goto-Jones points out, discontinuities should be looked for solely within the European history.²²⁰ Another reason often cited by philosophers like Charles Taylor for reluctance to engage in extra-European discontinuities is the linguistic challenges that raises an invincible barrier between East

²¹⁶ David Runciman, “History of Political thought: The State of the Discipline,” *British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 3, no.1 (2001): 84-104. Charles Taylor, “Philosophy and Its History,” in *Philosophy in History: Ideas in Context*, ed. Richard Rorty, J. B. Schneewind, and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984-98) :17-30.

²¹⁷ Runciman “State of the discipline,” 90.

²¹⁸ Runciman “State of the discipline,” 90.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*,90-91.

²²⁰ Taylor suggests that the site of discontinuity be located outside the ‘dominant philosophical schema’ but explains that it has to be located within the European tradition. Goto-Jones, “Philosophy in Wartime Japan,” 26-27.

and West.²²¹ But this argument has been refuted by comparative political thought scholars.

While it seems to me absurd to imply that philosophical positions expressed in such languages as Japanese, Chinese, and Hindi are somehow more impenetrable to modern historians of philosophy than ancient Greek or Latin, the main problem with Taylor's assertion is that it is contradicted most persuasively by the history of philosophy itself: Nishida Kitaro and his Kyoto School effected a very interesting (and discontinuous) synthesis of Western personality and Buddhist selfhood in the early twentieth century. As far as I am aware, all the members of the Kyoto School were from Japan, not from Sirius or Mars.²²²

A serious methodological issue confronting a scholar engaged in cross-cultural political theory is the application of the organizing themes of the Western canon on the non-Western thinkers. The canon that constitutes the history of political thought is built not solely on the original texts but also on the commentaries by various scholars. Scholars like Leo Strauss and Sheldon Wolin interpret the canon using a central theme like the 'common good'²²³ and the conception of the 'political'. They are regarded as significant narrators who, through the themes that they emphasize, structure the ways in which the canon is known, "and in doing so, they both frame and limit theoretical inquiry".²²⁴ An "uncritical embrace of their renderings of the history of political thought" can have the consequence of immature predetermination of the knowledge resources of the non-western political life.²²⁵ Navid Hassanzadeh points out that "the retention of salient themes from the canon can lead to an approach that proceeds on terms foreign to these works and result in distortions of the epistemological aspects that define them".²²⁶

The epistemological distortion that arises when salient themes from the 'traditional' canon are applied on non-western political constellations has been illustrated in the comparative political thought scholarship.²²⁷ To conclude, the scholarship emanating from

²²¹ Goto-Jones, "Philosophy in Wartime Japan," 28-29.

²²² *Ibid.*, 29.

²²³ Common good is the guiding outlook that orients the fundamental political structure in a political unit.

²²⁴ Hassanzadeh, "Comparative Political Thought," 186.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 184, 191.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 197.

²²⁷ For instance, Hassanzadeh analyzes the interpretation of the medieval Islamic thinker Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Taymiyyah by contemporary scholars who draw from Wolin and Strauss and demonstrates that the

the field of Comparative Political Theory have advanced and amplified the democratic and methodological critique by pointing out the persistent manifestation of the Eurocentrism in the omission of non-Western thinkers and texts, the imperial and racial dimensions of the canon and highlighting the strategies of exclusion vis-a-vis non-western political insights practiced in the canon.

Categories and Comparative Political Thought²²⁸

Categories perform the function of perceiving, ordering and interpreting the information pertaining to the human and the non-human world.²²⁹ They structure the thought and action of people. It is worth to remember Isaiah Berlin who emphasized the importance and difficulty in understanding categories. To quote Berlin, “The first step to the understanding of men is the bringing to consciousness of the model or models that dominate and penetrate their thought and action. Like all attempts to make men aware of the categories in which they think, it is a difficult and sometimes painful activity, likely to produce deeply disquieting results”.²³⁰ This difficulty gets accentuated especially in the study of non-western political traditions. One of the disquieting results which Berlin might not have foreseen is the ‘epistemic injustice’ which Western concepts and categories can wreak on non-western knowledge resources. Epistemic injustice is a form of injustice which happens when the concepts and categories that provide self-

interpretation suffers due to the uncritical embrace of frameworks by Strauss and Wolin. Hassanzadeh, “Comparative Political Thought,” 184-202.

²²⁸ The terms ‘comparative political theory’ and ‘comparative political thought’ refer to the same subfield. For instance, the description for the entry for ‘Comparative Political Thought’ authored by Farah Godrej in the *Encyclopedia of Political Thought* uses ‘comparative political theory’ rather than ‘comparative political thought’. I use the term Comparative Political Thought whenever the discussion is on the canon of political thought or on a particular political thinker rather than on political concepts. Farah Godrej, “Comparative Political Thought,” in *Encyclopedia of Political Thought*, ed. Michael Gibbons (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014) last modified 15 September 2014
<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/9781118474396.wbept0186>.

²²⁹ Isaiah Berlin, *Concepts and Categories: Philosophical Essays* (Princeton University Press, 2013), 1-288.

²³⁰ Berlin, *Concepts and Categories*, 159.

understanding and *weltanschauung* to a people are either displaced or detrimented by that of a colonizer.²³¹

Categories though purported to illuminate reality, most often conceal, obscure, obfuscate and erasereality. Categories are often complicit in entrenching the power of the hegemonic discourse as Foucault has shown us.²³² Rudolph and Rudolph coined the phrase ‘imperialism of categories’ to “designate the academic practice of imposing concepts on the other- the export of concepts as part of hegemonic relationship.”²³³ The unrestrained parochialism of categories results in epistemic distortion paving way for epistemic injustice. The construction of categories like the “West” and the “East” and the epistemic violence accompanying colonialism has been given a thorough analysis in postcolonial and decolonial scholarship. Dipesh Chakrabarty’s lament about the indispensability and inadequacy of Western categories in explaining the non-Western forms of modernity captures the predicament of non-Western societies in their efforts to access their premodern pasts.²³⁴

The early strand of scholarship in the domain of CPT had a naïve and romantic approach to cross-cultural political theorizing that overlooked issues of conceptual translation and imperialism of categories.²³⁵ In one of the essays in the work “*Comparative Political Philosophy: Studies Under the Upas Tree*” which is now considered as a “form of CPT *avant la letter*”, Anthony Parel, one of the editors of the book wrote of his idea of how to undertake the study of non-Western political texts.²³⁶ For Parel, comparative political philosophy should be guided by search for Voegelinian ‘equivalences’, the examples of which include “the Aristotelian *politikos* and the Confucian *junzi*, Indian dharma and the

²³¹ Rajeev Bhargava, "Overcoming the Epistemic Injustice of Colonialism," *Global Policy* 4, no. 4 (2013): 414.

²³² Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things (Les Mots et les choses)* (New York: Random House, 1970).

²³³ Susanne Hoebner Rudolph, "The Imperialism of Categories: Situating Knowledge in a Globalizing World," *Perspectives on Politics* 3, no.1(2005):6.

²³⁴ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton University Press, 2009),6.

²³⁵ Anthony Parel and Ronald C. Keith, ed. *Comparative Political Philosophy: Studies under the upas tree*. (New Delhi: Sage, 1992). The first edition of this work was published in 1992. It is worth recollecting that even Fred Dallmayr’s call for a dialogue among the civilizations is blind to the methodological barriers in accessing and understanding non-Western knowledge resources.

²³⁶ Diego Von Vacano, “The Scope of Comparative Political Theory,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 18 (2015) :466-467.

pre-modern Western notion of ‘natural justice’, the Islamic prophet-legislator and the Platonic philosopher-king”.²³⁷ The early strand were driven by the need to establish the epistemic value of the non-Western political traditions rather than the motivation to displace, de-center, re-center, or de-parochialize political theory per se (the latter themes are recurrent in the current CPT scholarship). The emphasis on establishing epistemic value and intelligibility of non-Western knowledge resources led the scholars to search for “equivalences” of the Western categories and concepts in the non-West.

Scholars engaged in cross-cultural political enquiry are now more than ever before is sensitive to the unthoughtful application of categories and concepts on non-Western cultural and political life. They not only demonstrate the “imperialism of categories” in the study of non-Western political thought but also offer new categories and registers that could illuminate aspects of non-Western political life. As one scholar puts it, “resisting problematic epistemic frames entails questioning the application of familiar Western idioms as interpretive categories, and alternatively employing indigenous categories such as rajanical thought ”.²³⁸ The emerging scholarship in comparative political thought has questioned the uncritical use of themes like the ‘political’, the ‘state of nature’, secularism and democracy in interpreting non-Western political thought. The pre-existing theoretical frameworks engendered out of the engagements with Western political thought, when applied on non-Western contexts could have the consequence of pre-determining the content of these sources.²³⁹ This could constrain the identification of specificities and unique theoretical insights that non-Western political thought contain.²⁴⁰

In his study of political thought, Stuart Gray problematizes a liberal-democratic and secular reading of the Vedic thought.²⁴¹ He also proposes a new category ‘rajanical’ for “designating a particular tradition extending from the Vedic to the contemporary

²³⁷ Anthony J. Parel, “The Comparative Study of Political Philosophy,” in Parel and Keith, *Comparative Political Philosophy*, 12.

²³⁸ Stuart Gray, “Cross-Cultural Intelligibility and the Use of History: From Democracy and Liberalism to Indian Rajanical Thought,” *The Review of Politics* 78 (2016) :254.

²³⁹ Hassenzadeh, “Comparative Political Thought,” 198. This point is elaborated in the section on canon in this chapter.

²⁴⁰ As Stuart Gray says, “Beginning with analytic approaches that assume basic similarities across cultural divides does not allow us to glean important differences, which is necessary to gain the critical leverage for understanding how potentially unique aspects of one tradition can be developed and make novel contributions to a particular political question or issue”. Gray, “Indian Rajanical Thought,” 264.

²⁴¹ Gray, “Indian Rajanical Thought,” 251-283.

period”.²⁴² He portrays the case for secularism in the Vedic context as “misguided ” because in Gray’s understanding secularism implies an “autonomous political sphere” which is characterized by the capacity to hold political deliberations and Vedic texts do not point out the existence of such a political sphere. In the Vedic texts, the ruling group (*rajanya*) is subordinate to the priestly social group (*Brahmin*) in terms of origins (order of temporal emergence from cosmic person), and hierarchy.²⁴³ Gray also challenges Louis Dumont’s reading of kingship in Vedic times as a purely political (temporal) institution separated from the spiritual realm. In Gray’s view, Dumont “overstates similarities between Vedic kingship and later political developments by relying on a modern, Western notion of secularism”.²⁴⁴

A liberal-democratic reading of the politics in the Vedic context overlooks the cosmological and metaphysical character of the early Brahmanical thought. It also omits the uniqueness of the understanding of the rule in Vedic context which incorporates both human and non-human well-being. Stuart Gray explains:

“Contra democratic readings, which emphasize ideas such as political equality and elections, as well as liberal ideas concerning rights and free choice, the Atharva-Veda expresses a monarchical political picture. In the Atharva-Veda kingly rule is assumed to be the only proper form of rule, which further exemplifies a trajectory towards increasingly hierarchical conceptions of rule in the liturgical *Samhitās* and *Brāhmaṇas*”.²⁴⁵

The category of the political in illuminating the ideas and concerns that constitute ancient Indian political thought is found to be inadequate for broadly two reasons.²⁴⁶ Firstly the very concept of the political has its etymology in the Greek term *polis* (city-state) and does not reflect the architecture of politics that is represented in the Vedic textual traditions. Secondly the employment of a Western idiom like the political and its interpretative frameworks to understand premodern Indian traditions would constrain the identification of continuities and discontinuities of premodern Indian traditions in contemporary Indian political theory. While attempts like a historical-linguistic approach

²⁴² Ibid., 255.

²⁴³ Gray, “Indian Rajanical Thought,” 261.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 262.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 274.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 276.

as employed by Sudipta Kaviraj unearths the differing notions of the political in modern and pre-modern India, the persistent use of the conception of the political in understanding premodern traditions obscures the broader context of rule and power in ancient India.

Thus, Stuart Gray proposes the category of 'rajanical' in lieu of the "political" for a productive engagement with early Vedic strand of ancient Indian political thought.²⁴⁷ This is because the designation 'rajanical' "better captures a core set of concerns that extend back to the early Vedic tradition: the meaning of rule, its relation to cosmological beliefs involving sacrifice and ritual, and questions of *with* and *forwhom* rulers rule within both human and human-nonhuman contexts."²⁴⁸ The nature of the rule in the Vedic rajanical thought is cosmological and non-anthropocentric. The idea of the rule emanating from the Vedic tradition is that of "rule as stewardship" as the ruler is entrusted with the task of ensuring the smooth conduct of the sacrificial rituals by Brahmins which is essential for the integration and maintenance of the interconnected well-being of an extensive human-nonhuman community. For instance, Gray points out how some of the leading Indian environmentalists like Sunderlal Bahuguna and Vandana Shiva subscribe to early Vedic principles like seeing all creations as imbued with divinity.²⁴⁹ This conception of rule is different from the polis-centric rule in terms of the cosmological significance and inclusion of the non-human in the former. Gray argues that aspects of the rajanical tradition of stewardship find its resonance in contemporary India especially among crusaders of the environment.²⁵⁰ He also illustrates the significance of the rajanical tradition for a novel understanding of the concept of swaraj. A reliance on the category of rajanical emphasizes on an aspect of swaraj that is overlooked in the democratic idioms which revolve around "who rules". The question which the rajanical gives importance is "with and for whom" is the rule, a question that illuminates interconnected nature of human beings. Understanding of ruling as stewardship as embodied in the rajanical can

²⁴⁷ Gray doesn't reject the utility of the category of political in toto. He says that as an initial foray into history of Indian political thought one could use the word 'politics' or 'political thought' but as one enters the pre-modern Indian political thought, any non-Brahmanical term or concepts like the rajanical should be employed to illuminate the native conceptions of rule. Ibid., 276-277.

