

# Manifestos for World Thought

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## *Chapter 1*

# **Orient, Orientation, and the Western Referent**

### *From Comparative to World Thought*

Andrea Mura

A number of contributions have appeared over the last two decades which have framed the scope and limits of comparative political theory, highlighting its specificity in terms of both methods and substantive ideas. Andrew March, for one, has offered a systematic depiction of what, from different angles, has appeared to him as a generalized “project” calling for the constitution of a disciplinary sub-field of political theorizing.<sup>1</sup>

While problematizing the moniker “comparative” attached to this project, March has identified several motivations which, in his view, sustain existing calls for expanding the canon of Western thinkers and traditions. Explanatory-interpretative justifications have, for instance, highlighted new interpretative possibilities that non-Western texts are said to bring to common problems of both political theory and comparative politics. In a parallel direction, rehabilitative claims have challenged the rigid divide between contemporary Western standards and non-Western traditions, while epistemic reasons seek to overcome the spurious “universality” of the Western canon in favor of a more authentic universalism which includes non-Western perspectives. Finally, with a stronger political focus, global-democratic evaluations have taken cross-cultural efforts to be “imperative in a globalized world,” while critical-transformative claims assume that “existing liberal or Western concepts, categories, and truth-claims” are not just “insufficient for global theorizing, but part (or more) of the problem to be solved.”<sup>2</sup>

While all these aspects often implicate one another, this taxonomy should help delineate conceptual and historic determinants behind which debates on comparative political theory have developed. These are likely to evolve further in the face of present challenges. In one of the most passionate defenses of cross-cultural theorizing at the beginning of the new millennium, Fred Dallmayr has linked his quest for a comparative turn to the cultural

challenges that September 11 had produced on a global scale. His work has thus instantiated what March defined in terms of a global-democratic claim. For Dallmayr, on the eve of 9/11, the congresses and studies falling under the category of “political theory” in Western academia evidenced little familiarity with non-Western authors and debates. They inadvertently illustrated “what Samuel Huntington termed the West’s exclusion of, or predominance over, the rest.”<sup>3</sup> In line with the then zeitgeist, cross-cultural comparison was thought to be a preferable tool to engage, under the conditions of globalization, with the emergence of a “global civil society” while moderating conflict and polarization between cultures. From this perspective, comparative political theory was qualified by a synthetic function. It was able to resist and moderate the conflictual nature of the civilizational clash that the war on terror appeared to instantiate, a clash challenging the image of the peaceful global village that many had celebrated in the post-Cold War era.

From a broad perspective, the irruption of global jihadism on the stage of world politics embodied a morphological negation. It cracked the logic of consensus and political adjustment that neoliberalism had endorsed in its advocacy of a post-ideological and post-conflictual world. At the same time, the very appearance of al-Qaeda on the international scene represented a threat to the illusion of full mastery that new economic forces, mainly under American and European influence, were said to uphold. This shift took place behind the image of the “new world order,” a term widely used by all sides of the political spectrum at that time, including neoliberal institutions, anti-globalization movements and even Osama bin Laden.<sup>4</sup> Trapped by the tension between an idealized picture of a post-conflict multicultural society and emerging narratives of the clash of civilizations, the “Western” opening to “non-Western” thought was mainly driven by a de-centralizing force. It aimed to “remedy the Eurocentrism of the field of political theory,” thus enlarging conventional scholarly horizons of political thought.<sup>5</sup>

The context in which this broad endeavor took place was one in which public debates reflected the perception that Western cultural and political hegemony endured. Although some had begun to interpret Islamism as a sign of the increasing “erosion of eurocentrism” on a geopolitical level<sup>6</sup>, the latter was still deemed to provide a dominant framework, infusing globalization with its pervasive force. But is this still the case? What if, our contemporary scene no longer presupposes the operational function of the West as the analytical ‘centre’ from which reflections on non-Western thought emerge as modes of de-centralization of the Western canon and discourse? What scenarios would be disclosed if we were to interrogate the unitary and necessary status of this referent? To address this set of questions may prove important, not simply to detect key changing conditions and motives behind comparative projects. Resolving these questions may serve better to reframe debates on

cross-cultural dialogue and commensurability, pointing to new possibilities of thought and action beyond the “cross-cultural” and the “comparative.”

