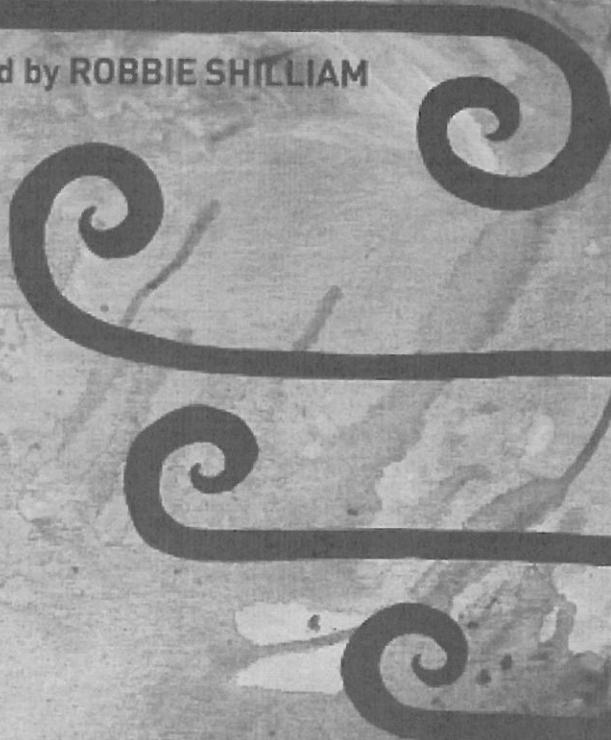# INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND NON-WESTERN THOUGHT

Imperialism, colonialism and investigations of global modernity

edited by ROBBIE SHILLIAM

INTERVENTIONS

2 The perilous but unavoidable terrain of the non-West

Robbie Shilliam

Introduction

In this chapter I argue that an orientation – or perhaps reorientation – towards non-Western thought is a perilous but unavoidable undertaking if international relations scholars wish to explore the global context of modernity. I begin by drawing attention to the inadequacies that are revealed in mainstream understandings of modern subjecthood held by the Western Academy when colonial and imperial route(s) to modernity are brought to the fore of investigation. However, I then explore the significant epistemological difficulties that accompany the engagement with a non-Western archive of thought that at least in part has been constructed through colonially induced forms of representing 'others'. Subsequently, I explore some approaches that might escape the tendency to essentialize and/or exoticize non-Western thought on modernity, specifically 'travelling theory' and 'translating modernity'. What is required, I argue, is a serious engagement with non-Western thought that is nevertheless sensitive to the way in which imperialism and colonialism have carved out the geo-cultural and geo-political terrains of West and non-West. Having made this 'return' to the non-West I suggest how, from this perspective, the ideal of Western modernity might be critically re-examined so as to provide a more adequate appreciation of the global context of modernity, modernity globalized through – and as – colonial and imperial projects.

The inadequacy of Western thought

In the social sciences, modernity refers to a condition of social existence that is radically different to all past forms of human experience that are categorized as 'traditional' and/or 'primitive'. Although IR is largely a derivative discipline to sociology and anthropology when it comes to debates over modernity, these debates – and they have historical roots that reach back into seventeenth-century European thought – have largely provided the framework within which IR theory has developed (for an overview see Shilliam 2010). It is over the question of modernity that the most influential debates have taken place regarding issues of continuity and change within and among societies and the contrasting forms and

sequences of change. Moreover, these debates have raised epistemological questions over how to explain the political order formed in the midst of anomie or alienation of the social subject, what kind of knowledge production this subject partakes of when it is impersonalized, desacralized and individualized, and what form of knowledge production is appropriate to understand this modern form of subjecthood.[1]

It is difficult to underplay the influence that these debates have wielded in the Western Academy. But, for the purposes of this chapter, perhaps the most signal effect has been the construction of a consensus that context-free knowledge is universally valid and thus thoroughly modern knowledge, as opposed to context-sensitive systems of thought that remain 'traditional', that is to say personalized, communalized, sacralized and thus 'prejudiced'. This distinction smuggles into the assessment of knowledge production a geo-political and temporal constituency, namely the modern West versus the traditional non-West.[2] Upon this distinction, and through this geo-cultural cleavage, the canon of legitimate social–scientific thought in the Western Academy is constructed and policed. Faced with this distinction, non-Western thought might be considered as a legitimate object of modern inquiry, but not a source through which to construct legitimate knowledge of modern subjecthood.