²⁴⁸ Gray, "Indian Rajanical Thought," 276.

²⁴⁹ Gray, "Indian Rajanical Thought," 278-279.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 278-279.

enhance accountability of the ruling strata. Gray also argues that equipping ordinary citizens with stewardship capacities could attenuate ossified hierarchical structures like caste system paving the way for true realization of swaraj.²⁵¹

A strong case for the use of the existing categories have been made by political theorist Gurpreet Mahajan. Mahajan terms the attempts to find authentic Indian concepts a “misplaced project” and argues against the construction of an Indian political theory on such grounds.²⁵² She points out that the projects of indigeneity based on a conception of a “culturally embedded self ” are predicated on the incommensurability of cultures.²⁵³ Mahajan is in favor of a constructing an Indian political theory illuminated by a “historically situated self ” which is predicated on the fusion of horizons.²⁵⁴ The advantage of a conception of historically situated self is that irrespective of the origins of ideas, it prods one to examine how ideas enter into public discourse and subsequently informs the political imagination of the people.²⁵⁵ But the disadvantage of the ‘historically situated self ’ is that it glosses over the power asymmetries that exists between societies. A Gadamerian “fusion of horizons” that buttress the ‘historically situated self’ could result in sanitizing a colonial past and thus, blunting the immanent critique that emerge from colonized societies.

Dipesh Chakrabarty talks about releasing new categories into the existing framework without replacing or denying the existing categories in social sciences. He argues that we need to add categories “into the space occupied by particular European histories sedimented in them other normative and theoretical thought enshrined in other existing life practices”.²⁵⁶ Only then “we can create plural normative horizons specific to our

²⁵¹ Ibid.,282-283.

²⁵² Gurpreet Mahajan, *India: Political Ideas and the Making of a Democratic Discourse* (London: Zed Books, 2013),5.

²⁵³ Mahajan, *India: Political Ideas*, 6.

²⁵⁴ The distinction Mahajan makes between culturally embedded self and historically situated self is as follows. To quote, “If the culturally embedded self is seen as the inheritor of a culture, thinking and acting through the meanings that are available in that culture, the notion of a historically situated self assumes that individuals are constituted through the productive interaction between two horizons: the prism of the culture in which they live (though this is itself a product of continuous interpretation and reconfiguration), and the horizon that makes their historical universe (the zeitgeist, as it were).The play of these two horizons shape the historically situated self”. Mahajan, *India: Political Ideas*,6.

²⁵⁵ Mahajan, *India: Political Ideas*, 7.

²⁵⁶ Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 20.

existence and relevant to the examination of our lives and their possibilities”.²⁵⁷ Chakrabarty, thus steers a middle course towards the employment of existing and new categories without rejecting either of them.

The issue of whether categories understood to be Western should be employed to understand the aspects of non-Western political life and political thought is based on an assumption of a divide that exists between the ‘East’ and the ‘West’. For many CPT scholars, the ‘comparative’ in CPT pivots around an East-West axis. But many CPT scholars like Chris-Goto Jones and Loubna el Amine have expressed fears of reification of the ‘West’ and the ‘Non-West’ categories and have suggested new axes to drive the ‘comparative’ in CPT. Chris Goto-Jones argues for treating discontinuities as the axes of comparison.²⁵⁸ Discontinuities exist across all traditions regardless of whether it is Western or Non-Western and does not privilege a singular cultural formation. Goto-Jones’ call for examining discontinuities as the way forward in the study of political thought is different from that of the calls made by Charles Taylor as the latter’s idea of discontinuity privileges European tradition. Loubna el Amine argues that modernity has inaugurated a “globally- shared institutional condition” which is the modern sovereign state.²⁵⁹ The emergence of modernity creates a “convergence of normative claims across traditions” and the East-West dichotomy which CPT assumes, fails to explain the eruption of similar protests for freedom across the world.²⁶⁰ Amine therefore argues for the reconceptualization of the history of political thought through the adoption of a pre-modern /modern division as opposed to a West / Non-West paradigm. She therefore wants the axes of comparison that drive CPT to be modern/pre-modern rather than the East-West axis. What Goto-Jones and Amine illustrate are novel ways to navigate the complex issue of appropriate categories (Western or Non-Western) to understand different traditions.

Alternative Ways of Interpreting Non-Western Texts

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Goto-Jones, “*Political Thought*,” 110.

²⁵⁹ Loubna El Amine, “Beyond East and West: A Reorientation of Political theory through the Prism of Modernity,” *Perspectives on Politics* 14 no.1(2016): 103.

²⁶⁰ Amine, “East and West,” 103.

The approaches to interpretation of texts have always been an essential point of debate and discussion in the study of history of political thought. This section briefly discusses Straussian and Contextualist approaches to the interpretation of works of political philosophy and its critique by both mainstream political theory as well as comparative political theory. The crux of this part of the essay is an examination of the methods used and advocated by scholars Sudipta Kaviraj, Stuart Gray, Leigh Jenco and Farah Godrej to the interpretation of non-Western texts.

The writings of political philosopher Leo Strauss have given rise to what is called the “Straussian” approach to the history of political thought. A Straussian approach to history of political thought is constituted by two central claims. The first claim is that the canonical works by a select group of thinkers beginning from Plato embodies the “whole truth” about politics and this timeless and constant truth can be accessed only by a privileged few.²⁶¹ The second claim is that early writers including political philosophers avoided explicit public expression of their thoughts for many reasons including fear of persecution.²⁶² They instead resorted to a technique of writing between the lines so that the real message never escaped the careful reader.²⁶³ So the appropriate way to interpret texts of such authors is to “read between the lines”.²⁶⁴ Leo Strauss argues that the most passages in a written text might not convey the real authorial opinion.²⁶⁵ For Strauss, the historians of political thought by privileging the explicit statements of the author as the final interpretation misses the “woods for the trees”.²⁶⁶ Strauss claims that most of the political philosophical tracts embody an ‘esoteric’ message intended for the cognoscenti and an ‘exoteric’ message for the uninitiated.²⁶⁷ The former provides a philosophical teaching while the latter reflects popular teaching.²⁶⁸

²⁶¹ Terence Ball, “The Value of the History of Political Thought,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of the Political Philosophy*, ed. George Klosko (Oxford University Press, 2011), 53.

²⁶² Leo Strauss, “Persecution and the Art of Writing,” *Social Research* 8 (1944): 489.

²⁶³ Leo Strauss, “On a Forgotten Kind of Writing,” *Chicago Review* 8 no.1 (1954): 64-75.

²⁶⁴ Strauss, “Forgotten Kind,” 67.

²⁶⁵ Strauss, “Persecution,” 497.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ Terence Ball, “The Value of the History of Political Thought,” 53-54, Catherine Zuckert, “The Straussian Approach,” 24. in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Political Philosophy* ed. George Klosko (Oxford University Press, 2011).

²⁶⁸ Strauss, “Persecution,” 503.

The contextualist approach to the history of political thought has many variants of which the methodology of the Cambridge school primarily associated with Quentin Skinner continues to be prominent.²⁶⁹ The contextualist school is broadly characterized by their act of situating texts in their contexts and adoption of modernist methods to establish empirical facts.²⁷⁰ It critiqued those approaches that read the authors as striving for a coherent metaphysics and contributing to perennial debates.²⁷¹ For Quentin Skinner, the key to understanding a text lies in the recovery of authorial intentions by locating the text in its historical and linguistic context.²⁷² The speech-acts of the author are contextualized in the wider linguistic conventions that govern it. Skinner does not encourage reading classics to find answers to contemporary political problems.²⁷³ Instead he issues the following exhortation that we must learn to ‘do our own thinking for ourselves’.²⁷⁴ The value of classical texts for Skinner lies in their ability to reveal “not the essential sameness, but rather the essential variety of viable moral assumptions and political commitments”.²⁷⁵

The inadequacy of the above approaches in the interpretation of non-Western texts have been pointed out by many scholars engaging in cross-cultural inquiry. The Eurocentrism of the school and its methodological requirements contributes to its inadequacy in understanding non-Western texts, Chris Goto-Jones points out that the political implications of the Cambridge school, proposed by Quentin Skinner and J.G.A. Pocock, which privileges *context* is yet to be fully played out in the field of history of political thought. The *context* in the study of history of political thought has failed to live upto its inclusive tone and democratic potential and it instead entrenches intellectual conservatism and ethnocentricity in the field.²⁷⁶ Goto-Jones laments that “despite its

²⁶⁹ Skinner, Quentin. "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas." *History and Theory* 8, no. 1 (1969): 3-53.

²⁷⁰ Mark Bevir, “The contextual Approach,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of the Political Philosophy*, ed. George Klosko (Oxford University Press, 2011), 14.

²⁷¹ Bevir, “Contextual Approach,” 14.

²⁷² Skinner, “Meaning and Understanding,” 49.

²⁷³ Skinner believes that any statement arises out of a specific occasion, embodying a specific intention and is providing a solution to a specific problem. Therefore, it is naïve to believe that texts in the classical tradition can be concerned with contemporary predicaments. *Ibid.*, 50.

²⁷⁴ Skinner, “Meaning and Understanding,” 52.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁶ Goto-Jones, “Philosophy in Wartime Japan,” 14.

ostensibly inclusive tone, context has unfortunately become a buzzword for intellectual conservatism and ethnocentricity in the history of political thought”.²⁷⁷The act of privileging the context would have logically opened the doors for non-Western contexts but the “historical context does not appear to overlap with the spatiocultural context”.²⁷⁸

Two critiques have been advanced against the Skinnerian approach. First, a Skinnerian approach to interpretation of texts is inadequate to the study of those texts for which, the historical context is difficult to establish due to the paucity of reliable historical records. For instance, Stuart Gray points out the inadequacy of Skinner’s approach in understanding texts belonging to early and middle Vedic periods.²⁷⁹Secondly it has been pointed out that the task and purpose which Straussian and Cambridge schools imply is antithetical to a ‘cosmopolitan political thought’.²⁸⁰A cosmopolitan political thought arises out of the application of normative principles of cosmopolitanism on the very methods and practices in political theory. It aims to transcend the binaries like “self” and the “other” and questions the assumptions of boundedness and discrete character that informs monikers like “European Political Thought” or “Indian Political Thought’’. Instead it pushes towards ‘webs of coeval engagement’ of political thought in various traditions.²⁸¹ While the Straussian imperative of a text to be studied for the universal values and transhistorical truth claims would potentially disqualify many non-Western texts from the ambit of scholarship despite the political insights it holds , the Skinnerian task of recovering the authorial intentions requires a nullification of the interpreter’s circumstances which would preclude the existential immersion in the otherness of the life-world of the non-Western text. Thus, the imperatives which Straussian and Skinnerian approach holds preclude the possibility of arriving at a ‘cosmopolitan political thought’ which Comparative Political Theorist like Farah Godrej envisions.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Stuart Gray, “A Historical-Comparative Approach to Indian Political Thought: Locating And Examining Domesticated Differences,” *History of Political Thought* 31 no.3 (2010): 386.

²⁸⁰ Farah Godrej, “Towards a Cosmopolitan Political Thought: The Hermeneutics of Interpreting the Other,” *Polity* 41, no. 2 (2008): 161.

²⁸¹ Godrej, *Cosmopolitan Political Thought*, 16.

Some of these critiques have been seriously taken by political theorists. I will discuss four approaches to the interpretation of non-Western texts illustrated by Sudipta Kaviraj, Stuart Gray, Farah Godrej and Leigh Jenco.

Historical-Linguistic Approach

Sudipta Kaviraj's essay employs what could be called a historical-linguistic approach in unearthing the various conceptions of the political that spans across Indian intellectual tradition in the pre-modern and modern times.²⁸² The focus of this approach is on the 'historicity of words' and is predicated on the assumption that "language carries an archive" of historical developments and "a paleontologic activity on linguistic practice can bring out both the underlying history and complexity of practical change".²⁸³ A historical-linguistic approach not only unearths the older meanings of a word/concept but also helps in revealing the residual associations of the past recurrent in the modern usage of a word/concept.²⁸⁴ In short, a text based historical-linguistic approach illuminates the "vast, complicated world reflected in the grain of language".²⁸⁵

To understand the nature and content of the concept 'political' in India, Kaviraj traces the historicity of the concept as embedded in the term '*rajniti*'.²⁸⁶ He states that though 'politics' and '*rajniti*' broadly refer to social practices around power, they are different as they have operated in different social worlds and their evolution is overshadowed by the political settings of their geographic location. The pre-modern conception of *rajniti* is characterized by 'segmentary exclusiveness', 'absence of sovereignty' and rigidity of the social world that precludes any state led reform.²⁸⁷ The pre-modern Indian politics is

²⁸² Sudipta Kaviraj, "On the Historicity of 'the political': Rajaniti and Politics in Modern Indian thought." in *Comparative Political Thought: Theorizing Practices*, ed. Michael Freeden and Andrew Vincent, (New York: Routledge, 2013), 24-39.

²⁸³ Kaviraj, "On the Historicity," 36 -37.

²⁸⁴ To quote Kaviraj: "Linguistic signs are open in the sense that they are being constantly used and can be analysed by scholars. It is hidden in the sense that the common contemporary usage tends to overlay the older meaning, simply by the fact that in innumerable uses of the word, the modern meaning is constantly reiterated, obliterating the sense that there must be a stratum of vestigially effective connotative effect still carried inside the term; that there is at least a possibility that the older meaning infects and deflects the newer meaning of the word." See Kaviraj, "On the Historicity," 37.

