

Daniel J. Kapust • Helen M. Kinsella  
Editors

# Comparative Political Theory in Time and Place

Theory's Landscapes

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# Introduction: Theory's Landscapes

*Daniel Kapust and Helen M. Kinsella*

## I: INTRODUCTION

Comparative political theory is an increasingly visible development in the field of political theory, garnering much attention for its critical engagement with the substance, scope, and purpose of political theory itself. Fundamentally challenging the hegemony and definition of “Western” political thought by engaging scholars and texts ignored or dismissed by the traditional canon, comparative political theory seeks to integrate perspectives and politics from all regions of the world. In doing so, it seeks to displace the normative and analytic priority of “Western” interpretations and definitions of fundamental political concepts such as freedom, subjectivity, and society.<sup>1</sup> Each of these moves has spurred further debate and

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<sup>1</sup> See Adom Getachew's critique of the trajectory of universalism and exclusion which challenges both conventional and comparative political theory's readings of the Haitian revolution. In particular, she argues “An alternative vision of the universal emerges when we begin by reconstructing practices and ideals as responses to specific political conundrums. “Adom Getachew, “Universalism After the Post-colonial Turn: Interpreting the Haitian Revolution” in *Political Theory*, online first. doi:10.1177/00905917166610181

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discussion of the merits of comparative political theory and its contributions to thinking about political theory.

Prompted by the increasing visibility of comparative political theory within political theory, on the one hand, and a desire to understand what, if anything, might constitute it as a distinct field of inquiry, on the other hand, we organized a conference at the University of Wisconsin–Madison (UW–Madison), “Theory’s Landscapes: Movements, Memories, and Moments,” in spring 2013. We invited a wide range of scholars—historians of political thought, scholars of comparative law, and political theorists with expertise in “non-Western” traditions of thought—in order to foster discussion and to involve a broad array of substantive approaches. We asked participants to consider the following questions, among others: What, precisely, do we mean by “comparative?” What does—or should—count as “political”? What particular sites, be they geographical, historical, or more, yield fruitful insights, and, in turn, how shall we evaluate the veracity or legitimacy of such insights.

Over the course of our conversations, which also included both political theory and comparative politics, faculty and graduate students from UW–Madison, we were struck by the scholarly and normative importance of comparative political theory, and the pluralism of approaches to and understandings of comparative political theory evinced by the participants. The seven essays in this volume, each of which was authored by a participant in the conference, replicate this pluralism, contributing to, rather than settling or reconciling, debates regarding the breadth and depth of comparative political theory. At the same time, each of the chapters illustrates a particular way of *understanding* and *doing* comparative political theory, which challenges the field of political theory as conventionally understood. Thus, taken as a whole, the chapters address questions, asked and unasked, about and within comparative political theory.

However, the volume is not simply an exploration of and contribution to comparative political theory, but it is also a demonstration of what comparative political theory can contribute to the study of political theory. In particular it offers three distinctive contributions to each: (1) it explores international law and legal histories as sites for practicing comparative political theory; (2) it analyzes an innovative set of comparative cases, such as the Peruvian Marxist José Carlos Mariátegui’s debate in the 1900s with both Peruvian nationalists and the canon of European thought, the performance of sovereignty by the culturally disparate Spanish, British, and indigenous agents in British-occupied Manila, and the comparative imperial thought of Paine and Burke’s views on India; and (3) it explores the ways in which translation (e.g. from Persian to Arabic) and transmission are themselves political acts and also forms of political theorizing.

We deliberately avoid referring to comparative political theory as a “new” subfield in this introduction as we, along with others, locate its origins in Roxanne Euben’s and Fred Dallmayr’s 1997 essays, which suggests that comparative political theory is already almost 20 years old.<sup>2</sup> We have also avoided the term “new” because we hold, as a result of conversations with the participants in the workshop and since, that work in comparative political theory over the past two decades is, in part, making obvious the plural origins and streams of political theory scholarship which were always present. Comparative political theory is both inductive (drawing insights from engagements with “non-Western” texts and traditions) and deductive (approaching “non-Western” texts and traditions with problems and interpretive frameworks in mind). One of its strengths is its straightforward contemplation of what it means to be situated, within the discipline of political theory (which remains defined, still, from a primarily Eurocentric tradition and practice), and yet to actively seek to displace that situatedness.

Comparative political theorists often write of the field in which their research is conducted. In this volume, the field’s boundaries and methods are variously defined as archival, historical, and geographic, but all of these themes share a common element: being external to the dominant scholarly and interpretive canons. In this sense, the field challenges the stability of political theory, while highlighting nuances and disagreements over the concepts central to the subfield itself. In other words, comparative political theory helps to illuminate the structure and confines of political theory as, in the words of Andrew March, an “organizational fiction.”<sup>3</sup> Although March is referring to a more limited sense of organizational fiction, our reading is more radical. This fiction conceals as much as it illuminates, in part because that very organization presumes clear distinctions and definitions, presumptions that entail exclusions, and oversight. Thus, Jeanne Morefield describes the canon as “that partial set of thinkers, traditions, and texts associated with the corpus of our almost entirely European and American collective,

<sup>2</sup>See, Fred Dallmayr, “Introduction: Towards a Comparative Political Theory,” *The Review of Politics* 59, no. 3 (1997): 421–7; Roxanne L. Euben, “Comparative Political Theory: An Islamic Fundamentalist Critique of Rationalism,” *The Journal of Politics* 59, no. 1 (1997): 28–55. Recognition of its two decades of development prompts the question as to why comparative political theory has now come to the fore, as opposed to earlier. While an interesting question to consider, we postpone any conclusive answers to another discussion.

<sup>3</sup>Andrew F. March, “What Is Comparative Political Theory?” *The Review of Politics* 71 (2009): 531–565, 533.

disciplinary imagination.”<sup>4</sup> The field of comparative political theory ideally helps to inscribe a different set of possibilities because it purposively draws from elsewhere. Therefore, because it expressly contemplates its consistent hybridization, which is not always recognized, one of the effects of comparative political theory is the development of multiple critical purchases on the histories, disciplinary and otherwise, of political theory. As Murad Idris well puts it: “the expansion of political theory should be accompanied by a questioning of its terms; to simply accept its categories, divisions, and visions of the globe is to pretend that they are not inflected by power.”<sup>5</sup> In a sense, comparative political theory discovers and highlights the pluralism and the disagreements that have always been present in political theory, even if this pluralism and disagreement have been masked by a seeming disciplinary consensus about or focus on an amorphous yet foundational notion of “Western” political thought. Indeed, Euben astutely comments that comparative political theory “problematizes the notion of a non-Western perspective and suggests the difficulty of marking off distinctively Western ways of knowing.”<sup>6</sup> Yet, comparative political theory also introduces a new set of definitional boundaries, exclusions and inclusions, which, in turn, are then contested. This vibrancy of debate is, in our minds, an essential part of the questioning and contemplation of the field of political theory and its elements.