A prescient example of this geo-cultural division of knowledge production can be found in the recent revival of interrogating the political effect of religious belief. The division of spiritual and profane ways of knowing the world is in large part dependent upon a colonial geo-cultural imaginary, one clearly evident in the traditional comparison of spiritual Indian 'thought' with rational Western 'philosophy' (Krishna 1988). Much thought on modernity in the Western Academy – both mainstream and critical – approaches religious belief having already internalized the Kantian expulsion of religion from practical reason (Hurd 2004). Jürgen Habermas's discourse ethics is perhaps the strongest restatement of this dichotomy. Habermas assumes that *the* problem of pursuing a modern ethical life arises from the loss of the religious basis of moral traditions and the confrontation with profane existence (Habermas 1998).[3]

And yet many routes through which modern subjecthoods were formed display none of the 'disenchantment' presumed by Habermas's moral philosophy. For example, a number of scholars have explored how British colonial rule denied the development of a secular Indian public sphere, which paradoxically led to the cultivation of a 'modern' Indian national identity within personal spheres heavily imbued with religious worldviews (Chatterjee 1986; Chakrabarty 2000, p. 4). Furthermore, in terms of the moral basis of critiquing modernity, many scholars have critically argued through religious – for example Islamic – worldviews about the harmful consequences of Western modernization, especially with regards to its secularization of the public sphere (see, for example, Euben 1997). Similarly, right in the heart of the so-called West – the Americas – there exists an established tradition of thought on black liberation that has offered radical social critiques of the relationship between slavery and modern subjecthood that have nevertheless been made in the religious lexicons of prophesy and redemption (Cone 1970;

Bogues 2003). Thus, when the standpoint is shifted outside of an idealized understanding of European history, profanity is not the only register that facilitates critical examination of modern subjecthood.

Similar issues arise if we consider the racial formation of modern subjecthood produced through imperial projects and colonial rule. By the time that classical political economy tradition had taken root in Scotland, a whole array of non-European cultures, value systems and political communities had started to become homogenized into meta-racialized identities – especially, 'native', 'primitive', 'savage', 'barbarian', 'Negro' – to be contrasted to the superior and more evolved European – and ultimately white – civilization (Quijano 2000; Garner 2007; Blaney and Inayatullah 2010). The Scottish and English scholars of classical political economy and social contract theory made race conveniently absent in their identification of civilizing subjects (Mills 1999). But intellectuals who had been interpolated as something other than civilized and white tended not to. For example, in the late nineteenth century, José Martí attempted to legitimize an independent Cuba by reference to the miscegenation of its population. Martí posited *mestizo* identity as the true emancipatory site of the Americas against homogenizing ideas such as *raza* that had been used by certain Creole elites to justify their rule by reference to a white European heritage (Aching 2005). The syncretism of African and Western modes of life within plantation economies raises the question of whether one can find a pure form of modern subjecthood within that hieroglyph of modernity itself, the United Sates. Alternatively, in the early twentieth century, Marcus Garvey's pan-African political philosophy made an impersonalized but racialized collective, the black diaspora, the agent of transnational self-determination (Shilliam 2006).

Of course, the imperial formation of meta-racialized identities always intersected with the gendered dimension of forming colonial subjects (see McCall 2005). European colonizers had a tendency to grant the 'savage' its own special 'nobility' as long as this savage mimicked the martial valour that the colonizers ascribed to themselves. Unfortunately, the proof of such nobility was a suicidal urge to throw oneself upon European muskets and maxim guns, and those of the colonized who decided upon a more prudent (and rational!) course of action were assumed to be feminized peoples, passive and weak. Colonial mentality had to subvert the fact that not all 'native' societies required women to be simply passive property of men; to acknowledge this would be to admit that Europeans might have to learn how to balance the self-determination of subjects with a complex division of labour from savages and barbarians. For example, British intellectuals in Aotearoa New Zealand mapped the complexities, nuances and frictions of gender relations in Māori societies onto a totally inappropriate imaginary of Christian and Victorian patriarchal rule (in general, see Smith 1999). But perhaps the key point to be made here is that the presumed distinction between the modern public sphere of the androgynous citizen and a gendered and affective private life could not coalesce upon a colonial foundation. Rather, as Priya Chacko shows with regards to India, the post-colonial nation came to be recognized in international society as an already gendered female body (Chacko 2008).

The purpose of this section has been to highlight the fact that in the context of imperial and colonial rule, embodied, communal and sacral subjectivities have not been subsumed under the modernist tendency to impersonalize, individualize and make profane. Rather, these subjectivities have formed the very matter of contestations over the modern promise of freedom and self-determination for the majority of the world's population. Thus, if we are concerned with investigating the global context of modernity, that is, modernity globalized through – and as – colonial and imperial projects, no analysis is adequate that makes a categorical distinction between the characteristics of pre-modern and modern subjecthood. This does not mean that Marx, Weber and Habermas are somehow irrelevant to understanding the global context of modernity. What it does mean is that we should be careful not to assume that non-Western categorizations and conceptualizations of modern subjecthood are unsophisticated or even misguided simply because they clash with the epistemological common-sense of the Western Academy. Rather, the clash reveals the fallacy of composition whereby an idealized Western modernity is mistaken for global modernity.