Our working hypothesis is that a full acknowledgment of the critical conditions currently traversed by the West as a historical-discursive formation enables us better to apprehend the contingent roots of the “Western” referent. Such a move would permit us to denaturalize the West, subtracting necessity and force from its discursive apparatus and thereby trace new horizons for the future of world thought. Hence, the structural relation between the West and the non-West should first be addressed, unpacking some of the tensions that continue to haunt the current debates on cross-cultural engagement. The Orientalist link between the two terms of the comparative approach, Western and non-Western thought, has amply been debated. Recently, Megan Thomas has emphasized how comparative political theory has come to repeat the projects of 18th and 19th century Orientalism. In their attempt to expand European intellectual horizons, both early Orientalist scholarship and comparative political theory essentially share a similar scope, using difference and commonality to compare traditions. In early Orientalism, two main tendencies have clearly emerged as modes of comparative methods, which would not be too dissimilar from the approach currently informing comparative projects. On the one hand stands the tendency to valorize equivalence through difference, recognizing an equivalent status for the structures, morals and values between the West and the “Orient.” On the other hand, there is a propensity to find value in commonality, therefore looking for some inner, pristine kinship between the two terms. Ancient India, for instance, was recognized by Schlegel as a relative of Europe, part of “one vast family.” An originary proximity between the East and the West was thus “rediscovered,” with the Hellenic tradition now assuming a transitional status, and losing its ancestral position as the mythical foundation of the European discourse: “the Greeks were not rightly seen as the origin of European intellectual traditions: instead their value lay in their being ‘an indispensable connecting link between the European imagination and Oriental tradition’.”<sup>7</sup>

According to Thomas, in striving to harmonize or tie Europe to the Asian world, these approaches would diverge sharply from Said’s canonical account of Orientalism. Said’s portrayal of Orientalist scholarship failed to appreciate the emphatic attitude of these early tendencies, mostly exposing imperial forms of domination of the West and pervasive processes of epistemological othering. This approach has ended up emphasizing and radicalizing differences between the East and the West. For Thomas, comparative political theory embraces Said’s negative characterization of Orientalism. It uses his critical approach to contrast essentializing and stereotypical accounts of Islamic civilization, which have become increasingly “significant after 9/11 and the intensified nationalism and Islamophobia that followed in the United

States.”<sup>8</sup> Yet, comparative projects would temper the more extreme effects of Said’s critique, addressing “difference while actively avoiding conclusions of utter incommensurability or irreducible difference.” Hence some sort of paradoxical position seems to affect comparative political theory, conditioned as it is between Said’s vision and its inability to “fully recognize that it shares qualities and questions with earlier Orientalist scholars.”<sup>9</sup>

We would agree with Thomas’s inspirational critique that early Orientalist approaches have genuinely attempted to broaden the scholarly horizons of Europe and promote some intimate link with the Asian world. Yet we wonder whether such an early opening concealed some subtle form of exotification and discrimination, ultimately in line with Said’s censure. In one of his passing references to Schlegel, for instance, Said highlights the negative complexity of Schlegel’s portrayal, whose Orientalist style would evidence a multifaceted and hierarchical combination of enchantment and bias. Despite Schlegel’s “lifelong fascination” with the ancient Orient, nowhere did the German poet and philologist “talk about the living, contemporary Orient. When he said in 1800, ‘It is in the Orient that we must search for the highest Romanticism,’ he meant the Orient of the *Sakuntala*, the *Zend-Avesta*, and the *Upanishads*. As for the Semites, whose language was agglutinative, unaesthetic, and mechanical, they were different, inferior, backward.”<sup>10</sup> Through Schlegel, an internal subdivision of the Orient is thus realized. It is one that counterposes the enchanted, romantic position of a familiar, ancient Orient—the locus of origin and mythical foundation—to the negative form of contemporary (Arab-Islamic) Oriental societies.