²⁸⁵ Kaviraj, "On the Historicity," 37.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 28.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 30-31.

exclusive as the rulership was limited only to a certain caste group (Kshatriyas, the warrior class). The pre-modern Indian ruler was not a sovereign in the modern sense as he himself was constrained by *rajadharma*. He did not possess the power nor the legitimacy to make laws. The function of political authority was to preserve the dharmic order and not to judge it.²⁸⁸ Also the traditional notion of politics precluded any social reform as the social rules and structures owed their legitimacy to divine origins. The entry of colonialism into the Indian landscape and the subsequent Indian national movement catalyzed the conceptual changes in the political. The latter ended the segmentary and elite character of politics by making political activity open for popular participation. The adoption of the Indian constitution marked the official end of pre-modern politics as it outlawed discriminatory caste practices and promised equality of citizens. Thus, pre-modern and modern understandings of politics differ, though the term to denote politics is the same in the past as well as the present.

Reconstructing a political history of pre-modern India solely based on textual sources could be problematic. The major problem is that a historical-linguistic approach might obscure the gap between the political world of the text and historical reality. Kaviraj points out that the textual derivation of a historical picture of pre-modern modes of power in India as embodied in the dharmashastric tradition might not present the real historical world. For instance, the saptanga theory which delineates the structure of political authority is informed by the understanding of caste as *varna*. Kaviraj describes this understanding of structure of caste as *varna* to be a “stylized ancient or medieval construct”.²⁸⁹ Over centuries, the caste system engendered various *jatis*. But the Hindu intellectuals continued to create texts in the dharmashastric tradition without taking into consideration this new reality of emergence of *jatis*. The dharmashastric tradition does not reflect neither the proliferation of various *jatis* causing change in social relations nor the capture of political rule by men of non-kshatriya lineages, thus giving a distorted picture of the historical reality.

Historical-Comparative Approach

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

²⁸⁹ Kaviraj, “On the Historicity,” 32.

In contrast to the above, a historical approach to comparative political thought is informed by attentiveness to texts and aims to examine the historical claims and meanings embedded in non-Western texts focusing on the terminologies, assumptions, concepts, genres and categories used within those texts. It is alert to the uncritical imposition of European concepts and categories to excavate the meaning of non-Western texts. A historical-comparative approach with its focus on the analysis of texts is fruitful in the study of texts when confronted by the absence of reliable historical records of the period in which text was written.

Stuart Gray is an exponent of this approach. In a seminal methodological essay in the field of comparative political thought generally and Indian political thought in particular, Gray elaborates a method to interpret non-Western texts but also demonstrates the Eurocentrism that have plagued the study of ancient Indian political thought.²⁹⁰ He argues that the existing literature on Brahmanical political thought is plagued by what he calls “domestication of differences” in the interpretive process. By “domestication of differences” Gray refers to the premature reliance on non-Indian assumptions, concepts, ideas and institutions to interpret the ancient Indian political thought resulting in the neglect of nuances and differences that are peculiar to the Indian context. The issue of domestication of differences in Brahmanical political thought largely arises out of the ‘broad historical scope’ that results in a lack of textual analytic precision.²⁹¹ Gray states that the aim of the historical-comparative approach to Brahmanical political thought is ‘textual responsiveness’ which means examination of “claims made in the texts using terminology, concepts, categories and assumptions drawn from the language and texts themselves”.²⁹²

One manifestation of eurocentrism in the study of the non-Western texts is when scholars find equivalences of Western categories and concepts in non-Western traditions. It is

²⁹⁰ By Eurocentrism, I mean the intellectual hegemony of certain concepts and categories (or their specific understandings) that are predicated on a specifically European historical experience. The imposition of concepts and categories that resonate European experience to understand the non-Western political life results in a distorted understanding of the subject due to the immanent inability of the heuristic devices to accommodate the non-Western particularities. Stuart Gray illustrates the limitations of the imposition of concepts like secularism and state of nature to illuminate ancient Indian political thought.

²⁹¹ Gray, “Domesticated Differences,” 384.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, 387.

worth to remind that the early scholarship in comparative political theorizing was driven by a need to find equivalences in the Voegelinian sense. This is evident in the scholarship on ancient Indian political ideas by nationalist historiographers.²⁹³ Stuart Gray focusses on the term *matsyanyaya* and contests its commonly given scholarly interpretation as equivalent to Hobbesian idea of state of nature to delineate the problem of domesticated differences. For instance, Gray contests the interpretation of *matsyanyaya* by John Spellman who is regarded as an authority on ancient Indian political thought, on the basis of latter's casual treatment of linking disparate genres and historical periods assuming an unchanging concept of kingship as a solution for the chaos generated by state of nature.²⁹⁴ He also criticizes Spellman for ignoring the cosmological, metaphysical and ontological aspect of the political ideas in these texts.²⁹⁵

The historical-comparative approach can be illustrated through Gray's attempts to understand the term 'matsyanyaya' and his contestation of its dominant interpretation as "state of nature". The reliance of many scholars on comparing *matsyanyaya* to the theoretical construct of state of nature domesticates important differences between ancient Brahmanical kingship and modern European notions of equality and ruling.²⁹⁶ This interpretative process entails invocation of the language of modern social contract theories. Stuart Gray points out five fundamental differences between the Hobbesian and Lockean social contract and state of nature theories and Brahmanical conceptions of ruling and kingship.²⁹⁷ Firstly, the reality presented by the early and later Vedic texts can be perceived as orderly and consists of four interconnected orders namely natural, divine, human and the sacrificial which are further undergirded by the pre-existing ordering principles of *rita* and *dharma*.²⁹⁸ Disorder that could arise if the sacrificial ritual is not conducted properly would be a cosmic disaster let alone a human one as human beings are not metaphysically and ontologically separate from rest of the beings and this reality of Vedic texts is in stark contrast to the materialist framework of

²⁹³ Gray, "Domesticated Differences," 385.

²⁹⁴ John Spellman's work "Political Theory of Ancient India" is considered as a classic work on the subject. Gray describes the 'doctrine of *matsyanyaya*' to be an "interpretive fiction" and argues that there is a continuity in the meanings for kingly rule in Vedic assumptions and terms. Ibid., 399.

²⁹⁵ Gray, "Domesticated Differences," 399.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ Ibid., 399-404.

²⁹⁸ Ibid., 399-400.

Hobbes.²⁹⁹The second fundamental difference is that Hobbes and Locke are against any natural right of rulers while the Brahmanical political thought presents a stratified social order where human beings are not naturally equal and persons from a particular social group namely Kshatriya is preferred over rest of the social groups.³⁰⁰Thus Brahmanical political thought and social contract theories differ on the notions of equality granted to human beings. The third difference is that “in Brahmanical thought kingly rule is built into the natural order of things” and is cosmologically coherent whereas political authority in modern social contract theories are based on consent and covenant.³⁰¹ Another difference is that while the Hobbesian and Lockean social contract theories are meant to provide human beings to escape troublesome conditions which characterizes the state of war, the breakdown associated with the reign of *matsyanyaya* is not human centric as it affects both humans and non-humans. A fundamental difference exists with regard to the ‘truth’ or highest good vis-à-vis politics. While Brahmanical political thought as reflected in the Vedas, dharmashastras and Arthashastra contain a broad agreement on what constitutes the highest truth, in the Hobbesian social contract theory there is an absence of agreement on the highest truth, triggering chaos that lead to a social contract.³⁰²

Hermeneutics of Interpreting the ‘Other’

Another approach can be found in Farah Godrej’s “hermeneutics of interpreting the other”.Farah Godrej offers the methodology for her vision of a ‘cosmopolitan political thought’ for political theory and offers a ‘hermeneutics of interpreting the other’ characterized by three hermeneutic moments.³⁰³The first hermeneutic moment is characterized by the immersion of the theorist in the life world of the “other” text with an openness and embrace the cultural framework of the text during the engagement with the text. This hermeneutic is predicated on the assumption that conceptual analysis alone does not hold key to the insights of the text but it should be coupled with “praxis-oriented

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 400.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., 400-401.

³⁰¹ Ibid.,402.

³⁰² Gray, “Domesticated Differences,” 403.

³⁰³ Farah Godrej, "Towards a Cosmopolitan Political Thought: The Hermeneutics of Interpreting the Other," *Polity* 41, no. 2 (2008): 135-165.

existential transformation in which the reader herself learns to live by the very ideas expressed in a text”.³⁰⁴

“Existential understanding suggests, then, that a text from a radically different culture may best be understood by penetrating the consciousness and lived experiences of those who live by the ideas expressed in a text. Such immersion involves the scholar's ability to penetrate a whole worldview, to produce a description of the adherents' own self-understanding in relation to the text, and to do so in terms of their own language, practices, and ideas”.³⁰⁵

The advantage of existential immersion is that it reduces the distance between the text and the theorist. The existential hermeneutic might be in principle sound similar to phenomenology, but it differs from it as it does not allow any scope for the Gadamerian deployment of prejudices as prejudgments.³⁰⁶ A philosophical hermeneutics of the Gadamerian variety could pave the way for “imperialism of categories” resulting in the misinterpretation of the text. Godrej illustrates this point with how an interpretation of the Indian concept of Dharma will suffer if one uses the framework of natural law of Aquinas’.³⁰⁷

The second hermeneutic moment entails transcribing the experience of existential immersion in the intellectual tradition of the text under study in textual and commentative form. The exegesis of the text should be accompanied by “good, self-reflexive ethnographies and fieldwork-filled accounts ”.³⁰⁸ Though authentically representing the cultural accounts of a text is “epistemically and politically problematic”³⁰⁹, the scholar should aspire to “multiple, specific instances of experience and discourse”³¹⁰ and utilize the evaluative criteria which phenomenologically oriented methodologies has to offer.³¹¹ The third hermeneutic moment entails the theoretical articulation of the experiential engagement. This moment is engendered by the reconciliation of the “conflicting

³⁰⁴ Godrej, “Interpreting the Other,”140.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.,148.

³⁰⁶ Ibid.,142.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.,143.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.,155.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.,152.

³¹⁰ Ibid.,153.

³¹¹ Ibid.,155.

imperatives of adherence and scholarship”.³¹²The third hermeneutic moment of articulating the existential insights from the non-Western texts is crucial to mount challenges to the conventional understandings of political life. Only by bringing the non-Western insights into the familiar debates can political theory be truly cosmopolitan for Farah Godrej. Inclusion of non-Western insights would catalyze transformation in the self-understanding of political theory. Godrej acknowledges that her “hermeneutics of interpreting the other” is limited by the fact that “the speech and writing-centered imperatives of Western scholarly communication” might not reflect the “sublime, complex, or praxis-based” insights emanating from existential engagement.³¹³

The Straussian and Skinnerian approaches to textual interpretation are unable to offer resources for a ‘cosmopolitan political thought’ which Godrej envisions. As Godrej explains,

“Neither of these interpretive methods allows for the sort of challenge and dislocation that the existential - and, ultimately, theoretical encounter with alterity should bring forth. A cosmopolitan political thought, rather than seeking universal values in these texts, or rejecting the possibility of any present-day knowledge in any ‘other’ ideas, should see new political insights as potentially emerging from any set of resources, present or past, ‘our’ traditions, or others”.³¹⁴

The methodology advocated by Godrej is daunting as the scholar will have to don various hats of an ethnographer, external observer, commentator and theorist and juggle the methodological difficulties associated with each role. Vacano points out that the union of the reader with text at an existential level, which ‘hermeneutics of interpreting the other’ calls for, is vague.³¹⁵ Godrej’s approach sets the standard high for entering the debates on the non-Western political life as linguistic excellence and ethnographic participation is essential for the approach to take off. Another limitation of Godrej’s hermeneutical stance arises out of the very limitation of hermeneutics as a method. Hermeneutic emphasis is on the reconstruction of the agents’ beliefs and values. It does not propose

³¹² Godrej, “Interpreting the Other,” 156.

³¹³ *Ibid.*, 160.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 162.

³¹⁵ Vacano, “Comparative Political Theory,” 471.

any critique of the self-perceptions of agents and their everyday consciousness.³¹⁶ Godrej's proposition of understanding a non-Western tradition by adhering to its practices (as entailed in 'existential immersion') is based on the assumption that non-Western ideas eschew violence. How does one understand those non-Western concepts and practices which inflict self-harm? For instance, the practices of sati and hara-kiri entails self-harm. The limitation of existential immersion which Godrej proposes becomes apparent when it comes to understanding non-Western practices which inflict self-injury. The determinate social and economic structures play an important role in shaping individual beliefs and values. The 'hermeneutics of interpreting the other' also fails to illuminate the material reality that shapes the self-perceptions of the agents.

Methods-Centered Approach

Leigh Jenco offers a "methods-centered approach" to the interpretation of non-Western texts.³¹⁷ While she shares her concern of the prevalence of Eurocentrism with many comparative political theorists and is keen on understanding non-Western political insights using terms and concepts internal to the non-Western tradition, Jenco laments that many comparative theorists, in their quest to avoid Eurocentrism, reproduce ethnocentrism by retaining the frames of inquiry based in the Western philosophical tradition. Jenco urges that for political theory to be global, it has to look to non-Western traditions not just for substantive ideas and insights about political life but also for methods of inquiry rooted in the non-Western traditions. Only an alternative frame of reference could "supplant" rather than "embrace" Eurocentrism, a Eurocentrism which many postcolonial scholars like Dipesh Chakrabarty and others find to be inevitable.³¹⁸ Jenco endows cross-cultural enquiry with a new purpose: to examine "culturally situated methods of inquiry" and "ask new questions through alternative frames of reference".³¹⁹ This assumes significance given the fact that the acquisition of knowledge is contingent on methods and no single method could glean knowledge resources

³¹⁶ Gurpreet Mahajan, *Explanation and Understanding in the Human Sciences* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011), 69.

³¹⁷ Leigh Kathryn Jenco, "What does heaven ever say?" A Methods-centered Approach to Cross-cultural Engagement," *American Political Science Review* 101, no. 4 (2007): 741-755.

³¹⁸ Jenco, "Cross-Cultural Engagement," 741.