Enrique Dussel provides a useful critique of this fallacy of composition. Dividing the world into centre and periphery, Dussel makes a *general* claim that peripheral subjects – and here he notes the historical existence of a shifting periphery within Europe itself – have had to define themselves against already established 'civilized' images of the human persona, but, as newcomers or outsiders, have enjoyed a critical perspective from which they might be better placed to interrogate the reality of such images (Dussel 1985, p. 4). In Dussel's geo-cultural imaginary, critical thought has just as much (if not more of) a tendency to arise from the periphery than from the centre. Not only does this model suggest that thought from the periphery is more than simply 'derivative' of an 'original', but it also suggests that critical thought from the centre can never really be critical of its own situated experienced if it ignores thought from the periphery (Connell 2007; Walsh 2007).

The perils of representing the non-West

But, as I shall now discuss, there is no simple or direct route into non-Western thought understood as a *sui generis* and transparent archive. I do not wish to downplay the very practical obstacles for scholars who wish to engage with this archive, be it 'mundane' funding problems to language issues where English – and certainly not, for example, Arabic – is the lingua franca of social science (see Mignolo 2000, p. 71; Tickner 2003, p. 301). However, non-Western thought has never really been absent from the Western Academy; and neither should we imagine that its archive is simply waiting to be fully opened, thus revealing a pristine world of discovery. Rather, to use Spivak's terms (Spivak 1988), it is already represented – rather than re-presented – and more often than not in ways that tend to essentialize and exoticize non-Western culture.

For example, debates within the Western Academy have contributed much to the thesis that the success of the East Asian Tigers in the 1980s was due to the

preservation of Confucianism (Bell and Chaibong 2003): in short, 'Asian values' are, at least to a certain extent, values inscribed upon 'Asia' by (especially) American scholars. Not just non-Western value systems but identities too have been, in part (but not in whole), constructed by the Academy. Elizabeth Povinelli, for example, makes the case that non-indigenous Australian scholars have inscribed Aboriginal identity as part of a timeless culture worthy of preservation so as to allay liberal guilt about historical illiberal actions. This has produced a paradoxical situation wherein '[n]on–aboriginal Australians enjoy ancient traditions while suspecting the authenticity of the aboriginal subject. Aboriginal Australians enjoy their traditions while suspecting the authenticity of themselves' (Povinelli 1999, p. 31). These examples demonstrate that even when the Western Academy turns its attention towards the 'outside', it is often documenting the fruits of its own (idealized) intellectual labours.

Alternatively, it cannot be assumed that scholars hailing from outside of the Western Academy represent authentic and pristine traditions of non-Western thought. Generally speaking, a body of thought becomes inscribed as 'traditional' only when it is threatened or disturbed by contending bodies of thought. In this respect, any call to embrace tradition as a resource that might oppose, say, Westernization, is itself at least part of the effect of Westernization.[4] Perhaps the most famous example of this process is the embrace in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century by a number of East Asian scholars of the Eurocentric categorization of their own cultures as the exotic 'other'. This 'reverse Orientalism' (Dallmayr 1994, p. 529) is evident, for example, in the Kyoto school of philosophy wherein intellectuals often sought to give value to the East in the global order by virtue of its negative (spiritual) complementarity to the (rational) enlightenment values of the West (Jones 2003, p. 143).

Moreover, the concepts deployed by non-Western intellectuals to guide the creation of post-colonial societies were often inherited from the colonizers' blueprints of modern society and state. For instance, it has been well documented how through a variety of different historical discourses the European concept of the modern state has remained in Indian political thought as an essential – although enigmatic – normative concept (Nandy 1988, p. xi; Chakrabarty 2000, p. 42; Kaviraj 2005). These days, North American approaches to IR tend to dominate national academies in most of the world (see Tickner and Waever 2009). And, of course, many scholars who have filiations to non-Western societies, or hail from racialized communities internal to the West, are themselves gatekeepers in the Western Academy, especially, but not solely, through the carving out of a post-colonial studies niche.[5] Nevertheless, it is disturbing to note that often these intellectuals are either exoticized as curiosities or dismissed as fakirs. The wound of Dubois's 'double consciousness' has yet to heal (Gilroy 1993).

There is, then, a serious myopia involved in representing the archive of non-Western thought as authentic and pristine when it has been constructed through centuries of colonial and imperial relations. But perhaps the greatest effect of this representation is that it must ignore the complexity and heterogeneity of the social worlds and worldviews that imperial forces encountered and in and against which

colonial projects proceeded. Moreover, as I have mentioned, the evolution of the disciplines of the Western Academy depended in large part upon the collapsing of this heterogeneity into a gross hierarchy of human conditions mapped, as always, onto a geo-cultural imaginary: the savage, barbarian and civilized. And if this imaginary framed imperial and colonial policy, it also determined the expectations of what kind of capabilities for self-reflection might be encountered amongst certain populations in the world.

