

Anticolonialism and the Decolonization of Political Theory

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ABSTRACT This essay surveys some recent attempts to decolonize political theory and engage with non-Western political thinkers and traditions, especially anticolonialism. The authors' concern is that these engagements remain too centered on Western political thought as the object of critique and analysis. Through a reading of Gandhi and Fanon, the authors argue that anticolonialism, while engaged in a critique of the West, also had a positive or reconstructive theoretical agenda, one that has been taken up in creative ways in postcolonial political thought. Taking cues from the work of Sudipta Kaviraj, Partha Chatterjee, and Mahmood Mamdani, the essay proposes an alternative mode of decolonizing political theory that takes as its central aim the generation of theory from the study of postcolonial politics. It argues for a historically attuned and comparative approach to postcolonial politics that aims to innovate new concepts and reanimate inherited ones. From this perspective, decolonizing political theory is less a recurring critique of Eurocentrism than an effort to shift the terrain of theorizing and thereby reinvigorate the practice of political theory as such.

KEYWORDS anticolonial thought, Eurocentrism, postcolonial theory, Gandhi, Fanon

Decolonization has become a critical watchword across the humanities and social sciences. It challenges disciplines to attend to their implication in histories of imperial domination and racial hierarchy and to reckon with the continuing ideological imprint of this past. Political theory has joined this effort at decolonizing in several promising modalities, many of which have focused on rethinking and expanding the canon of political thought. Arguably more than any other discipline, political theory is defined by a relatively stable set of venerated texts, often explicitly denoted as the “Western” tradition.¹ Revisions to this canon have proceeded along two fronts. Firstly, there is a widespread call to open the canon to include anticolonial and non-Western thinkers, as well as more critical and counterhegemonic voices.² This has been relatively successful and, we suspect, will have long-

lasting effects. At the institutional level, for instance, courses that teach core texts of political thought now regularly include works such as W. E. B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk*, M. K. Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj*, and Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*.³

A second line of revision has been driven by explorations of the historical and conceptual links between imperialism and political theory. A generation of scholarship has highlighted the ways in which questions of empire and expansion, and more broadly European encounters with the non-European world, were central themes in the history of political thought. Empire was shown to have provided a formative context for conceptual development, for example, in generating modern theories of sovereignty and property. Such work also became a key conduit for delineating and critically examining how a range of political ideologies—and their categories and concepts—enabled and justified European domination. In this vein, debates focusing on the relationship between liberalism and empire, and the legacies of liberal imperialism, were especially fruitful for questioning the particularistic anthropological and sociological assumptions that underwrite purportedly universal ideals.⁴ Interrogating the epistemic biases and occlusions of modern political thought has motivated a broad swathe of contemporary political theorists, situated within a range of traditions and debates from critical theory to global justice, to wrestle with the political and philosophical legacies of colonialism. And in that effort, contemporary political theory has also begun a serious dialogue with, and incorporated theoretical insights from, anticolonial thought and postcolonial theory.⁵

One potent rubric that draws together these various lines of revision is a shared interest in diagnosing the Eurocentric character of the field and offering remedies for its overcoming. This arguably is the most prominent way of articulating what it means to decolonize political theory. This critical move is salutary and compelling, and it has initiated probing discussions of the limitations, blind spots, and exclusions of the purportedly universal theories, categories, and narratives of Western political thought. It has motivated calls for more inclusion and recognition of non-European thought, and generated important political and philosophical debates about how to chart and address the ongoing legacies of empire and racial domination today. At the same time, we worry that the overriding concern with Eurocentrism is indicative of a problem, a persistent limit of these approaches, namely that they tend to focus on Western political thought as the sole object of critique and analysis.

Such a strategy of internal critique is perhaps understandable in scholarship on empire and political theory, which has focused on recontextualizing canonical debates and thinkers by elucidating the imperial context of the formation and foundation of modern political thought. But the dominance of this framing is also apparent in studies of non-Western thinkers. When anticolonial and postcolonial

thinkers are incorporated and engaged with, their political and theoretical insights are very often reduced to the critique of European political thought and practices. In the process we lose track of what arguably was the primary context and aspiration of anticolonial argument: an attempt to reconstruct viable political futures in the aftermath of European domination. Likewise, even as postcolonial theory's critique of European thought has come to be more generously cited, the alternative concepts it proposes for the study of postcolonial politics are rarely taken up.

While the critique of Eurocentrism is noteworthy and important, it should not exhaust what it means to decolonize political theory. Our hope is to advance and pluralize the project of decolonizing political theory by suggesting ways of generating political theory from and for the non-European world, that is, by imagining political theory of a truly global reach. To do so, we begin by returning to some key themes of anticolonial thought to remind us of some of its theoretical projects and purposes. Our contention is that there is much to learn from its methods and arguments to aid the project of decolonizing theory and, in turn, to offer a path toward the rejuvenation of political theory writ large. We also hope to correct the one-sided reception of anticolonialism as simply a critique of the West. Indeed it might be useful to think of anticolonial thought as having two connected aims — one critical and another reconstructive. To highlight these aims across differing political projects, we read together two classic, if often opposed, figures, Gandhi and Fanon.

Much of the critical work of anticolonialism was, indeed, imbricated in revealing the false, compromised, or corrupted universalisms of Western civilization and the hypocrisy of its self-understanding as the beacon of enlightened humanism. The record of colonial violence, exploitation, and domination revealed the limits and fragilities of the West's commitment to freedom and, especially, its capacity to be the agent of its universal realizability. But it is worth remembering that this critical project, exposing the complicity of Western universalism with violence, was not just an argument with and for the West. As is the case with Gandhi and Fanon, very often it was an argument with and for their colonized compatriots; it was a mode of self-critique meant to diagnose and break the collective enthrallment with the West.

As the field of political theory begins to engage more routinely with anticolonial thought, we should remember the importance of the specific context or problem-space of anticolonial argument, a context that shapes and clarifies the nature and purpose of its theoretical interventions.⁶ The attunement to context is all too rare; more often, the critical insights of anticolonialism are registered as abstract and isolated conclusions. But the structure, location, and audience of critique matters. For instance, the anticolonial critique of Eurocentrism concerned decolonizing the mind; its aim was to undo the ingrained moral psychology and habituated practices of colonialism through which the colonized reproduced their own subordination. Moreover,

this critical gesture was meant to clear the ground and make possible a reconstructive argument. This was to make possible an alternative universal, whether that normative ideal was characterized as a truer humanism, a more liberatory politics, or forms of freedom that did not require the domination of others. What is also distinctively anti-colonial in this form of utopian politics was its situated method. Anticolonial thinkers tried to pinpoint the cultural and institutional sites—immanent to the experience of the colonized—that could generate new emancipatory futures. Crucially, this was simultaneously an analytic and normative endeavor.

After delineating what we take to be the distinctive features of anticolonialism as a genre of political theory, we contrast this to the ways in which these insights have been taken up in contemporary political theory. Here we focus on some of the prominent ways critical theory has tried to address the philosophical challenges of Eurocentrism. We explore the seminal contributions of Susan Buck-Morss, Amy Allen, and James Tully in this regard, and consider how they reckon with the problem of empire as they offer new models of universality. We argue that these attempts, while salutary, remain either too abstract or too self-referential; they often try to correct the problem within the terms of Western political thought itself. Decolonizing becomes a form of intellectual self-critique and self-cleansing, which seems to proceed at some distance from concrete sites of political praxis, especially sites beyond the West.

The article concludes by presenting alternative ways to decolonize political theory, by turning to the ways in which postcolonial political theory has developed important strands of anticolonial argument. By examining the work of Sudipta Kaviraj, Partha Chatterjee, and Mahmood Mamdani, we excavate and recommend two strategies that aim to innovate forms of analysis and to reanimate inherited concepts through a historical and comparative approach to the study of postcolonial politics. While these postcolonial theorists are situated in a problem-space distinct from the anticolonial context of Fanon and Gandhi, they take up the latter's situated mode of theorizing and extend the critical and reconstructive ambitions of anticolonial thought. Elaborating conceptual categories from the specificity of postcolonial predicaments, they also identify normative and political horizons immanent to postcolonial politics. From this perspective, decolonizing political theory is less a recurring critique of Eurocentrism than an effort to shift the terrain of theorizing to better attend to politics "in most of the world,"⁷ and thereby reinvigorate the practice of political theory as such.