\* \* \*

We begin, in the next section, by exploring different approaches to comparative political theory. Drawing and building in particular on Diego von Vacano’s recent review essay on comparative political theory, we outline the multiple elements found within comparative political theory scholarship. In the final section, we offer a brief description and discussion of the methods, purposes, and arguments of the seven chapters, along with their implications for the field of comparative political theory.

<sup>4</sup>Jeanne Morefield, “Urgent History: The Sovereignty Debates and Political Theory’s Lost Voices,” *Political Theory* (2015): 1–28, 4. See also, Leigh K. Jenco, *Changing Referents: Learning Across Space and Time in China and the West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015). See also, Roxanne Euben, *Journeys to the Other Shore: Muslim and Western Travelers in Search of Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

<sup>5</sup>Idris, Murad. “Political Theory and the Politics of Comparison.” *Political Theory*, online first. doi:10.1177/0090591716659812.

<sup>6</sup>Roxanne L. Euben, “Contingent Borders, Syncretic Perspectives: Globalization, Political Theory, and Islamizing Knowledge,” *International Studies Review* 4, no. 1 (2002): 23–48, 47. See also, Euben, *Journeys to the Other Shore*, 10.

## II: DEFINING COMPARATIVE POLITICAL THEORY AND ITS ELEMENTS

The term “comparative political theory” was first used in print by Roxanne Euben in her 1997 article “Comparative Political Theory: An Islamic Fundamentalist Critique of Rationalism.”<sup>7</sup> While Euben coined the term, her article builds on previous comparative studies of different traditions of political thought, which typically focused on exemplary texts from other cultures. We too might ask whether and how the following texts might be understood as comparative political theory: the nearly 70-year-old journal *Philosophy East and West*, along with works such as Hall and Ames’ *Anticipating China*, Parel’s *Comparative Political Philosophy: Studies Under the Upas Tree*, or Strauss’s classic *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, a study of Maimonides (the Cordoba-born Jewish-Arabic philosopher-physician), Halevi (the Spanish-Jewish philosopher-poet), and Spinoza (the Dutch-Jewish philosopher of Spanish extraction). We could even point to much earlier texts, including medieval Jewish, Islamic, and Latin-Christian encounters with Greek thought, Tacitus’ political-theoretical ethnographies of the peoples of Germany and Britain, or Herodotus’ exploration of the socio-political order and morals of non-Greek peoples. The distinctiveness of comparative political theory derives, then, not from doing something entirely different or new per se, but in an awareness and constitution of itself as seeking to intervene in the putatively non-comparative practice of political theory, along with its efforts to define itself in scope, purpose, and method.

The impetus for comparative political theory’s emergence in the late 1990s is complex. Certainly, phenomena outside the discipline and the academy influenced its emergence. Williams and Warren<sup>8</sup> point to globalization and its clear impact on cross-cultural exchange, which created a renewed contemplation of what Dallmayr called the “global arena.”<sup>9</sup> The networks of scholarly production and rapid circulation of seemingly everything from capital to labor to individuals to ideas made manifest the need to reconsider the political. Within the academy, the humanities were grappling with the transformative challenges of postcolonial theorizing and anti-imperial histories. Yet the discipline of political theory was arguably

<sup>7</sup> Diego A. Von Vacano, “The Scope of Comparative Political Theory,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 18 (2015): 465–80, 466.

<sup>8</sup> Melissa S. Williams and Mark E. Warren, “A Democratic Case for Comparative Political Theory,” *Political Theory* 42, no. 1 (2014): 26–57.

<sup>9</sup> Dallmayr, “Introduction: Towards a Comparative Political Theory,” 421–7, 421.

still embedded in, and seemingly reproducing, traditional narratives that prioritized “Western” political theory rather than “inaugurating new fields of inquiry.”<sup>10</sup> Given the deepening of globalization and the spread of post-colonial insights in the academy, a critic of the field of political theory might suggest that it appeared to be out of step in the mid-1990s and, indeed, perhaps in “crisis.” After all, as Andrew March suggests, to call for a new subdiscipline of comparative political theory is to “make a statement about its importance and about the moral and intellectual implications of the broader discipline having ignored it for so long.”<sup>11</sup>

If comparative political theory began to constitute itself within political theory in the late 1990s, what characterizes it as a distinct component of the field of political theory and why is it important? Following the work of Roxanne Euben, Diego von Vacano describes the project of comparative political theory thus: “it is a call to cross borders and travel—sometimes metaphorically, sometimes literally—to gain insight by looking at problems from perspectives outside the Western one.”<sup>12</sup> He also notes—as we, too, discovered during the course of the conference—that “the body of work produced by scholars working under the banner of comparative political theory is diverse and could not be said to coalesce into a single school of thought.”<sup>13</sup> Given this diversity, von Vacano highlights as regions of focus Islamic (Arabic and non-Arabic), Eastern European, Latin American, East Asian, African, and South Asian political thought, each of which entails a historical and a contemporary dimension.<sup>14</sup> However, we also recognize that the invocation of ‘perspectives outside the Western one’ and a regional classification may also work to re-inscribe certain hierarchical schemas. As Idris cautions, “one should not ignore what this coding may reenact, circumscribe, or foreclose,”<sup>15</sup> even if its intent is to decolonize the field itself. Accordingly, while we appreciatively use von Vacano’s normative/interpretive typology in what follows, we recognize it as one particular interpretation—as we make clear below. Moreover, we

<sup>10</sup>Leigh K. Jenco, “How Meaning Moves: Tan Sitong on Borrowing across Cultures,” *Philosophy East and West* 62, no. 1 (2012): 92–113, 108.

<sup>11</sup>March, 533.

<sup>12</sup>Von Vacano, 466. For an extended treatment, see Euben, *Journeys to the Other Shore*.

<sup>13</sup>Von Vacano, 468.

<sup>14</sup>Nevertheless, to provide an overview, the chapters gathered in this volume explore Arabic and Persian Islamic (London), Latin American (Gordy), South Asian (Baxter), South African (Leebaw), and East Asian political thought (Moore), in addition to European encounters with South Asian politics (O’Neill) and Southeast Asia (Thomas).