³¹⁹ Ibid.

exhaustive of a tradition. She argues that political theory cannot be reconstituted by merely accommodating voices that announce disparate political thinking but it has to be coupled with the deployment of non-Western traditions of scholarly inquiry.³²⁰ A methods-centered approach has the advantage of deepening as well as critiquing cross-cultural engagements based on Western paradigms. The additional dimension of the ‘interpretive nuance’ of the methods-centered approach lends profundity to the cross-cultural encounter, it simultaneously exposes the ethnocentricity of the Western methods that could distort or ignore the insights provided by non-Western societies and polities. Jenco states that “focusing on methods in addition to substance draws attention to the modes of expression that mediate what is being expressed, and to the traditions of scholarship that exist apart from the particular subjective opinions expressed by discrete texts or persons”.³²¹

The methods-centered approach to comparative political theory is illustrated by using the examples of two Chinese classicists- Wang Yangming and Kang Youwei. Wang Yangmin’s “heart and mind” approach is an interpretive methodology based on intuition, self-reflection and practice of the principles embodied in a text. The meaning of the text generated from the ‘heart and mind’ approach stems from the internal subjectivity of the individual rather than from any external sources. Jenco points out that Wang sought the reflection on what Classics meant in himself rather than on any teacher or commentaries.³²² The call for a direct engagement with the text by Wang however does not operate in a vacuum.

“This kind of self-identification with the Classics that for Wang constitutes successful interpretation does not come without effort, however: daily and rigorous practice replaces a reading of the Classics mediated by commentarial talk. Wang’s ‘Inscription’ on the Classics pavilion discussed here, in fact, is not an academic essay discussing subtleties of hermeneutics, but a visual reminder to students to act on their interpretations. Such actions are shaped and facilitated by a multitude of daily practices- consistently virtuous

³²⁰ “Put slightly differently, privileging the substance of particular utterances comes at the expense of taking seriously the traditions of scholarly inquiry that inform, but have existence and applicability apart from, the

individual utterances or texts being examine”. Ibid.,744.

³²¹ Jenco, “Cross-Cultural Engagement,” 745.

³²² Ibid., 746.

behavior in the manner of the sages, for example, or the memorization and recitation of the Classics. The importance of such practices suggests that interpretation of the Classics is less like interpretation than imitation, a point to which Wang alludes elsewhere”.³²³

The ‘activist approach to interpretation’ that characterizes the ‘heart and mind’ method prioritizes the affirmation and practice of the truth rather than how to understand the truth of a text.³²⁴ It privileges action over thought.³²⁵ The interpretive stance of the heart and mind approach of Wang Yangmin views Chinese Classics as a bidding for internally directed self-cultivation which could result in the transformation of the individual as well as the world.³²⁶ Kang Youwei belongs to the group of scholars in early twentieth century China who subscribed to the “new text” methodology in interpretation of Chinese classics. Unlike Wang Yangmin who privileges the inward subjectivity in the interpretation of Chinese classical texts, interpretation for Kang Youwei is contingent on the social and political problems an individual confronts in the external world. Going beyond the philological techniques to interpret a text, the “new text” scholars like Kang saw in the Classics “an important precedent for adapting political institutions as the times dictated, rather than slavishly copying the details of Zhou-era institutions as many contemporary commentators suggested.”³²⁷ He advanced arguments for “constitutional government on the basis of ancient precedents of change and adaptation”.³²⁸ The interpretive stance Kang adopted included the imperial Chinese structure of teacher-student relations and its transmission of oral messages. Jenco writes as follows.

“Kang’s New Text commitments, manifest in his classical exposition in the *Xin Learning*, calls into question the idea that texts alone, with their esoteric words, are reliable bearers of truth. He places more emphasis on oral traditions, extratextual practices of study, and pedagogical customs—both those that supported transmission of the Classics past the Qin

³²³ Jenco, “Cross-Cultural Engagement,” 748.

³²⁴ Ibid.

³²⁵ “Knowledge, then, is not primarily a matter of thought, but also of action; one cannot know something unless one has performed it or done it. As Wang notes, how can one know food before he has ever eaten, or clothes before he has worn them”. Jenco, “Cross-Cultural Engagement,” 748.

³²⁶ Jenco, “Cross-Cultural Engagement,” 748.

³²⁷ Ibid., 749.

³²⁸ Ibid., 750.

disaster, as well as those that surround him, Kang, in the present- to unlock the great meanings of what Confucius is trying to convey”.³²⁹

As opposed to the logocentrism of the scholars in the Western tradition, the hermeneutic stances adopted by scholars of Chinese classics as illustrated by Wang and Kang, “privilege human relationships, action, and the understandings these practices convey”.³³⁰ The importance of a methods-centered approach is that it “multiplies the sites and resources for normative appraisal by recognizing that a wide variety of traditions provide means for self-reflection, question-raising, and immanent critique”.³³¹ However, a methods-centered approach has been critiqued on the grounds of impracticality and exclusivity. Brooke Ackerly argues that the ethnographic participation in the historical practice of theory which Jenco calls for would not be possible as the recreation of the life-world of the theory cannot be done.³³² Vacano points out that the hermeneutic stances proffered by Jenco posits a high threshold ballasted on linguistic, behavioral and personal transformation.³³³

Conclusion

In this chapter, I began by discussing how the CPT scholarship is advancing the democratic and methodological critique of the traditional political theory canon. While democratic critique points out the Eurocentrism in excluding non-Western political thinkers or schools of thought like the Kyoto School and their strategies of exclusion, the methodological critique reveals the limitations of the organizing themes of the canon like the concept of ‘common good’ employed by Leo Strauss in his construction of the history of political thought. In the second section, I have described the cases for and against the use of non-Western categories for understanding non-Western political traditions. Stuart Gray points out the limitations of employing concepts like secularism and the political to

³²⁹ Ibid., 750.

³³⁰ Logocentrism refers to the belief that consider linguistic factors as fundamentally expressing external reality ignoring nonlinguistic factors. The methods-centered approach discussed by Jenco focus on the extra-textual practices and sheds light on alternative epistemologies. Ibid., 751.

³³¹ Jenco, “Cross-Cultural Engagement,” 753.

³³² Brooke Ackerly, “Twenty-first century Political Theory: Methods and Problems” City University of Hongkong. July 31, 2012. <http://www6.cityu.edu.hk/ceacop/KPCP/workshop/Ackerly.pdf>.

³³³ Vacano, “Comparative Political Theory,” 474.

understand ancient Indian political thought. He proposes the category of the 'rajanical' which understands rule as stewardship to reflect the holistic idea of the rulership in ancient India. Gurpreet Mahajan is against the rejection of existing categories and is in favor of employing a 'historically -situated self' to illuminate Indian political theory. Dipesh Chakrabarty steers a middle course towards the employment of existing and new categories without rejecting either of them. I finally examined the four approaches to the interpretation of non-Western texts proposed by Sudipta Kaviraj, Stuart Gray, Farah Godrej and Leigh Jenco

It is worth to conclude by quoting what Charles W. Mills has to suggest about revising the political theory to accommodate non-Western traditions.

"The rethinking of familiar categories in the light of their imperial genealogy, the admission of new categories that illuminate structures of domination not registered in the official lexicon, the complicating of standard narratives, would open up the cognitive field of the discipline's current self-conception so as to make possible a genuine selfknowledge that current orthodoxies—given the need to evade the past—preclude. In this revised framework, a real dialogue of equals could take place that would better be able to address and begin the remedying of the legacy of the Euro-polity, thereby giving the appropriate respect and justice to the non-political Others upon whom for hundreds of years it has historically been imposed".³³⁴

There is no doubt that the CPT scholarship reflects the desire to foster a genuine "dialogue of equals" as Mills suggests.

³³⁴ Mills, "Western Political Philosophy," 23.

CHAPTER 3

THE CONCEPT OF POLITICAL ACTION

While Chapter 1 contextualized Comparative Political Theory (CPT) in terms of the internal critiques within political theory, Chapter 2 broadly looked at how the scholarship emerging from CPT is pluralizing the canon, categories and approaches to political theory. In Chapter 3, I focus on the contribution of CPT scholars in enlarging the existing understandings of the concept of political action. I also discuss how the conceptual revision embodied in Leigh Jenco's discussion on Zhang Shizhao's theory of political action, Roxanne Euben's construction of Islamist jihad as political action and Farah Godrej's deployment of Gandhian concept of nonviolence for political justification, hold the larger possibilities for inaugurating political change.

Introduction

The concept of political action is a significant concept in political theory. Political action is generally understood as the public actions of private individuals which aim to bring political change. The object of such actions could be a change in government, a particular law or policy or it could even be the fundamental laws of the land. It would not be an exaggeration to state that political theory and political action mutually constitute each other. If political theory is understood as the pursuit of examining systematically the feasible and desirable aspects veering around the conceptions of good life, it is political action that bridges the gap between 'what is' and 'what ought to be'. This is because political actions arise out of the discontentment with the existing state of political affairs and it wants a change in the status quo. Political action, in this sense, becomes a means to various ends that are valued in political life. Political action is instrumental in enabling people to live a life that are conducive to their conceptions of good. This understanding is reflected in the definition of political theory as a "critical study concerned with the problems of working out feasible programs of action to advance more consciously conceived values in the light of both the limitations and possibilities of empirical political

reality”.³³⁵ Thus, one task of political theory is to supply resources for political action. Conversely, political action too supplies materials for rich political theorization.

Given the significance of the concept of political action for the practice of political theory and political life, it is important to understand how the concept of political action is treated in the subfield of Comparative Political Theory. This exercise is crucial because of the consequences that conceptual change brings into political life. While discussing the link between conceptual revision and political change, William Connolly argues that “the concepts of politics do not simply provide a lens through which to observe a process that is independent of them”, instead they help constitute political life.³³⁶ When the changes in these political concepts gets the recognition of a critical mass of people, it inaugurates changes in political life itself. Thus, the proposals for revising certain dimensions of political concepts, according to Connolly, has implications for political life. The link between conceptual revision and political change “once grasped can deepen our understanding of the intimate relationship between thought and action”.³³⁷

The first section of the chapter briefly looks at how the concept of political action is defined and discussed in political theory. The second section examines how selected works of three Comparative Political Theorists namely Leigh Jenco, Roxanne Euben and Farah Godrej break new grounds in enlarging the concept of political action and what it implies for political change.

Defining Political Action

One of the classic definitions of political action is given by R. G. Collingwood.³³⁸ Collingwood defines political action as an action aimed at achieving a political good and

³³⁵ Neal Riemer, “Political Theory as a Guide to action: Madison and Prudential Component in Politics,” *Social Science*, vol.35, no.1 (1960) : 20.

³³⁶ William E. Connolly, *The Terms of Political Discourse* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 180.

³³⁷ Connolly, *Political Discourse*, 180.

³³⁸ R. G. Collingwood, "Political Action," in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, vol. 29, (1928) : 155-176.

“political good is a life lived under good laws.”³³⁹ Though the definition appears to be quite general, Collingwood’s understanding of political action is characteristic of the political science of early twentieth century. It is state-centric and hence narrow. For Collingwood, political action is “essentially regulation, control, the imposition of order and regularity upon things.”³⁴⁰ He argues that prosperity is the end of economic life whereas in political life, peace is the end and state is the “weapon” to pursue peace.³⁴¹ He even goes on to the extent saying that state is “an incarnation of political action”.³⁴² If one discounts the interpretation of Collingwood, defining political action in terms of achieving a political good holds numerous possibilities given its open-ended nature of actors and ends.

Despite the 1960s and 1970s being a tumultuous age in which a plethora of political actions like the Civil Rights Movement, the anti-Vietnam war protests etc. rocked the world, the concept of political action per se in general was not given adequate attention. Nevertheless, some attempts were made in examining the role of political principles vis-à-vis actions. For instance, Quentin Skinner considered the relationship between the “professed principles and the actual practices of political life” to be “dynamic” in nature and hence proposed “a more ideological -subject matter for the history of political thought”.³⁴³ Skinner identified two situations where avowed principle could make a dent in a political action.³⁴⁴ The conspicuous situation was when the principle motivated the action. But this idea of understanding actions as being motivated by principles is “generally abandoned” due to various reasons.³⁴⁵ The other situation in which a principle and action are interlinked is when the agent performs a particular social or political action which is unconnected with a principle but nevertheless uses it to legitimate his or her actions.³⁴⁶ Skinner’s focus is on the various ways in which the “innovating ideologist”

³³⁹ Collingwood describes political goodness as “the goodness of a life which is lived under good laws well administered.” Collingwood, “Action”, 160.

³⁴⁰ Collingwood, “Action,” 165.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 176.

³⁴² *Ibid.*

³⁴³ Quentin Skinner, “Some Problems in the Analysis of Political Thought and Action,” *Political Theory* 2, no. 3 (1974): 289-290.

³⁴⁴ Skinner, “Thought and Action,” 290.

³⁴⁵ Skinner points out the criticism that the principles affirmed in political life are most often rationalizations of motives and impulses.

³⁴⁶ Skinner, “Thought and Action,” 292.

legitimizes his untoward social actions. To substantiate his argument, Skinner shows how the principles of Protestant Christianity were used to legitimize practices of capitalism.³⁴⁷ The Protestant work ethic which stressed on hard-work, thrift and discipline suited the kind of work regimen in capitalist industries and was often used to enhance the acceptability of capitalist system.