Reconstructing Anticolonial Thought: Gandhi and Fanon

Gandhi and Fanon have been accepted in the canon of political theory as representatives of anticolonial criticism. As such, much is at stake in how we situate and interpret their arguments and political projects. One reason why we focus on

their contributions—rather than attend to lesser-known figures in the anticolonial tradition—is to illustrate some general features of that tradition. This is also why we have chosen to read Gandhi and Fanon *together* as exemplifying anticolonial argument despite the many known differences in their politics and political worlds. Their specific locations—Gandhi writing within and against the British Empire, Fanon formed vis-à-vis French colonialism in the Caribbean and later Algeria—produced distinct analytical approaches to the problem of empire. Gandhi's debt to the anti-industrial radicalism of a figure like Leo Tolstoy is also far removed from the language of existential Marxism and radical psychoanalysis that shaped Fanon's thought and practice. Perhaps most prominently, they are quintessentially opposed figures in their advocacy of nonviolent versus violent forms of mass action. Despite these important and sharp contrasts, we hope to convey some remarkable overlaps of polemical and political argument. The fact of such a shared terrain despite such overt differences is perhaps the strongest evidence that anticolonialism as political theory is a distinct genre, with recognizable targets and argumentative strategies, and most importantly a shared view of decolonization as both a critical and reconstructive project.

In their critical posture, both thinkers directed their analysis at two interconnected targets. First, they attempted to disclose the false universals of Europe; in Gandhi's language this was described as the false promise of civilization, and in Fanon's, the crisis of European humanism. Second, both were animated by the need to diagnose and undo the psychological dynamics of colonialism through which the colonized identify with and accept the hierarchy of values established by the dominating power. In Fanon, this was the nature of alienation and its overcoming, disalienation. In Gandhi, it was self-enslavement, the solution to which was *swaraj*, or self-rule. In their reconstructive ambition, they tied this critical labor to the realization of true freedom or emancipation, one that was more properly universal in scope. While they offered different accounts of the content of newly renovated universals and the politics that would engender them, they shared a view of the colonized masses as the exemplary agents of its realization. For Gandhi, this would culminate in India revealing the path of true civilization, in which unceasing and illusive desires for material comfort and power are replaced by self-mastery, a liberation that allows the voice of morality to speak again.⁸ For Fanon, decolonization would reanimate the project of universal humanism by making a "new start," developing "a new way of thinking," and endeavoring to "create a new man."⁹

These new universals of decolonization were concrete universals in two senses. First, the cultivation of self-mastery and the generation of a new humanism were located immanently in the experiences of colonization. Rather than being abstract ideals generated through philosophical inquiry, they were disclosed in the institutional and cultural fabric of the colonized world. Second, the realization of

these universals in turn depended on the political practices and agency of the colonized. Although Gandhi and Fanon had opposed conceptions of political action, they shared a deep commitment to mass mobilization as the engine of liberatory social transformation.

To arrive at their respective concrete universals, Gandhi and Fanon each situate their critical and reconstructive projects in the specific locations of the colonized world. Early in his classic text *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon introduced his memorable depiction of the Manichean world of colonialism where European and native sectors are counterposed. The superfluous colonist's sector "is a sated, sluggish sector, its belly is permanently full of good things" while the native sector is "a famished sector, hungry for bread, meat, shoes, coal, and light."¹⁰ This is a world divided by "what species, what race one belongs to."¹¹ Fanon's depiction of the European sector replays a recurring anticolonial critique of Europe as a decadent and therefore decaying civilization. Its material abundance is so excessive that even the trash cans "overflow with strange and wonderful garbage, undreamed-of leftovers."¹² At the heart of this civilization is a violence that has no other meaning or purpose than confirming the lines of domination, a violence that serves no redemptive or progressive function.¹³

Fanon's analysis of a racialized colonial world, drawn from the settler-colonial experience of Algeria and the legacy of Atlantic slavery in the Caribbean, foregrounds the exceptional violence of the colonial state. Gandhi's critique of violence aims to sharpen and radicalize the critique of Europe as a decadent civilization. In language closer to that employed by Fanon's teacher Aimé Césaire, Gandhi indicted European civilization as degrading and decivilizing.¹⁴ The colonial context was where the decivilizing character of Europe was most extreme and therefore visible, but it was not specific to that context. For Gandhi, the colonial state was representative of the modern state, whose coercive violence was necessarily a threat to freedom; he thus pursued a more thoroughly antistatist version of the anticolonial critique of European civilization.¹⁵

The critiques of European civilization advanced by Gandhi and Fanon are articulated from the standpoint of the colonized and the practices of colonial rule. Viewing colonialism from this situated context, one would come to see these dynamics of exploitation, domination, and expansion most clearly. They also argued that such dynamics could not be mitigated, arrested, or redeemed from within the traditions of European civilization—a conclusion that distinguishes the anticolonial critique of European civilization from the contemporary critique of Eurocentrism.

Relatedly, the audience for this anticolonial critique is not Europe itself, but fellow colonized elite subjects, who like Gandhi and Fanon were engaged in the collective project of decolonization. The dialogic mode of *Hind Swaraj*, for instance, speaks back to the radical anticolonial nationalist who has embraced violent means

that reproduce the colonial state's domination and coercion. *The Wretched of the Earth* critiques fellow nationalists who have failed to properly engage in popular mobilization. In these contexts, Gandhi and Fanon deploy the critique of European civilization as a strategy of unmooring fellow colonized elites from their veneration of European ideals and aspiration to mimic European models. Such aspirations framed decolonization as a project of catching up to Europe, of replicating its trajectory of modernity. As Gandhi put it, "Indian rule based on modern methods" would condemn India to "become a second or fifth edition of Europe or America."¹⁶ For Fanon, this was "sickening mimicry" and a futile project. For if the goal of decolonization was to replicate a European model, there was no need to reject European rule.¹⁷

By demonstrating that Europe is a decadent and irredeemable civilization, Gandhi and Fanon aimed to disrupt the imitative ambition of fellow colonized elites and clear the ground for a project of innovating alternative paths of social and political transformation in the colonized world. The rejection of European models need not be taken to be primarily a claim of authenticity. Though Gandhi especially sought to rejuvenate Indian institutions, neither thinker placed cultural particularity or singularity as their primary objection to following European models. Instead, they both diagnosed a gap between social conditions in the colony and inherited European institutions, concepts, and practices.¹⁸

It is with this background in mind that we might reread Fanon's famous call to stretch Marxist analysis in the context of a racialized colonial world.¹⁹ This is usually taken up as a critique of the limits of Western Marxism, but his intervention here is better understood as a contribution to a century-long debate at the heart of Third-World Marxism, a debate about how class analysis and strategies of revolution could be replicated under different historical conditions, in societies with different historical trajectories. For Fanon, a central and distinctive experience of colonial modernity is the coexistence of the hypermodern alongside so-called traditional social and economic forms. The clash and misrecognition of these two social forces expose and exacerbate a much deeper divide between the urban and rural, one that is spatial and existential, cultural and political. It also generates a distinct type of class formation where the nationalist bourgeoisie is really a cosmopolitan-comprador elite, and the urban working class functions more like a pampered bourgeoisie. Both classes are politically conscious but turn out to be weak if not corrupt; in short, they are not by nature progressive forces.²⁰

The need for analytic stretching emerges from the failure of inherited categories to come to terms with this colonial situation and to generate a political program of transformation. Fanon illustrates this failure through an analysis of the nationalist party, which grafts onto the colony a model of political mobilization developed for industrialized societies in which the base of socialist and other left

parties is largely composed of an urban proletariat. Among the elite, Fanon argues there is a “blind devotion” to the political form of the party that “takes priority over a rational study of colonial society.”²¹ Absent an adequate reconstitution of the party form for the social reality of the colony, the party addresses itself to an urban proletariat who constitutes only a small minority of the colonized and whose social conditions are far removed from the rural masses.²² More generally, urban elites are pitted against the rural majority; they do not know or trust the rural masses and reproduce the same colonial prejudices about the latter’s backwardness. Instead of trying to organize, integrate, or politicize a class, which was for Fanon the real source of revolutionary energy, the urban elite instead exploits and manipulates it.²³ In this context, the party quickly degenerates into a bureaucratic and sclerotic shell rather than becoming a nimble institution capable of adapting to the conditions of mass mobilization in the colony.