Thomas also acknowledges that “the relationship of commonality that Schlegel drew” was not “one of parity.” Yet, her emphasis on early Orientalist attempts to valorize the non-West risks obscuring the structural link between enchanted and more discriminatory forms of Orientalism. It might be useful to highlight here the very function of Orientalism as a device of paranoid capture as well as a means of ensuring the self-representation of the West. At first glance, this requires exposing the position of the Orient as an object of modern knowledge through which “the Orientalist, poet or scholar, makes the Orient speak, describes the Orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the West.”<sup>11</sup> This is certainly functional to the process of domination and control that imperialism and colonial rule have enacted, one that concerns more conventional approaches to the Orientalist debate. In this sense, the risk for comparative projects associated with early Orientalism is precisely the reinstatement of forms of knowledge production. Such projects might end up assuming the Orient to be an “object of modern inquiry, but not a source through which to construct legitimate knowledge of modern subjecthood.”<sup>12</sup> In early Orientalist scholarship, particularly in German Orientalism, the tendency was to mobilize a modernist framework.

The traditional, context-situated extreme of the modernist continuum was enlarged to include a complex hierarchy of geo-cultural others, each one displaying greater or lesser proximity to the modern-universalist position of the West.

In relation to comparative political theory then, the risk is to reinstate the image of non-Western thought as an open and plain archive to be “discovered,” via comparison or commensurability. In taking this direction, Robbie Shilliam has insightfully warned against the tendency of Western academia to project and document “the fruits of its own (idealized) intellectual labours.”<sup>13</sup> This approach would hence obscure the processual and transformative process that has allowed non-Western traditions to be constituted, betrayed, modified or reinvented in a critical engagement with colonial modernity. To be aware of this risk would permit comparative projects to invalidate “simplistic and universal” reductions of the non-West to either seeking resistance or assimilation to the West.

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.<sup>14</sup>

The array of individual contexts needs to be acknowledged in which experiences of coloniality and modernity are produced. As Shilliam notes, such recognition should guide any possible “reorientation towards the non-West.” Nonetheless, what still needs to be emphasized is the retroactive moment constituting the Orientalist imaginary in the distorting and essentializing projections of the West. The force of the Orientalist gesture rests not just in the violent transformation of the Western “outside” into the non-Western landscape of Oriental otherings. When moving from a plane of domination and accompanying structures of power to the production and distribution of subjectivities, it is the returned image of the self that should also be given emphasis, being that it plays a crucial role in sustaining the Orientalist representation. Here Orientalism works as a privileged mode of construction of the West’s (and Europe’s) self-image, allowing a phantasmatic relation with the Orient to hijack the “ex-centric” condition of the West (an inclination to be constituted in an ever-elusive relation with alterity). The phantasmatic character of this relation is given by the paranoid logic of reversion that Orientalism enacts at an embryonic level. This logic requires that the ontological constitution of the Western self – one containing all those inassimilable elements that,

in different historical and geopolitical contexts, have challenged its self-representation – be ejected in the abyssal alterity of the Orient. While instantiating the construction of an Oriental excessive other, this phantasmatic relation permits, retroactively, the restitution of a unitary and integral image of the self. It is here that the Orient expresses what could be defined in terms of an *orienting function of the Orient*, enabling the West to *orient* itself at the level of its imaginary constitution along a principle of moral and cultural integrity. Hence, there remains a certain duplicity in the endless Orientalist production of discourses on ancient Asia, contemporary Asia, Asiatic despotism, Asiatic capitalism, Islamic culture. On each occasion, they reproduce in various ways the excessive character of the Oriental other, whether as a locus of sensual deprivation, historical obsolescence, cultural anomie, or rather bodily pleasure, sensuality, refined aesthetics and, in the Orientalist vision of Schlegel, pristine culture. It is here that those positive, passionate and fascinated portrayals of the Orient that Thomas identifies at the core of early Orientalism mark less of a rupture than a structural contiguity, involving more negative and biased Orientalist projections. Drawing on Bonnie Honig's reflection on the interplay between xenophobia and xenophilia,<sup>15</sup> Orientalism can be said here to function as both Islamophobia and Islamophilia. In each case, it mobilizes the Orienting function of an Orient assumed to be the imaginary point of origin and the location of Western discourse. As Foucault put it: "In the universality of Western Reason [*ratio*], there is a split [*partage*] which is the Orient: the Orient thought of as origin, dreamt of as the vertiginous point from which are born nostalgias and promises of a return."<sup>16</sup> It is this very phantasmatic aspect and the incommensurable distance from the oriental point of origin that retroactively allows the West to assert its ontological consistency, positivity, and necessity.