The dearth of theorizing on action in political theory and the need to distinguish between a theory of action and a theory of an explanation of an action was pointed out by John G. Gunnell as early as 1979. Gunnell argued that despite the general acceptance of human action as a primary object of research by political scientists, there is a “singular lack of any sustained analysis of action as a kind of phenomenon”.³⁴⁸ Though Gunnell attributed the lack of a general theory of action partly to the legacy of behavioral vision of political science which focused on facts and individual behavioural patterns ignoring values and institutions, he explains the existence of “an operative concept of human action in political science” as “largely the residue of certain physicalist or behaviorist implications of logical empiricism and ideas appropriated from a similar persuasion in psychology.”³⁴⁹

What troubled Gunnell was the commonsensical framework that pervaded the writings of political scientists on action. He points out that the models of social scientific enquiry, frequently associated with the works of philosophers Alfred Schutz and Peter Winch, do not develop a theory of action instead, a “theory of the explanation of action”.³⁵⁰ In a subsequent essay, Gunnell presents the “basic elements of a theory of human action and to suggest their relevance for claims about political phenomena”.³⁵¹ Gunnell stresses that “*specifying* an action and *describing* an action” are two different things.³⁵² His attempt is to develop “a theory of action that avoids both behaviorism and mentalism”, which in his view are “doctrines that tend to surface more in claims about the explanation of action

³⁴⁷ Skinner, “Thought and Action,” 301.

³⁴⁸ John G. Gunnell, “Political Science and the Theory of Action Prolegomena,” *Political Theory* 7, no. 1 (1979), 75.

³⁴⁹ Gunnell, “Prolegomena,” 82.

³⁵⁰ Gunnell points out that Winch and Schutz focused on understanding actions through intentions of the actor and situating the performance of the action in the general and conceptual context. *Ibid.*, 85-86.

³⁵¹ John G. Gunnell “Political Theory and the Theory of Action,” *Western Political Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (1981): 341-358.

³⁵² Gunnell, “Theory of Action,” 350.

than in the analysis of action itself”.³⁵³ Action exists wherever the criteria for applying action predicates is present.³⁵⁴ Explanation of a phenomenon involves making it intelligible and explanation of an action entails elaborating the reasons or purposes behind it.³⁵⁵ Whereas comprehending the meaning of an action entails situating it in a commonplace context which illuminates the meaning and intelligibility of the intention of the action .³⁵⁶ The significance a theory of action holds for political theory is that it provides coherence to the commonsensical language in which action is understood in political enquiry and works as a critical instrument for the evaluation of “conflicting ontological assumptions or tacit theories of action and political reality which are often embedded in the use of that observation language by either political actors or observers of political action”.³⁵⁷

Hannah Arendt’s Conception of Political Action

Hannah Arendt’s conception of action is predicated on her restatement of an ancient distinction between *vita contemplativa* and the *vita activa*. ‘*vita contemplativa*’ implies a ‘life of the mind’. It refers to a life committed to theoretical pursuits and hence includes all the activities of thinking, willing and judging. According to Hannah Arendt, the category of *vita activa*, refers to the practical activities that arises out of engaging the problems thrown up by nature, and human conditionis constituted by three fundamental activities namely labour, work and action.

Labour is the “activity which corresponds to the biological process of the human body”.³⁵⁸ Labour entails the activities that are necessary for the reproduction of human life. The fruit of labor is ephemeral as it vanishes as soon as the need is met or in other words, it is consumed. It is the lowest form of all human activities as it is determined by the exigencies of survival which marks all living beings. Work is defined as “the activity

³⁵³ Ibid.,347.

³⁵⁴ Ibid.,356.

³⁵⁵ Ibid.,355-356.

³⁵⁶ Ibid.,353.

³⁵⁷ Ibid.,358.

³⁵⁸ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, introduced by Margaret Canovan 2nd edition (Chicago:University of Chicago Press ,1998), 7.

which corresponds to the unnaturalness of human existence”.³⁵⁹ Its purpose is to create an “artificial world of things” that protects human beings from nature and the worldlessness of labour. Work is a distinctively human activity. Work denotes human capacity for transcendence as it fabricates object that could survive generations. These objects are created for its utility or beauty (for instance, a tool or a work of art). The human conditions for labour and work are life and worldliness respectively. If work saves human beings from the predicaments of labour, action saves them from the meaninglessness of work. Action is the highest form of all human activities as the reality it confers is everlasting as opposed to labour and work.

Action is defined by Arendt as “political activity par excellence”.³⁶⁰ Action entails taking initiative, beginning something new or setting something new in motion. The open-endedness of action presents immense opportunities for human beings: “The fact that man is capable of action means that the unexpected can be expected from him, that he is able to perform what is infinitely improbable”.³⁶¹ Action is characterized by spontaneity, unpredictability and a quintessential element of surprise that could stun the actor herself or the witnesses of an action. Action, unlike labour, is not driven by necessity. Action is distinguished from work in terms of its non-instrumental nature. Action is an end in itself.

“With word and deed, we insert ourselves into the human world, and this insertion is like a second birth, in which we confirm and take upon ourselves the naked fact of our original physical appearance. This insertion is not forced upon us by necessity, like labor, and it is not prompted by utility, like work. It may be stimulated by the presence of others whose company we wish to join, but it is never conditioned by them; its impulse springs from the beginning which came into the world when we were born and to which we respond by beginning something new on our own initiative”.³⁶²

Human plurality is the condition of action. Arendt describes it as “the paradoxical plurality of unique beings”.³⁶³ This is because human beings are simultaneously equal and

³⁵⁹ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 7.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 178.

³⁶² Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 176-177.

³⁶³ *Ibid.*, 176.

distinct. The distinction of human beings is revealed through their actions and speech which are closely related.³⁶⁴ Arendt writes as follows.

“If men were not equal, they could neither understand each other and those who came before them nor plan for the future and foresee the needs of those who will come after them. If men were not distinct, each human being distinguished from any other who is, was, or will ever be, they would need neither speech nor action to make themselves understood. Signs and sounds to communicate immediate identical needs and wants would be enough”.³⁶⁵

Arendt points out that though all the three human activities and their respective human conditions are rooted in natality, it is action that has the “closest connection with the human condition of natality”.³⁶⁶ According to her, “the new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew, that is, of acting. In this sense of initiative, an element of action, and therefore of natality, is inherent in all human activities”.³⁶⁷ Action becomes the ‘actualization of the human condition of natality’.³⁶⁸ Arendt at one point describes action as a miracle.³⁶⁹

Hannah Arendt’s conception of action has many features. Firstly, action has a revelatory quality. The act reveals the agent to himself as well as others. It reveals who a person is rather than what a person is. In short, action achieves the disclosure of a personal identity.³⁷⁰ Secondly, action provides human lives with meaning. Thirdly, action takes on multiple forms and political action is the paradigmatic form of action. Bhikhu Parekh describes this point.

“Although action can take a number of forms, political action is its paradigmatic form, and the organized public space its ideal home. In political life man acts amongst his peers, whose very presence and critical judgement bring out his full potential. What is

³⁶⁴ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 178.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 175-176.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 178.

³⁶⁹ As Bhikhu Parekh explains “In action man performs miracles, creates the extraordinary, and the unpredictable and reveals himself. Action appears from nowhere and cannot be causally explained”. Bhikhu Parekh, “Hannah Arendt’s Critique of Marx,” in *Hannah Arendt: The Recovery of the Public World*, ed. Melvyn A. Hill (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1979), 87.

³⁷⁰ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 179.

more, political life is especially designed for action, and gives it a sense of reality and permanence that no other area of life can give".³⁷¹

The twin predicaments which action presents, 'boundlessness' and 'unpredictability', in Arendt's theory of action are moderated through reliance on the human faculty of 'forgiving' and 'promise-making'.³⁷²

At the heart of Hannah Arendt's conception of the political is the public space. It is the 'space of appearance'. An individual reveals himself or herself through speech and action in the public space. Public space has the twin implications of a type of activity as well as the context of an activity. It is an avenue for the pursuit of excellence. In the words of Arendt, "every activity performed in public can attain an excellence, by definition, the presence of others is always required, and this presence needs the formality of the public, constituted by one's peers, it cannot be the casual, familiar presence of one's equals or inferiors".³⁷³

What constitutes an act political is not only its 'public' character but also it has to be enacted in concert with others. To quote Arendt, "The political realm rises directly out of acting together, the sharing of words and deeds. Thus, action not only has the most intimate relationship to the public part of the world common to us all but is the one activity which constitutes it."³⁷⁴ The Athenian *polis* is the paradigmatic form of public life for Arendt. Phillip Hansen aptly points out that for Arendt, *polis* is both a historical and normative phenomenon.³⁷⁵

Hannah Arendt's conception of political action has courted the criticism that her account of politics is unrestrained and does not offer any evaluative criteria except to judge an action in terms of its "greatness". Lucy Cane dismisses the charge by interpretation that the 'regenerative' quality of a principle (which is the quality that strengthen the liveliness of a public arena) provides Arendt ,non-moral standards of evaluation.³⁷⁶ Cane also

³⁷¹ Parekh, "Critique of Marx," 70.

³⁷² Arendt, *Human Condition*, 237.

³⁷³ *Ibid.*, 49.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 198.

³⁷⁵ Phillip Hansen, *Hannah Arendt: Politics, History and Citizenship* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005) ,51.

³⁷⁶ Lucy Cane, "Hannah Arendt on the Principles of Political Action," *European Journal of Political Theory* 14, no. 1 (2015): 55-75.

responds to the charge that Arendt turns political action into “an exercise in hollow dramatics”.³⁷⁷ Cane does so by gathering unsystematic description of principles of political action by Arendt which are interspersed across her writings from “*The Origins of Totalitarianism*” to the “*Life of the Mind*”. Cane brings to the fore an underappreciated feature of Hannah Arendt’s conception of action: that “action is always inspired and guided by principles”. Though one might get the impression after reading “*The Human Condition*” that action for Arendt is purposeless, a nuanced reading of Arendt’s account of action in her oeuvre suggests otherwise. Cane illustrates that Arendt, drawing her understanding of principles substantially from Montesquieu claims principles to be inspiring action as well as serving political judgement.³⁷⁸ Cane attempts to reconcile the tension that arises out of Arendt’s claim in “*The Human Condition*” that political action is novel and unpredictable and the claim in “*On revolution*” that principles from history gets repeated in action. Reconciliation is carried out by rearticulating the principles from history.³⁷⁹ This process of re-articulation or reinterpretation of a principle is creative, thus constituting the ‘novelty’ of an action.

Political Action in Comparative Political Theory

This section examines how the work of three comparative political theorists, Leigh Jenco, Roxanne Euben and Farah Godrej expands the meaning and scope of political action. Leigh Jenco’s work “*Making the Political: Founding and Action in the Political Theory of Zhang Shizhao*” examines the theory of political action given by a Chinese thinker, Zhang Shizhao.³⁸⁰ Roxanne Euben contests the popular and scholarly constructions of jihad and illustrates how jihad could be construed as a political action. Farah Godrej looks at how Gandhian civic virtue of nonviolence could perform the role of arbitration of competing truth claims.

³⁷⁷ Cane, “Political Action,” 55.

³⁷⁸ Ibid., 69

³⁷⁹ Cane, “Political Action,” 69.

³⁸⁰ Leigh K. Jenco, *Making the political: Founding and Action in the Political Theory of Zhang Shizhao* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 137-236.

Zhang Shizhao's Theory of Political Action

Is it plausible for individuals to effect collective transformation when the social and political environment they inhabit is yet to engender a political community and acts as a constraint for collective action? Can individuals act as agents for collective transformation when there is no collective action or social movement in the horizon? Zhang Shizhao, the Chinese political thinker answers in the affirmative to these questions of political founding in the absence of a political community. Zhang Shizhao's theory of political action is a step closer to as well as a step away from contemporary democratic political theories. In its attribution of agency and efficacy to the ordinary activities of citizens rather than any social elites or powerful personalities, Zhang's theory of political action moves in the direction of contemporary democratic theories.³⁸¹ Simultaneously, in its extraordinary emphasis on uncoordinated citizen activities at an individual level, it is a departure from democratic theories that rely more on collective action and the prior existence of democratic institutions or attitudes.

In Leigh Jenco's analysis, Zhang upsets the public-private divide by situating political action in disparate individuals. Zhang's idea of the political is unconstrained by the understandings that pin transformative political action to activities in the public realm. Zhang turns our attention to other ways to define political activity that "turn on the cumulative cultivation of personal qualities rather than on existing institutions, shared values, or spontaneous, community-wide consent".³⁸² The emergence of a true 'public' can be occasioned only by preserving the individual particularities.³⁸³ Insisting that "each defines for oneself" what is "good", "bad," and "appropriate", Zhang locates the practices necessary to building the state in individual capacities for personal

³⁸¹ While Zhang charts out the role for individual citizens in effecting change in the absence of well-functioning institutions, it also maps out an alternative scenario when individual interaction with existing institutions can effect transformation.

³⁸² Jenco, *Making the Political*, 104.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, 108.

judgement.”³⁸⁴ Thus the architecture of the public that Zhang envisions is constructed with emphasis on private actions, feelings and needs of each individual.

Zhang’s idea of political action does not go for an effacement of the public private divide but straddles it.³⁸⁵ Unlike Hannah Arendt, Benjamin Barber, Hannah Pitkin and Sheldon Wolin who presupposes an inextricable link between public space and political action, Zhang delinks political action from public space. For these theorists “politics takes the form of explicitly coordinated action to deal with commonly shared consequences”.³⁸⁶ Zhang’s individual centered model of action can be considered political only if it is efficacious in altering shared environments as well as “fit within in a theoretical structure that credibly registers them as contributing to more than merely personal or moral issues”.³⁸⁷ Leigh Jenco makes an attempt to demonstrate the feasibility of Zhang’s project by drawing on works in social and political theory that examines the role of individual participation in shaping collective outcomes.³⁸⁸

Jenco describes Zhang’s attempts to make individual acts political as “making the personal political”. The phrase has different connotation than one used in the context of second-wave of feminism. For Feminists ‘making the personal political’ entails collapsing of the private into the political by revealing the power structure that operates in the domestic sphere. Here political action is sought for the emancipation of women in the private sphere by opening the “personal to a public gaze”.³⁸⁹ In contrast, in Zhang’s usage ‘making the personal political’ entails a collapse of the “political” into the private in the sense that internal decisions of the individuals begin to have overt political consequences. Zhang’s theory of political action is a call for effective self-management through navigating the “personal, internal struggles to define one’s own capacities” vis-`a-vis other citizens and the larger political environment.³⁹⁰ By personalizing politics, Zhang’s conception of individual founding, unsettles the “political” from the “public”. It

³⁸⁴ Ibid.,109.

