Introduction

Thinking Secularism from the Global South

In the performance of a magic trick, misdirection involves drawing attention away from where the trick is happening to another place, or to other objects that are made to appear more fascinating. In this book I address the manner in which the master discourse of secularism and the grid of meanings it produces effect such a misdirection. The field of meaning that "secularism" invokes structures our vision—making certain objects and features hypervisible while obscuring others that are critical factors in contemporary politics and intellectual production.

What would democracy and intellection look like if we took these factors into account? This is the question that will absorb our attention as we travel this journey together. Lifting this grid, which has long shaped our vision, has been enabled by decades of scholarship from the global South—scholarship that has moved away from the universalising thrust of European Enlightenment thought, opened up its non-European histories, and carefully insisted that all thought emerges from specific spatio-temporal locations.

The perspective I will outline is from the global South and from India, but my attempt will be to open up from this ground and theorise from this location in order to make arguments about secularism and democracy in general. I draw on scholarship and politics in my part of the world to set up conversations with debates on and experiences of secularism globally—much as theorists from the global North, though starting from their own contexts, quite unselfconsciously theorise broadly or imply the universality of their adopted positions.

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The key difference may be that when we in the global South theorise on the basis of our experiences we rarely assume that our perspectives are universally generalisable and applicable everywhere. At the same time, I believe that a comparative perspective enables conversations across contexts; in such conversations we sometimes hear resonances and sometimes recognise disjunctures—and taken together these enable the mapping of new ground.

This is therefore not a book "about" India but "from" India, reconceptualising some aspects of secularism more generally. A limitation of any comparative theorising exercise across cultural and geographical contexts—especially with the goal of better understanding one's own location—is that the selective study of "other" locations might make the latter seem under-theorised, and under-contextualised in terms of their own dense debates. This is, all the same, a better mode of theorising than simply applying theory—on the assumption of its universality—from the North to other parts of the globe, this having long become a normalised and largely unquestioned mode. By contrast, I see the more implicitly dialogic mode of theorising in the present book as a listening in on conversations elsewhere. This I attempt in order to throw light on our own positions and perspectives, without laying any claim to a full understanding, and in the hope that this theorising speaks to multiple contexts.

I take into account here knowledges that are a form of counter-hegemonic practice. They feed into multiple kinds of resistance to authoritarianism, capitalism, patriarchy, caste, and race domination worldwide. At every point, therefore, resistance is implied in the conversations that are set up in this book.

Thinking from the Global South

The term global South does not here refer to a geographical region, nor to a category within a developmental discourse. It is intended to indicate a space of thought, the possibility of revaluing and learning from speech that exists in the margins, of reworking the co-ordinates of intellectual labour to free ourselves from Eurocentric universalising

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narratives, and to destabilise the East–West distinction which is routinely made in the context of thought and intellection. Such conceptualisation might make spaces within the geographical global North part of the global South—as, for instance, the thought of African Americans in the United States of America, and of Indigenous people in the Americas and Australia. This would apply also perhaps to some parts of Europe—around the Mediterranean, for example, or parts of Eastern and Central Europe with histories that cut through all neat continental divisions. And, of course, the term global South assumes, to begin with, certain histories of normalised cartography which are challenged by strategies such as "upside down maps." The Argentinian philosopher Walter Mignolo asserts, "I am *where* I think," that is, you constitute yourself (I am) in the place where you do and think.[1] Note that this statement is not a claim to ahistoric indigeneity, authenticity, or superiority vis-à-vis "the West"—a stance very familiar in India from the Hindu nationalist frame-work. Rather, it is an insistence on privileging *location*, a recognition that spatial and temporal co-ordinates inevitably suffuse all theorising. A sensitivity to location invariably leads to a productive contamination of the purity of empty universalist categories with specific histories, thus challenging their claim to speak about everywhere from nowhere, pointing towards unexpected other histories that unsettle the idea of a single point of origin.

The hemispheric divide is bridged by links with the South-within-the-North. Latin American decolonial feminism has found allies in the Latina/x feminist tradition of the United States. Latina/x "symbolically encapsulates identity conditions of migration, immigration, and diaspora to the United States from countries in Latin America and the Caribbean" and can capture a range of identities (e.g. Afro-Latina, Afro-Caribbean, Nuyorican, Xicana).[2] Dalit intellectuals in South Asia have been in conversation with Black politics and scholarship in the USA from the time of the correspondence between B. R. Ambedkar and W. E. B. Du Bois in 1946—when Ambedkar hoped to follow Du Bois

[1] Mignolo 2011: xvi.

[2] Berruz 2018.

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in submitting a petition to the UN on the plight of India's Untouchables—down to the present.[3] The Dalit Panther organisation founded in 1972 by Namdeo Dhasal, J. V. Pawar, Raja Dhale, and Arjun Dangle was explicitly inspired by the Black Panthers of the USA; at its peak, for about five years, it provided inspiring and militant leadership to young Dalits.[4] Activists like Thenmozhi Soundararajan, founder of Equality Labs, who studies the practice of caste discrimination among South Asians in the USA, have made explicit connections between Dalit and Black experience. Equality Labs' report *Caste in the United States* was discussed widely among Black audiences.[5]

A more recent alliance is between postsocialist and postcolonial feminisms exploring their "uneasy affinities."[6] On the one hand postsocialist scholars are seen by postcolonial scholars as more aligned with the North; on the other the concept of "postsocialist precarity"—referring to "geo-historical experiences resulting from the dismantling of state socialist modernity and the (re-)incorporation of relatively closed economies into the capitalist neoliberal order"[7]—draws the two closer in their shared critique of imperialism, capitalism, and heteronormativity. Moreover, racism tends to be less visible in the postsocialist imaginary and the conversation with postcolonialism brings the issue of racialised hierarchies into focus.[8]

We can begin to see what thinking the global South involves—the attempt to bring into conversation with one another concepts and categories that have emerged from different spatio-temporal locations is key. This conversation would have to be produced with the sharp awareness of incommensurability, mistranslation, productive misreading, and above all, and always, the awareness of the materiality and politics of location.

The process of engaging with thought from the global South involves

[3] West and Yengde 2017.
[4] J. V. Pawar Interview 2022.
[5] Paul 2018.
[6] Koobak, et al. 2021.
[7] Suchland 2021: 14.
[8] Koobak, et al. 2021.

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at least three tasks, each of them addressed in the next three sections. The first is a critique of Eurocentrism which has, as of now, been substantially carried out, with Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) as an important landmark. The ensuing section covers this ground and focuses, in particular, on the themes of "Asia as method" and spirituality in decolonial thought.

The second task is to question the West/non-West binary assumed with reference to philosophy, and to unpack and trace the interweaving histories of these two categories of thought.

The third and most critical task is to identify concepts internal to knowledge traditions, think about the extent to which these can travel to other contexts, and to see what productive translations (and mistranslations) can come about.

An important clarification to make is that in this book the word "tradition" is never used as the antonym of "modernity," largely because both terms come under continuous interrogation. I use "tradition" in the sense of continuing practices and knowledges, regardless of whether they have ancient roots or are more recent. Thus, a knowledge tradition could, for example, be scientific or feminist or religious, or have elements of all these. All traditions are living palimpsests through which can be dimly (but sometimes brightly) glimpsed layers of histories, like a fertile undergrowth.