Whether the Orient is to be taken as essentially singular or as assuming the empirical form of a hierarchical distribution of Oriental others (e.g., ancient India, contemporary Islamic societies, etc.) depends on the practical scope that any Orientalist projection serves in different periods. In any case, what needs to be ontologically preserved is the unitary, integral and necessary character of the Western or European self. The determination of this identity is particularly important when thinking of the status of comparative political theory and any invitation to seriously attend to the non-West. Any "reorientation towards the non-West" that is able to account, to say with Shilliam, for the differentiated nature of geo-political and geo-cultural experiences of non-Western thought should also be able to de-essentialize the specular pairing of the non-West with the unitary and integral character of the West, so challenging this unity and depriving it of its salient necessity. Nonetheless, one widespread tendency in comparative political theory is to oppose the multifaceted and ever transformative nature of the non-West with its frequently monolithic

and essentialized representation of the Western archive. Such an approach dismisses the long history of minor and silenced traditions, internal betrayals, and accidental assumptions through which the “West” has constituted itself.

To our mind, the historical conjuncture confronting comparative political theory today reveals a changed international scene, which may help to expose the contingent status of the West as both a discursive formation and an analytical concept, so allowing its suppressed internal complexity to emerge. From the 2007 international financial crisis to the Arab uprisings, the persistence of conflicts around the world, alongside the appearance of new geopolitical actors and projects, have disrupted any residual ideal of full mastery and Pax Americana. Meanwhile, the vulnerabilities of an enfeebled Western hegemony have been exposed. Moreover, the post-Westphalian conceptual apparatus of international law has been challenged by new political vocabularies and imaginaries, symbolized symptomatically by the assertive restoration of the ideal of the caliphate and the tension that Daesh mobilizes between “state” and “*dawlah*” (the latter usually translated as “state” but signaling an administrative province of the caliphate across several Islamic traditions). An enormous migration crises, years of austerity measures and attacks on social welfare have profoundly destabilized Europe. Social, political and territorial configurations had been shattering before and after Brexit, and ultimately threatening Europe’s self-representation. New historical conditions seem therefore to have emerged, promising the potential demise of the West as an analytical referent and historical formation. Earlier quests for comparative projects mostly retained both the West and the non-West identity components of the comparison, preserving the analytical value of the Western referent and its integral and necessary representation as a unitary and normative ideal. A new international scenario instead can perhaps motivate cultural openings to be organized along the lines of a “West-less” relational grammar.

In this context, the current crisis of Europe might signal a wider crisis in the self-representation of the West. While certainly conducive of a traumatic moment of symbolic and imaginary dislocation, such moments could offer the opportunity of new relational attitudes to arise in world thought.

## **WESTLESS EUROPE AND MINOR GRAMMARS**

Having recently been invited to comment on the “Dialogue of Civilizations” theme, Fred Dallmayr warns against the tendency to provide unilineal and monolithic representations of Europe which would isolate the Christian Middle Ages as “Europe’s essential core without which the term loses its meaning.”<sup>17</sup> Drawing upon Gadamer’s and Derrida’s critical reflections on European identity, Dallmayr suggests that the risk is now for Europe



to be “lost in translation.” As he puts it, there is a danger that Europe will ultimately be betrayed, precisely because it has stuck to “one-sided portrayals” of itself.<sup>18</sup> Such monolithic representations threaten to conceal Europe’s fundamental “multivocality, the diversity of its meanings, the multiplicity of traditions held together in a loose symbiosis” – a plurality which has enabled Europe to stand as a diversified and “rich tapestry.” Drawing on the Italian terms *traduttore* / *traditore* (interpreter / traitor), Dallmayr envisages a linkage between translation and betrayal. We think that this linkage could more conventionally be rendered here through the etymological couple *tradizione* / *tradimento* (tradition / betrayal or treason). While both these terms share the common Latin root *tradere* (to hand over; from *trans-* “over” and *dare* “to give”), *tradimento* is associated to the idea of someone (a traitor) “handing over” to the enemy that which he or she was supposed to protect (the keys of a city, a fortress, or the holy scriptures). We might refer instead to *tradizione* as the handing over of doctrines, values, etc. across different ages. Standing as a doublet of treason in its etymology, “tradition” might then evoke the idea that, in the very handing over of beliefs and customs, something gets altered or betrayed.