³⁸⁵ Jenco, *Making the Political*,111.

³⁸⁶ Ibid.,113.

³⁸⁷ Ibid.,116.

³⁸⁸ Jenco discusses Richard Tuck’s work to illustrate the feasibility of Zhang’s theory of action.

³⁸⁹ Jenco, *Making the Political*,126.

³⁹⁰ Ibid.

shows the inadequacy of the public-private binary in explaining certain political actions which are performed. As Jenco points out,

Breaking down the divisions between public and private provides greater numbers of sites for such transformative action, even as it invites us to reconceptualize the meaning of “political” without recourse to these terms. When the political is defined as any deliberate attempt to intervene in a collective fate, the personal and the political do not stand as opposed or as distantly separate as they seem when the binary inscribing our action is a public-private one.³⁹¹

By reconceptualizing the very meaning of what constitutes the “political”, Zhang Shizhao solves the puzzle he grappled with: “how to initiate political change in the absence of a political community”. Zhang formulates his theory of political action during the period of Yuan Shikai whose tenure has seen the gradual demise of the incipient Republican era inaugurated in 1911 and increasing centralization. Zhang Shizhao is against the top-down models of establishing democracies as they are elitist and it smacks of the imperial Confucius thought that privileges only select group of people. He does not view the feasibility of establishing democracy as a “problem of education”, a view held by his contemporary Liang Qichao. Similarly, Shizhao is not in favour of Sun Yat Sen’s reliance of party leadership for spreading the ethos of a democratic polity. Instead, Zhang relies on individualized action for fostering democratic practices as opposed to any top-down model. Zhang’s emphasis on ordinary individual as a key source of political change is reminiscent of the Gandhi’s exhortation, “Be the change you wish to see in the world”. His bootstrapping vision of attributing agency to average individuals living in a polity not desired by them reminds one of Hemingway’s lines in *The Old Man and the Sea*: “Think of what you can do with what there is”.³⁹² Zhang Shizhao’s conceptualization of disparate individual actions fostering democratic practices is buttressed on three elements which I examine below.

Self-awareness is the first among the three specific political practices that could inform the incremental and everyday processes of polity building. Self-awareness *orzijue*, for Zhang, means the “realization by individuals that their actions and mental orientations

³⁹¹ Ibid., 133.

³⁹² Ernest Hemingway, *The Old Man and the Sea*, (New York: Scribner, 1952), 54.

can constitute the foundation for wider socio-political change”.³⁹³ Self-awareness connects individual orientations to the probabilities of self-rule by goading citizens to reexamine how their individual actions can affect political outcomes .³⁹⁴ In his essays , “Self-awareness” and “The State and the Self ” that surfaced in the inaugural volume of *The Tiger* ,Zhang, links self-awareness as the ability of individuals to view critically and imaginatively their social and political selves in the context of post-revolutionary political collapse in China.³⁹⁵ Self-awareness is required to counter indolence, desperation and determinism in the people living in a non-republican polity. Self-awareness is an important trait in Zhang’s account of political transformation because it enables the citizens to see their individual selves, daily activities and surroundings differently, thereby motivating them to work towards socio-political transformation.³⁹⁶ . Thus “self-awareness stands both as a primary defense and as an embodiment of the need for “theory” – imaginative visions of political life that ground both action and reflection – in fragmented contexts”.³⁹⁷

Leigh Jenco illustrates how the self- aware individual portrayed by Zhang is a reworked rendition of the classical Chinese literatus. The literatus was at the centre of action in imperial China owing to the sway of neo-Confucian cosmology “in which self-reflection could both reveal and correct the larger patterns in the external world”.³⁹⁸ The literatus derived his legitimacy from his being a moral exemplar, everyday legal administrator , and the “interpreter of the morally and politically authoritative canon of Classics”.³⁹⁹ The literatus was perceived as “primarily responsible for effecting the moral juncture between normative and actual authority”.⁴⁰⁰ The ethical activity of the literatus is perceived as capable of resulting in changes in the metaphysical and social world. Zhang attributes the role once played by the literati to the nontraditional political actors. They acquire the “virtuous and efficacious capacities” of the literati through an inner

³⁹³ Jenco, *Making the Political* ,18.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*,137.

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*,138.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*,147.

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

reorientation of the self.⁴⁰¹ Self-awareness endows ordinary people “an open-ended capacity to interpret, theorize about, and criticize their environment”.⁴⁰² It gives them the understanding that an effective operationalization of sovereignty need not be premised on collective action alone.

Leigh Jenco evaluates Zhang’s model of self-awareness by juxtaposing it with the work of Hannah Pitkin. Jenco points out that though Pitkin and Zhang might converge in their emphasis on individually differentiated action, Pitkin would not agree to Zhang’s claims of individual imposition of the goals of political life. By posing Pitkin as a bold counterpoint to Zhang, Jenco reveals the seeds of tyranny embedded in the self-aware individual of Zhang who assuming the part of an epic theorist in which “he sees other people as objects and himself as the only relevant decision maker”.⁴⁰³

Zhang’s steps for political action is apt for the period before spontaneous public action when a concrete consciousness of a “we” or a collective notion of self-identity is yet to emerge. It is not apt for mature regimes where concrete democratic institutions and collective identities are already in place. Self-awareness is the beginning of an efficacious political action. Leigh Jenco argues that Zhang’s concept of self-awareness functions as a vision as well as a lens. As a vision, “it crafts those material and visual environments that mark effective, human-initiated change”.⁴⁰⁴ “Self-awareness as lens helps us see an old situation in a new way that revises our targets and sources of action”.⁴⁰⁵ In this lens other individuals are not seen as possessing interests antithetical to the self-aware individual. Irrespective of the orientations of the other, an individual has an agency that has to be unlocked by oneself.

Self-awareness as a mode of political action shifts the onus of action from a group which is largely non-existent or that is yet to emerge to the individual. A self-aware individual who is sensitive to the gap between desirable polity and the actual political environment

⁴⁰¹ Zhang exhorts the nontraditional actors fashion themselves on the model of imperial literati by being aware and acting as if they alone are responsible for the orderliness of the world. Jenco, *Making the Political*, 153.

⁴⁰² Jenco, *Making the Political*, 153.

⁴⁰³ *Ibid.*, 138-139.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 158.

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

inaugurates transformative action with this understanding. This self-work is important in preparing the ground feasible for collective political action in future. Zhang Shizhao's model of political action puts emphasis on the immanent imaginations of political community and explains "how their external manifestation, even by one individual in the form of everyday practices, can matter".⁴⁰⁶ It is self-awareness that help transcribe a political community's internal vision on the external practices of citizens. Individual political actions are a glimmer of hope in dark times and rescues people from falling into fatalism and desperation. In short "self-awareness reorients the focus of political activity away from action in concert and toward disparate – though cumulative – efforts to render shared problems incrementally and personally tractable, in ways that complement or supplant deliberately coordinated public control."⁴⁰⁷

Secondly, Zhang Shizhao's schema of self-use of talent is the concrete expression of the internal reconditioning that began with self-awareness. The element of self-use of talent is an innovative renovation that tweaked imperial rules for furthering democracy. The treatment of talent as a concept in Chinese politics is ambivalent. The most received understanding of talent is that it must be regulated with the use of virtue. Talent was always linked with virtue. The examination system for the recruitment to Chinese imperial bureaucracy is an example of the regulation of talent using virtue. Zhang's innovation lies in delinking talent which had been hitherto tied to virtue in Chinese imperial thought. And the acknowledgement and development of talent for Zhang would mean "to have a self". For Zhang, selfhood lies in the use of talent. The uses which Zhang's self-aware individual puts his talent to use are writing opinion pieces on politics, non-indulgence in corruption etc.

Invoking talent as a political remedy is not common for democratic theory as considerations of equality often force theorists to either ignore or vilify the advantages stemming from expertise and natural capability. But for Zhang, the very fact that talent is individual centric and its non-transferable nature gives talent a potency to transform politics. The political transformative potential of talent lies in its unpredictability and nonconformity. The open-ended nature of talent could be utilized by

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., 160.

the individual to shape the external environment and the individual herself.⁴⁰⁸ Talent, for Zhang, lies in the individual ability to fight normalizing forces that bind one personally (social values, for instance) and politically (authoritarianism). Seen in this context, self-use of talent inaugurates institutional and personal transformation. Self-use of talent is the logical extension of self-awareness and it does not require recognition from other citizens for its efficacy. What renders legitimacy to it is the active self-application which is mindful of the temporal as well as political transformations.⁴⁰⁹

Unlike the use of talent in the imperial bureaucracy where application of talent was informed by virtue (which was essential to nip dissent under imperial rule), Zhang extricates talent from virtue in order to unleash its “destabilizing potential of democratic action”.⁴¹⁰ Thus the concrete implication of Zhang’s propagation of talent’s self-use is that it is destabilizing on an institutional and conceptual plane. The personal actions arising out of self-application of talent sows the seed for founding the polity, thus laboring for a long-term transformation in the existing institutional scenario. Simultaneously, it reconceptualizes political action without coordinated action.

Finally, accommodation is defined as the “peaceful, non-assimilative negotiation of differences between two or more putatively equal parties”.⁴¹¹ It is a process that arises out of mutual opposition and flourishes through “mutual concessions”.⁴¹² It is instrumental in constructively bridging interpersonal differences.⁴¹³ Also “differences can be constructively bridged not within already-existing public spaces but first within and between persons”.⁴¹⁴ Zhang is interested in how assertions of difference can form a political community and found a polity. The personal process of accommodation helps an individual to overcome his or her “animalistic desires that lead one to favor the same and hate the different”.⁴¹⁵

⁴⁰⁸ Jenco, *Making the Political*, 164.

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 187.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*, 244.

⁴¹² *Ibid.*, 194.

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*, 193.

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁵ Jenco, *Making the Political*, 207.

Zhang's greatest concern is the conformity engendered by political structures and he is interested in careful cultivation of those differences that could immunize the socio-political environment from "totalizing concepts embodied in persons or institutions".⁴¹⁶

Accommodation entails "nurturing particular relationships between persons, acknowledging the political world as comprising interconnected but differently motivated agents" whose differences manifest in idiosyncrasy and political dissent.⁴¹⁷ Zhang, inspired by the works of British liberals Walter Bagehot and John Morley, emphasized the role of dissent as one of the preconditions for political advancement. Zhang characterized dissent, one of the meanings of difference as "motivating an interplay of forces, ideas, or interests that sharpens the commitment of its participants without fostering mutual exclusivity."⁴¹⁸ Zhang's understanding of difference is local and relational rather than preexisting and absolute.⁴¹⁹

While accommodation is similar to other two doctrines in its emphasis on internal retooling of the self, it differs in terms of its categorical other orientation. The doctrine of accommodation connects a self-aware and talented individual to other similarly situated citizens. It takes into consideration the pluralism and difference that exists in society. The process of accommodation works simultaneously at multiple registers mainly personal, social and political "which is precisely why Zhang can invoke it as polity-building device in the absence of a clearly defined public space".⁴²⁰ The working of the process of accommodation challenges the foregrounding of a public space for accommodating difference. This is because, "Zhang expects citizens to exercise "accommodation" not episodically and deliberately in public fora but constantly, as a habit of everyday life".⁴²¹ One needs to recall that Zhang's theoretical formulation is focusing on the yet to be found political community. Zhang's notion of accommodation implies "spontaneous harmonization of difference in the absence of a guiding principle upon which all were expected to converge.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid.,202.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid.,20.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid.,21.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid.,204.

⁴²⁰ Ibid.,214.

⁴²¹ Ibid.,217.

The constituent elements of Zhang's theory of political action namely self-awareness, self-use of talent and accommodation elevates ordinary individuals as agents in altering socio-political transformation. In this process, Zhang reconceptualizes political action by delinking it from the requirement of coordinated action in the public space and situating it in the uncoordinated activities of individual citizens.

Jihad as Political Action

The overarching theme of this chapter is broadly to understand how conceptual revision can accelerate the possibilities of novel ways of thinking about as well as effecting political change. The previous section illustrated how Zhang Shizhao's theory of political action reconceptualizes political action through its emphasis on the efficacy of uncoordinated activities of individual citizens in effecting political change in contradistinction to democratic theories which primarily understand political action as collective action enacted in the public sphere. The essay "*Killing (For) Politics: Jihad, Martyrdom and Political Action*" by Roxanne L. Euben reinterprets jihad as a political action.⁴²² A reinterpretation of jihad as political action is significant in light of the highly emotive responses engendered by inadequate and partial interpretations of jihad by social-scientific and rational actor models. Euben's analysis of the complexity and contestation that marks the career of jihad as a concept, her juxtaposition of jihad with certain episodes from European history and invocation of Hannah Arendt enables her to reflect on the larger significance of death and violence hold for politics across cultures. Euben's demystification of jihad and her analysis of Jihad as political action if translated into policy circles, I argue, can inaugurate possibilities for political diagnosis of the problem and warrant political solutions rather than knee-jerk responses that escalates violence.