Critique of Eurocentrism

We can briefly define Eurocentrism as a set of assumptions about (i) the universalisability of the European/Western experience, and (ii) the Telos of Progress and History. From this position, the non-West is a place of data and facts which must be excavated and theorised in the "neutral" conceptual frameworks that have evolved in the West. From this point of view, the non-West is either always lacking—modernity is incomplete, secularism impure, democracy immature, development arrested, capitalism retarded—or the non-West can be translated perfectly into Western terms by answering, for instance, questions like "is there 'civil society?,'" "are there conceptions of 'equality?,'"

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"were there 'liberal' thinkers?," and "what kind of 'modernity' do they have?" Frantz Fanon put it this way: if ever the colonised happen to "arrive," "Everything is anticipated, thought out, demonstrated . . ."[9]

There is of course by now a great deal of self-reflexivity about Eurocentrism among Western scholars: hence, for instance, Charles Taylor's warning against the easy transposing of the state–civil society opposition derived from the experience of Western Europe to other parts of the world, and his proposal to enrich the concept of civil society by including within its purview other forms of state–society interaction in non-European contexts. But—as Partha Chatterjee in his response to Taylor points out—the central assumption of Taylor's proposal continues to be an understanding that "it is only the concepts of European social philosophy that contain within them the possibility of universalisation." Chatterjee's own project, therefore, is to explore the specificity of the European concept of civil society and to try demonstrating the ways in which "that concept could be shown to be a particular form of a more universal concept"; in other words, "to send the concept of civil society back to where . . . it properly belongs—the provincialism of European social philosophy."[10] And, of course, while concepts emerging from Western (Euro-American) social philosophy are assumed to contain within them the possibility of universalisation, the reverse is never assumed. Can, for instance, Nyerere's concept of Ujamaa, or the Mahabharata's trope of Draupadi as the ambiguous figure of assertive femininity, ever be considered relevant in analyses of Euro-American experience? Only Antigone can be made to speak about women and war everywhere.

Asia as Method

One important element of the critique of Eurocentrism has come from the lectures delivered in 1960 under the title "Asia as Method" by the Japanese scholar of Chinese literature Takeuchi Yoshimi. In these

[9] Fanon 2009: 263.
[10] Chatterjee 2010: 275–6.

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lectures Takeuchi was concerned with how one could engage with Western theory from an Asian perspective. Taking up the values of freedom and equality as they emerged from Western thought, he recognised the contradiction between these ideals and the imperialist histories with which they were linked. However, rather than simply rejecting these Western ideals he suggested instead that Asia should "re-embrace the West," reassess these values from the outside, and apply Asia's "own cultural values." He noted that "these values do not already exist, in substantive form" but may nevertheless still be possible "as method . . . as the process of the subject's self-formation." He called this process "'Asia as method," concluding that it was "impossible to definitively state what this might mean."[11]

Kuan-Hsing Chen, in his book *Asia as Method* (2010), engages with Takeuchi Yoshimi as well as with Mizoguchi Yuzo's *China as Method*, published twenty-five years after Takeuchi's essay. Mizoguchi Yuzo, in Chen's rendering, rejects Takeuchi's polarising understanding in which Japan "turned direction," gave up its own sense of self, and fully embraced Europe, while China "returned to the core," "resisting Europe even as it constantly tries to overcome it."[12] Mizoguchi Yuzo argues that neither total affirmation nor total negation are possible and that the specific pasts of different societies will condition their present. He used the term *jiti* (base entity) and *muti* (mother's body, or originating basis) to refer to these pasts. Chen sees his own project in *Asia as Method* as developing a theory based on understanding heterogeneous presents through the lens of *jiti* and *muti*.[13]

These concepts are productive beyond the specific context in which Mizoguchi Yuzo developed them. Every moment and space in the contemporary is a knot of intersecting histories and fragments, rooted at different depths, impossible to untangle in the present—they can only be understood *within* and *as* a tangle. The "originating basis" is already variegated and complex, so the invocation of *jiti* and *muti* cannot be

[11] Rojas 2019: 211.
[12] Chen 2010: 247.
[13] Ibid.: 245 and 248 for *jiti* and *muti*, respectively.

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a reference to any pure and homogeneous past. Rather, these terms alert us to the view that engaging with the contemporary requires us to accept different elements as having varying resonances and meanings even in the same context, depending on which part of the past's undergrowth we connect to the present.

In his classification Takeuchi Yoshimi had placed India closer to China than Japan, and this seems to me an accurate representation. Several Indian intellectuals had begun articulating a critique of the wholesale adoption of Western thought from the late nineteenth century onwards. In 1954 the *Visvabharati Quarterly*, published by Rabindranath Tagore's university, republished a lecture by Krishna Chandra Bhattacharyya delivered in 1931, sixteen years before India's independence. Titled "Swaraj in Ideas," Bhattacharyya's talk extended the notion of *swaraj* (self-determination) to the realm of ideas.[14] Calling cultural domination a subtle form of political domination, he was nevertheless clear that the assimilation of an alien culture was not necessarily an aspect of subjection, and that in fact the assimilation of new and foreign ideas was probably necessary for progress: "When I speak of cultural subjection, I do not mean the assimilation of an alien culture. That assimilation need not be an evil; it may be positively necessary for healthy progress and in any case it does not mean a lapse of freedom." Cultural subjection happens "when one's traditional cast of ideas and sentiments is superseded without comparison or competition by a new cast representing an alien culture which possesses one like a ghost." The "Indian mind," said Bhattacharyya, has "subsided below the conscious level of culture" for (Western-)educated men; it operates only at the level of family life and in some social and religious practices. Meanwhile,

[14] The text of this lecture reappears in a later publication, with "swaraj" spelt as "svaraj." Here the lecture is cited as having been informally delivered in 1928 at a meeting of the students of the Hooghly College, of which Bhattacharyya was Principal, during 1928–30 (Bhushan and Garfield 2011: 103). The *Visvabharati Quarterly* attributes the lecture to October 1931, as part of the Sir Asutosh Memorial Lecture series (Bhattacharyya 1954: 175). I have retained the spelling and date as cited in the *Visvabharati Quarterly*.

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Western ideas, "springing as they do from a rich and strong life—the life of the West . . . induce in us a shadow mind that functions like a real mind except in the matter of genuine creativeness."[15]

Bhattacharyya is not arguing for rejecting Western thought, but for Western thought to be *engaged with through* Indian modes of thinking and Indian cultural resources. This is exactly how Naoki Sakai reads Asia as method—as a conceptualisation of agency and subjectivity in critical relation to itself and to colonial modernity—not the valorising of pre-existing "Asian values."[16]

In my view, then, to take Asia as method seriously is to insist on *location*, which is differentially constituted, and rooted in spatially and temporally variegated *jiti.*

Spirituality and Decolonial Thinking

From another part of the global South, Walter Mignolo names as the "Western code" the belief in "one sustainable system of knowledge, cast first in theological terms" and later in secular philosophy and sciences.[17] This system of knowledge is assumed to have been inaugurated by the European Enlightenment. Decolonial thinking counters this idea—that European modernity was the point of arrival of human history—and focuses on the "colonial matrix of power" of which the "rhetoric of modernity" and the "logic of coloniality" are the two sides.[18] Coloniality is a term Mignolo derives from the Peruvian thinker Anibal Quijano, who sees it as a process inaugurated by the European invasion from the fifteenth century of the regions now called the Americas and the Caribbean. Coloniality led to the formation of these regions from kingdoms that existed at the time, and to the massive trade of enslaved Africans. Coloniality is thus constitutive of modernity, its "darker side."