There is a striking overlap with Gandhi’s criticism of elite nationalism as merely wanting “English rule without the Englishman.”²⁴ That the Western-educated elite did not want to change the nature of rule but merely occupy the place of rulers was a sign that elite nationalism was at heart an egoistic desire for power. Fanon and Gandhi both portray the urban elite as decadent, even hedonistic, and by nature exploitative. The elites are blind to the fact that truly popular rule had to start in the countryside, with the mobilization of the poor, rural majority. Without such participation in the project of self-rule, nominal decolonization would amount to little more than a “mere change of personnel,”²⁵ and “the masses . . . would merely pass from one form of slavery to another.”²⁶

Fanon’s and Gandhi’s criticism of elite nationalism was primarily political; they argue, in different ways, that true decolonization is being thwarted by elite capture and the refusal to fully politicize or include the rural majority—that is, the refusal to make them agents of popular rule. Within this critique of imitative nationalism, however, is also an epistemic claim about the social forces and institutions—immanent to the colonized world—that are capable of being rejuvenated and/or mobilized to realize the project of liberation.

In Gandhi’s case, the critique of elite nationalism was connected to an alternative view of the means and ends of a popular swaraj, or what Gandhi termed “swaraj *in terms of the masses*.”²⁷ *Satyagraha* in the form of disobedience and noncooperation would provide “scaffolding” for the internal reform and “positive” construction of indigenous institutions.²⁸ Gandhi associated the social content of swaraj with “the constructive programme” and its threefold emphasis on Hindu-Muslim unity, the abolition of untouchability, and the promotion of *khadi* (hand-spun cloth). Mass participation in *khadi*, for example, was essential; it was a program precisely “calculated . . . to make the poorest of India, whether men or women, conscious of their strength and make them partakers in the struggle for India’s freedom.”²⁹

The constructive program was a national program conducted at the village level; it aimed at the reconstruction and revival of the self-ruling Indian village as the cornerstone of a radically decentralized polity, an alternative basis of individual self-rule and true democracy.

Whether one accepts the substantive conclusions of Fanon's or Gandhi's analyses, what is noteworthy is that both frame the problem of Eurocentrism as a question of how inherited analyses, practices, and institutions distort our capacity to understand the distinct political dynamics and predicaments of colonial societies. They show, in other words, how the enthrallment to Western categories makes it impossible to properly cognize alternative futures and enunciate strategies needed to attain them. By tracing this preoccupation across two differently situated thinkers, we are suggesting how broadly the inadequacy of inherited categories of thought registered as a problem. For any project of reconstruction requires a truer comprehension of a reality that was seen to have been fundamentally obscured or distorted in the colonial mirror. For anticolonial thinkers, to move beyond Eurocentrism, to engage in decolonization, was thus intimately tied to a project of developing analytical and political models that properly corresponded to the specificities of the (post)colonial context.

The Limits of the Contemporary Critique of Eurocentrism

In contemporary political theory, attempts to reckon with the legacies of empire and the challenge of Eurocentrism have enlisted insights from anticolonial criticism. While there are similarities and overlaps in common worries over epistemic domination and occlusion, the ways in which the problem of Eurocentrism is posed and resolved today are markedly different. Consider, for example, the dangers of notions of unilinear history, which position Europe as the telos of the postcolonial world, a concern shared by Gandhi as well as a number of critical theorists working from Foucauldian as well as Habermasian perspectives.³⁰ The purpose and implications of making historical progress an object of critique differs dramatically. For Gandhi, as we suggested above, questioning the idea of progress was in part meant to disrupt the internalization of the superiority of European civilization among the colonized. This, in turn, freed the assessment of one's own practices and traditions, and the capacity to reform and innovate them, from imposed cultural values. This kind of epistemic swaraj or autonomy was the precondition for sustaining the ongoing project of decolonization.

In both form and content, the contemporary critique of Eurocentrism in political theory departs significantly from this endeavor. Below, we will explore three prominent attempts, from within the broad tradition of critical theory, to overcome Eurocentrism especially as an obstacle to building new universals. Perhaps the most distinctive aspect of how contemporary critical theory poses the problem of Euro-

centrism is that it treats it primarily as an intellectual or epistemic problem. Hence, notions of development and rationalism that implicitly structure European political thought are framed as the primary objects of critique. Implied in this emphasis is an idealist account of empire, which views imperial domination as the product of exclusionary philosophical or anthropological assumptions. To decolonize political theory from this perspective is to cleanse and purify intellectual traditions. In this section, we identify three strategies by which this cleansing operation is enacted: redemptive, corrective, and dialogic. Each of these makes important interventions in illuminating the embedded logics of Eurocentrism, but they remain limited by abstraction, self-referentiality, and/or a limited engagement with the political conditions and contexts of postcolonial societies.

A central starting place for the contemporary critique of Eurocentrism is the view that European political theory and political theory more generally have ignored or silenced the history of empire and the intellectual traditions of the colonized. This silence opens Susan Buck-Morss's influential 2000 essay "Hegel and Haiti" as she locates a discrepancy between metaphorical invocations of slavery among Enlightenment theorists of freedom and their rare engagement with the New World slavery of their day.³¹ For Buck-Morss, the self-emancipation of enslaved people on the island of Saint Domingue during the French Revolution bursts open the question of the relationship between universal ideals and slavery in a way that the European public sphere could no longer ignore. She reads Hegel's lordship/bondage dialectic in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* as one instance in which a European master theorist encountered and incorporated the real struggles of enslaved people in his theorization of freedom. Though Buck-Morss stages this encounter between Hegel and Haiti with an eye to opening a path for decentering Europe, her account nonetheless redeems the universal intent of European modernity. As she puts it, the project is one of "rescuing the idea of universal history from the uses to which white domination has put it."³² Centering the role of Haitian revolutionaries in catalyzing the ideal of universal freedom, she contends, means that this project "does not need to be discarded, but, rather, redeemed and reconstituted on a different basis."³³

One salutary upshot of this effort is the reversal of a Eurocentric story of transmission in which ideals and practices travel from European metropole to colonial periphery. Locating the source of the lordship/bondage dialectic in the Haitian Revolution, Buck-Morss conceives of the colonized as the source of the ideal of universal freedom. But this has the unintended effect of recognizing subaltern political action only through the verification of a canonical thinker and in terms of an already-existing ideal.³⁴ It is as the basis of Hegel's theorization that the Haitian Revolution enters the realm of universal history. And the exemplary moment in the encounter between Hegel and Haiti is not the revolutionary project itself

but Hegel's "clarity," his ability and willingness to learn from the revolution of the enslaved.³⁵ The redemptive mode of critique thus conscripts subaltern actors in a self-referential project in which European political thought is both the starting and end points. Neither the form nor the content of the universal is altered, but it is now cleansed of its association with exclusion and domination.