Take, for example, Edward Said's celebrated thesis on Orientalism. Orientalism, for Said, is the form of knowledge production of the 'other' that constructs a despotic, sensual and stagnant Orient against the European 'self', a persona typified by reason, enlightenment and progress (Said 1994). The development of the comparative method in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European universities relied upon the distinctions that Orientalism allowed to be made between areas, while allowing these distinctions to be ranked through a universal narrative of human progression. Alternatively, the intellectual construction of Africa was a far more extreme process of 'othering'. Comparative studies failed to attribute even the faded glory of ancient civilization to Africa, and all things African were cast as the absolute other – the animalistic domain counterpoised to the quintessentially human(e) lands of Europe (Mudimbe 1988). Hegel, at his most charitable, attributed a permanent childhood to Africans; 150 years of learning later, Huntington, at his most charitable, conceded the 'possibility' of a thing called African civilization (Huntington 1996). The silence on Africa in the European comparative studies tradition, in this sense, speaks volumes, and recent collections of comparative studies still woefully under-represent African thought on modernity (see, for example, the selection in Parel and Keith 1992; Jung 2002).

On the other hand, if various regions were historically integrated into the European (and subsequently American) geo-cultural imaginary differentially, so too did the geo-political modes of integration vary, ranging from indirect rule through princely states in South Asia, to direct settler colonization, to the wholesale shipping of Africans into the Americas as part of the creation of an 'Atlantic modernity'. The colonial frontier was (and is) always shifting, blurring and composed of multiple divisions. This variety of integrative processes is important to unpack when one seeks to clarify the particular situatedness from which non-Western intellectuals critically encountered global modernity.

For many intellectuals in the Americas it was the ambiguity of identifying the Americas with Europe that drove investigation of modernity. Walter Mignolo goes so far as to argue that Said's Orientalism thesis partakes in the occlusion of the preceding colonial production of the European 'Occident', which, from the Iberian expansion across the Atlantic, began to include the Americas as a frontier of the European 'West' (Mignolo 2000, pp. 55–60). To their European counterparts, New World colonists were very quickly assessed as contaminated with the savagery of the New World (both putatively found within the Amerindians and imported with Atlantic slavery) (see Pagden and Canny 1989; Garraway 2005). However, Creolization, a concept that addresses the process of 'making native' to the New World and focuses upon the arising ambiguities over geo-cultural

identification, has been developed as an emancipatory form of modern subject formation by Caribbean thinkers (Glissant 1989; Bernabé *et al.* 1990).

Alternatively, far removed from the colonial plantation economies lay those regions that might be termed the 'quasi-colonized'. Here, the threat of Western imperial expansion framed intellectual engagements in a specific way, notably via the identification of European modernity as a resource *and* a threat. From the time of Alexander II onwards some Russian intelligentsia embraced their developmental destiny as replicating the recent history of Western Europe in order to avoid 'Asiatic' morass. However, Slavophiles preferred the idea of a 'separate' path for Russia with its claim to the uniqueness and superiority of the Slavic communal spirit (Bassin 1991, p. 9). After the Opium Wars with Britain, Chinese intellectuals struggled in their own way with the need to accommodate, but not be assimilated by, Western imperialism. The maxim, *Zhongxue weiti, Xixue weiyong* (Chinese learning as essence, Western learning as means), resonates even today in the attempt to build an IR theory with 'Chinese characteristics' (Yeh 1998, Chan 1999, p. 173).

The point of this section has been to sketch out the perils of representing non-Western thought when its archive has been constructed so intimately through diverse imperial projects and colonial rule. In the face of these epistemological challenges, any attempt to engage with non-Western thought might seem tragically doomed to merely re-produce the colonizers image of the world. And yet, even with the best of intentions, non-Western thought cannot be so easily dismissed. The Western Academy considers the archive to be, by and large, the repository of derivative, substandard or exotic knowledge, even though it contains originally situated thought upon the experiences of imperialism and colonialism, and even though the Academy's valorization of its own archive is in part a requirement of the very same processes of imperialism and colonialism. But most importantly, these experiences *continue to reverberate* in the present lived experiences of subjects worldwide (to varying degrees of intimacy, of course). Therefore, to acknowledge the perilous nature of the journey (back) to the non-West cannot be misunderstood as an injunction simply to stay at home.

To summarize the argument so far: even having recognized the co-constitution of the archives of Western and non-Western thought through (the threat of) relations of colonial domination, and even after having problematized the authenticity, essentialist nature and pristine character of the non-Western archive itself, it is crucial that we do *not* ignore non-Western thought as a collection of situated outlooks on the modern condition. For it is upon this *uneven* non-Western geo-intellectual terrain – by no means an alien world, yet neither a global commons – that many of the deepest engagements and problematizations of modernity have been produced. Dismissing non-Western thought as an epistemologically suspect archive runs the risk of effacing the global and colonial dimension of the making of modernity, thus lapsing back into a default Eurocentrism. In what now follows, I point out some strategies that might allow for a more adequate navigation of this perilous, but unavoidable, journey.