[15] Bhattacharyya 1931/1954: 103–4.
[16] Sakai 2010.
[17] Mignolo 2011: xii.
[18] Ibid.: xviii.

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The world around 1500 was "polycentric and non-capitalist,"[19] with several coexisting civilisations—the Ming Huangdinate, the Ottoman Sultanate, the Mughal Empire, the Oyo and Benin kingdoms of the Yoruba nation in Africa, the Incas in Tawantinsuyu, and the Aztecs in Anahuac. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the world is monocentric, interconnected by a single type of economy, capitalism; the violence of colonial practices has ravaged the world, which is now marked by a diversity of political theories and practices. In between these two scenarios, "modernity" enters as a double colonisation of time and space. A structure of control and management has emerged, of "authority, economy, subjectivity, gender and sexual norms," driven by the exploitation of labour and the expropriation of land.[20]

According to Nelson Maldonaldo-Torres a serious engagement with spirituality is a distinguishing feature of decolonial—as opposed to postcolonial—thought. Mignolo himself is not interested in drawing sharp lines of division between decolonial and postcolonial thought. He sees both as "options" that can coexist, and as having different trajectories in terms of points of origin and linguistic fields, and therefore different areas of concern.[21] But he does outline the "spiritual option" as one of the trajectories that decolonial thinking will have to take seriously in the coming decades as it challenges both secular modernity/coloniality, and also the colonisation of institutionalised religions.[22] Maldonaldo-Torres sees this as a distinctive feature of decolonial thinking for, while postcolonial studies emerge from and are located in the academic field of the secular humanities, decolonial thinking has not been an academic discipline alone: it has included community activists, artists, and scholars critical of modern Western secularism who have drawn from and contributed to religious studies as well.

It is from this perspective that Maldonaldo-Torres reads Fanon as offering a critique of the coloniality of the religion/secularism divide.

[19] Ibid.: 3.
[20] Ibid.: 7.
[21] Ibid.: xxvii.
[22] Ibid.: 33–4.

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Rejecting the understanding of Fanon as a secularist philosopher, Maldonaldo-Torres insists Fanon did not believe that overcoming religion is necessary for decolonisation to take place, or that decolonisation would lead to a religionless society. This is reflected, he says, in a paper Fanon co-wrote with an intern, Jacques Azoulay, while Fanon was Director of the Blida Psychiatric Hospital in Algeria. The paper warns psychiatrists and other scientists that while "some conducts, some reactions can appear 'primitive' to us . . . that is only a value judgment, one that is both questionable and bears on poorly defined characteristics." The authors were, in particular, referring to the idea that "genies" (*jinn*) produce madness, a belief prevalent in Algeria.[23] Maldonaldo-Torres concludes that Fanon's "view of the self as a gift and his intersubjective account of healthy individuality and social relations, draw from and are compatible with a large variety of sources, including so-called religious or spiritual formations."[24] Fanon's decolonial thinking should therefore be related to "non-secular or post-secular accounts of reality, including the African diaspora spiritualities that are found in Fanon's own island of Martinique and through the Caribbean, some of which probably informed Fanon's thinking and worldview too." It seems, too, that Fanon is read quite widely as a critic of the coloniality of secularism among militant intellectuals in the Indigenous communities of South America.[25]

In a similar move, but from a position different from that of Mignolo, Achille Mbembe reasserts a "critical and inclusive universalism" as the "latest avatar of a certain tradition of Western humanism." In an interview around his book, *Brutalisme* (2020), Mbembe reflects on the shift that has taken place from the beginning of modernity—when "the sharp separation between the world of humans and the world of objects" was an emancipatory move—to the current moment when what "prevails is the idea that the human is the product of technology" and "[e]verything, including consciousness itself, is

[23] I will engage with this idea at some length in chap. 4.

[24] Maldonaldo-Torres 2022.

[25] Ibid.

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being reduced to matter."[26] Mbembe terms this the "new secular religion," counterposing to it the non-dichotomy of precolonial African and Amerindian metaphysics which enables us to "de-dramatize the human/object relationship."[27] At the same time Mbembe is concerned that the "critique of reason" should not become "a war against reason," and it is in this context that he asserts the new critical universalism.

In the present book I attempt to assert multiple notions of reason and unreason, as well as a somewhat suspicious attitude towards universalism. The point, however, that emerges from these different sets of not necessarily congruent arguments is that the idea of "applying theory" produced in one context to "understand practice" in another assumes that "political practice" is "non-theoretical"—completely bereft of any discursive-theoretical content—so that any theory (from the West) can be used to make sense of political practice anywhere. But, as some of us argued in an earlier work, all political practice is always constituted by some form of reflection and thought—theoretical or non-theoretical—and, as we realise today, at least one part of theorisation must be about making sense of "practice" through an understanding of the subject's own world and her categories of thought.[28]

What these layered discussions indicate is that the dichotomies of universal/particular, east/west, and tradition/modernity are articulated in far more complex ways than their invocations often imply.

Unpacking West and Non-West

The second task, also substantially advanced upon, is to go beyond postcolonial critiques of Eurocentrism, and postcolonial theory's object of critique—Empire—in order to unpack "West" and "non-West." Much of modern thought in the non-West has engaged with Western notions and vernacularised them—Sudipta Kaviraj uses the analogy of

[26] Mbembe 2022: 129.
[27] Ibid.: 130.
[28] Menon, Nigam, and Palshikar 2014.

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speaking English with different accents.[29] But, equally, Western knowledge formations have deep roots in the non-West. In his controversial book *Black Athena* (1987) Martin Bernal points out that until the nineteenth century Greek culture was accepted as having arisen from an incorporation into the Egyptian and Phoenician empires, whereby Greek culture was undeniably a mixture of European, African, and Arabic civilisational influences. It was only in the first half of the nineteenth century in Europe that Greece began to be viewed as essentially European or Aryan. This coincided with post-Enlightenment notions of "progress" as well as the beginnings of institutionalised racism. During this period a body of scholarship was created which identified Greece as the cradle of European civilisation. It was intolerable in this corpus for Greece to be identified—as it had been for centuries—as Levantine, or as Mediterranean when the latter denoted *all* the territories around the Mediterranean Sea—North Africa, West Asia, and Southern Europe. Bernal's work came to be derided as "controversial" precisely because it challenged mainstream Eurocentric Enlightenment-inflected wisdom, although the attacks against him were launched on other, ostensibly non-political grounds—challenging his knowledge of linguistics, his handling of classical texts, his alleged under-deployment of primary sources, and so on. Bernal published a definitive response to his critics in 2005, bringing together essays and replies he had written over the decades, organised thematically and systematically.[30] He addressed each critique substantially and, in my opinion, his argument stands.