Hegel and his legacy also loom large in a more recent effort at decolonizing political theory—Amy Allen's *The End of Progress* (2016). Allen attends to the contemporary Frankfurt School of critical theory, whose most prominent representatives Jürgen Habermas, Axel Honneth, and Rainer Forst, she argues, have remained silent on the history of imperialism and the relationship between moral-political universals and imperialism. She aims to diagnose this silence by tracing its source to deep philosophical investments in developmentalism among Frankfurt School theorists, investments stemming from a commitment to a form of immanent critique that does not fall prey to relativism.³⁶

Though both Habermas and Honneth employ a deflationary, contingent, and reversible account of progress, Allen argues that the account of sociocultural learning and the appeal to "the necessity and unavoidability of the universal norms central to the legacy of the Enlightenment" reproduces a hierarchical ordering with European modernity at the apex.³⁷ While Forst does not rely on similar neo-Hegelian commitments, his alternative strategy of grounding normativity in a universal moral-political standard of "the right to justification," drawn from an account of practical reason, fares no better in its Eurocentrism. Forst avoids the problem of developmentalism, but he implicitly universalizes the particular. Forst's conception of practical reason is revealed to be "a thick, particular, and Eurocentric notion in disguise."³⁸

In this effort to decolonize critical theory, Allen powerfully employs the Frankfurt School's method of immanent critique against itself. Through careful reconstruction of the three theorists, she identifies a persistent and unacknowledged commitment to developmentalism, which is not easily excisable from the normative aims of critical theory. Progress, in her reading, is a necessary feature of Habermas's and Honneth's political-theoretical project. Relatedly, Allen's critique of backward-looking progress casts doubt on the redemptive strategy Buck-Morss pursues. The Eurocentrism embedded in ideas of progress and universal history is not a matter of "selective and inappropriate application" but instead functions as a structuring logic.³⁹ As a result, rescuing universal history from the uses to which white domination has put it is bound to fail.

But if Allen moves beyond a redemptive reading of the tradition of critical theory, her corrective strategy reinforces an idealist account of empire in which imperialism issues from an epistemic standpoint that views European modernity as universal. Allen puts the idealist account of empire in the following terms: "Impe-

rialism as a political project cannot sustain itself without the *idea of empire*, and the idea of empire, in turn, is nourished by a philosophical and cultural imaginary that justified the political subjugation of distant territories and their native populations through claims that such peoples are less advanced, cognitively inferior, and therefore naturally subordinate.⁴⁰ It is not clear such a unidirectional relationship between imperial ideas and imperialism accurately captures the problem of empire.⁴¹ For our purposes here, the problem with this idealist approach is that it abstracts the task of decolonizing political theory, emphasizing the identification and transformation of hidden imperial philosophical assumptions.

As we described in the last section, anticolonial thinkers also incorporated a critique of false universalism as part of their conception of decolonization. But notice the anticolonial critique began from a historical and material account of the experience of empire. It was less interested in locating the theoretical sources of these false universals than recording and transforming their practical consequences. We will argue in the following section that this approach opens an alternative path for the decolonization of political theory that takes the form of generating analyses and reanimating concepts to better attend to the political trajectories of the postcolonial world.

For Allen and others, however, political theorists' capacities to grapple with postcolonial conditions and theory depend on overcoming its internal and implicit commitments to Eurocentrism. Her corrective strategy aims to overcome "the seductions of self-congratulation," inducing critical theorists to "adopt a stance of modesty or humility, not one of superiority, toward our own moral certainties."⁴² This humility, she argues, is a starting point for any process of intercultural exchange and learning.⁴³ But in Allen, even such calls for humility are oddly self-referential, since they are grounded in skeptical theories of history championed by Adorno and Foucault and not distinctive to, nor the product of any dialogue with, anticolonial or postcolonial thinking.

The dialogue with "cultural Others" to which Allen gestures is taken up more thoroughly in James Tully's project of deparochializing Western political thought. Like Allen, Tully draws from Foucault, but where she is concerned with his exploration of the entangled history of power and reason, Tully highlights an orientation to philosophy as a tentative activity in need of constant revision and correction.⁴⁴ For Foucault, a self-reflexive philosophy can only emerge from an encounter and engagement with "the practice of a knowledge that is foreign to it."⁴⁵ Tully identifies significant roadblocks to this process of engagement, from the tendency to universalize one's intellectual tradition to the ways the dominant interlocutor surreptitiously sets the procedural terms of the dialogue in an exclusionary manner. Though he recognizes that these tendencies are deeply related to wider political and economic asymmetries and has elsewhere charted these relations, his

most recent interventions emphasize the psychological challenges to meaningful engagement with non-Western traditions, especially the tendencies toward self-deception and self-aggrandizement.⁴⁶

To arrive at a genuine dialogue that produces “reciprocal elucidation,” Tully outlines the necessary preparatory work theorists in the Western tradition need to undertake.⁴⁷ The ultimate aim of a deparochializing dialogue requires first parochializing Western political thought. The universal and abstract form of political theory needs to be counteracted by historical contextualization revealing, on the one hand, the particular and nongeneralizable character of European thought and, on the other, the violent history of imperial imposition through which the institutions and practices of the Western world were globalized.⁴⁸ Such parochialization is joined with a pluralization of what counts as political thought. As a specialized academic genre, political theory tends to privilege abstract and formalized forms of political thinking. But, as Tully notes, most political thought does not take this form. He argues for a broad vision of political thought, beginning from the assumption that “wherever there are people involved in practices of governance of oneself and others—and this is in every form of society, small or large—there is political thought in and about those practices of governance.”⁴⁹ The boundary-opening exercise of pluralizing political thought can only produce meaningful cross-cultural dialogues when we recognize that political thought happens in the context of traditions. That is, non-Western texts and thinkers cannot be selected for dialogue and comparative engagement without reconstructing the constitutive background of the traditions in which they first appear as interventions.⁵⁰

Tully’s call for a situated reading of non-Western texts corrects a decolonization of political theory where canon expansion does not take seriously the specific problem-spaces of non-Western thinkers. As we have modeled in our discussion of Fanon and Gandhi, we take the view that reconstructing the animating questions and audience of anticolonial thought is central to any critical engagement with its theoretical interventions. While we share Tully’s historically contextualist orientation, his language of traditions might be too restrictive to make sense of thinkers for whom an imposed relationship to the West and Western political thought is the starting point of political theorizing.

We view intellectual traditions as more intertextual, layered, and always open to appropriation and reinscription, rather than discrete, self-enclosed conversations. The paradigmatic instance of a layered, conscripted, and creative tradition is the tradition of Black political thought, which, formed against the dislocations of transatlantic slavery, was never articulated as entirely outside the West but rather was co-constituted with Western political thought.⁵¹ Even intellectual traditions that might appear whole and continuous—such as Indian or African or Islamic political thought—were profoundly and decisively disrupted by European domination.⁵²

The dislocation of colonialism does not mean, however, that the institutions, processes, and discourses of European modernity were transposed wholesale onto postcolonial societies. Instead, colonial conscription produced an uneven, differentiated experience of the modern. It is the attempt to conceptualize the specific character of this experience of modernity and theorize political futures shaped by that experience that constitutes the central conundrums of anticolonial and postcolonial thought. In this respect, in Sudipta Kaviraj's formulation, what makes modern Indian thought *Indian* is not so much a philosophical heritage drawn from the concepts of classical Indian texts, but the efforts of a range of Indian thinkers to stretch the concepts of Western political thought in order to grasp the distinctive experience of colonial modernity.⁵³

The historically specific trajectories of the postcolonial world alert us to a recurring absence in the contemporary critique of Eurocentrism—a theoretical engagement with the experience of politics beyond the West. That is, in the preoccupation with an epistemological decolonization, contemporary theorists have failed to notice that the most consequential problem with our political-theoretical concepts may not be that they are internally and necessarily imperial, but instead that they lack critical purchase on the political practices of most of the world. In the face of political trajectories that do not correspond to the experience of modernity in the West, the conceptual categories culled from this experience run up against their own sociological and historical limits. The exhaustion of our conceptual vocabulary in the context of politics beyond the West requires reorienting the task of decolonizing political theory beyond strategies of redemption, correction, and dialogue.