Writing in the aftermath of September 11,2001 terrorist attacks on the United States, Euben criticizes the constructions of jihad in political theory and American public culture

⁴²²Roxanne L. Euben, "Killing (For) Politics: Jihad, Martyrdom and Political Action," *Political Theory* 30, no. 1 (2002): 4-35.

which portray it as a “general eruption of the irrational, archaic, and pathological”.⁴²³ In these distorted understandings, Jihad becomes a byword for “atavistic politics of retribalization, balkanization, fanaticism, and tyrannical paternalism”.⁴²⁴ Even rational actor models which improves the explanations of martyrdom by modernization theories overlooks the “ethico-political context”⁴²⁵ in jihad.⁴²⁶ The instrumental understanding of such theories ignores the “intrinsic appeal of religious ideas”.⁴²⁷ Euben argues that the portrayal of jihad as the primary site of violence and bloodshed short-circuits the images of violence by Europe and America. What these “dehistoricized and reified” constructions achieve is the “the displacement of anxieties about killing and dying for politics onto an Islamic Other”.⁴²⁸

Euben illuminates the complexity and contestation that marks jihad by situating it in a plurality of contexts ranging from references to jihad in Quran and Hadith literature which display ambivalence to violence, early military expeditions under Prophet Muhammed for material gains, the codification of jihad in the backdrop of Muslim conquests in the mid-eighth century which privileged the “jihad of the sword” as opposed to “the greater jihad”⁴²⁹, the 11thCE Almoravids, the widening of the application of jihad even against Muslim rulers, to the rejection of non-violent jihad by Sunni Fundamentalist theorists, Abu al Ala Mawdudi and Sayyid Qutb who saw it as playing into the hands of the colonial strategy. What emerges out of surveying the multiple interpretation of jihad is that it “is less a fixed set of rules for violent, fanatical conquest than a category that refracts changing understandings about scope and meaning of worldly action given radical political and social change”.⁴³⁰

Euben illustrates that the Islamist understandings of jihad, rather than being, an expression of the activation of atavistic politics of irrationalism and tribalism, is the

⁴²³ Euben, “Political Action,”6.

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

⁴²⁵ Ibid.

⁴²⁶ The structural-functionalist models and modernization theories explain jihad as a “by-product of and an atavistic reaction against modernity, a pathological reflex of the body politic against the march of rationalization”. Ibid.,7.

⁴²⁷ Euben, “Political Action,”7.

⁴²⁸ Euben, “Political Action,”22.

⁴²⁹ Ibid.,12.

⁴³⁰ Euben, “Political Action,”21.

outcome of an “innovative reading of an Islamic past through the prism of contemporary dilemmas and discourses”.⁴³¹ The present-day Islamist perception of jihad is a concomitant protraction and cessation of past understandings of jihad. Euben focuses on the interpretations of jihad provided by two prominent theorists of Sunni fundamentalism, Abu al-Ala Mawdudi and Sayyid Qutub to advance her argument that what is concealed in the religious garb of jihad is action with athis-worldly orientation and death embodied in certain understandings of jihad entails a furtherance of politics rather than the end of politics. The interpretation of these thinkers is an act of engaging the past through the present. These thinkers in contrast to the classical doctrine to endure unjust Muslim rule, reinscribe “the cosmic battle between the Abode of Islam and the abode of War inside the Muslim community”. Doing so they redefined the purpose and scope of jihad in light of political imperatives of their times and substantiates their argument with hitherto marginal incidents in Islamic history.⁴³² Also, both Mawdudi and Qutb appropriate the term *jahiliyya* which in Quran refers to the “era of pre-Islamic ignorance in Arabia”.⁴³³ They shift the meaning of *jahiliyya* as a historical period to as a condition which any society could slip into when it deviates from Islam. “Whereas ancient *jahiliyya* was a function of simple ignorance, modern *jahiliyya* is a conscious arrogation of God’s authority and is expressed in the simultaneous repudiation of divine rule (*hakimiyya*) and instantiation of human sovereignty”.⁴³⁴ In their novel interpretation of *jahiliyya*, jihad is rendered an urgency and should not be considered as solely a defensive action. Though the establishment of divine sovereignty is invariable and desirable, nevertheless it is contingent on human action.

When viewed in the context of Islamist fundamentalists’ undertaking of jihad as a pursuit for realizing divine sovereignty on earth, jihad can be construed as a political action. The violence and killing which entails the jihad of the Islamists is political violence and the goal is to realize a public sphere that embodies the divine will. Euben writes,

⁴³¹ Ibid., 15.

⁴³² Ibid.

⁴³³ Ibid.

⁴³⁴ Ibid.

“Rather, for those who endorse it, it is a form of political action that endows human struggle to remake a common world with existential weight. This is because jihad simultaneously signifies an enactment of God’s will and the political effort to bring into existence a public sphere in which true justice, equality, and freedom are possible. While the mujahidin may seek the ever-elusive rewards of the afterlife, jihad against modern jahiliyya entails the political struggle to realize the umma in a particular historical moment; in turn, it is the continued existence of the earthly umma that immortalizes their efforts”.⁴³⁵

Hannah Arendt could seem to be an unlikely candidate to contemplate on the relationship between death, mortality and politics given her understanding that violence embodies conditions that destroys the central premises for politics: equality and deliberation that are central to politics. But Euben draws light on Arendt’s understanding of action which is opposed to eternal rather than mortality.

“Importantly, contra Seery, Arendt does not simply oppose death to politics, for while she does indeed argue that the initiative central to action is closest to the condition of natality, she also identifies the pursuit of earthly immortality, and the awareness of mortality on which it is parasitic, as the spring and center of the *vita active*”.⁴³⁶

Euben continues,

“For Arendt, then, the very significance of political action (properly understood) for those who engage in it is contingent on constant awareness of the conditions of natality and mortality that characterize the human condition, and human endeavor lives on in the continued existence of the polis. Exemplified in the politics of the Greek agora, such conditions rendered the dignity of politics and the meaning of earthly life mutually constitutive”.⁴³⁷

⁴³⁵ Ibid., 22.

⁴³⁶ Euben, “Political Action,” 9.

⁴³⁷ Ibid., 10.

Euben believes that the connection between immortality and politics crucial to Islamist conceptions of jihad gets illuminated by Arendt's conjuration of a globe in which "political action was not merely instrumental but existentially significant".⁴³⁸

The violence that is intrinsic to the Islamist conception of jihad is essential for political founding and the consequent political artifact ensures Arendtian immortality. Euben juxtaposes the Islamist political action with Christian crusades and sixteenth century Puritans to show that killing and dying for politics is not the monopoly of one particular culture but is present in both West as well as the non-West. The violence that is central to the Islamist Jihad does not signify an end to the politics as in the Arendtian formulation but it signifies the inauguration of politics.⁴³⁹ Euben's juxtaposition also illuminates the paradoxes that beset incidents of democratic founding i.e. the violence that marks jihad as well as Athenian polis defy the very norms and practices it strives to inaugurate.

Gandhian Non-Violence as Political Action

The fascination for non-violent methods of political action has had its ebb and flow ever since its inauguration and popularization by M. K Gandhi. Gandhi who was a pioneer in theorizing and practising the principle of ahimsa, which is roughly translated as non-violence, deployed it to conceptualize satyagraha (roughly translated as "holding fast to truth"), the non-violent direct action comprising many techniques ranging from boycotts to hunger strikes.⁴⁴⁰ Gandhipredicated his conviction in principle of non-violence on moralist, epistemological and pragmatic reasons. Gandhi eschewed violent methods not just because it was immoral and unjust to inflict suffering on others but also because of its assumption of "infallibility". The one who indulges in violence believes that he or she is not right and dismisses the possibility of his or her commission of a wrong action. For

⁴³⁸ Ibid.,10.

⁴³⁹ For Arendt violence is antithetical to the preconditions of politics: deliberation among equal citizens. Since killing forecloses deliberation, it is in fact killing politics itself.

⁴⁴⁰ Gandhian principle of satyagraha, a corollary of ahimsa refers to the "political tactics of resistance, such as civil disobedience and active noncooperation in the form of strikes, fasts, sit-ins, and deliberate law-breaking, along with the strict commitment to the disavowal of violence for gaining advantage". Farah Godrej, "Nonviolence and Gandhi's Truth: A Method for Moral and Political Arbitration," *The Review of Politics* 68, no. 2 (2006): 299

Gandhi, this was an epistemological error because human beings cannot access the absolute truth in their embodied form. Gandhi's innovative use and advocacy of non-violent political action was also a response to a realist understanding of politics.⁴⁴¹ Gandhi understood clearly the limits of rational persuasion and sought ways to appeal to the heart rather than the head. Self-suffering which is a key process to the undertaking of satyagraha apart from having the benefits of cleansing the soul had the effect of transforming the heart of the opponent resulting in the attenuation of entrenched positions. Non-Violence in this sense, was a response to the moral-psychological dimension that underlie politics.⁴⁴² Gandhi was aware of the potential of the collective power embodied in non-violent political action to go out of control and fall into violence. Hence, he built into the concept of satyagraha "self-discipline" which limited the negative consequences of politics mainly the escalation of violence and conflict. The twin aspects of self-suffering and self-discipline imbued *satyagraha* with its "self-limiting character" and what emerges is a "form of political action that seeks to constrain the negative consequences of politics while working toward progressive social and political reform".⁴⁴³

Farah Godrej gives an interesting twist to the Gandhian concept of non-violence as political action.⁴⁴⁴ Gandhi, argues Godrej, provides "fresh insights" for understanding and arbitration of conflict among moral projects. What motivates Godrej is the belief that engaging in "genuine comparison of models of political action emerging from diverse traditions" can broaden the insights of political thought past the Western tradition.⁴⁴⁵ A juxtaposition of Gandhian and Rawlsian model for arbitrating competing claims illuminates the advantages of the former and the limitations of the latter. Godrej proposes that the Gandhian 'civic virtue of nonviolence' (CVN) can be utilized to arbitrate moral conflict emanating from competing moral claims. CVN, animated by a rich and

⁴⁴¹ Karuna Mantena, "Another Realism: The Politics of Gandhian Nonviolence," *American Political Science Review* 106, no. 2 (2012): 455-470.

⁴⁴² Mantena, "Gandhian Nonviolence," 459-461.

⁴⁴³ *Ibid.*, 455.

⁴⁴⁴ Godrej, "Political Arbitration," 287-317.

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 317.

convoluted comprehension of political life, offers a “productive approach” to conflicts than the proposals by the present-day pluralists.⁴⁴⁶

The notion of truth subscribed by Gandhi provides him a framework for human actions including political action. Godrej points out that “Gandhi's notion of truth echoes the Hindu understanding of truth as an all-pervading force of divine consciousness that holds the universe together”.⁴⁴⁷ Gandhi identifies absolute truth with God and understands relative truths as manifestations of the Absolute truth. Human beings are incapable of comprehending the Absolute truth but nevertheless should strive for it as implied in Gandhi's emphasis on “experimentation” which indicates the corrigibility of the individual epistemological enterprise. Gandhi was against compartmentalizing human life into various spheres of action as he believed that quest for truth should animate all spheres of life-social, economic and political. Since absolute truth is unavailable for mortals, the challenge of politics and other realms of action is to “arrive, through practice, at a series of relative truths—truths about the right action to be taken in a specific situation, for a specific reason.”⁴⁴⁸ But this vision of Gandhi, as Farah Godrej points out raises a potential epistemological as well as a moral challenge both of which is responded with his concept of non-violence.⁴⁴⁹ Gandhian principle of ahimsa which could be roughly translated as non-violence minimally is negative: non-performance of a violence, and in its positive dimension is concerned with systematic cultivation of certain virtues like “humility, sincerity and selfless service to others, accompanied by self-examination and self-regulation.”⁴⁵⁰ Truth becomes accessible through a daily performance of rigorous penance. Individual gets the capacity to align his actions with the relative truths he or she garners as a result of the transformation of one's mind after systematic training of one's will.⁴⁵¹ Non-violence becomes the method for awakening a conscience from its unthinking and self-interested mode. The strict discipline that entails adopting a nonviolent way of life trains the interior consciousness of the political actor

⁴⁴⁶ Godrej, “Political Arbitration,” 317.

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 288.

⁴⁴⁸ Godrej, “Political Arbitration,” 294.

⁴⁴⁹ The epistemological challenge is that how do individuals ascertain whether the relative truths they hold is not erroneous and contribute to absolute truth. The moral challenge is concerned with the justification of political action without ascertaining the veracity of the relative truths.

⁴⁵⁰ Godrej, “Political Arbitration,” 297.

⁴⁵¹ The awakened conscience is the “ripe fruit of strictest discipline”. *Ibid.*

and prepares it for accessing “truths about the moral and political world”.⁴⁵² Ahimsa, thus contain a potential for moral or political arbitration. Godrej uses ‘arbitration’ not to mean mediation of strife but describes it “as an internal adjudication that allows people to use their own judgement to make moral and political choices in consonance with the truth.”⁴⁵³

Farah Godrej points out that the major difficulties in the applicability of the concept of non-violence could stem from its stringent requirements and its basis in a comprehensive moral doctrine (Hindu cosmology). The latter raises issues of impartiality in arbitrating truth claims. Godrej finds a way out of this predicament through bypassing metaphysical assumptions and extracting elements that constitute a “secular doctrine of political action” which discharge similar functions of arbitration.⁴⁵⁴ She does so by distinguishing ahimsa as a civic virtue from ahimsa as a creed and points out that even if we discount absolute Truth from Gandhian idea of nonviolence, one could still extract components of nonviolence as civic virtue from it that could help one arrive at relative political truths. These three components are “humility or recognition of one’s own fallibility”, “capacity for self-examination and correction”, and “conscious, disciplined self-suffering”.⁴⁵⁵ Adhering to these three components would enable the alignment of one’s moral judgement in a particular case to proximity of its truth.

Farah Godrej compares Rawlsian account of garnering political agreement on principles of justice with that of Gandhi’s Civic Virtue of Non-Violence. Rawls’ attempt is animated by the fact of pluralism which characterizes the modern era. Rawls’ solution to bypass metaphysics and eschewing reliance on any singular comprehensive moral view to gain political agreement makes him arrive at his idea of an ‘overlapping consensus’ that taps on to the “implicitly recognized basic ideas and principles within a society”⁴⁵⁶.

The Gandhian Civic Virtue of Non-violence offers an alternative account for public justification. Its focus is not solely on reasons but also on actions that accompanies these reasons (humility, discourse and non-violent suffering). In the Gandhian schema, “theory

⁴⁵² Godrej, “Political Arbitration,” 298.