It is a truism now that the supposedly natural division of this part of the world into continents—Europe, Africa, Asia—is anything but natural. Spatially, North Africa, West Asia, and Southern Europe are more contiguous with one another than with other parts of "their" continents. Moreover, as scholars of Oceanic Studies point out, oceans have not historically separated pieces of land; rather, they have

[29] Kaviraj 2005.
[30] Bernal 2005.

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acted as conduits of communication.[31] In other spheres, too, long hidden or conveniently invisible connections between the three discursively separated continents around the Mediterranean have been made visible. Mahmood Mamdani, when referring to the ways in which knowledge flowed in an earlier age, points out that the graduation gowns seen all over the modern world are derived from the Islamic *madressa* of West Asia. And the early universities of Europe—Oxford, Cambridge, the Sorbonne—borrowed not just gowns but much of their curricula from these institutions, ranging from Greek philosophy to Iranian astronomy to Arab medicine and Indian mathematics: "They had little difficulty at that time in accepting this flowing gown, modeled after the dress of the desert nomad, as the symbol of high learning."[32] When reading Ibn Khaldun's *Muqaddimah*, Mamdani suggests, it may be productive to think of Africa before the Atlantic slave trade in *regional* rather than *continental* terms, involving an imagination that brings together the Mediterranean and West African regions "in a single history," a la Bernal.[33]

We need to recognise and recover what Mignolo calls "decolonial cosmopolitanisms" that go back to the twelfth century.[34] Take for instance Ibn-Rushd (1126–1198), a key twelfth-century figure who developed the Aristotelian distinction between form and matter to assert human free will, which mediates between essence and existence. In the debate between reason and revelation in Islamic scholarship, Ibn Rushd asserted that it was the philosopher, not the theologian, who needed to establish the true inner meaning of religious beliefs in the event of a dispute because of "his ability to deal with doubt, ambivalence and criticality."[35] Between the eighth and fifteenth centuries the Islamic world struggled between faith and mysticism on the one hand, and reason on the other, and eventually Ibn Rushd and the party

[31] Menon, et al. 2022; Hofmeyr 2012; Vink 2007; Ray 2020.
[32] Mamdani 2010.
[33] Mamdani 2012: 2.
[34] Mignolo 2011: 5.
[35] Hoskote and Trojanow 2012: 80.

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of reason were set aside. But in twelfth-century Europe Ibn Rushd emerged as the standard bearer of the rebels—they called themselves the Averroists—against Catholic authoritarianism.[36] These were Christian intellectuals who had read Aristotle in Latin translations as well as through the extensive commentaries of Arab Aristotelians, and they made no distinction between Christian, Pagan, and Muslim authorities when arguing points of Christian doctrine. The Church reacted to them with anxiety and brutality through the first half of the thirteenth century, wiping out the mass movement of the Cathars (another sect deemed heretic) while first banning Ibn Rushd's commentaries on Aristotle and then the study of Aristotle himself. However, Ibn Rushd continued to remain a powerful force in the Renaissance.[37] Ranjit Hoskote and IlijaTrojanow have pointed out that while European accounts usually reduce the contribution of Arabic thinkers to European philosophy, treating them as couriers safeguarding and forwarding European philosophical treasures, in fact Arabic thinkers (*falasifa*) were philosophers themselves, not merely translating words but providing erudite commentary and paving the way for critical enquiry.[38]

This story is told very differently by the European scholar Umberto Eco. For him Averroes (Ibn Rushd) is a "blatant example of cultural misunderstanding" because he wrote his commentary on Aristotle's *Poetics* knowing no Greek and "hardly any" Syriac. He read Aristotle, says Eco, through a tenth-century Arabic translation of a Syriac translation of the Greek original. "To increase this mish-mash," he adds, "Aristotle's *Poetics* was accessed in Europe in a Latin translation of Averroes' commentary to the *Poetics* in Arabic."[39] What Eco sees as a mish-mash was a massive and complex project of translation in the twelfth century located on "a bridge between languages" in which texts "began to flow in various directions" among Greek, Arabic, Hebrew, and Latin,

[36] "Averroes" being the name for Ibn Rushd in the Christian world.

[37] Hoskote and Trojanow 2012.

[38] Ibid.: 95.

[39] Eco 2003: 85.

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and into the emerging languages of Castilian, French, and Italian. "A special process of collaborative translation . . . was developed: usually a Jew (occasionally a Muslim) translated the Arabic text orally into Romance or Castilian, and then a Christian rendered this oral version into written Latin."[40] Jewish interpreters and Latin scribes also translated Greek originals and Arabic commentaries. These twelfth-century translations, cumulatively a massive philosophical project, Eco can only see as a failure.

Jonardon Ganeri outlines the extraordinary ways in which ideas travelled across these spaces: Schopenhauer read the Latin rendering of a Persian translation of the Upanishadic idea that the self is not an object; through Schopenhauer the idea reached Wittgenstein. The Buddha's ideas about the absence of self and emptiness reached China, from where through Jesuit missionaries "they entered that 'arsenal' of the Enlightenment," Pierre Bayle's *Dictionary*, a book "plundered by many Enlightenment thinkers," including David Hume.[41]

An instance of such a transmission from another part of the globe is presented by David Graeber and David Wengrow, who argue that the idea of the desirability of equality was brought to Europe through the encounter of Europeans with the indigenous peoples of North America. Specifically, Baron de Lahontan, a French army officer who took part in several campaigns in Canada in the late seventeenth century, became fluent in the indigenous languages of Algonkian and Wendat, and had several conversations with political figures. Among these was Kandiaronk, a Wendat warrior, strategist, and thinker, four conversations with whom de Lahontan published in 1703. Kandiaronk, who had visited France, offered a severe critique of European civilisation and of the deep inequality he witnessed there. This indigenous critique, as reproduced by de Lahontan, sparked debates and discussions in multiple languages in Europe, fuelling the works of philosophers such as Rousseau.[42]

[40] Hoskote and Trojanow 2012: 71.
[41] Ganeri 2007: 7.
[42] Graeber and Wengrow 2021: 78–102.

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Evidently, West and non-West (or North and South) are not independent spaces of thought.

"Other" Conceptual Traditions and the Question of Translation

Our third and most important task is to identify concepts *internal* to other knowledge traditions through which intellectual conversations take place. What kinds of debates have happened, and what have been the key issues in them? It is equally important, when doing this, to take care not to treat the non-West as a homogeneous space. It is necessary to recognise and make visible internal structures of power, and voices of dissent and debate within non-Western knowledge formations. In what terms is criticism conducted and dissent expressed within these formations?

The issues of heterogeneity, power, and dissent within the non-West/global South are not generally addressed by postcolonial or decolonial thinking, where the objects of critique remain empire/coloniality. However, in this book we will look at debates and contentions within the South in order to take seriously the heterogeneity and power relations internal to the South.