<sup>15</sup>Idris, Murad. “Political Theory and the Politics of Comparison.” *Political Theory*, online first. doi:10.1177/0090591716659812.

wish to continually underscore our understanding of the radical purpose and potential of comparative political theory as both deconstructive and reconstructive of the concepts, narratives, and canons of political theory as well as its practice.

Von Vacano usefully distinguishes between two broad methodological approaches to comparative political theory—normative and interpretative—further identifying four normative and four interpretive subcategories. All of these approaches—normative and interpretive—share the goal of reorienting political theory.

The first normative paradigm, which von Vacano identifies as “dialogic” and includes especially the work of Dallmayr, aims at a “cross-cultural learning experience” that produces a “more genuine universalism... beyond the spurious ‘universality’ traditionally claimed by the Western canon.”<sup>16</sup> This approach is rooted in the claim that political theorists often extend—consciously or not—“Western”-rooted concepts and categories in understanding the political theory of “non-Western” traditions. Aiming at “reciprocal questioning and critique,” such an approach recognizes that the distinction “between West and non-West is deeply problematized” in the contemporary world, and yet the weakness of such a distinction does not mean “essential sameness or non-distinction.”<sup>17</sup>

The second normative paradigm, the justificatory account, is exemplified by March (who uses the term to characterize his own approach). March focuses “on moral disagreement and justification across multiple distinct, semi-autonomous traditions.”<sup>18</sup> This approach derives from March’s defense of an “engaged” form of comparative political theory, engagement rooted in our interest in “moral conflict” between “Western’ and ‘non-Western’ perspectives.”<sup>19</sup> Insofar as engaged comparative political theory, then, focuses on moral conflict, it ought, in March’s view, to be especially concerned with “*comparing responses to specific questions or problems of importance.*”<sup>20</sup> Such conflicts “affect adherents of the doctrines

<sup>16</sup>Fred Dallmayr, “Introduction: Towards a Comparative Political Theory,” *The Review of Politics* 59, no. 3 (1997): 421–7, 422. Fred Dallmayr, “Beyond Monologue: For a Comparative Political Theory,” *Perspectives on Politics* 2, no. 2 (2004): 249–57.

<sup>17</sup>Dallmayr, “Introduction: Towards a Comparative Political Theory,” 423. See also Roxanne Euben, *Journeys to the Other Shore: Muslim and Western Travelers in Search of Knowledge* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

<sup>18</sup>March, 565.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 534, 550.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 558. Italics in original.

and traditions that constitute those contestations,” and the attention of comparative political theorists should be on “what first-order implication the normative dispute has.”<sup>21</sup>

Third Williams and Warren, by contrast, formulate a “democratic normative justification,” aiming to enable “self-constituting publics to form across boundaries of linguistic and cultural difference.”<sup>22</sup> For these scholars, comparative political theory is a resource and a call to “de-parochialize political theory” even if, as they explain, theorists and others are not trained in nor do they directly participate in comparative political theory.<sup>23</sup> Thus, they offer an example of the importance of comparative political theory for understanding the interaction of globalization and the potential for the democratization of transnational and global politics, along with the creation and identification of global constituencies and public spheres linked by dialogue. Indeed, according to Warren and Williams, comparative political theory *is* a form of moral dialogue that may inform “global emergent publics” and, significantly, motivate a shared sense of moral responsibility for a common fate.

Fourth, the “anti-Occidental model,” found in scholarship by Farah Godrej, promotes “a cosmopolitan political theory...one in which we might bring the ideas of Gandhi or Confucius to bear on our discussion of freedom or justice.”<sup>24</sup> For Godrej, doing this well, however, calls upon us to grapple with the tough issues involved in “representing these ideas within our own discourse, attempting to bring them to life without violating the existential insights they provide, nor assuming an authority or authenticity to our representations.”<sup>25</sup> To be successful, the interpreter must be immersed—not by “going native,” in the conventionally pejorative sense, but by creating “scholarly cultural accounts that are phenomenologically aware and self reflexively immersed.”<sup>26</sup>

With respect to the four subcategories of interpretive approaches, Freedom and Vincent, whom von Vacano characterizes as deploying a “scholarly” approach, hold that “when we study political thought in a

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 560.

<sup>22</sup> Williams and Warren, 3.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>24</sup> Farah Godrej, *Cosmopolitan Political Thought: Method, Practice, Discipline* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 160.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

comparative perspective, we study above all the nature of politics.”<sup>27</sup> For Freedden and Vincent, comparative political theory entails a “combination of universality and specificity,” as most of the features of “thinking politically” they identify—“the unequal distribution of significance in ranking and valuing social phenomena...the different ways in which support is bestowed on or withheld from collectivities...arranging and regulating the relative competences and jurisdictions of various social spheres and establishing a prioritizing agent,” to name but a few—are to be found in “any society.”<sup>28</sup> This interpretive framework, recognizing the arbitrary structure of “divided spaces,” cultural or geographic, posits that the appropriate objects of comparison are “concepts and conceptual configurations; discourses; arguments, ideologies and other belief systems; macrotraditions; or thinkers.”<sup>29</sup>

Euben, by contrast, exemplifies a “phenomenological” approach, focusing on “an important phenomenon even if the term for it is not prevalent in its cultural context”—for example, the term “fundamentalism” was created in Arabic as a translation of the English term.<sup>30</sup> As Euben explains, she deploys the term fundamentalism—as opposed to “Islamism, extremism, radicalism”—in spite of its status as a “specifically Western and Christian term” because the movements she seeks to understand (the phenomena, i.e. Islamic fundamentalism) “attempt to retrieve ‘fundamentals,’ or ‘original foundations.’”<sup>31</sup>

Jenco is representative of what von Vacano labels an “immanent-reconstitution paradigm.”<sup>32</sup> She argues “it is possible for anyone to think *within* Chinese thought” as an antidote to other modes of comparative political theory which proceed “by means of those very discourses whose cultural insularity is what prompts critique in the first place.”<sup>33</sup> As von Vacano explains, via “immersion in local cultures, appreciation of the indigenization of learning, and replication of non-Western hermeneutic

<sup>27</sup> Michael Freedden and Andrew Vincent, eds. *Comparative Political Thought: Theorizing Practices* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 2.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 1, 2.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 9, 13.

<sup>30</sup> Von Vacano, 473.

<sup>31</sup> Euben, “Comparative Political Theory: An Islamic Fundamentalist Critique of Rationalism,” 29.

<sup>32</sup> Von Vacano, 473. See also, Euben, *Journeys to the Other Shore*.