Reorientation towards the non-West

To begin with, the situated, concrete historical contexts of non-Western thought can never be lost sight of. Non-Western thought must be approached as parts of a relation of a process of domination. For this purpose, however, domination cannot be understood as a one-way relationship comprising the exploitation of a passive victim (Dunch 2002). After all, the colonial relation has always had a negative effect upon the colonizer – and the culture of the 'mother country' – as well as upon the colonized (Nandy 1988; Memmi 1990). With different impacts and to different extents *both* subjects of the colonial relation could conceivably be considered 'victims'. And if this is the case, it follows that so could both colonizer and colonized, again differentially, be considered agents of transformation, or at the very least, possessors of the ability to creatively reason on the mode of transformation.

Indeed, it is simply not possible to explain every non-Western engagement with the West as one of pure and simple colonial domination. For example, and to return to the realm of the 'quasi-colonized', Japan did not come under direct Western domination until the end of the Second World War, and not until attempting its own Western-inspired – if substantively differentiated (Beasley 1987, Chapter 1) – colonial project in Asia, while at the same time attempting an entry into Western-dominated 'international society' (through the League of Nations) as a racial equal. The 'Kyoto school' of philosophy in Japan that formed around Nishida Kitarô in the first half of the twentieth century attempted to critically address Japan's place – and ethico-political mission – in a Western-dominated world. To understand Japanese 'being in the world', Kyoto school intellectuals displayed an interest in Heidegger's works on phenomenology (in general, see Parkes 1987). But it would be hard to then claim that German theory was forced upon the Japanese Academy in an act of cultural domination; and neither is it the case that through this engagement Kyoto phenomenology became a 'Heideggerian' derivative.

Although the Japanese case might be quite particular, it nevertheless alerts us to the fact that the Western script of modernity has never simply been written onto a blank paper to be internalized by the non-Western mind. Non-Western intellectuals (and, of course, populations at large), rather than assimilate the message, have just as much copied this script – out of command, necessity, pre-emption or inventiveness – into existing narratives for pragmatic, political and/or ethical purposes other than what the script was intended for. Therefore, when engaging with non-Western thought we must not only recognize the concrete relations of domination through which such thought has been both created and received, we must also recognize the creative agency that has been deployed in order to construct understandings of an imperially and colonially induced modernity.

Through what conceptual frameworks might it be possible, then, for the Western Academy to enter – or perhaps leave and return to – the terrain of non-Western thought? Two possible frameworks have arisen in recent years: 'travelling theory' and 'translation'.

The idea of theory as travel is by no means new. In both ancient Greek and Islamic thought the act of theorization was closely associated with travel and the dislocation of oneself from one's own context in order to gain a critical perspective on that context (Euben 2004). That travel might be a constitutive act in the production of knowledge has become especially important to anthropology in recent years. After all, ethnographic knowledge is not produced in a direct relationship between the observer and the observed but rather is just as much knowledge produced by the 'travels' – practical and conceptual – of the interlocutor (Clifford 1992). In short, the 'native informant', in order to communicate to both sides, has her/his own history of encounter and discovery. Hence knowledge production of cultural and societal difference is never a comparison of discrete entities; it is itself a practice – a production – of inter-relationships.

As Said pointed out, the origin and destination of a travelling idea might occupy very different socio-political contexts, and depending on the conditions of accepting or tolerating an 'alien' idea, the meaning and use of the idea could be transformed through this incorporation (Said 1984, pp. 226–7). And if ideas travel then they requires translation. Translation is also a generative act of knowledge production rather than simply a technical act of producing a philological fidelity of meaning across discrete lexicons. Ideas do not 'travel' by themselves but are always carried through political projects (Liu 2002, p. 324; Young 2002, pp. 408–9). '[T]he question', Lydia Liu insightfully argues, 'is not whether translation between cultures is possible – people do it anyway, or whether the other is knowable, or even whether an abstruse text is decipherable, but what practical purposes or needs bring an ethnographer to pursue cultural translation' (Liu 2002, p. 306). Here the very practical issue of the nature of colonial domination and the creation of the 'terrain' of non-Western political thought re-arises. So rather than assuming translation to be a predominantly 'cerebral' pursuit quarantined to a privileged stratum of interloping agents (migrants, intellectuals or otherwise), we must understand translation to work more constitutively in the structural reformation or transformation of societies and cultures.[6]

Drawing together the strands of the argument made so far I would argue that translating modernity is not simply an act of assimilating meanings and practices, and neither is it solely an act of resistance. Rather, domination, resistance, appropriation and transformation have to be understood as congenitally entangled in this moment of knowledge production, their entanglement often generating novel meanings of 'modern' categories and concepts. The complexity of this aspect of knowledge production rules out any simplistic and universal ascription of non-Western thought solely as a tradition of resistance or assimilation, and thus guards against the exoticizing of the 'other'. Vincente Rafael's work on Spanish attempts to convert the Tagalog of the Philippines to Christianity is instructive in this regard (Rafael 1988). Rafael documents how Latin words formed areas of untranslatability in the Spanish vernacular of prayers and commandments that were taught to the Tagalog, who then imbued these words with 'inappropriate' indigenous meanings. Submission to the Spanish God could then be performed orally by the Tagalog but minus the meanings of domination that the Spanish

idea of conversion assumed. Neither domination nor resistance nor appropriation defined the Tagalog intellectual engagement with Spanish colonialism *in toto.*[7]