Translation as paradigmatic of any conversation, and every act of translation as shot through with power relations—this understanding is now very much part of a certain common sense arising from a formidable body of scholarship. One point of departure from here is in the direction of seeing translation as a hermeneutic project of understanding, an ethical project of destabilising the Self through engagement with the Other. Another is in the direction of recognising constitutive misreading as underlying any project of translation. A third critical aspect of translation is seeing it as a project of rendering things intelligible. What are the limits to this project? Who seeks intelligibility? Who evades it, or simply, in daily quotidian ways, bypasses its operations? Is the quest for mutual intelligibility implicit in all social interaction? But, more critically, is this very assumption of the possibility

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of mutual intelligibility complicit in projects of power? I will offer one illustration here of heterogeneity within the global South and how translation can act as a mode of exercising power.

In January 2012 the artist Subodh Gupta was one of the performers listed in an evening of performance art titled "Spirit Eaters," organised by Khoj, an artist-led organisation in Delhi. His performance lasted about thirty minutes, during which he remained in the audience. In the video which I saw,[43] the performance began with three men—from their clothes evidently lower-middle class—stepping up to a stage. They did not seem poor but were certainly not of the same class or cultural background as the audience, which was also visible. The three men sat in a row on the floor of the stage, cross-legged, before three steel plates and glasses. (Gupta is best known for enormous art installations using traditional steel vessels.) After they had seated themselves, two other men stepped silently on to the stage, one after the other, to serve on the plates mounds of what looked like beaten rice (*chidwa*) followed by large dollops of curd. The three men sat looking silently at the food for a moment, then raised their voices in an indecipherable chant, then dug their entire right palms into the mass of *chidwa* and curd, lifting huge sloppy handfuls almost up to their mouths, and then let it all drop back onto their plates. At this point one of the men looked at Subodh Gupta in the audience and started to argue loudly in a Bihari accent and vocabulary not immediately comprehensible to the largely non-Bihari audience. From the audience Gupta responded by muttering in Hindi "*chalo shuru karo, shuru karo*" (go on, start off). Once again the chant was resumed by the men on the stage, once again the food taken up to their mouths was dropped, once again there was argumentation, and once again "*chalo chalo, shuru karo*." This process was repeated several times, and it soon became clear that some sort of bargaining was

[43] I visited the Khoj Studio, where I was able to see a recording of the whole performance. I am grateful for that opportunity because I missed the live performance, but Khoj is in no way responsible for my interpretation of it. A brief one-minute clip of the performance has been put up by Khoj: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T-a7GuSHIYA.

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going on. The spokesperson of the eaters demanded, initially, a lakh of rupees for each of them; but gradually, with repeated urgings to continue eating, he came down to a lakh for all three, before finally settling for an even smaller amount—which happened when Gupta appeared to become irritated and said "*toh mat kha*" (well then, don't eat, leave).

The bargaining was amusing and soon engaged the audience, who were laughing at the repartee and who applauded when the eaters lost the battle and started eating in earnest. The man who did most of the speaking for the eaters was flamboyant and good-humoured, and appeared to be utterly relaxed during the performance, while the one who appeared to be the youngest did not speak at all, looking embarrassed and shy.

After the negotiations were done, the remaining eight or ten minutes of the performance were entirely taken up by the men eating silently—very sloppily, using their entire palms (not just the fingers, in the style of most North Indians). They smeared their mouths and moustaches with food, dropping some on the floor and around their plates—first the *chidwa* and curd, and then a succession of huge amounts of rotis, curry, dry vegetable, and sweets. All the while, the upper-class audience, well clad for a Delhi winter, watched attentively, or else with much murmuring and giggling.

The Khoj site describes the performance this way:

> Spirit Eaters explores notions of identity, cultural specificity, aspiration and excess that preoccupy Subodh Gupta's art making. De-contextualizing the presentation of specific cultural practices, Spirit Eaters harks to his childhood experience of watching *kanthababas*, a group of paid, professional eaters in Bihar who rapidly consume vast amounts of food for the appeasement of the souls of ancestors and elders. The performance is simultaneously repulsive, vulgar, amusing and awe-inspiring.[44]

I saw a video of the performance made via two cameras that Khoj used to record the evening, not the performance itself. From detailed

[44] Khoj 2012.

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conversations with many who did see it live, I gathered that the information above had not been accessed by most viewers before the event, and the general feelings reported were of bewilderment and deep discomfort with the class politics of a performance involving men, clearly poorer than the audience, who were bargained down before they could eat. Many also wondered at the strangely messy manner of eating, so unlike the normal eating practices of most Indians, including the poor. It seemed to many, then, that the performance objectified economic and cultural difference in an elite art space. As one artist, disturbed by the performance, said to me in a personal conversation, "This kind of collapsing of two worlds in a performance space could have been interesting, but the terms of the collapsing are important." She was suggesting, it seemed to me, that there was no mutuality in the collapsing, their world was simply collapsed into ours.

It was only gradually, in newspaper interviews, that the context emerged, and, as the Khoj website later made clear, Gupta had deliberately in his performance—or, one should say, in the performance he produced—de-contextualised the practice of mourning in Bihari Hindu society. The terms "vulgar," "repulsive," "amusing," and "awe-inspiring" on the Khoj website are noteworthy, while another newspaper reported the amount of food consumed as "obscene" and the performance as "simultaneously brilliant and bizarre."[45] RoseLee Goldberg, an American art historian and curator, said in an interview:

> I loved Subodh Gupta's piece. Beginning with physical objects, he brings in the references of rituals, history of class and politics in his work . . . The work was funny and beautiful . . . This is what is performance art. Here is a visual artist who is working in time and space but with such beautiful objects. And whatever he set up for the viewers to see was exquisite—the three eaters, vessels and six screens placed at different places on the terrace for people to watch it comfortably. The angles and the frames showing the hands of the eaters, the lighting . . . it was all really nice. I learnt so much about a place and its culture in just 20 minutes.[46]

[45] Nath 2012.
[46] Tripathi 2012.

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What is fascinating in this whole story is the process by which an embedded local practice is decontextualised (and secularised) in a manner that enables it to be translated, or rendered intelligible entirely—and only—in cosmopolitan terms: "obscene" amounts of food, "repulsive," "amusing," "funny and beautiful," "bizarre." What is missing is precisely what Goldberg claims to see—"references of history and class," and specifically because it is de-contextualised. One wonders what she or any viewer learnt about the place and its culture—that was exactly what the performance was *not* about. One did not even learn the names of the performers who enacted a ritual familiar to them, but in a space that was utterly alien, and in a context that could have held no meaning for them. I wondered if they were professional actors rather than traditional *kanthababas*, but had they been actors their names would have been in the Khoj catalogue and website, or they would have been interviewed too. Not one newspaper spoke to any of them—they remain unknowable, except in a language that is ours alone, not theirs. It is because they performed the same role that steel utensils play in Gupta's work that outside of the performance they remain anonymous and unknown.[47]

I should add that Gupta himself had positioned six cameras to record the performance, and in a later interview referred to "Spirit Eaters" as "video art." I can hazard a guess that the video Gupta produced (which I have not seen) will not be a simple recording but an art object in itself which may well escape the terms of my critique.[48] The afterlife of installations and performances as videos, photographic stills, catalogues, and so on is another register of translation that distances even further the "real" objects involved from the contexts into which they were brought by the art work. This can, at least potentially, be a radical move to question context itself, but the initial performance lingers spectrally over all its afterlives.