<sup>33</sup> Leigh K. Jenco, “What does Heaven Ever Say? A Methods-centered Approach to Cross-Cultural Engagement.” *American Political Science Review* 101, no. 4 (2007): 741–55, 741.

techniques, political theorists can and ought to reconstitute political theory.”<sup>34</sup> As such, Jenco’s methods facilitate her emphasis on deep understanding of the intellectual and cultural traditions of study, as she writes this “process may trouble the very terms through which we understand what it is we are doing.”<sup>35</sup>

Fifth, and finally, von Vacano describes what he terms “conceptual metanarrative.” Von Vacano points as an example to his recent book, *The Color of Citizenship*, in which he develops an alternative to the “domination” and “dualistic” paradigms characterizing most European and American political thought work on race.<sup>36</sup> This account, which he terms “synthetic,” understands race through “the idea of *mestizaje*,” entailing “a politico-nationalist project with a heavy ideological charge,” constructing race socially while locating “mixture” at the center of race itself.<sup>37</sup> Von Vacano’s approach thus focuses on a particular concept—that is, race—in the context of Latin America, but analyzes it “within the grand discursive arc of modernity,” further “disarticulated into central moments or periods.”<sup>38</sup>

Von Vacano’s account of comparative political theory is of immense value, but we also recognize it is but one take on a broad and rapidly developing field of thought. Therefore, we wish to add, three additional subcategories—two normative, and one interpretive. On the normative side, the concept of representative thinking as proposed by Hannah Arendt helps to illuminate the situation and aims of the comparative political theorist. According to Arendt, “political thought is representative. I form an opinion by considering a given issue from different viewpoints, by making present to my mind the standpoint of those who are absent; that is, I represent them.”<sup>39</sup> The dialogue that occurs in thinking itself—“between me and myself,” what Arendt identifies as the “two in one”—supposes that political thought is never singular, and that representative thinking requires the movement and consideration of another. For Arendt, the faculty of imagination allows this to occur—a ceaseless and restless effort that informs our “enlarged mentality.”<sup>40</sup> Significantly, it is a faculty that

<sup>34</sup> Von Vacano, 473.

<sup>35</sup> Jenco, 2015, 23.

<sup>36</sup> Diego A. Von Vacano, *The Color of Citizenship: Race, Modernity and Latin American/Hispanic Political Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 15.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>38</sup> Von Vacano, “The Scope of Comparative Political Theory,” 474.

<sup>39</sup> Hannah Arendt, “Truth and Politics,” in *Between Past and Future* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 237.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

we all possess regardless of training or disposition, although not all would choose to exercise it.

Interestingly, especially considering the frequent invocation of a call to travel, and Euben's masterful exploration of travel, feminist theorists (in the company of postcolonial theorists) have often turned to the concept of "traveling" as a way to contemplate the internal and external dislocations of self and other, especially in regard to challenging essentialisms of race and gender. For example, "World traveling" was taken up by María Lugones in her canonical 1987 feminist essay, "Playfulness, 'World'—Travelling, and Loving Perception." For Lugones, imagination must be coupled with empathy (itself a form of love) to facilitate "travel" from one world to another which, in turn, informs the capacity to understand the perspective and the experiences of the other. Lugones underlines an affective element to world travelling that cannot be replaced merely by technical expertise or rote fluencies—it must be felt, experienced, and lived as well as thought. Significantly, for Lugones travel is an internal disorientation and displacement as much as it is external, whereas for Arendt it is less so.

This is not the place to engage in a fully comparative reading of these two highly dissimilar scholars, nor are these references meant to limit the resonance of this task to these two. Instead, it is to point out that the difficulties in achieving an empathetic and imaginative understanding of another and their "worlds" have long occupied political theorists. Arendt and Lugones, very distinct theorists, each hold that such an orientation toward the other is possible without necessarily immersing oneself through language or culture of the other, relying instead on our disposition toward imagination and understanding—although this effort has its own risks. Cautioning against what Lugones calls "arrogant perception,"<sup>41</sup> and what Arendt dismisses as a flawed "re-presentation" of another, both highlight these as evidence that such efforts may fail. Failure, while more common than not, is profoundly concerning for it highlights our persistent inability to reach empathetic and engaged understanding which results in a violent distortion of a world in common. Thus, the question of *how* self and other are engaged is inextricably linked with the effects of doing so.

On the interpretive side, an approach which might be termed "soft contextualism" speaks both to the problem of understanding the context within

<sup>41</sup> María Lugones, "Playfulness, 'World'—Travelling, and Loving Perception," *Hypatia* 2, no. 2 (1987): 3–19. See also Edward Said, "Traveling Theory," in *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1982), 226–47.

which a text or performance was produced, on the one hand, and to the possible commensurability between concepts from different traditions, on the other. Such a view has been outlined by Philp, among others, in response to the so-called Cambridge School approach of Skinner. Skinner famously argues, “To understand any serious utterance, we need to grasp not merely the meaning of what is said, but at the same time the intended force with which the utterance is issued.”<sup>42</sup> To understand what a text means, then, involves understanding “not merely what people are saying but also what they are *doing* in saying it.”<sup>43</sup> Understanding what they are doing, in turn, requires deep engagement with context, an engagement that will produce not histories of a “determinate idea,” but instead “a history of its various uses, and of the varying intentions with which it was used.”<sup>44</sup> The outcome of such an account is that we cannot look to the history of political thought in order to gain insight into “the ‘perennial problems’ allegedly addressed in the classic texts,” as “the classic texts are concerned with their own questions and not with ours.”<sup>45</sup> We can, in Philp’s view, agree with the claim that “there is room for a good deal of context in understanding what people were trying to do,” but we do not need to hold that “everything we do with them” should “be relativized to their context.”<sup>46</sup> In other words, getting the context right matters, but the concepts and categories we locate in the past (*or* in other traditions) can be deployed to clarify and contribute to our own debates. If this is true of the past—and the distant past—within the “Western” tradition, this should, in principle, be true of the “non-Western” tradition as well.

In clarifying our discussion of the elements of comparative political theory it may be initially useful to draw an analogy between method(s) of comparative political theory and comparative politics. Within comparative politics, there is a seeming division of labor between single-case studies and multi-case studies. As Simmons and Smith put it,

Political scientists typically understand the value of comparison to be its ability to help us develop explanations for a given outcome, be it democratization, economic growth, the onset of civil war violence, or any number of

<sup>42</sup> Quentin Skinner, “Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas,” in *Visions of Politics, Volume 1: Regarding Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 82.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>46</sup> Mark Philp, “Political Theory and History,” in *Political Theory: Methods and Approaches*, ed. David Leopold and Marc Stears (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 139.

other political phenomena, by controlling for differences in some places and looking for similarities in others (n.d. 9).