Thus stated, an anti- or post-colonial engagement by the Western Academy with non-Western thought requires the cultivation of a set of linked sensitivities. First, we must recognize the determining history of colonial/quasi-colonial cultural and political impingement/domination in modern thought. That is to say, quite simply, that if knowledge is always produced within particular contexts, then (the threat of) colonialism is a meta-context in which knowledge of modernity has been produced. But, second, we must nevertheless be sensitive to the differentiated nature of experiences of imperialism and colonialism. That is to say that non-Western thought has been situated within an array of geo-politically and geo-culturally variegated experiences. However, third, we must remember that this difference has never been unbounded such that all that is required is to list a set of open-ended cultural particulars. We cannot incorporate the archive of non-Western thought into our Academy through a liberal embrace. Rather, we should remember that the variegated contexts within which non-Western thought has produced knowledge of modernity have always been bound to constellations of power that have foisted a *global* imperial and colonial order. Therefore, in the historical–geographical imaginary, the West and non-West operate as positionalities already produced by various intellectual attempts to map and chart a passage through the variegated global experience of colonial modernity. Hence, non-Western thought is *constitutive* of global thought on modernity.

The West viewed from elsewhere

Orienting oneself towards the non-Western side of this relationship might even allow for more adequate critical reflection of the ideal Western experience of modernity, although this should not be taken to be the ultimate purpose of such re-orientation. For this purpose, though, it is expedient to consider engagements in modern European thought with the concept of the 'other' (Bernestein 1991, p. 3; Neumann 1999, p. 1). Two philosophers immediately stand out, who built upon the phenomenological tradition of continental thought (especially Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger), namely, Hans-Georg Gadamer and Emmanuel Lévinas. Gadamer's work on 'philosophical hermeneutics' seeks to make explicit the situatedness from which one already receives meanings of the objects of investigation. Dialogue is the key to making visible the 'horizon' of experience to the extent that it allows an expansion of this horizon to a point where it might 'fuse' with differentially situated horizons of experience (Gadamer 2004, pp. 301–5). Here lies Gadamer's contribution to an ethics of difference, that is, that there should be no closure of understanding of the self so that the space always exists for understanding the self in terms of an ethical relation to the other (for example, Dallmayr 1996; pp. 41–8, Shapcott 2001). Alternatively, Lévinas posits a far more radical alterity between the self and the other. Because the other can never be known in and of itself, one cannot make the other into an object of the self. Therefore subjectivity is essentially ethical: the constitution of the self is

at the same time a responsibility towards maintaining the integrity of the other (Lévinas 1969).[8]

Gadamer and Lévinas might seem to provide important prompts on how to situate the Western Academy vis-à-vis non-Western thought. And yet it seems as if in both cases the 'other' is effectively contained within the concrete history of European civilization. Indeed, there is a sense that the 'radical' alterity of non-European 'others' is treated more as a threat than as an opportunity for understanding the European 'self'. This bias can be excavated from Gadamer's writings on translation. His fusion of horizons is, at root, a dialogical engagement between diachronic differences within a given society, especially between past and present meanings of social intercourse. However, Gadamer seems to be far more uncomfortable in dealing with the task of translating between presently existing and differentiated systems of meaning. Ultimately, he contains the threat of synchronous (rather than diachronic) difference by claiming rather offhandedly that the task of translating synchronic differences in meaning 'differs only in degrees and not in kind from the general hermeneutical task that any text represents' (Gadamer 2004, pp. 387–99, 438–40).[9] In a similar vein, David Campbell has outlined the problem that the existence of multiple others presents for Lévinas' ethics (Campbell 1999, pp. 37–8). When having to ethically negotiate relations between the one and the *many*, Lévinas organizes this task by asking 'Who is closest?'. The closest seems to be those who have historically shared a common cultural experience . . . a European (colonial) experience?

The effective bracketing within European civilization of the ethical response to the problem of the 'other' leads to a tendency to treat the problem of difference as one internal to *the* modern subject understood to universally be the 'sovereign individual' of sociological and economic lore. Once this is assumed, there is no reason why an engagement with non-Western thought should be considered an organic requirement of dealing analytically and ethically with the modern problem of the self/other relation. Instead, there is a tacit assumption that the Western archive is sufficient alone for the task. Again, one does not need to leave home to know the world; the world comes into view once we have already constructed a (European) worldview.