[47] It is possible that by now their names have been recorded for posterity, but they had not been at the time of the performance, nor for some years afterwards.

[48] "Spirit Eaters" has since then become the title of a catalogue produced for Subodh Gupta's solo exhibition in Switzerland (Hirsch 2013).

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What I am trying to argue from the instance above is that we must listen in on conversations *internal* to cultures as well as *between* the West and non-West. Such attention centrally foregrounds the question of language and translation. It is useful here to consider an argument made by Peter Winch, who, writing about the relationship between language and reality, makes a distinction between two kinds of "languages."[49] One is a set of linguistic conventions, such as English, French, and so on. When one knows a specific language and wants to learn another, one remains within the same world, learning English names for the objects and experiences one already knows in French. Thus, when one learns to command, say, in English (to say, "Do this"), one is not learning to command per se. But the differences between the language of science/modernity and those of other worldviews are not of this order. (Winch uses the example of the magic practices of an African tribe, the Azande, as studied by the anthropologist E. E. Evans-Pritchard.) When one learns mathematics, say, or science, one learns a whole worldview, a set of beliefs, of which the language is only an expression. Learning to prove something mathematically is not simply learning a new way of expressing something already known in another language; it means learning a new action that can *only* be performed in that language.

From this perspective we can understand the intellectual predicament outlined by the Guinean scholar Siba Grovogui—that it is impossible to talk in the African languages of many concepts common within the discipline of International Studies, the reason being that these African political societies are radically different. In Guinea, for example, there have been "stateless" or acephalous societies among whom the notion of "Great Power responsibility," for instance, makes no sense. And of course the term "stateless societies" already assumes the modern state to be the norm. Another comparable problem arises in translating across African languages with their different histories.[50]

[49] Winch 1987.
[50] Grovogui 2013.

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There is also the question of the internal hierarchy of languages. G. N. Devy uses what he calls the "traditional Indian term" *bhasha*—a word deriving from Sanskrit meaning "language"—to refer to modern Indian languages, thus distinguishing them from Sanskrit, which is not the spoken language of any community while being the only language in which Brahminical rites are conducted. So, power relations operate between language communities at different levels—between English and the Indian languages (although English is also one of the two official languages of India); between the claims of Sanskrit—put forward by Hindu nationalism as the oldest "Indian" language—and Tamil, which is claimed to be older;[51] and between on the one hand the *bhasha*s (of which there are many more than the twenty-two state-recognised languages) and Hindi and English on the other.[52] Indeed, as Devy points out, even the Sanskrit heritage has "percolated into the modern Indian consciousness after being filtered through bhasha literature and bhasha culture."[53]

The colonial experience produced one set of complexities; another has been produced by the post-Independence politics of the ruling elites—who have for many decades been English-speaking, and urban upper-class and caste—followed by the rise of the upper-caste and upper-class elites of the Hindi heartland. Positing Hindi as the national language is part of Hindu nationalist politics, and the claim is bitterly contested. Only 26 percent of Indians speak Hindi, and even this percentage is derived by placing under the label of Hindi at least eight full-fledged languages that are claimed to be "dialects" of Hindi.[54]

Similar histories as well as power relations between multiple language communities across the global South are being disentangled,

[51] Sulochana 2019. Both these are among the twenty-two languages officially recognised in India.

[52] An analysis of the 2011 census showed that in India there are 121 languages spoken by 10,000 or more people; and that there are more than 19,500 languages spoken as mother tongues: Press Trust of India 2018.

[53] Devy 2009: 52.

[54] *The Hindu* Data 2019.

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played out, and lived through. Sri Lanka and South Africa provide just two of many examples.[55]

Translation is thus critical to the enterprise of thinking *from* the global South. Here I use an important distinction made by Anup Dhar in the context of psychoanalysis—between doing psychoanalysis *in* India and doing psychoanalysis *from* India.[56] In my understanding, the first indicates specificity; the second, location. Specificity is important to demarcate, but it must not remain at the level of marking difference from the norm. *From* a location, on the other hand, can be theorised in more general terms, recognising specificity but making comparability key and finding resonances across contexts. Perhaps this is why the Japanese philosopher Naoki Sakai sees translation as having to assume a "heterolingual" mode of address, which assumes a "non-aggregate community of foreigners." That is, translation must assume mutual "foreignness" between two language communities. Rather, what translation tends to assume is a "homolingual" address based on the normalcy of reciprocal and transparent communication in a homogeneous medium. In a heterolingual mode of address, the addressee could respond with varying degrees of comprehension, including missing the signification completely.[57] The heterolingual address thus assumes that every utterance can fail to communicate, because heterogeneity is inherent in every medium, and therefore translation is endless.[58]

All knowledge production must start with one's location, with the questions about the world that puzzle you from your vantage point. A comparative dimension is inescapable—issues in other parts of the world seem at one level familiar to those in one's own, but they get articulated in unfamiliar ways; concerns specific to a location nevertheless resonate, echoing predicaments faced in some other place or at some other time. It is, after all, not just a question of translating words from

[55] Coperahewa 2019 for Sri Lanka; Mekoa 2020 for South Africa.
[56] Dhar 2018.
[57] Sakai 1997: 4–5.
[58] Ibid.: 8.

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one language to another, it is about engaging with entire ways of life and modes of thinking arising from different trajectories of time and space.

A striking instance of translation as appropriation is the application of "gender" to African societies, for example.

African feminists have pointed out how Western feminism has universalised the concepts of "woman" and "patriarchy," failing to see the actual, very different structures of societal power in operation. Oyeronke Oyewumi argues that gender as a category did not operate in any significant way in pre-colonial Yoruba and many other African cultures.[59] Western post-Enlightenment philosophy privileges appearance ("seeing"), and therefore the body, and assumes certain structures of social difference based on these. Differences not visible to the eye in the same way are not understood. Oyewumi cites a study on the Ga traders of Ghana that refers to them as "market women," drawing all its conclusions from this foundational premise even when the identity of traders in West African societies is not gender-specific. Through her own work Oyewumi argues that, among the Yoruba, seniority is the defining axis of hierarchy, not gender.

Nkiru Nzegwu, through a critique of Martha Nussbaum and Ifi Amadiume, shows how the "metaphysics of gender" erodes cultural specificity and the historicity of societies such as that of the Igbo.[60] Even Amadiume, a Nigerian scholar—as she struggles to produce a culturally grounded account of the position of women—is caught up in this metaphysics, says Nzegwu. Gender identity in Igbo society, in Nzegwu's account, is "a flexible, fluid, state of being, and is tied to social roles and functions that demand deliberative rationality from females," and here too the principle of organisation is seniority.[61] Nzegwu argues that Nussbaum derives her entire understanding of women and womanliness in African societies by her (mis)reading of some lines from Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, while Amadiume too, though

[59] Oyewumi 1997.
[60] Nzegwu 2004.
[61] Ibid.: 563.

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much better informed than Nussbaum, even as she recognises the fluidity of gender roles, is trapped in the metaphysics of the binary gender model because she describes non-normative gender roles in binary terms—as for example "male daughters and female husbands."