This is not to assimilate comparative political theory to comparative politics, *per se*, but it is to note that insofar as a key impetus behind comparative political theory is, in effect, to expand the scope and formulation of inquiry, a different and a similar logic of explanation is at play: by looking at texts and figures produced at distinct moments in time, in particular historical and political circumstances, and as inscribed by domains of power and exchange we can also theorize political and social phenomena, in tandem with comparative politics, albeit it with a different purchase, whether from a conceptual, normative, or historical perspective. However, unlike comparative politics, one purpose of comparative political theory is to question the insularity of the discipline as a whole. Comparative political theory actively reflects on the act of and reasons for the comparison. This reflection includes an explanation of events, but is also alive to the conceptual predicates of such interpretations and is less focused on controlling for differences than in tracing their construction and effect.

Yet, again, a crucial issue is how we interpret (and define) texts and how we understand dialogue. For Euben and Dallmayr comparison is analogous to a form of conversation, a model of “how disparate cultural traditions can speak to one another,” thus ensuring that “political theory is about human and not merely Western dilemmas.”<sup>47</sup> However, Jenco points out the difficulties of ensuring that such a “speaking” does not conclude with “merely the addition of culturally diverse voices to established parochial debates”<sup>48</sup> within what Rey Chow describes as the Eurocentric “hierarchizing frame of comparison.”<sup>49</sup> Further, Jenco, given her attention to the importance of training within an intellectual tradition and its interpretive-literary practices, cautions against repeating the logocentrism of political theory, and thereby excluding “practices like imitation, ritual, dance, or other forms of non-verbal expression,” and not countering the privileging of language and writing.<sup>50</sup> These practices matter for they allow theorists

<sup>47</sup> “Introduction: Towards a Comparative Political Theory,” 32.

<sup>48</sup> Jenco, “What does Heaven Ever Say? A Methods-centered Approach to Cross-Cultural Engagement,” 741. See also Jenco, *Changing Referents: Learning Across Space and Time in China and the West*.

<sup>49</sup> Rey Chow, *The Age of the World Target: Self-Referentiality in War, Theory, and Comparative Work* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 80.

<sup>50</sup> Jenco, “What does Heaven Ever Say? A Methods-centered Approach to Cross-Cultural Engagement,” 744.

to consider political meanings evidenced in non-verbal and dramaturgical ways, and broaden recognition of the scope of participants in its making.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, grappling with these practices, actions, and events challenges us to more seriously evaluate any metric of significance within the conventional canon, pushing the interpretive horizon and moving us toward what Godrej argues marks a genuinely cosmopolitan approach, namely, one which “disturbs or dislocates our familiar understanding of politics.”<sup>52</sup>

Having discussed different approaches to comparative political theory—both normative and methodological—we would like to highlight two examples of scholarship that, in our view, illustrate the insights that can be gained from a comparative approach—insights which would be less available to a non-comparative approach. The first of these—Mills’ 1999 *The Racial Contract*—is not a book that Mills self-identifies as comparative political theory, and is strongly influenced by postcolonialism.<sup>53</sup> Yet Mills’ approach, which involves an examination of the history and thought of both “non-Western” peoples and minority racial and ethnic groups (all of whom are identified as non-white) from within the West itself, displays features that make it a recognizably comparative endeavor. Drawing on the voices and traditions of non-white peoples, Mills demonstrates that the apparently neutral concepts upon which the “Western” social contract tradition is built are, in fact, predicated upon an unseen and unstated racial contract that subordinates non-white peoples to white peoples. In this instance, a comparative approach enables Mills to demonstrate that the concepts central to Western thought are, in his view, rooted in the encounter with and subordination of peoples who would be designated non-white in and through the racial contract. With Mills, a comparative turn allows us to see what might not be seen were the focus to be solely on Western (white) political thought. Mills’ method is analogous to von Vacano’s description of conceptual metanarrative, insofar as he is interested in understanding the formation and structure of concepts across time (the racial contract and race, more broadly), along with the dialogic normative commitment of Dallmayr and Euben: the outcome of Mills’ enquiry is a more accurate account than the narrative he is replacing.

<sup>51</sup> Farah Godrej, “The Neoliberal Yogi and the Politics of Yoga.” *Political Theory* (forthcoming).

<sup>52</sup> Farah Godrej, “Towards a Cosmopolitan Political Thought: The Hermeneutics of Interpreting the Other,” *Polity* 41, no. 2 (April 2009): 135–165, 138. See also, Euben, *Journeys to the Other Shore*.

<sup>53</sup> Charles W. Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999).

If Mills' use of a comparative approach enables him to show what might not otherwise be seen, Bell's use of the comparative approach enables him to develop normative and conceptual critiques of "Western" political thought in addition to normative proposals for the design and reform of modern democratic political institutions. For example, in *Beyond Liberal Democracy*, Bell turns to the Confucian tradition to critique "Western" (Greek-derived) theories that prioritize active citizenship; he also turns to the Confucian meritocratic tradition to call for a meritocratic element in representative institutions.<sup>54</sup> For Bell, the study of "non-Western"—especially Chinese—political thought does not simply lead to a greater understanding of political thought writ large, but leads us to rethink "Western" normative and institutional commitments in light of the theoretical insights gained from an encounter with Chinese thought. Bell's methodology, insofar as it relies upon immersion in Chinese thought and culture, echoes Jenco's—especially because it leads to a transformation of the scholarly agent; in his normative aims, he approximates the "anti-Occidental" model of Godrej, in that he is interested in how insights from Chinese thought can enrich "Western" thought.

These are but two examples of how a comparative approach in political theory can yield insights and arguments that could not emerge in the same way without a comparative approach. Yet these two examples, similar as they are in prominence, differ greatly in method (Mills' account is arguably genealogical, in that it looks to the hidden story behind concepts, while Bell's is a more conventional history of political thought) and normative thrust (Mills' aim is a rethinking of liberalism, while Bell aims to rethink the foundations of "Western" thought itself.) Notice, also, how the term "Western" in each of their works is also one which shifts and changes, multiply signifying white, European, etc., suggesting that by reading comparatively we also gain further knowledge of the production of, and instability, in these sorts of oppositions.