This narcissistic tendency can be gleaned in the collection of French intellectuals that have been labelled, imperfectly, as 'poststructuralists' and who have constructed debates about modernity overwhelmingly by reference to the discrete matter of (an idealized) European thought and history. It is all the more peculiar a tendency when one considers the intimate historical relation between the rise in France of structuralist/poststructuralist thought and the pursuit of decolonization in its colonies. For as Robert Young, Pal Ahluwalia and Alina Sajed have noted, the Algerian war of independence formed a crucial part of the political context in which structuralism and then post-structuralism arose as critiques in the French academy. Algeria, more than anything else, revealed the limits of the assimilatory character of the French singular and sovereign subject, the *citoyen*. One might validly question whether critiques of otherness, difference, irony, mimicry,

parody and deconstruction of grand narratives are possible, in large part, because of this evolving post-colonial context (Young 2002; Ahluwalia 2005; Sajed 2011). Seminal intellectuals such as Louis Althusser and Jacques Derrida were born in Algeria and spent formative years there, and in his adult life Michel Foucault spent an important sojourn in neighbouring Tunisia.[10]

Poststructuralism cannot be judged solely on the grounds of its colonial lacuna. And neither should one claim – tritely – that it is impossible to critically interrogate non-Western thought through the conceptual frameworks of post-structural authors, for example Foucault and Derrida.[11] Instead, the point is quite simple: that critical European thought in general tends to obfuscate perhaps the foundational geo-cultural and geo-political context of modern knowledge production itself – imperial rule and colonial domination. I would argue that shorn of this context, the use of critical European thought to interrogate the 'other' on the global stage can tend to produce a 'concept' driven research agenda rather than a 'problem' driven one. The former leads to an abstract engagement with the universal modern condition (albeit interrogated concretely through the European condition) wherein non-Western experiences can be treated as case studies but not as originary sites of legitimate knowledge production (see Neumann 1999, p. 29; Diez and Steans 2005, p. 138; Grosfoguel 2007). And this, perhaps, reveals how insidiously colonial epistemology works in the Western Academy. To put it provocatively: why is it that recent critical responses to the 'war on terror' in IR can so easily, but curiously, evade the non-Western perspectives of this 'war', and instead use its deadly effects to vindicate the writings of various European intellectuals such as Schmitt, Foucault and Agamben?

However, my argument should not be read as an injunction to let the ideal modern subjecthood of the West go un-interrogated. Rather, armed with this appreciation of the colonial context of the production of the 'other' we might better recognize the transformative impact upon – and tainting of – modernizing Europe by its own various colonial ventures. For example, as Ashis Nandy has illustrated, taking on the identity of the hyper-masculinized colonizer abroad also meant tainting the putatively pristine modern character of the mother country's public sphere with the atavistic affectivities of masochism and desire (1988, pp. xv, 2). We might further recognize that different colonial ventures were embarked upon in the context of different trajectories of development between European polities, leading to different forms of colonialism 'outside', and different returning effects 'inside'.[12] Diversity in inter-relation is not only the prerogative of the non-West. And armed with this knowledge, we might be better able to appreciate the progressiveness as well as the limits of radical thinkers within Europe and their negotiation of the interlinkages between class, gender and racism. In this regard, the thought and practice of Sylvia Pankhurst could prove very informative (see Davis 1999). Finally, we might be able to better retrieve the history of colonial domination and the production of the 'other' *within* Europe. Ireland, of course, was the first domain to be colonized by Britain (see, for example, Carroll and King 2003). And possibly the most abiding 'other' within (Christian) European

civilization was the Jew. Much critical thought on the modern experience within European thought, we might remember, was developed by German-Jewish intellectuals (e.g. Mendelssohn, Hess, Heine, Marx) and, perhaps, made possible by the agonistic nature of this hyphen.[13] Indeed, it was Albert Memmi's liminal position as a 'native' Jew (and not Muslim) in the French protectorate of Tunisia that, he believed, allowed him to personally experience the identities of both colonizer and colonized (see the preface to 1990).

What I have attempted to show in this section is that an engagement with the terrain of non-Western thought does not need to be an exercise in provincialism, any less than an engagement with critical European thought has to be. But that such an engagement has, so far, received woefully inadequate attention must be understood as part of the effect of Eurocentrism. For Eurocentrism is most evident in the unspoken assumption that we do not need to attempt to travel to intellectual terrains outside of the ideal West, and that all that is required to problematize the modern condition can be found within the Western archive. The solution is not to add non-Western thought into the expanding archive of the Western Academy, for that is a continuation in the intellectual sphere of imperial expansion and colonial rule. Rather, the purpose is to undermine the security of an epistemological cartography that quarantines legitimate knowledge production of modernity to one (idealized) geo-cultural site.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that a reorientation towards non-Western thought is a perilous yet unavoidable enterprise if we are to cultivate a more adequate appreciation of the global context of modernity, that is to say modernity globalized through – and as – colonial and imperial projects. To conclude, I would like to point out the concepts and categories that might be problematized in IR theory specifically, and to which many of the subsequent chapters of this book speak.