Alternative Modes of Decolonizing Political Theory

The decolonization of political theory can move beyond the critique of Eurocentrism by taking up the political predicaments of the non-Western world as sites of political theorizing. In the first section of this essay, we sketched a historical and contextual approach to this task that situated Gandhi and Fanon in the specific problem-space of anticolonialism. Here we outline an analytic approach that aims to develop theoretical insights from the experience of postcolonial politics. We identify two strategies for this analytical agenda: *conceptual innovation*, where new concepts are generated out of the specific experiences of postcolonial politics, and *conceptual reanimation*, through which existing concepts are reformulated and retheorized as a result of their circulation and instantiation in postcolonial contexts.

We excavate these strategies from anticolonial insights into the consequences of Europe's epistemic domination and how those insights have been taken up and expanded by contemporary postcolonial theorists. In the work of Fanon and Gan-

dhi, one legacy of epistemic domination was the psychological wound of cultural inferiority, one that was expressed via an enthrallment to the West and the desire to emulate its values and institutions. Many contemporary postcolonial and decolonial critics rightly point to the normative injustice of this dominance, namely the ways in which European knowledge systems were violently imposed, complicit in domination, and were themselves biased and exclusionary. A second legacy of epistemic dominance was its implication in conceptual distortions about the nature of colonized societies. Recognizing and correcting these analytical failures was a necessary part of the political project of decolonization and the reconstructive ambitions of anticolonialism.

Contemporary postcolonial theorists such as Partha Chatterjee, Sudipta Kaviraj, and Mahmood Mamdani have also assessed the limited analytical purchase of European categories for attending to postcolonial politics, and, we argue, they have employed the strategies of innovation and reanimation to transcend these limits. But where Gandhi and Fanon announced their critique of epistemic dominance with decolonization as a political horizon yet to be realized, these theorists write in the context of its eclipse. Indeed, their projects began as efforts to reassess and come to grips with the yawning gap between the expectations of decolonization in the mid-twentieth century and the experience of postcolonial politics.⁵⁴ Why the utopian aspirations of figures like Fanon and Gandhi failed to materialize, what the legacies of a partial and incomplete process of decolonization have been for postcolonial societies, and how best to assess the modalities of postcolonial politics in its wake have been central to this cohort of theorists. This has been primarily an analytical and critical project, but as we shall see, it has also at times generated a reformulation of decolonization as a normative horizon.

This effort to develop new analytical frameworks emerged from a broad consensus that the traditional categories of Western political thought were not adequate to describe or analyze the global experience of politics, especially the political life of the postcolonial world. For much of the twentieth century, this consensus was expressed in a dismissive way. In the crisis and aftermath of decolonization, many Western analysts and observers came to interpret political formations in these societies as expressive of various absences and failures. Third World societies or new nations did not replicate the processes of modernization, democratization, and industrialization as given in the sociological and historical narratives underlying Western political thought. But because of the continuing hold of these categories, explanations for nonreplication often relied on attributions of socio-cultural pathology or historical backwardness.⁵⁵ There was very little attempt to rethink, adjust, or stretch categories such as the nation-state, democracy, or the political party to better fit these new political realities and experiences. Rather, the overriding impulse was to treat difference as anomaly or deviation.⁵⁶

Central to postcolonial interventions is the view that the categories of modern social and political thought have been closely tethered to the historical trajectory of modernity in the West and therefore reach palpable limits when uncritically applied across societies whose insertion into the global history of modernity was enacted on very different terms, according to very different temporalities, and under different pressures. Sudipta Kaviraj has thoughtfully reflected on how to comprehend in theoretical terms this historical fact and what it demands from us as theorists. He suggests there are at least four basic reasons that modernity, while essentially a global process, follows a “logic of self-differentiation”;⁵⁷ that is, as modernity spreads it becomes more plural and varied.⁵⁸ Whether defined primarily by the spread of capitalism and industrialization, cultural and institutional rationalization, or state-formation and democratization, political modernity does not take place upon a blank state. Even if understood as radically disruptive, the experience of modernity will be shaped by preexisting social forms that are superseded and/or transformed. Secondly, in much of the non-Western world, these processes appear in different sequences and combinations, often imposed under different configurations of power. For instance, in most decolonizing societies, political democracy is often instituted before or alongside projects of top-down industrialization, a sequence and combination that will inevitably change the character and stability of democratic contestation. The third factor is closely related to the second and stems from the institutional legacies of colonial rule. The colonial imprint varied immensely depending on the character of that rule, from settler colonialism, to practices of indirect rule, to conditions of racial slavery. Finally, and perhaps most crucially, then, there is a reflexivity and improvisational quality to the way postcolonial societies and thinkers take up, interpret, and respond to these processes, which is reflected in anticolonial debate as well as in non-Western political traditions more generally. The encounter with colonial modernity and Western political thought opens a space of self-conscious interrogation and innovation precisely because non-Western thinkers can view Western concepts with critical distance, sometimes from the standpoint of latecomers, but always as simultaneously insiders and outsiders.

The strategies for generating theory—conceptual innovation and reanimation—that we propose follow from Kaviraj’s insights. What Kaviraj’s analyses suggest is that reflexivity and variation in the expansion of political modernity is a profoundly *enabling* condition for the generation of theory once we jettison the assumption that politics outside the West is simply backward, anomalous, or deviant. It is an enabling condition because juxtaposition and comparison across diverse cases allow one to discern what are necessary or universal characteristics of modern politics and what are contingent or conjunctural, as well as to locate novel trajectories and trends. Conceptual innovation takes the dynamics of differentiation and pluralization seriously; it attends to the specificity of postcolonial political histories and predicaments and

from there tries to generate new concepts, categories, and forms of analysis to best capture the novelty and distinctness of these experiences.⁵⁹ Conceptual reanimation, on the other hand, begins from existing concepts and categories, tests and interrogates them vis-à-vis diverse instances, and then revises, stretches, and clarifies the categories accordingly.

Partha Chatterjee's theorization of "political society" is exemplary of the kind of conceptual innovation we have in mind.⁶⁰ Sharply distinguished from civil society, or the classical bourgeois public, political society was proposed as the new, modal form of mass democratic politics across most of the world. It is closely tied to the logic of governmentality and is meant to capture the political life of enumerated, classified populations—such as squatters, refugees, itinerant laborers—defined often by their illegal or para-legal status via the state. Clashes with the state become sites of contestation, negotiation, and the strategic extraction of benefits. While civil society associates and legislates, political society protests and demands exemptions. For Chatterjee, this novel pattern of politicization and collective mobilization was entailed by a specific, compacted sequence of postcolonial democracy: universal suffrage and a governmentalized bureaucracy established prior to (or in the absence of) industrialization and a unified, national demos. Political society is marked by a heterogenous and constantly differentiating social—the very essence of Foucauldian governmentality—which Chatterjee suggests is not only the norm of postcolonial democracy but also becoming the universal experience of democracy everywhere. In its distance from and distrust of liberal modes of representation, political society is a cognate concept to populism and counterdemocracy.⁶¹ Here the implication is that understanding the distinct dynamics of postcolonial democracy might provide insight into the crisis and transformation of Western democracy. For in many ways, contemporary politics in the West also has betrayed some long-held expectations of political modernity.

A second exemplar of conceptual innovation is Mahmood Mamdani's idea of the "bifurcated state" as the typical state-form of colonial and postcolonial Africa. Divided between a directly ruled civil sphere marked by racial exclusion and an indirectly ruled customary sphere differentiated along ethnic lines, the bifurcated state privileges and politicizes claims of indigeneity.⁶² Mamdani shows how many crises of postcolonial politics in Africa stem from this distinctive institutionalization of power and identity and, crucially, its incomplete decolonization. While independence from colonial rule was accompanied by the deracialization of civil society, it rarely involved democratization of the customary, which Mamdani defines as de-ethnicization or detribalization. What Mamdani was especially keen to show was that postcolonial political identities—racial, ethnic, tribal—were neither primordial nor natural, neither cultural nor economic in origin, but rather a *direct* consequence of state-formation.