The risk for any tradition may be that it is “lost in translation” as Dallmayr puts it, but there is greater certainty that it will be “lost in transition.” This approach already finds fertile ground in the German theological school when investing the very concept of “archive” here assumed to be a “liminal zone” between memory and forgetting.<sup>19</sup> To take for granted a certain homogeneity of the European or Western canon is therefore to pinpoint a particular facet serving as some central core from which tradition unfolds along its telos; meaning to side-line internal betrayals, ruptures, innovations and differences within the archive, while projecting a unified identity narrative of tradition.<sup>20</sup> *The cultivation of linked sensitivities about the specific contexts pluralizing the non-West as a referent, therefore risks being insufficient if it is not accompanied by a similar effort from the other side of the comparative project.*

Hence, exposing the contingent scopes and orienting positions in respect to which Europe and the West have historically essentialized their own narrative enables them to be opened up to minor grammars and trends behind their self-portrayal as a locus of authenticity and unicity. However, this approach may require that sites of emergence and decline in the idea of Europe be highlighted, so demonstrating how a process of appropriation of previous traditions (included the most represented ones as the Greek, the Roman, the medieval Christian) operates from within the narrative of necessity that Europe displays in its modernity. This is then to affirm that similar conditions of emergence, appropriation and possible lines of decline might be exposed behind the concept of the West.

For instance, in disclosing the contingent appearance of this discourse, Carl Schmitt pointed to the process of gradual replacement of the idea of “Europe” with the “West.” What appears at the beginning of the new millennium as a natural overlapping between Europe and the West is, for Schmitt, a substantial novelty emerging out of a critical battle between two poles. One of these poles, Europe, has played for some time an orienting function, standing as the Orient of an emerging American West. As problematic as this might be, such a reconstruction is useful as it shows the geopolitical intricacy and contrasting narratives that have informed the Western referent in the aftermath of WWII. In his 1950 study *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of the jus publicum Europaeum*, Schmitt refined his concept of *nomos*, identifying a relation between order and orientation through which the concreteness of legal and political orders may be revealed. A key theme in the book is the fundamental tension between the territorial distribution of power within the European nation-state order, organized around the juridical notion of the *Jus Publicum Europaeum*, and the emergence of a new political system modeled on the ideal of US liberal democracy and embodying a globalizing force which substantially reverses the logic of “orientation” and territorial appropriation of Europe: “The Western Hemisphere counterposed to the Eurocentric lines of a global worldview a new global line that was no longer Eurocentric, and called into question the global position of old Europe. The public history of this new line in international law began with the proclamation of the so-called Monroe Doctrine on December 2, 1823.”<sup>21</sup>

Schmitt describes how the notion of *Western Hemisphere* formalized in the Monroe Doctrine initially entailed the establishment of a line of separation between the old and the new continent. The expression *Western Hemisphere* was used in the Monroe Doctrine to instantiate a defensive strategy against the old monarchies of Europe, and the possibility that American territory be subjected to European land appropriations. In denoting the influence of American affairs within this new spatial order, this line has also signaled a fundamental tension. On the one hand, it presented the need of the Western Hemisphere to detach, isolate and defend itself from the old European powers. On the other, it expressed the “moral and cultural claim to embody the free, authentic and essential Europe,” standing in opposition to its old, corrupt system. This twofold movement was said to bring about a new status completely different from all former soil statuses existing in international law: “American soil would not belong to any soil status that European international law had recognized in the 19th century: neither soil with no master (and thus open for occupation in the former sense), nor colonial soil, nor European soil as the territory of European states, nor a battlefield in the sense of the old amity lines, nor a European sphere of extraterritoriality with consular jurisdiction, as in Asian countries.”<sup>22</sup>

For Schmitt, this new status has entailed the celebration in international law of a new spatial order guaranteeing peace, freedom and law against the corrupt Old World which, until then, was taken as the center of the earth. It is intriguing to question exactly how the orienting function of the Orient had allowed Europe to stand as an occidental locus of rationality and law in the face of all contemporary forms of Asiatic despotism, notwithstanding the idealization of the Orient as a pristine cradle of civilization for German orientalists. Here, a close reading of Schmitt evidences how, for the German theorist at least, the *Western Hemisphere* was now accrediting Europe with its own *orienting function*. An emerging West could then emerge as a locus of “peace and freedom from a sphere of despotism and corruption”:

Strangely enough, the term “Western Hemisphere” was opposed precisely to Europe, the old West, the old Occident. It was not opposed to old Asia or to old Africa, but rather to the old West [...] The new West, America, would supersede the old West, would reorient the old world historical order, would become the center of the earth [...] The center of civilization shifted further West, to America. Like old Asia and old Africa before her, old Europe had become the past. As always, old and new are used here not only in the sense of condemnation, but also, and above all, in the sense of the redistribution of order and orientation.<sup>23</sup>

For Schmitt, the history of the West is the history of the gradual movement of the line of the Western Hemisphere towards the East. This history concludes with WWII, when the old continent came to be absorbed within the new cultural and political space of the West, but was left forgotten in its wake. This shift in power entailed the end of the *jus publicum Europaeum*, the nomos of the Earth or a concrete order of the globe and the principle of which Schmitt had claimed to be the last representative. In Schmitt’s narrative of Europe, the *jus publicum Europaeum* was assumed to be the principle devised in modern international treaties for rationalizing international relations through the nation-state system amongst European actors. Such a principle was intended to allow for the institution of a principle of *limited war* across powers that mutually recognized each other as *justus hostis*; that is as enemies acknowledging their equality and mutual respect. This achievement was portrayed as the necessary application of universal principles of freedom, rationality, and equality, all of which were rooted in the cultural patrimony of European modernity, enabling Europe to constitute its self-image as the archive of accumulated Greek, Roman and Christian traditions.

To demystify this narrative, Schmitt then disclosed the “appropriative” and contingent force leading to the formation of Europe. Far from standing as the necessary outcome of a rational telos that emerged with the Greeks, the *jus publicum Europaeum* was nothing but the concrete order resulting from

a process of territorial appropriation and partition beginning with modernity. While effectively rationalizing relations amongst European nations, the *jus publicum Europaeum* primarily consisted of an order of divisions and separations. Despite any idealized reference to equality, the rationalization of conflict that the *jus publicum Europaeum* then celebrated was devised as a principle uniquely conceivable among “states,” which naturally limited its application solely to Europe. In fact, this rationalized system of equality and limited war was countered by “unlimited war” outside Europe, where no “states” were identified and recognized by the Europeans and where land (including American land) was qualified as *res nullius* (nobody’s property) and was thus subject to appropriation.

In deconstructing Europe’s narrative as a necessary rational order, exposing its contingent roots (and orientation), Schmitt’s description of the Western Hemisphere also pointed to the emergence of a new space characterized by a lack of division and separation and by claims to absolute justice. In turn, this new space allowed for doctrines of just war to be recovered. For Schmitt, the replacement of the *jus publicum Europaeum* with the West was ultimately destined to propel the affirmation of a global and undifferentiated world, signaling the crisis of the modern state. The process of gradual subsumption of Europe under the West was in fact accompanied by the entrance of new actors on to the international scene, including Asiatic states, and most prominently Japan, which would contribute to expand “the community of European international law into a spaceless, universalist international law.”<sup>24</sup>

Under the force of this generalization, American liberal democracy and the West would themselves be destined to experience the terms of their own obsolescence:

In relation to the new East Asian sphere rising in world history, the American continent was now put in the position of an eastern continent, just as one hundred years earlier old Europe had been thrust aside in the eastern hemisphere by the world-historical rise of America. Such an illuminating change would be a highly sensational theme for an intellectual history of geography. In 1930, under the rubric “rise of a new world,” it was suggested that America and China should unite.<sup>25</sup>