Another important feminist voice from Africa is Sylvia Tamale, whose *Decolonization and Afro-Feminism* (2020) sees as a key decolonial move the assertion of a reworked Pan-Africanism that is both decolonial and Afro-feminist. Tamale is critical of the Western human rights paradigm based on the fragmented individual. She proposes instead the African philosophy of Ubuntu (from the Zulu language) which thinks in interconnected terms and is better geared to social justice.[62] Ubuntu is far from "I think therefore I am," and is rather "I am because you are"—a person is a person through other people. This idea echoes a theme characteristic of thought in the global South—the discomfort or lack of identification with the individual as assumed by Western modernity.[63] The above is only a brief account of a dense discussion among African scholars, offered here to indicate what it might mean to listen to internal conversations seriously.

Among feminists in Latin America, too, the term "gender" has been seen as problematic, but for a different reason. In an essay on Latin American feminist philosophy and politics, Stephanie Rivera Berruz states that gender entered the region with the translation of Gayle Rubin's scholarship into Spanish. The term was translated into Spanish as *género*, whose direct translation is more akin to "genre" or "species." Latin American feminists have contested the legitimacy of gender as a category of feminist analysis, for they see it as depoliticised and appropriated by states and funding agencies. These feminists have generally used the concept of patriarchy, preferring it because "it offered a framework grounded in ideological and socioeconomic conditions that allowed for articulating the cause of women's oppression."[64] The

[62] Tamale 2020.

[63] To this we will return in chap. 4, in our discussion on psychoanalysis from the global South.

[64] Berruz 2018.

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interlinked ideas of decoloniality and translation are central to Latin American feminist thought, as translation is "politically and theoretically indispensable for feminist, anti-racist, decolonial, and anti-imperial alliances."[65] Drawing on Sonia Alvarez, Berruz draws our attention to the understanding that difference emerges as a rich terrain from which to engage others. It is evident that this "difference" refers to differences internal to feminism too, not merely between the hemispheres. This understanding involves accepting degrees of incommensurability. However, the idea is not to abandon translation but to "recognize the complexity and diversity of speaking positions with which we engage." The term *transloca* has been coined to indicate both the processes of translation ("trans") and the material effects of location ("loca")—"the transloca highlights multiple dimensions that shape conditions of difference."[66]

Berruz discusses a critical intervention in contemporary Latin American feminisms—a volume in Spanish rooted in decolonial epistemic practices[67]—which "reconceives Latin America as Abya Yala, the term used by Kuna (Indigenous people of Panamá and Colombia) for what colonizers termed 'America'. Abya Yala translates as 'land of full maturity' or 'land of vital blood' and is taken as a methodological starting point for theorising ways of knowing through a decolonial lens."[68] In this understanding decolonisation cannot occur without de-patriarchalisation. The project of decolonial feminisms is not framed by "privileging one category of analysis over another (e.g. race over gender); rather, it proposes a systemic critique focused on the conceptual framework of dominant Latin American feminisms, calling attention to the ways it has reified classism, sexism, racism, and heteronormativity."[69]

[65] Alvarez 2014: 1.

[66] Ibid.: 4.

[67] The Spanish volume is edited by Yuderkys Espinosa Miñoso, Diana Gómez Correal, and Karina Ochoa Muñoz.

[68] Berruz 2018.

[69] Ibid.

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To conclude this discussion on translation, we may remind ourselves that translation can work in two ways. First there is the way in which the world has experienced translation since the fifteenth century in the Americas, and since the eighteenth century in other parts of the world—that is, as the process by which the language of the powerful can translate and render legible the languages of the powerless into the terms of the language of power. The other recognises processes under way since the twelfth century in which mutual equality is assumed, and in which there has been both a mutual flow of intelligibility as well as potential misreadings that could be productive. As the discussion in the previous two sections indicates, these two processes are not exclusive and clearly delimited. For when the tangled *jiti* of different spaces and times collides, we cannot say in advance whether power or mutuality will be at work.[70]

Secularism as Misdirection— A Map of the Book

As indicated at the start, this book attempts to show how the smoke-and-mirrors effect produced by the magic term "secularism"—the sound-and-light show that it produces—misdirects us and takes us away from crucial factors, while making certain other objects hypervisible.

In Chapter 1 I start with two key instances of misleading hypervisibility—"religion" and "women." Here I explore the intertwined issues around religion, state, women, and secularism. On the one hand there is the assumption—in debates around secularism in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries—that a specific field, separate from politics and the state, recognisable as religion, is self-evident, and that modern politics is manifested in establishing a wall between the two. On the

[70] An important intervention in the attempt to start conversations among concepts internal to the global South while simultaneously exploring their potential for travelling more universally is a volume in which twenty scholars from across the world identify concepts in sixteen languages across Asia, Africa, the Arab world, and South America. As the editor of the volume puts it, "They explore the entailments of a word while suggesting that these have implications for the humanities and social sciences everywhere" (Menon 2022: 6).

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other hand there is the assumption that religion is made visible primarily on the bodies of women; and that the process of defining religion and religious freedom is to be conducted through indicating specific ways in which women's social status and roles indicate modernity, tradition, democracy, and secularism—or whatever value is at stake in a particular controversy. Both these assumptions are sought to be unpacked in this chapter.

The next two chapters focus specifically on India, hoping to draw out implications for wider contexts. Chapter 2 continues to discuss religion and how it is produced under specific circumstances. By examining ascendant Hindu supremacism as a state project in India, it tries to understand the ways in which the construction of religion functions under conditions of majoritarianism. In addition, three key elements in the co-construction of religion and the state are considered—the Essential Religious Practices test; the idea of religious institutions/deities as juristic persons; and the state's role in managing the finances of religious institutions.

If religion and women are hypervisibilised by the discourse of secularism, other features and objects are rendered invisible. Chapter 3 focuses on one such feature, caste, as it operates in a particular space. Caste, one of the critical elements in this region, is obscured by the celebration and practice of secularism. The chapter examines the millennia-old project of Brahminism in this territory, now called India, of producing a community that abides by the caste system and accepts Brahminism as the dominant ideology. Starting from roughly the Puranas (composed *circa* fourth to eleventh centuries) and continuing into twentieth-century ideologues of Hindutva such as V. D. Savarkar, and further into the Hindutva of the twenty-first century—the rich heterogeneity of beliefs and practices across the subcontinent (those which cannot be classified as Muslim, Christian, Jewish, or Parsi) have been sought to be assimilated into Brahminism, or marginalised, or wiped out.[71] This diversity of practices gets labelled as Hindu only because

[71] "Hindutva" is the self-assumed name of the modern project of Hindu majoritarianism in India. The term simply means "Hinduness" and was used from the nineteenth century to denote a cultural identity. From the 1920s it was popularised by

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the legal definition of Hindus is one that gathers up all those who are not Muslim, Christian, Parsi, or Jewish into its fold. Thus, what is often celebrated as the rich diversity, inclusivity, and tolerance of Hinduism is merely the massive and age-old assimilationist project of Brahminism which has still not succeeded in making "Hindus." The grid of secularism that focuses on "religious" identity enables the elision of caste, and via the elision the legal and social normalising of the label "Hinduism." This label enables Hindutva politics to claim Hindus as the majority in India, which is the basis of Hindu nationalist and Hindu supremacist politics. We need to recognise that India is a collection of minorities, not a "Hindu majority" country. This book argues that the modern project of Hindutva is only the current phase of a process that began with the advent of Vedic people into this land mass. Of course, the rise and growth of an ideology called Hindutva in the last hundred years is a new development in the history of Brahminism, and this project has been extensively studied, but in isolation from an older history. Here I focus on Hindutva's continuity with the millennia-old project rather than the breaks. Rejecting the claim of Hindutva that Hindus are the majority requires mainstream Left, secular, and feminist politics to reorient itself through a serious engagement with Dalit Bahujan scholarship and life worlds.