Chatterjee and Mamdani reverse the logic of norm and deviation and suggest that what once seemed deviant in fact holds a clue to understanding the true trajectories of modern politics writ large. To make these political forms legitimate objects of theoretical inquiry, they attend to their specificity and offer a positive conceptualization. Over the course of developing and elaborating these new concepts, they link the specific political forms to more general historical processes and evaluate them through comparison. Here comparison does not take the form of assessing a specific experience against a normative model. Instead, by identifying comparable political trajectories and elaborating these concepts in new historical and political settings, they can become context-transcending categories.⁶³ This effort to build generalizable theory from the specificity of postcolonial politics is explicitly stated in Mamdani's question, "What can the study of Africa teach us about late modern life?"⁶⁴ In recent work he has generalized his insights about state formation and political identities, arguing that the experience of colonial statecraft in Africa was part and parcel of the formation of the modern nation-state as such, which everywhere involved the violent manufacture of permanent majorities and minorities.⁶⁵

While sharing an analytical orientation that combined specificity and generalizability, Chatterjee and Mamdani vary in their concern with articulating a normative horizon. Chatterjee's political society is primarily an analytical and critical category. It does not name a politics to be overcome or to be achieved. Instead, it is a lens through which we might better understand the modalities of political claim-making around the world. It is also articulated against an overly idealized and normatively laden picture of democratic citizenship, which privileges the public sphere of rights, representation, and deliberation. By contrast, Mamdani's diagnosis of a bifurcated state names a structure to be transcended. The bifurcated state is the consequence of an incomplete process of decolonization. Mamdani turns in this context to a project of depoliticizing ethnic and racial identities, by historicizing their origins and naming alternative modalities of identification.⁶⁶ But if calls for detribalization and democratization are normative horizons in Mamdani's work, they are immanent to his analytical framework. They do not operate as terms of an ideal theory that stand apart from political practices. Instead, they are disclosed in and through the analysis of African state formation and the modes of political contestation generated within and against its frameworks. The method of conceptual innovation thus attends to the specificity of the postcolonial context as a way of both developing generalizable analytic categories and renovating the project of decolonization as a normative ideal.

The second strategy of reanimation is similarly concerned with undoing the norm/deviation logic. Here, however, the primary concern is with concepts that have global reach. For instance, categories such as the state, democracy, and secularism have indeed become global, but such preponderance—what we might

call a geographic universalism—belies divergent instantiations. Studies of these phenomena in North America or Europe are assumed to have nonlocal relevance, yet from the vantage point of mainstream political theory, conceptual work on, for instance, democracy in India, secularism in Egypt, or state formation in Latin American or the Caribbean is viewed at best as a case study, lacking in universalizable theoretical or normative implications. In political theory, this is arguably the deepest legacy of Eurocentrism: the seemingly ingrained resistance to the idea that theory can be generated from the trajectories, dilemmas, and experiences of non-Western politics.

Reanimation would begin by taking a concept, such as the concept of democracy, and exploring how it has been taken up in radically diverse contexts. The wager is that by examining how democracy works in historical spaces far removed from its supposed origins or ideal-typical form, something truer about the dynamics of democracy might be revealed. The postcolonial experience presents an opportunity to disinter the theory of democracy from the ideological, normative, and sociological assumptions and expectations concomitant with its development in the West and to delineate features that are necessary and global from those that are more local, contingent, or conjunctural.⁶⁷ Of interest in this method is an analytical universalism, which moves beyond the global ubiquity of practices and institutions to uncover recurring logics and dynamics that might appear most visible in the postcolonial context.

Consider for example a central puzzle in democratic theory about the relationship between universal suffrage and redistribution. In the history of democracy, a common argument for and against the expansion of suffrage was the belief that enfranchising the poor would lead to radical (and destabilizing) demands for redistribution. But the evidence from the last two and a half centuries is at best mixed. Electoral democracy has only under rare circumstances led to such an outcome and more alarmingly seems compatible with extreme inequality. Even in countries like India where the poor seem to be genuinely enfranchised, iterative elections have not led to radical or even consistent calls for redistribution.⁶⁸ This should force us to think more pointedly and systematically about what obstacles to redistribution are thrown up from *within* the logic of democratic politics. What is it about the logic of democratic politics that makes elite capture possible, invisible, and/or compatible with democracy? On the flipside, what is it about the nature of political competition and the formation of political interests, that “objective” economic interests is rarely the driving force of political mobilization?

Observers of postcolonial politics often predicted that such economic interest and other “universal” demands would displace “particularistic” attachments to ethnicity, caste, and religion once societies had undergone modernization and in particular urbanization. Yet despite rapid urbanization across South Asia and now

Africa, the mobilization of communal identity has been a persistent feature of democratic politics.⁶⁹ The experience of postcolonial democracy has in fact confirmed how central collective identities — of race, caste, ethnicity, and religion — have been to the logic of electoral democracy. And this, too, is not just as a consequence of democratic politics being grafted onto societies with deep cultural pluralism, or societies in which communal identities and institutions remain powerful.⁷⁰ There is also a recursive and iterative nature to the politicization of identity in democratic politics. Democratic competition and mobilization can over time politicize and empower different kinds of identities and push them into opposition or alliance. These could be linguistic or ethnic or racial or religious, the latter becoming a more central axis of conflict globally over the last thirty years. Moreover, as identities become imbricated into democratic dynamics, they are transformed in and through them. As Indian democracy, for instance, continues to entrench caste in its very core, the meaning and experience of caste has been profoundly altered.⁷¹

The cumulative experience of elections and their attendant techniques of organization, mobilization, and competition in postcolonial democracies arguably provide some of the best evidence of an intrinsic connection between democracy and the politicization of identity. Postcolonial democracies, and the conflict of identity within them, have proved to be more volatile and violent than normative democratic theory has expected. But the sense of fragility and tumult, as well as the conflictual nature of democracy, might in fact draw them closer to the ancient experience of democracy. Viewed in this new light, classical accounts of democracy might also yield fresh insight into dynamics of identity in democracy. Indeed, if Western theorists were not so quick to view kinship and birthright as premodern and/or apolitical categories, they might have noted the entrenchment of blood-based kinship, appeals to nativism and birthright, at the height of Athenian democracy. Autochthony and birthright arguably made imperial Athenian citizenship possible and provided the solidarity that grounded its egalitarianism.⁷² All of which suggests that studies of postcolonial democracy and new interpretations of ancient democracy might make possible fresh explorations of the persistent recourse to kinship-like distinctions in the dynamics of democracy.

If we are right in suggesting that the association between democracy and identity is not an occasional or accidental implication of democracy, this should compel us to ask different and better questions about the link. Instead of asking why voters respond to appeals to identity over economic interests, we might instead ask, “Which appeals to which identities work? Under what conditions, through which tactics?” If we start interrogating democracy in this way, we may get a new perspective on the current crisis of democracy in the West. With the rise of white nationalism in the US (and Europe), we have been surprised by the potency of the open and blatant appeal to whiteness. Undoubtedly, this resurgence has much to do with lon-

ger and deeper histories of privilege and supremacy built upon long-standing structures of racial domination. But the form and timing of its resurgence is undeniably tied to strategies of electoral mobilization, the recourse to racism being a recurring and constitutive feature of democratic politics in the US. And yet something more needs to be understood about the nature of democratic politics—perhaps something about the moral psychology of democratic contestation—that makes appeals to race compelling and instrumentally successful. Here it would be useful to reconsider a classic work such as W. E. B. Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction in America* in light of recent history to understand the conditions under which appeals to racial pride, as a form of social and political recognition, are successful. For in that work Du Bois foregrounds the contingent and conjunctural dynamics of democratic coalition-building that embolden the appeals to race.⁷³

Radical diversity of experience can cast into serious doubt, in a salutary way, what is normal and what is pathological, and compel us to reexamine what we take to be given in the nature of democracy. In this way the study of postcolonial democracy can reveal something essential about the nature of democracy—its real constraints, challenges, and possibilities. To really be open to decolonized, comparative analysis of this kind, and to work toward conceptual innovation and/or reanimation, the extreme normativity of contemporary democratic theory has to be jettisoned.⁷⁴ Abandoning normativity is not the same as giving up on the promise of democracy. Rather, it means positing the problems clearly and locating the immanent dynamics and institutions capable of transformation.