Despite any unlikely unification between America and China, more than sixty years after the publication of *The Nomos of the Earth*, the tension between the modern state at the core of the *jus publicum Europaeum* and the new world of space-less universalism (read economic globalization) is still the object of intense debate. The merit of Schmitt’s analysis, regardless of the fact of it being the expression of a German theorist who had adhered to the Nazi Party and happened to be aligned to those who had just lost the war against US

liberal democracy, lies in its attempt to deconstruct the fundamental tenets of political modernity, exposing the tensions affecting its basic principles (i.e. equality) and unitary representations. By showing that political rationalization in Europe was made possible by complete irrationality outside, and by disclosing the concrete conditions that allowed referents as Europe and the West to emerge in respect to their geo-cultural counterparts, the hidden relation between order and political decision was thus brought to the fore in international politics. Schmitt was thus able to point to the fundamental groundlessness of Europe as both a unified discourse and a normative ideal. Far from being the expression of a necessary evolution of a certain canon or tradition, Schmitt showed that Europe carried within itself the trace of its own origin. In political terms, this meant conceiving of the system of the modern state less as the extension of European rationality than the expression of a real, concrete order, which at some point would emerge to serve a specific scope in respect to a historical *orienting* other.<sup>26</sup>

To look for the contingent roots of this order is, for Schmitt, to reveal what hides behind the discourse of the modern state i.e., colonialism and a politics of difference and appropriation rather than equality. Hence, in removing any necessity from Western concepts, Schmitt was thus able to write a counter-history of philosophy and disclose internal tensions of the Western referent, whether between minor and dominant traditions, or in the historical battle between the *jus publicum Europaeum* and the lack of orientation of emerging spaces.

At this point, we will reflect upon what has been called a “minor tradition” of political thought within the Western canon in an attempt not only to move beyond the logic of identity-belonging informing the narrative of necessity of the West, but also to escape the counter-history that Schmitt opposed. Such a move may help us to explore new possible horizons stretching from comparative to world thought.

### **TOWARDS A MINOR EUROPE: BARUCH SPINOZA AND THE DISCLOSURE OF WORLD THOUGHT**

One of the great voices of modern thought, Baruch Spinoza, has frequently been relegated to a “minor tradition” in the European intellectual canon. In a 2006 essay dedicated to Talal Asad and appropriately entitled “Europe: A Minor Tradition,” William E. Connolly challenges common assumptions about the cohesion of the Western and European tradition. This is a canon that most often identifies Christianity, the Judeo-Christian tradition in general and the modern construction of secularism as the essence of Europe. According to Connolly, what is missing from these accounts is the tendency for

minor trends to have been obscured by central European orientations towards religion, morality, secularism and politics. In this account, for instance, Kant is normally assumed as the dominant interpreter of a homogenous Enlightenment tradition. Nonetheless, this tendency should not distract us from minor trajectories in Kant's thought which do not necessarily conform to his overall contributions to the modern concept of conscience and the autonomous agent. For Connolly, the Enlightenment tradition is more the product of a contemporary retrospection by "Euro-American intellectuals" than "of the actual distribution of perspectives during the period in question."<sup>27</sup> To add, the sedimentation of the European and then the Western canon entails, for Connolly, a subjugation of a "minor tradition" behind the majority expression of the Enlightenment.

Rooted in early forerunners such as Epicurus and Lucretius, this tradition was "reactivated" by Spinoza whose critical stance challenged mainstream perspectives at that time, those which included a "dominant religious tradition, the dominant voices of Enlightenment and secularism elaborated later, and even the scientific atheism that become another minor voice in the Enlightenment."<sup>28</sup> Spinoza's inclusion within this tradition is sometimes ascribed to his (ethnic) minority status as a "Jewish philosopher." Willi Goetschel, for instance, highlights the "disowning attitude" of contemporaries towards Spinoza's work and his alien position within the dominant canon of modern political thought which otherwise runs from Machiavelli to Hobbes and Locke: "Suspiciously eyed as outsiders, Jewish philosophers, especially Baruch de Spinoza and Moses Mendelssohn, would be granted admission to the discursive universe of modern thought only by way of an assimilation that would at the same time both assimilate and 'other' them."<sup>29</sup> Yet Spinoza's qualification as a "Jewish philosopher" was always complicated by the "logic of double exclusion" which he experienced following the *herem* (permanent ban and excommunication) decreed by his Portuguese-Jewish community in Amsterdam. Refigured as both a non-Jew for Jews and a Jewish philosopher for Christians, Spinoza's peculiar position presents for Connolly "a new adventure of thought that offended all the ecclesiastical faiths of his day and continues to puzzle Euro-American secularists today."<sup>30</sup>