Chapter 4 addresses another element obscured by the grid of secularism—the non-secular self in the global South—non-individuated, non-rational, and drawing on multiple spiritual sources for its sustenance. This chapter takes us on the journey of the modern secular discipline of psychoanalysis in various parts of the global South, and the manner in which it is reshaped here from the lifetime of Freud onwards.

It is interesting to note that although some postsecular arguments draw our attention to psychoanalysis as enabling a questioning of the rationality of political subjectivity, it is only to reassert Freud and

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V. D. Savarkar as the ideology asserting that the land mass now called India is essentially and eternally Hindu. Hindutva thus refers to the political project of Hindu nationalism in India.

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psychoanalysis as expressing some kind of universal human condition. Rosi Braidotti, for instance, sees psychoanalysis as the "missing link" between "feminism, religious activism and the postsecular condition."[72] She draws our attention to two aspects of psychic life that psychoanalysis lays stress on—"the vitality of drives, including the all-powerful death drive, whose entropic force is central to human desire," and "the crucial importance of totemic and iconic figures as fundamental structures of psychic order and social cohesion."[73] This draws all of humanity into one frame, in which radically different philosophies on life, living, death, and afterlife—in the non-Christian as well as other parts of the world—are all assumed to be expressive of the entropic death drive identified by Freud. Totems in Braidotti's reading can be images as wide-ranging as Nelson Mandela, Angela Davis, Elvis Presley, and Princess Diana, all "residues of religious worship practices,"[74] implying both a progression of beliefs in time (from religion to non-religion), and the assumption of an easy legibility for the Western/Northern scholar, across contexts, of all practices of worship involving images and icons.

However, consider another way of thinking across contexts. Writing on the Ayoreo of South America, Benno Glauser points to the intrinsic incommensurability of the two universes—"our knowledge is fragmented, representing a fragmented worldview, we use abstractions that reduce what is being talked about to an object. The Ayoreo discourse in turn always refers to an entire reality in its wholeness, and speaks about concrete events, people, phenomena, very often using images with a sensual quality that abstractions don't have."[75] Glauser finally had to recognise that it was an "absurd pretension" to think that he could write about his conversations with the Ayoreo in methodological terms acceptable to the academy. "We discover that speaking to indigenous peoples forces us to abandon our own method."[76]

[72] Braidotti 2008: 10–11.
[73] Ibid.: 11.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Glauser 2011: 23.
[76] Ibid.: 23–4.

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Our engagement with psychoanalysis will thus not be reasserting how psychoanalysis speaks to the "human" condition. Through a study of how psychoanalysis was interpreted and how it travelled in the global South, we will find that, in comparison to all the other forms of modern post-Enlightenment knowledge that entered the global South, psychoanalysis was most committed to drawing on specific locations in the project of understanding the self. In doing so, psychoanalysis across the global South offered fundamental challenges to Freud even in his own lifetime, rejecting any idea of a decontextualised human, and often transforming the practice beyond recognition from its incarnation in the land of its birth.

The final element obscured by secular discourse that this book will consider is capitalism, discussed in Chapter 5. The invocation of secularism enables an uncritical acceptance of the violence of capitalism on people and nature as the historically inescapable way into modernity—where religious sectarianism is supposed to no longer hold sway. Disenchanted now, land, forests, rivers, and all of nature are available to be commoditised. This is the journey from the darkness of pagan beliefs and religious sectarianism into the light of secular modernity. Thus, the project of secular modernity emerged alongside capitalist transformation in the West, and in post-Independence India too is intimately tied to a notion of "development" predicated on the large-scale sacrifice of the interests of specific communities in order to serve the greater interest of the "Indian citizen."

Apart from the dispossession of communities from resources and land, a related critical factor obscured by the grid of secularism is that of environment/ecology. Since much of the resistance to capitalist transformation is conducted by indigenous peoples whose lands are rich in minerals, the resistance is often conducted in terms that sacralise nature and draw on indigenous spiritualities. Secular environmentalism is often unable to relate to this mode of resistance to capital. On the other hand in India the political doctrine of Hindutva (as opposed to indigenous and other spiritualities) has a dual relationship to capitalism, as we will see.

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Two specific instances from India will be discussed in Chapter 5 to illustrate the larger argument: (a) the controversy over the construction of a shipping canal, the Sethusamudram Project; and (b) the state-led process of ensuring individual land rights for women, now part of a World Bank agenda. I argue that the invocation of land rights for the poor and for women acts as a cover for capitalist transformation of the commons. In India, land rights for women come under the Personal Laws of religious communities, and the boundaries between "secular" capitalism and "religious" personal laws become blurred. There is a wider global recognition of this process too, and we will move outwards from India to get a glimpse of that as well.

The last two chapters map resistances and the assertion of new and other worlds. They look at creative resistances to the anti-democratic and capitalist state, whether by invoking the Constitution (in India and Chile), or through larger global philosophies such as degrowth.

The argument of this book is not that "secularism" should be abandoned, but that secularism is not in itself a positive value and nor is its meaning self-evident. Secularism can serve majoritarian, anti-minority politics, and capitalist transformation, but it can equally be invoked to sustain democratic politics that respects heterogeneity, social justice, and ecological concerns. In India, the understanding of secularism as *sarva dharma sama bhava* alone is legitimate from the perspective that this book adopts, and we see the reassertion of this meaning in militant struggles like the Indian farmers' movement of 2020–1. This movement's central concerns were capitalist transformation of the agrarian sector and climate change, but the questions of caste, gender, and minority rights were also very much in the foreground.[77] We will see how anti-capitalist politics globally inhabits very heterogeneous spaces, facing up to internal dissent and differences that erupt within. These movements coalesce around different kinds of values that are locally produced and inflected but which are, at the same time, in some sort

[77] We will not be discussing this movement, but see Sandhu 2021 for a detailed account.

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of conversation with one another across the globe. If secularism is invoked at all in these movements, it is never in the sense of separation of state and religion, but in a more people-oriented understanding of how to live with difference. The overriding value being asserted in these movements appears to be democracy, with all its faults. But democracy too is reimagined in more direct terms, distanced in particular from political parties which have over the twentieth century appropriated and ventriloquised "the people."

Is it possible to think of democracy radically differently in the post-Covid twenty-first century? What role does secularism have to play in it, if any? Chapters 6 and 7 will consider these questions and their implications.

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