Conclusion

Our strategies of conceptual innovation and reanimation are efforts to reimagine the task of decolonizing political theory. They emerge from the view that the current conception of this task has been too narrowly preoccupied with the critique of Eurocentrism. This has led to arguments and solutions that are often self-referential and abstract. Though the arguments might have been provoked and inspired by anticolonial or postcolonial criticism, they do not engage deeply or consistently with the intellectual and political contexts of argument that generated these critical interventions.

We have argued that while anticolonialism engaged in a critique of the West—Gandhi and Fanon produced arresting analyses in this regard—it would be limiting to reduce its aspirations or implications to exposing the blind spots or exclusionary character of Western thought. Anticolonial thought had positive or reconstructive ambitions. Its theoretical agenda was simultaneously analytical and normative and has been taken up in creative ways in postcolonial political thought, especially in terms of developing new forms and categories of analysis. Moreover, it is a problem and agenda shared by many modern, non-Western thinkers, as well as what

we might call minority or counterhegemonic thinkers within the West. All wrestle with the inadequacy and occlusions of the inherited categories of social and political thought, but in a distinctive way. They rightly perceive that their political experiences, struggles, and aspirations are not adequately captured by existing categories. But it is essential to recognize that some of the source of creativity and originality in these alternative traditions lies in the ways in which thinkers stretch and transform inherited ideas and categories rather than simply rejecting them. This is another reason why the critique of Eurocentrism needs to attend to more subtle moments of invention and transgression within modern political thought as much as the more polemically critical postures taken against it.

Because political theory is a plural project, employing varied methods and theoretical approaches, the strategies of innovation and reanimation will not be the only ones required for the decolonization of political theory. Yet they are instructive and compelling for two reasons. First, they embody a more general commitment to bringing analytical focus to non-Western political histories and predicaments, and engaging with their intellectual and political traditions. At this general level, the decolonizing of political theory can be taken up in different ways and with a variety of theoretical ends in mind.⁷⁵

Second, the more specific strategies of advancing new political concepts and rejuvenating older ones share affinities with political theorists' commitments to universalizable concepts and theories. As such, they suggest ways of navigating the contemporary impasse of political theory. If minoritized and non-Western thinkers have long recognized that categories of European political thought have limited purchase on non-Western political predicaments, then the contemporary crisis of the postwar democratic welfare state in the West—whether understood as the decline of traditional political parties, the mismatch between representative institutions and popular politics, or the emergence of a new global right—suggests that even in the contexts that gave rise to modern political thought, political predicaments have outrun the critical and analytical purchase of this intellectual tradition.⁷⁶

As strategies for generating political theory from diverse contexts and in response to new experiences and predicaments, innovation and reanimation are well positioned to revivify political theory in this context. We have shown that these approaches need not begin or conclude with the dismissal of Western political thought but rather energize a continuing and critical dialogue with it. Moreover, while primarily analytical and critical strategies, innovation and reanimation also suggest an immanent approach to normativity by locating in political practices new languages and institutions that can deepen normative ideals like democracy and citizenship. Understood in this way, the decolonization of political theory will not only yield new theorizations of postcolonial politics but also be the basis of

renovating and reenergizing the field in the wake of its contemporary conceptual and critical exhaustion.

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Notes

1. Since the late nineteenth century, and reconfirmed through various civics courses in the twentieth century, the standard canon was meant to chronicle the “rise of the West” through a procession of “great” books and thinkers, typically beginning with Plato and Aristotle, through Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Locke, and ending with Marx and Mill. For a recent article reflecting on the canon’s origins and the difficulty of its displacement, see Sturman, “Canon of the History.”
2. The call for expansion has spawned a whole new subfield, namely comparative political theory. For the challenges of expansion see Hassanzadeh, “Canon.”
3. The growing subfield of comparative political theory has introduced to political theory an ever-wider array of thinkers and texts. While plural in method, comparative political theory foregrounds traditions of political thought outside of the canon and, in so doing, provides an immanent critique of the Eurocentrism of political theory. For a recent survey of the field, see Jenco, Idris, and Thomas, *Oxford Handbook*.
4. For a survey of this scholarship see Pitts, “Political Theory.” For a recent retrospective of this body of work see Marwah et al., “Empire and Its Afterlives.”
5. See, for example, Allen, *The End of Progress*, which we discuss later, and Lu, *Justice and Reconciliation*.
6. Thinking with R. G. Collingwood and Quentin Skinner, David Scott proposed the idea of “problem-space” as a way to make visible the implicit questions and answers that shape contexts of argument and intervention. Scott used the concept to offer his provocative and influential account of the problem-space of anticolonialism. See Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity*.
7. This is a reference to the sly subtitle of Chatterjee, *Politics of the Governed*.
8. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, 66–73, 112–19.
9. Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 239.
10. Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 4.
11. Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 5.
12. Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 4.
13. Sekyi-Otu, *Fanon’s Dialectic of Experience*, 47–101.
14. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, 30–39, 129–33. For Césaire on decivilization see *Discourse on Colonialism*.
15. Gandhi, “Interview to Nirmal Kumar Bose”; Mantena, “Gandhi’s Critique.” Merve Fejzula has recently argued that the kind of antistatist critique that Gandhi advanced played a wide role in anticolonial critique across Africa. Because decolonization very

- quickly became a project of state capture and institutional alternatives to the state were defeated and dismissed, scholars have not thoroughly considered the role of antistatism and wider debates about the state within anticolonial thought and politics. See Fejzula, “Cosmopolitan Historiography.”
16. Gandhi, “Letter to H. S. Polak,” 130.
 17. Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 235, 239.
 18. For the idea of “colonial inheritance” see Hall and Schwarz, *Familiar Stranger*. As Stuart Hall puts it, Caribbean intellectuals and artists turned “a colonial inheritance inside out” (137). We use the idea of inheritance here and elsewhere in the article to indicate the ways in which colonial legacies are selectively appropriated and creatively reinvented.
 19. Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 5.
 20. Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 21–23, 98–105.
 21. Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 64.
 22. Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 22, 64.
 23. Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 71.
 24. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, 28.
 25. Gandhi, “Is It Non-co-operation?,” 369.
 26. Gandhi, “Sentence on the Great Tilak,” 29.
 27. Gandhi, “In Fulfilment of Promise,” 345.
 28. Gandhi, “Is It Non-co-operation?,” 369; Gandhi, “Interview to *Liverpool Post*,” 103.
 29. Gandhi, “In Fulfilment of Promise,” 345.
 30. See, for example, the important critical work of Thomas McCarthy, *Race, Empire, and the Idea of Human Development*.
 31. For her subsequent book expanding this argument see Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti*.
 32. Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti*, 74. Buck-Morss, “Universal History Upside Down.”
 33. Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti*, 75.
 34. Getachew, “Universalism.”
 35. Getachew, “Universalism.” We might contrast this approach to *Black Jacobins*, in which C. L. R. James stages the Haitian Revolution as a world-historical event, with the hero, Toussaint L’Ouverture, an exemplary figure absent the mediation of European political thought. For this contrast, see Scott, “Antinomies of Slavery.”
 36. Allen, *The End of Progress*, 3.
 37. Allen, *The End of Progress*, 68.
 38. Allen, *The End of Progress*, 15–16.
 39. Allen, *The End of Progress*, 69.
 40. Allen, *The End of Progress*, 1. On the underlying idealism of Allen’s critique, see also Nichols, “Progress, Empire, and Social Theory.”
 41. Mantena, *Alibis of Empire*, 185.
 42. Allen, *The End of Progress*, 33.
 43. Allen, *The End of Progress*, 76.
 44. Tully, *Democracy and Civic Freedom*, 72.
 45. Foucault, *The Uses of Pleasure*, 8–9, quoted in Tully, “Deparochializing,” 51.
 46. See Tully, *Imperialism and Civic Freedom*. On the psychological challenges, see Tully, “Deparochializing,” 53–55.
 47. Tully, “Deparochializing,” 60.
 48. Tully, “Deparochializing,” 56.