First, and at the heart of IR theory, is the nature and exercise of political power. In this respect, non-Western thought might provide new perspectives on the interrelated yet multiple forms of modern sovereignty, of rule by law, of hegemonic rule, and in general of the relationship (if any) between *potentia* and *potestas*. For example, much IR theory is devoted to explaining the form of – and intent behind – power exercised through Western institutions, whether this is explained in terms of imperial power, soft power, bio-politics, governmentality, neoliberal governance, etc. Yet IR theory is exceptionally bad at addressing the ways in which these influences have been incorporated, appropriated, resisted and/or transformed in their 'target' societies. In many ways, IR theory depends upon a fallacy of composition to be made between Western and global forms and technologies of political rule. For example, the fact that some Western societies might be governed through technologies of governmentality does not mean that there exists a Foucauldian world order (Joseph 2009).

Second, non-Western thought might provide novel perspectives on the spatial

constructions of modern world order, whether these are understood in terms of empire, international society, core/periphery, or a system of states. In the 1970s Hedley Bull mooted the possibility of the replacement of the society of European states by a neo-medieval patchwork of overlapping authorities. Scholars have recently retrieved this idea in order to make sense of the transformations happening within the European Union and in global governance at large (Friedrichs 2001; Zielonka 2006). And yet surely the type of interconnected plurality of (hierarchical) forms of governance that the phrase 'neo-medieval' intonates is not an idea of a future world order in emergence but more accurately an historical and enduring description of the colonial world!

This leads onto the third point, that non-Western thought problematizes – while not ignoring – the proclaimed historical specificity of modernity that is predicated upon a set of temporal dichotomies: traditional–modern, religious–secular, national–post-national, international–global.[14] It is no exaggeration to say that it is our sense of epochs, eras and conjunctures that determines the kind of violence to the movement of things that we perform in theoretical abstraction. If these dichotomies are problematized, along with their implicit grand narratives, political philosophies of internationalism, cosmopolitanism and humanism might take on different characteristics and with that our sense of what is past, what is possible and what is desirable.

Finally, I would argue that the greatest challenge to IR theory is an abiding one that is endemic to the Western Academy as a whole and all who partake in it. It is by no means a challenge that is born of the global war on terror, nor of the rise of the G20. For the social sciences it delineates the horizon of modernity itself. It is the assumption, best articulated by Hegel, that production of knowledge of modernity is, necessarily, self-reflective production of knowledge of our discrete selves, and vice versa. It is hard to underestimate how central this assumption is to the *raison d'être* of the Western Academy: theorizing modernity *is* the production of ourselves as Western subjects being *the* subjects of human history. I would suggest that, as a whole, IR theory is also caught up in this colonially induced hermeneutic circle. In this respect, Jean-Paul Sartre's guide to the European audience reading Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* remains the most prescient – and as yet unanswered – provocation:

> After a few steps in the night, you will see strangers gathered round a fire, draw closer, listen: they are discussing the fate they have in store for your trading posts, for the mercenaries who defend them. They will see you perhaps, but they will continue to talk among themselves without even lowering their voices. Their indifference strikes at our hearts . . . Standing at a respectful distance, you will feel furtive, nocturnal, chilled to the bone; everyone has their turn; in this darkness out of which will come a new dawn, you are the zombies.
>
> (Sartre 2001, p. 141)

Notes

1 Here we need think only of Max Weber's instrumental–rational ideal type of modern political authority and Karl Marx's explanation of alienation within the capitalist social relation. See Sayer (1991).
2 On the terms 'context-free' and 'context-sensitive' see Ramanujan (1990) and the sympathetic critique offered by Dallmayr (1994).
3 Even Habermas has recently qualified – if not entirely disowned – his own secularization thesis (Habermas 2008). Linklater (2005) shows the effect of the Habermasian assumption on IR theory when he claims that, even though non-Western communities have in principle the resources to embark on Habermasian-style dialogic politics, Western civilization provides the ideal conditions. For an effective response, see Shani (2007).
4 On the invention of traditions in Chinese philosophy see Defoort (2001).
5 For a critique of this niche see Dirlik (1997). For a critical recovery of the post-colonial project see Young (2002).
6 Clifford is very aware of this point, for example, see Clifford (1992, p. 103).
7 On translational issues regarding the Bible and colonialism see Sugirtharajah (2001).
8 For examples of how Lévinas has been productively used to problematize discourses of geo-politics see Campbell (1999) and Howitt (2002).
9 However, see Dallmayr (1996, pp. 41–6) for comments on Gadamer's subsequent development of a more agonistic understanding of the self–other relationship.
10 To this might be added the influence of Maoism on the French left. With regards to Althusser, see Elliot (2006).
11 See, respectively, the post-colonial work of Said and Spivak.
12 German colonialism is, here, an important consideration to the extent that it was embarked upon as a reaction to a German elite sense of 'backwardness' and 'lateness' *within* European civilization itself. On the specificity of German colonial discourse see Berman (1998).
13 See Chapter 5.
14 My own work has been at least partially caught up in these dichotomies. See, for example, Shilliam (2009, p. 201).