Given the differences between Mills and Bell, along with the approaches surveyed above, one may note that even an expansive account of what counts as comparative political theory, on the one hand, and an openness to variation, on the other, does not entirely resolve the questions of analysis and method. For example, what counts for—and how does comparative political theory account for—variation, and what sorts of variation does it require? As March points out, "Given the inevitability that most forms

<sup>54</sup> Daniel A. Bell, *Beyond Liberal Democracy: Political Thinking for an East Asian Context* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

of comparative political theory will justify themselves on the basis of the importance of the question being studied...the next choice to be justified is the thinker or text being studied.”<sup>55</sup> Jenco and Godrej, each for their own reasons, however, would be more skeptical of how the selection of the thinker or text would be justified, and why scholarship might display a singular focus on traditional sites of knowledge, such as written texts, as opposed to performances or oral traditions. Yet, even with those caveats, the question of justification remains. Is linguistic variation between cases sufficient if, say, the authors deploy similar concepts or make similar arguments? Is conceptual or argumentative difference sufficient? What are we to make of generic differences in addition to temporal and linguistic differences—for instance, the dialogue form of Plato versus the quasi-parable form of many Confucian texts?

It is not simply the thinker, text, or genre, per se, but also the salient spatial or temporal categories that require attention. Does the comparative project entail comparison simpliciter, or need it involve a dismantling of a presumed comparison between “Western” and “non-Western?” Should the texts under comparison be produced at roughly the same historical moment? How can periodization be reconciled across different traditions—say, between early modern Europe and early modern Japan? For example, we might wonder if the political and moral vocabularies of twenty-first-century America are more commensurable with the ostensibly “Western” Homeric Greece than they are with, say, the ostensibly “non-Western” twenty-first-century South Korea. And if a key component of comparative political theory is the study of “non-Western” political thought (typically compared to Western political thought), what constitutes “Western” and “non-Western”? How useful are the often incoherent yet widely used labels Western and “non-Western”—very much the product of a post-Enlightenment world, along with categories of race rooted in scientific theories—for understanding the political thought of, say, classical antiquity, the medieval world, or the multiethnic empires (e.g. Ottoman, Persian, Austro-Hungarian, and Russian) of the sixteenth through twentieth centuries? Depending on how we answer these questions, a critic might suggest that the project of comparative political theory—comparing Western and “non-Western”, or, say, early modern Latin America and early modern Spain—in effect re-performs the logic it wants to undermine by reifying cultural or temporal divisions, along with the coherence of traditions.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, the chapters in this volume all highlight the ways

<sup>55</sup> March, 556.

<sup>56</sup> Godrej, *Cosmopolitan Political Thought: Method, Practice, Discipline*, 138.

in which given traditions—Islamic, South Asian, Buddhist, Christian—contain within themselves not just tensions and incoherencies, but analogues to the “other” that constitute the building block of comparative political theory writ large. Similarly, in any given historical moment, authors and texts are concerned not just with their own temporal horizons but also with their own histories—and often histories produced by “others.” This suggests that comparative political theory may well look to within-tradition variation and comparison across time or space or language.

A third question goes to the second broad set of issues with which these papers are concerned: the purposes of comparative political theorizing. For example, how should we understand the relationship between the ideal and the non-ideal in comparative political theory? Does attention to the shortcomings of one theory from the perspective of a distinctly other theory alert us to the non-ideal dimensions of political theorizing, the sort of political theory that scholars such as Jacob Levy and Christopher LeBron have advocated?

These questions, in our view, minimize the centrality of method, explore the appropriateness of different mediums of exchange and influence—and highlight the interpretive assumptions upon which comparison relies—and their relationship to the substantive dimensions of comparative political theory. We recognize, as Idris writes, that “many theorists who write under the sign of “the comparative” are alert to the issues cataloged by these questions,”<sup>57</sup> and more. It is the questions we ask, after all, which are intended to alter the substance and practice of political theory, and perhaps more radically also rebound upon the practitioner herself. Thus, if we assume immersion, per Jenco, and dislocation, per Godrej, then we are contemplating a radical reorientation of the self—“an existential transformation”—within and through the study of political theory and, thereby, an equally radical reorientation of the practice of politics.<sup>58</sup> By relaxing the presumption and imposition of a putative dichotomy “Western/non-Western”, and the self and other, it is not necessarily the sites or texts of comparison that constitute comparative political theory, but the effects they have on us and the questions we put to ourselves and our “others.”

Of course, questions can be raised as to whether this suggests political theory remains a discipline separate from that of, say, anthropology or comparative literature, if it borrows from those methods and, in turn,

<sup>57</sup> Idris, Murad. “Political Theory and the Politics of Comparison.” *Political Theory*, online first. doi:10.1177/0090591716659812.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

what the discipline uniquely offers. These questions might be further sharpened by continued contemplation of power and of race (following the examples of Hooker, Klausen, Thomas, LeBron and von Vacano) in the writings of comparative political theorists.<sup>59</sup>

### III: THE CHAPTERS

Jennifer London's chapter, "The Abbasid 'Circle of Justice': Re-reading Ibn al-Muqaffa's *Letter on Companionship*," is a close historical reading of two letters attributed to the eighth-century Persian secretary Ibn al-Muqaffa. Ibn al-Muqaffa is considered one of the preeminent founders of Arabic prose literature. In this chapter, London traces Ibn al-Muqaffa's Arabic translation and adaptation of a political trope called the "circle of justice," to consider what Ibn al-Muqaffa sought to *do* politically with this trope. The "circle of justice" is a Near Eastern model of social and economic equipoise that appears in mirrors for princes in Arabic, Persian, and Ottoman Turkish over hundreds of years. In her exposition, London first introduces the classic Persian formulation of this trope in *The Letter of Tansar*—a letter that Ibn al-Muqaffa translates from middle-Persian into Arabic. Next, London reads Ibn al-Muqaffa's original Arabic *Letter on Companionship* to track how the author invokes and redeploys the trope to advocate for political reform in his environment. *The Letter on Companionship* is a document that Ibn al-Muqaffa writes to his Abbasid ruler to advise him on political, social, and ethical matters. In her analysis of *The Letter on Companionship*, London traces concepts that Ibn al-Muqaffa generates through integrating pre-Islamic and early Islamic ideas. London suggests that the concepts Ibn al-Muqaffa develops are symbols through which he represents his own non-Arab Muslim identity in the emerging Abbasid public sphere. For instance, London reads Ibn al-Muqaffa's uses of particular Arabic concepts, such as discretionary opinion (*ra'y*) and companionship (*ṣaḥāba*), to consider how he redefines such words to integrate aspects of his Persian cultural heritage in the early Abbasid context. London's analysis thus discloses how political writing

<sup>59</sup> Juliet Hooker, *Race and the Politics of Solidarity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Jimmy Casas Klausen, "Jeremy Waldron's Partial Kant: Indigenous Proximity, Colonial Injustice, Cultural Particularism," *Polity* 46, no. 1 (2014): 31–55; Von Vacano, *The Color of Citizenship: Race, Modernity and Latin American/Hispanic Political Thought*. Chris Lebron, *The Color Of Our Shame: Race and Justice In Our Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

in general, and letter writing in particular, was a resource secretaries like Ibn al-Muqaffa<sup>c</sup> could use to introduce their perspectives in politics. In this way, London uses early Arabic sources to extend Cambridge school methods in new directions. Her method of reading early Arabic concepts in context suggests that there are multiple traditions even within one text, and that understanding the history and translation of these concepts brings that multiplicity to the fore.