⁴⁵³ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁴ Godrej, “Political Arbitration,” 300.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid., 301-303.

⁴⁵⁶ Godrej, “Political Arbitration,” 311.

and praxis are equally important and come under scrutiny equally”, and “presents a vision in which thought, action, and politics are contiguous with one another” unlike Rawls who separates political activity from rest of the human life.⁴⁵⁷ Farah Godrej argues that the adoption of Rawlsian model is at the expense of the very activity of “political philosophy and on political life”.⁴⁵⁸

“Perhaps the main cost of the Rawlsian model is the impoverished understanding of political life and of the activity of political philosophy that emerge from it. The banishment of truth to the realm of the private, with stability and consensus as overriding concerns, leaves Rawls's enterprise looking more political than philosophical. Because it is focused on establishing agreement on the acceptance of certain ideas rather than the proof of their truth, the Rawlsian model turns the activity of political philosophy into a political rather than a philosophical undertaking. Isn't political philosophy, we might argue, precisely the search for truth, involving argumentation about controversial metaphysical premises? Furthermore, in banishing such argumentation and subordinating the pursuit of truth to that of agreement, the members of society lose the opportunity to engage one another in a mutually enriching (if contentious) dialogical enterprise in which each substantive commitment is subject to questioning, articulation and, perhaps, renegotiation—a process that some might argue lies the very core of democratic political life”.⁴⁵⁹

What emerges out of Godrej’s essay is an innovative applicability of Gandhian concept of nonviolence in arbitrating competing moral claims. Gandhian CVN is animated by a realistic understanding of political life and prioritizes the pursuit of truth. The traits of humility, self-introspection and self-suffering that characterizes CVN charts an individual into a trajectory of relative truth that is proximate to the absolute truth. What gets illustrated is the potential of Gandhian concept of nonviolence in rendering novel and rich ways of political justification that even a Rawlsian conception fail to provide.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid.,312.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid.,314.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid., 313.

Conclusion

Leigh Jenco's work "*Making the Political: Founding and Action in the Political Theory of Zhang Shizhao*" illustrates a way of comparative political theorizing that is radical in what it seeks to achieve. A radical approach to Comparative Political Theory is neither satisfied with a mere inclusion of 'non-Western' traditions and thinkers in the existing practices of Euro-American political theory nor reduce it for the instrumental purpose of enhancing the self-reflexivity of the practitioners of academic discipline of political theory. A radical approach to CPT does not lament the inevitability of the European concepts and categories that pervade the thought in the modern era. It does not see Eurocentrism as an incurable disease that characterize the pursuit of knowledge in the modern world. The act of theorizing is no longer considered as a pursuit doomed to be crushed by the fetters of Western epistemic domination. Instead a radical approach to CPT is animated by its mission to de-parochialize political theory by acknowledging and demonstrating the potential of the 'non-Western' as a conducive ground to conduct rich theorizations and innovative practices that could have bearing on other parts of the globe.

Leigh Jenco's work is emblematic of the radical approach to comparative political theorizing. The radicalness of her approach derives from her advocacy and efforts to "re-center" political theory. In her words, "Recentered political theory banks precisely on the recognition that foreign communities of scholarship support rigorous research agendas that, while locally anchored, often do make wider claims about the modern challenges of a globalized world even as they remain open to internal critique."⁴⁶⁰ It is worth to elaborate the distinction between a decentering and re-centering approach to comparative political theorizing. De-centering the discipline of political theory involves shedding light on the inadequacy of Western concepts and categories in illuminating knowledge resources and political life that is integral to the non-Western world. A de-centering approach does not come up with an alternative to Eurocentric approaches and practices in political theory. Such an approach is content with bringing representation to non-Western stories and voices. A decentering approach provides the non-Western, representation and recognition but stops short of redistribution. This is probably because of its understanding

⁴⁶⁰ Leigh K. Jenco, "Recentering Political Theory: The Promise of Mobile Locality," *Cultural Critique* 79, no. 1 (2011):51.

that Eurocentrism is a permanent condition which cannot be rectified. Jenco spells out her approach as follows, “it seems to me that the best way to affirm the global diffusion of political theorizing is to act upon it: to develop from alternative traditions and in alternative modes new possibilities for thinking critically about politics”.⁴⁶¹

Jenco expands the scope of the meaning of political action by contesting the conventional understanding that political action is always an act in concert with others and performed in a public space. Jenco analyses the theory of political action provided by Zhang Shizhao who emphasizes on the efficacy of individual actions in bringing about a democratic polity while living under a regime not suited for democracy. Zhang Shizhao’s theory of action is suited when public actions challenging the regime is an impossibility. Jenco using Zhang Shizhao’s theory displaces the centrality of the public space in constituting the political. She extensively discusses the ideas of political action in the works of political theorists like Hannah Arendt, Hannah Pitkin etc. and shows their limitation in providing guidance for political action in hostile regimes. Jenco’s immersion in the Chinese political thought as a fount for creative theorizing is at its best when she analyses the political thought of Zhang Shizhao and displaces the conventional understanding of what constitutes a political action. Zhang Shizhao’s conceptualization of disparate individual actions fostering democratic practices is buttressed on three elements: self- awareness, self-use of talent and accommodation. This has wide applicability in authoritarian regimes where a strong surveillance state precludes the possibility of largescale political action. The novelty of Shizhao’s theory is that by re-orienting political action from the public sphere to the private, it grants agency to the individual, who by cultivating certain personal qualities would bring about political transformation in the long run. Thus, it keeps hopes alive for a desirable polity when one’s shared environment is hostile to it. By delineating the theory of political action in Zhang Shizhao’s political thought, Jenco among many other things call into question the centrality of the public space for political action and in the process expands the scope and meaning of the political broadly, and political action in particular. Needless to say, that this is creative political theorizing at its best because an obscure non-Western political

461 Jenco, *Making the Political*, 10.

thinker is being resurrected in a monograph for the first time in a Western language and is being shown relevant for a wide variety of political situations and audiences.

Written in the explanatory-interpretative paradigm of CPT, Roxanne Euben reconstructs Islamist conception of jihad as a political action which shares its contours of violence and political founding with certain episodes in the European history namely Christian crusades, Reformation etc. What Euben illustrates is the claim that the 'West' and the 'non-West' are not alien cultures as it portrayed to be and they share common dilemmas. Also illustrated is the possibility of meaningful conversations among different cultural traditions that could temper the prejudices and hostility one culture have for the other. Euben's illumination of the political dimension of Islamist jihad, if engaged seriously by policy circles, could logically lead to a demand for political solutions to deal with Islamist practices of jihad which is often constructed as an irrational phenomenon warranting only military solutions. It is worth to remember that political problems always warrant political solutions and administering a military pill to quell a political phenomenon result in the demise of peace. Farah Godrej breathes new lease of life to the Gandhian concept of nonviolence. She highlights its applicability for the process of political justification which entails arbitrating competing moral claims. Godrej compares a Rawlsian conception of political justification with Gandhi's 'civic virtue of non-violence' and shows the limitations of the latter. The works of Leigh Jenco, Roxanne Euben and Farah Godrej together are animated by an underlying concern of comparative political theory: hope for a better world.

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I have pursued the twin objectives of contextualizing Comparative Political Theory, a new subfield in the academic discipline of political theory and examining how the emerging CPT scholarship has unsettled the ethnocentric canon, categories and approaches in political theory and pushed the discipline towards plurality. I have also explored how CPT is reconceptualizing the concept of political action and have delved upon its implications for political change.

In Chapter 1, I have contextualized CPT as the third immanent critique in political theory which attempts to fulfill the gap between the promises and practices of political theory. CPT builds on the first internal critique in political theory that emerged in the context of behaviorist revolution as well as the second critique, the strands of which criticized the parochiality of the concerns in political theory as a whole as well as the Eurocentrism in the understanding of specific concepts like modernity. I have concluded the Chapter 1 with the justifications given by CPT scholars for the creation as well as endorsement of CPT.

In Chapter 2, I elaborated how the traditional canon, categories and approaches in political theory are being unsettled by the emerging scholarship in CPT. I began Chapter 2 by examining how CPT scholarship is advancing the methodological and democratic critique of the canon of history of political thought. Then I illustrated the need for new categories by exposing the limitations of the existing categories as well as the explanatory power of a new category 'rajanical' proposed by CPT scholar Stuart Gray. I also delineated political theorist Gurpreet Mahajan's case against the deployment of new categories to comprehend non-Western political thought. I concluded the debate on the need for new categories with Dipesh Chakrabarty's suggestion to release new categories into social sciences without rejecting the existing ones. After providing an overview of the Straussian and Skinnerian approaches and their limitations, I have described the alternative ways of interpreting non-Western texts by Sudipta Kaviraj, Stuart Gray, Farah Godrej and Leigh Jenco. One shortcoming of Chapter 2 is that I have not explored

whether the approaches to interpretation of nonwestern political texts followed by these scholars could be applied to Euro-American texts.

In Chapter 3, I explored how conceptual revision in CPT can accelerate the possibilities of novel ways of thinking about political action as well as effecting larger political transformations. For this purpose, I have analyzed the works of three comparative political theorists on the concept of political action and pointed out its implications for inaugurating political change. In contradistinction to democratic theories which primarily understand political action as collective action enacted in the public sphere, Leigh Jenco's discussion of Zhang Shizhao's theory of political action illustrates that the 'public' can be delinked from 'the political' under certain conditions and reconceptualizes political action through its emphasis on the efficacy of uncoordinated activities of individual citizens in effecting political change. Zhang's theory of action privileges agency to ungrouped individuals in necessitating transformation in the political environment.

Roxanne Euben's interpretation of jihad as a political action illuminates the larger violence that go into political founding. Though the idea of indispensability of violence in state making is not new (recall Charles Tilly's work and his famous statement "war made the state and state made the war"), Euben's reconstruction of jihad as a fluid concept pliable to political imperatives of various historical settings not only offers a better explanation of the phenomena but also is a reminder that 'West' and the 'Non-West' are not alien cultures as it portrayed to be and they share common dilemmas vis-à-vis politics. I have suggested that Euben's demystification of jihad and her analysis of jihad as political action if translated into policy circles can inaugurate possibilities for political diagnosis of the problem and generate political solutions to the issue of Islamist fundamentalism rather than knee-jerk responses that escalates violence.

Farah Godrej's work takes Gandhian principle of nonviolence to a different tangent by presenting its potential for arbitrating competing moral claims. Her work is at a preliminary level and details have to be teased out to tailor it to be relevant for public policy decisions.

Further Areas of Research

I would like to suggest some future areas of research which CPT scholars could engage, not only for the larger epistemic purposes, but also for the clarity which CPT requires regarding its central assumptions and relevance for other academic fields of study like history and literary studies.

CPT remains a conscript of the East-West divide. Though alternative axes of comparison have been suggested from Chris Goto-Jones, Loubna El Amine and Andrew March, the larger imaginary of CPT continue to be driven by an East-West axis. It will be fruitful if CPT scholars engage seriously with decolonial scholarship, a promising field of enquiry which among many other things, explore the non-Western roots of intellectual resources that are conventionally understood to be Western. Such an exploration could reveal cases of Western appropriation of non-Western intellectual resources. Also, CPT scholars should not shy away from scholarship that has the potential to disrupt some of its central assumptions like the boundary between East and the West or the Western provenance of modernity.

Sanjay Subrahmanyam's methodological contribution to the historiography of early modern world history through the notion of "connected histories" is significant for the nascent subfield of Comparative Political Theory in its quest to avoid the trap of Eurocentrism and Orientalism. Subrahmanyam delineated the notion of 'connected histories' in an article where he explores early modern Eurasia and its network of commercial exchanges. He writes the following in this context.

"Speaking of supra-local connections in the early modern world, we tend to focus on such phenomena as world bullion flows and their impact, firearms and the so-called 'Military Revolution,' or the circulation of renegades and mercenaries. But ideas and mental constructs, too, flowed across political boundaries in that world, and—even if they found specific local expression—enable us to see that what we are dealing with are not separate and comparable, but connected histories".⁴⁶²

⁴⁶² Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Notes Towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia," *Modern Asian Studies* 31, no.3 (1997) :748.

Connected histories privilege connections in terms of contact: intellectual and commercial exchanges between regions that are mostly tied to the Early Modern period. An adoption of ‘connected history’ framework could be useful for heuristic purposes in CPT as it seeks to expand the geographic and thematic scope of what we mean by ‘early modern period’.⁴⁶³

The project of CPT is yet to directly address the way Eurocentric temporal narratives can be decentered.⁴⁶⁴ Nevertheless, the emerging scholarship demonstrates that non- Western political thought has resources to theorize agency and temporalities that are non-linear and blurs the distinction between modern and traditional. For instance, an essay by Leigh Jenco discusses the work of Li Dazhao who is ‘known somewhat misleadingly as China’s first Marxist’.⁴⁶⁵ Li Dazhao attributes agency to the force of time itself .He offers a theory of time which conceptualizes time as “an ontological, non-human force that shapes, but also makes possible, human efforts to change their political and social worlds”.⁴⁶⁶ Another theme that calls for engagement is whether the approaches to the interpretation of nonwestern texts suggested by the CPT scholars are applicable in the Western context. Thus, there remain rich and productive avenues of investigation in the field of Comparative Political Theory.

⁴⁶³Ben Breen, accessed June 25, 2018<http://notevenpast.org/explorations-in-connected-history-from-the-tagus-to-the-ganges-by-sanjay-subrahmanyam-2004/> .

⁴⁶⁴Leigh Jenco, “New Pasts for New Futures: A Temporal Reading of Global Thought,”*Constellations* 23 no. 4 (2016):444.

⁴⁶⁵Jenco, “New Futures,” 436.

⁴⁶⁶Ibid., 436.

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