49. Tully, "Deparochializing," 57.
50. Tully, "Deparochializing," 57–58.
51. Mills, "Dialogue."
52. Kaviraj, "James Tully's 'De-parochializing,'" 164–69.
53. Kaviraj, "James Tully's 'De-parochializing,'" 167.
54. If, as we noted in the first section, anticolonial thought has critical and reconstructive dimensions that aim at the prospective project of decolonization, we might say that at least one element of the problem-space of postcolonial theory is a backward-looking critical reassessment of the project of anticolonialism and decolonization tied to an interrogation of its legacies in the postcolonial present. For this restatement of the project of postcolonial theory, see Scott, *Refashioning Futures*, 5–15. Classic examinations of the limited and partial achievement of decolonization include Munroe, *Politics of Constitutional Decolonization*; Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought*; Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject*; Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony*.
55. Modernization theory came to explain deviation in terms of "hybrid" or "mixed" systems in which features of "traditional" society had not yet been overcome. Others developed theories of "political culture" and used ethnographic methods to describe how particular cultural and psychological traits made some societies resistant to modernization. For accounts of these intellectual trajectories from two pioneers in the field of comparative politics, see Pye, "Political Modernization"; Almond, "Political Development." See also Gilman, *Mandarins of the Future*.
56. On the norm/deviation structure of social and political theory, see Chatterjee, *Lineages of Political Society*, 8–11; Nigam, *Decolonizing Theory*, 35–36.
57. Kaviraj, "Outline."
58. We have culled (and sometimes condensed) these four causes from six texts by Kaviraj: "Modernity and Politics"; "In Search of Civil Society"; "Outline"; "Democracy and Social Inequality"; "Disenchantment Deferred"; "James Tully's 'De-parochializing.'"
59. Nigam, *Decolonizing Theory*, 19–21.
60. These are a few of the key texts in which this concept has been developed and elaborated: Chatterjee, "On Civil and Political Society"; Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed*; Chatterjee, *Lineages of Political Society*.
61. Chatterjee, *I Am the People*; Rosanvallon, *Counter-Democracy*.
62. Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject*; Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers*.
63. The concept of political society is adopted, for instance, in a study of renewed popular protest across Africa. See Branch and Mampilly, *Africa Uprising*. By identifying a similar trajectory of politicization, Stephanie McCurry, a historian of the US Civil War, also stretches the concept beyond the postcolonial contexts of Africa and Asia to describe modes of claims-making by Confederate women. As she puts it, "The mobilization of poor, mostly rural women in the Confederate South during the Civil War bears resemblance not to the process of gradual extension of citizenship around which most American political history is framed, but far more to the ways politics was practiced by poor rural and urban people in the modern world: what one historian has called the politics of the governed in most of the world" (*Confederate Reckoning*, 216).
64. Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers*, xv. For an exploration of Mamdani's account of identity and its relevance to democratic theory, see also Mantena, "Political Identity and Postcolonial Democracy."

65. Mamdani, *Neither Settler nor Native*.
66. Mamdani's project of detribalization has taken several forms. On the one hand, he has sought to reconstruct intellectual interventions and political examples that have directly challenged and eroded the naturalization of racial and ethnic identities. These include the pioneering scholarship of the Nigerian historian Yusuf Bala Usman, whose work on precolonial Nigeria destabilizes ethnic categories; Tanzania's nationalist project of statecraft led by Julius Nyerere, which successfully built a common citizenship undoing racial and ethnic privilege; and the struggle against apartheid in South Africa, which abandoned race-based resistance for cross-racial alliance and modeled a form of political justice distinct from the criminal model of Nuremberg. See Mamdani, *Define and Rule*, 85–125; Mamdani, *Neither Settler nor Native*, 31–33, 147–80. In addition to these historical and historiographical examples, Mamdani has culled from the archives of African political experience alternative categories of identification, particularly the “resident” and the “survivor” as sources of identification for the remaking of postcolonial citizenship. On residence, see Mamdani, “African States.” On the idea of survivors’ justice as transcending the categories of victim and perpetrator, see Mamdani, *Neither Settler nor Native*, 180–92.
67. John Dunn pursues the analysis of democracy along these lines in *Breaking Democracy's Spell*. His aim is to “de-parochialize the understanding of democracy . . . to disentangle the skein of ideas the term now evokes and the political phenomena associated with those ideas, as far as practicable, from the contingencies of local political experience and to relocate them back in the intractably global setting that the term itself so unmistakably occupies” (12).
68. Dunn suggests that this is one of the dramatic and surprising things we learn about “what democracy does and does not imply” from the Indian example (*Breaking Democracy's Spell*, 125).
69. Nathan, *Electoral Politics*.
70. Even within one national setting, variations across institutional background conditions as well as historical and political context reveal different interactions between democratic mobilization and identity. In a recent study of democratic politics in Accra, Jeffrey Paller shows how different neighborhoods—the core “indigenous” settlement of the Ga Mashie, the diverse migrant neighborhood of Ashaiman, and the informal squatter neighborhood of Old Fadama—suggest different trajectories for the combination of identity and democratic politics (*Democracy in Ghana*). Ethnicity, for instance, is salient in both Ga Mashie and Old Fadama, but whereas indigeneity structures claims of inclusion/exclusion and of political leadership in the former, ties to a rural homeland are leveraged in the latter. Alternatively, residents of Ashaiman have largely avoided the mobilization of ethnic identity, drawing instead on long-standing cross-ethnic networks based on residency. This variation across the same city illustrates both the deep affinity between democratic politics and the politicization of identity and their contingent combinations. Moreover, by attending to such variation, we might also identify mechanisms that mitigate the political entrenchment of identity.
71. For example, the rise of caste as a political identity seems coincident with the secular decline of caste as the organizing principle of social structure. On the adaptive dynamic between caste identities and democratic institutions see Kaviraj, “The Empire of Democracy.” The literature on caste in Indian politics has rapidly expanded since the seminal work of Rajni Kothari, *Caste in Indian Politics*. For an overview see Gupta, “Caste and Politics.”

72. See especially Kasimis, *Perpetual Immigrant*.
73. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 381–486.
74. This is a key point made by Chatterjee and Mamdani, and here summarized very succinctly by Pierre Rosanvallon: “When democracy is studied in a classically normative perspective, no *useful* comparison is really possible. One can only record successes and failures, measure relative achievements, and establish typologies. The danger in this is that we risk mistaking particular values for universal and making sacred cows of specific mechanisms” (*Counter-Democracy*, 26–27). Rosanvallon recommends a properly comparative view as a way to “de-Westernize” democratic theory.
75. For instance, while innovation and reanimation are concerned with generating context-transcending or generalizable categories and frameworks, this need not be the only aim of a decolonized political theory. Recuperating and reconstructing non-Western traditions, either ancient and precolonial or modern, can provide critical distance on contemporary theoretical frameworks in order to destabilize their hegemony. Such an approach shares affinities with a central aim of the history of political thought and is taken up in recent work in comparative political theory.
76. John Dunn presciently warned of the limits of modern political thought and provocatively claimed that the future of Western political thought lies in Asia and Africa, in *Western Political Theory in the Face of the Future*. One sign of the contemporary crisis of concepts can be discerned in the reigning diagnoses of democratic decline, death, and backsliding, as well as the renewed circulation of populism as an alternative frame for understanding the current political moment. If not outrightly stated as a conceptual crisis, this searching for alternative frameworks implies an awareness of the gap between the categories of Western political thought and contemporary political practices.

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