Matthew J. Moore's chapter, "Buddhism and International Law," turns to a putatively universal system of governance, international law, to highlight the potential contribution of Buddhist political and legal theory to international law and, in turn, to incite more political theorists to contemplate its tradition and theorizing. He argues that Buddhism (even within a focus on "Asian thought") has been oddly neglected, and, yet, to garner commitment to and compliance with what is, fundamentally, a system of international law derived from and representative of Western European states, theorists should engage in a comparative political analysis of Buddhism's convergences and divergences with the conceptual history of international law. Moore illuminates the multiple cross-fertilizations of Buddhism, both within and through the work of different Buddhist scholars, and across the history of its practice. As a dialogic engagement, and a thought experiment of sorts, Moore relies on a close reading of the complex history of Buddhist legal and political thought to draw out particular concepts which provide a unique purchase on the sometimes consonant purposes of religion and the law, for example, the pursuit of peace, and on the sometimes dissonant purposes, for example, the pursuit of a particularly prescribed action by a moral agent (be they states or individuals). This contrapuntal exchange illuminates the potential for what Moore terms a "layered pluralism": this is not a synchronous fusion of Buddhism and the contemporary system of international law, but "partial, and incomplete" agreements that would, as a consequence of exchange, sustain cooperation and compliance with a system of rule. While not a translation, as with the *Letter to Tansar*, it is indeed a form of textual exegesis in pursuit of sufficient understanding. Moore's work, like London's, investigates how political tropes and traditions can be put to work for distinctive ends. In this way, they both explore how diverse traditions of political thought can serve as poetic vehicles for expanding canons and political vocabularies.

Megan Thomas, in "Proclaiming Sovereignty: Some Reflections from the Eighteenth-Century Philippines," illustrates how a turn to historical events featuring cross-cultural encounters and conflict can capture dimensions of sovereignty fought over by both religion and state. Her chapter

illuminates the puzzling action of a member of the local provincial elite, Diego Silang, who exhorted his province (colonized by Spain) to reject Spanish capitulation to the British in the name of the Spanish Crown and the Catholic Church. Taking us carefully through the multiple and competing challenges and claims of Spanish and English colonization, Thomas uses the British occupation of Manila and Silang's actions to highlight the internal and performative dimensions of sovereignty—for instance, explaining the capitulation of the Spanish governor of Manila to British authority. British claims to sovereignty derived from the authority of the Spanish Crown. Therefore, “Spanish sovereignty in Manila...was exercised by British agents.” Thomas helps us to contemplate why they acted as they did. Why did the British claim to exercise sovereignty in the name of Spain and not England? How did Silang's formulation of sovereignty, in resistance and in submission to Spain, both engage and reject that of both states as legitimate? Thomas is using a comparative *moment*, and its pertinent actors, both elite and local, to critique conceptual debates over sovereignty from within the tradition of political thought that both gave rise to and confirmed imperial sovereignty. In this, Thomas pulls from postcolonial thought, highlighting the role of Manila, which was a node in the China trade (and thus significant to commercial competition between Spain and England), as a site of multiple forces, not simply those of the two powers. Her attention to the words and audiences of local and imperial statements brings the unsettled and performative dimension of sovereignty to our attention.

Dan O'Neill's chapter, “Burke and Paine on the Origins of British Imperialism in India,” is, on the face of it, much less clearly a work of comparative political theory—but only if, by comparative political theory, we mean the comparison of non-Western to Western thought, or a focus on non-Western thought. Yet, like Mills's *Racial Contract*, O'Neill's chapter is comparative. O'Neill compares Burke and Paine, and their response to British imperialism in India, he does so across time and through the lens of both thinkers' efforts to compare the meaning and impact of imperialism on “Western” and “non-Western” peoples. O'Neill thus offers a model of doing comparative political theory from within the canon, focusing on Western encounters with—and attempts to theorize such encounters—non-Western peoples. In O'Neill's view, far from being the anti-imperialist eighteenth-century thinker par excellence, Burke is a full-throated defender of the British imperial project, and someone who consciously turns a blind eye to its barbarous cruelty. Paine, by contrast, sees the cruelty of the East

India Company's operations in Bengal at the moment they occurred while Burke forgives them in the name of defending the expansion of Britain's empire. Moreover, Paine's perception of the cruelty and rapacity of British imperialism in India would go on to influence his own support of the American and French revolutions, his hostility to slavery, and his defense of Irish independence. Conversely, Burke's acceptance and promotion of British imperialism in India was of a piece with his opposition to the separation of the American colonies and Ireland from the empire, his defense of slavery, and his opposition to the French Revolution. Yet in O'Neill's reading, even if Paine is a good deal closer to being the quintessential anti-imperial Enlightenment thinker, both he and Burke share an imperial commitment to the subjugation of the indigenous peoples of British North America.

Katherine A. Gordy's essay, "Strategic Deployments: The Universal/Local Nexus in the Work of José Carlos Mariátegui," argues that Latin American theorists at once "actively espoused" European political thought while also insisting on the "uniqueness" of Latin America. Rather than simply accepting or discarding European thought, Latin American scholars "strategically deployed" it within their own local contexts. This often had the effect of decentering the universal in the name of contingent and collective generalizations. A theorist who allows us to see this is José Carlos Mariátegui, a twentieth-century Peruvian Marxist who drew not only from European (Marxism and feminism) sources, but also from indigenous sources as well. Indeed, it was the role of the indigenous, specifically the Inca, that informed his clash with both Peruvian nationalists and Soviet Marxists who adhered to orthodoxy in light of their interpretation of Peruvian material conditions. Mariátegui argued that historical materialism must be, in Gordy's words, "consciously and unapologetically rooted in local conditions." Further, his engagement with feminism underlines his curiosity about the role of political thought in mobilization, and his claim (contrary to some nationalists) that feminism was not "exotic" to Peru, but was an indication of its civilized status and representative of the unique role of women laborers. We must understand *how* Mariátegui engaged with European political thought—not his embrace or rejection of it—and the political effects of this engagement. For Gordy, the deployment or use to which political thought is put best clarifies its dynamic, evolving, and specific cultural iterations. Thus, to be in the 'field' is to be attentive to circulation, modification, and implementation. Gordy, then, indicates that comparative political thought is indeed analysis of already hybrid thought.

In his essay, “The Jewish Gandhi Question, or, *Ich* and *Sma*: Martin Buber and the Five Minute Mahatma,” Matthew Baxter takes on two figures pivotal to the field of comparative political theory: Gandhi and Fred Dallmayr. Baxter challenges what he views as the monological dimensions of Gandhi’s thought and Dallmayr’s coupling of Gandhi with Gadamer’s notion of dialogue. Instead, Baxter turns to Martin Buber, a competing twentieth-century theorist of dialogue, to reveal a Gandhi who is “not a figure of cooperation, interaction, and encounter, but whose commitments displayed a hegemonic and imperial potential of their own.” Baxter does so by focusing on the exchange between Gandhi and Buber in the wake of *Kristallnacht*, an exchange that he argues illustrates a contrast between Gandhi’s *Sma* (self), which emphasizes individual assertion and suffering, and Buber’s *Ich* (I), which emphasizes communal relationships and sensuality. Buber, he demonstrates, while still emphasizing the role of dialogue, invites a critical reading of Gandhi that better orients us to the complexity of responses which the massacre demands—one where Gandhi’s links between non-violence and justice or birth and belonging cannot be presumed. Moreover, it is Buber, not Gadamer, who, as a “philosopher of dialogue,” most effectively outlines the means to build a world in common inflected more by intimate connection than linguistic encounter. This building project, rather than an encountering one, Baxter underscores as central to the project of comparative political theory. Baxter’s chapter is, in addition, ironic: in effect, the encounter between Buber (a “Westerner”) and Gandhi (a “non-Westerner”) not only highlights a core tension within Gandhi’s thought, but shows how “Western” thought might enrich “non-Western” thought, further troubling the Western/Non-Western distinction altogether.

In the final essay, Bronwyn Leebaw suggests that the scholars of restorative justice, within the field of transnational justice, and of political theory, share a similar concern with and an attention to actively listening and responding to previously unheard voices excluded from the canonical debates. Indeed, each set of scholars has begun “to grapple with the way that dialogue is limited or blocked by approaches to theorizing and judgment that selectively ‘tune out’ dissonant, unfamiliar, or unsettling ideas and modes of expression, analysis, and theorizing.” Leebaw offers a reflection on how these two sets of scholars might inform each other’s theoretical and practical deliberation on how best to accomplish the task of listening, valuing, and responding. To do so requires both theoretical and practical commitments not only to listen, but also to acknowledge what is at stake in the failure to listen. For Leebaw, the processes of the South

African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, established in 1995 to deal with effects of apartheid, illuminate the very real risks and outcomes of a failure to listen.

Through a theoretical engagement with the work of Farah Godrej and Sonali Chakravarti, specifically their respective conceptual development of “travel” and of “listening,” and her own fieldwork with the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission and its processes Leebaw develops a case for a more engaged, and inevitably more often difficult to sustain, form of listening—one which does not attempt to conciliate or ameliorate dissent and dissonance. In particular, Leebaw highlights how an emphasis on forgiveness, reconciliation, and consensus silences more confrontational emotions such as anger, resentment, or disgust and presumes an already set consensus not only on what occurred, but also on what the proper response should be. She notes that if “the case for listening is predicated on the attainment of common ground or the capacity to move one...it becomes very difficult to hear shattering expressions of despair, paralyzing narratives of grief and irredeemable moral collapse, voices that convey a refusal to reconcile.” And if the exercise is designed to exclude voices and modes of expression that do not conform to a desired outcome, it can no longer really be called an effort to listen. Instead, “good listening,” as she puts it, has potentially beneficial effects on the transformation of transitional justice from therapeutic, or restorative, to a more radical outcome—necessary to truly grasp its potential. In particular, Leebaw draws our attention to the significance of listening to those whose testimony, or dialogue, does not conform to an acceptable vocabulary or range of expression. These moments and individuals, rather than subject to being ignored, dismissed or silenced, are in fact moments of potential disruption which highlight the difficulties and dangers of presuming that one can indeed come to agreement.

Collectively, the chapters share multiple themes. For one, whether it is London's account of Ibn al-Muqaffa's and transformation of classical Persian texts and concepts into Arabic, or Gordy's account of Mariátegui's innovative and indigenizing use of Marxist thought, a number of the chapters illuminate the possibility and potential of different uses of translation. London and Gordy address the possibilities of translations across cultures and, in so doing, highlight how the act of translation is itself a generative and transformative political act. In contemplating the perils and problems of exchange either within or across discursive traditions, Leebaw and Baxter further nuance the practice of translation by accentuating the dialogic as well as the auditory elements of exchange. Baxter outlines the

danger of dialogic speech that collapses into monologue in his reading of Gandhi as a figure whose own commitment was less open than realized, while Leebaw documents how listening can be in tension with the purported intent of political dialogue. Their cautions are well-taken, considering the profound colonial violence and foundational inequalities which striate the histories and texts of political theory.

O'Neill and Thomas address the histories and practices of empire and colonialism as sites of political theorizing. They demonstrate that these histories and practices can be approached as exercises in translation, recognizing that such translations take place in what David Kim has described as the “epistemic landscape of Western culture, politics and philosophy.”<sup>60</sup> This landscape is a terrain hostile to consensual forms of dialogue, but this hostility is not wholly determinative. Thomas demonstrates the performative nature of sovereignty made manifest by the uprisings in Manila against British and Spanish imperialism. O'Neill, in his comparative reading of Burke and Paine, underscores the misreadings of the colonial context made possible by actors who assimilate it to an imperial frame. For Moore, this misreading can become a form of institutional violence when codified in international law, which draws from only one tradition, that is, Christianity, and one experience, that is, Western European, to dictate its tenets. This misreading also weakens the potential universality of international law and ignores its compatibility with other ethical and legal traditions, traditions from which it could draw. We offer this synoptic overview of the chapters not as exhaustive, but as indicative of the many ways in which this book may be read. We hope that in surveying them we sight new directions in theory's landscapes.

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<sup>60</sup>David Haekwon Kim, “José Mariátegui's East-South Decolonial Experiment,” *Comparative & Continental Philosophy* 7, no. 2 (2015): 1–23 (157–79, 165).