Spinoza's influence will be relevant to future "minor" philosophical voices from Nietzsche to Bergson, Hampshire and ultimately Deleuze, who identified his own minor tradition within the framework of pre-Kantian thinkers such as Spinoza, Leibniz and Hume and the post-Kantians Maimon, Nietzsche, and Bergson. One primary element in Deleuze's reading of Spinoza – whom he characterizes as the "ever more worthy" but at the same time the "more maligned and hated" philosopher – is found in his great theoretical thesis combining atheism and pantheism under the idea of a single substance having an infinity of attributes. This 'substance' allows all "creatures" to stand as

its modifications or attributes: “We may easily conceive the whole of nature to be one individual, whose parts, that is to say, all bodies, differ in infinite ways without any change of the whole individual.”<sup>31</sup> Hence, by opposing dominant orientations to finalism and to strict dualism as the mind / body and God / nature, Spinoza elaborates a metaphysical monism through which substance is immanent in the order of things and their movement. However, while bearing a resemblance to Nietzsche, for Deleuze it is Spinoza’s work on his “practical theses” – the devaluation of consciousness, values and sad passions – that offers a new model to philosophers: *the body*.

He proposes to establish the body as a model: “We do not know what the body can do...” [...] We speak of consciousness and its decrees, of the will and its effects, of the thousand ways of moving the body, of dominating the body and the passions—but *we do not even know what a body can do*. Lacking this knowledge, we engage in idle talk. As Nietzsche will say, we stand amazed before consciousness, but “the truly surprising thing is rather the body...”<sup>32</sup>

Spinoza instantiated a central principle of *parallelism* here between body and mind. He does not reject any causality and primacy between the former and the latter, but states that any change in bodily state is accompanied by a parallel change in mind and thought, also working vice versa. An action taking place in the mind therefore implies an action in the body, while a passion in the body is a passion in the mind. While challenging the traditional approach to morality as a tool for consciousness to control the passions, Spinoza’s *Ethics* shows that the “body surpasses the knowledge that we have of it, and that thought likewise surpasses the consciousness that we have of it.”<sup>33</sup> In such way, Spinoza was able to establish that a life involves a fundamental connection between ideas and affect which instantiates a whole order of the composition and decomposition of relations.

Positive and negative encounters unfold between human beings according to complex laws affecting all of nature and reflecting “sadness and joy” as the two fundamental passions lying behind “affect” and its variations: “To the extent that an idea replaces another, I never cease to pass from one degree of perfection to another, however miniscule the difference, and this kind of melodic line of continuous variation will define affect (*affectus*) in its correlation with ideas and at the same time in its difference in nature from ideas. We account for this difference in nature and this correlation.”<sup>34</sup> Hence, the trace that each body leaves upon other bodies as an effect of this modulation of ideas and affects is a trace that Deleuze assumes to be a key element in Spinoza’s philosophy. It is with reference to this trace that an *affection* of the body can be conceived and defined in terms of “the mixture of one body with another body, the trace of another body on my body.”

Here, Spinoza's philosophy expresses its profound relational and affective character, allowing life to reveal its assertive and vital force through a principle of multiplicity and ultimate relationality. Hence, we can observe the "potent anomaly" of Spinoza's materialism within the dominant European conceptions of power, where a constitution-production unitary nexus and an immanent functionality of power as sharing and desire disengage from the "mixed-up 'democratic' soup of normative Hobbesian transcendentalism, Rousseauian general will, and Hegelian *Aufhebung*" that is often taken as the core of European modern thought.<sup>35</sup> In this context, the dominant Western tradition grounded on its great dualisms – self-reflexive individualism and rationality and the metaphysical transcendence and unicity of modern power – counters with a minor tradition of powerful and democratic liberation of the mind and the body in which the subject figures as not *the cause* but rather *the product* of a constituent relation:

Spinoza builds upon this nonreductionist break with dualism to articulate an ethic of cultivation, in which cultivation of the body contributes to the cultivation of the mind and vice versa, and in which a positive ethos of cultural composition is needed to inaugurate the vision of democratic pluralism he embraces even before later, less pluralistic ideals of democracy became popular in Europe.<sup>36</sup>

We believe that an insight into the intellectual vision of Spinoza will help us uncover the contested nature of the Western canon further. This approach would also permit us to emphasize the ambiguity of the Western referent, exposing both the endurance of its function as a normative ideal and the limits of any comparative project counterpoising the West to the decentralizing force of a non-West. Moving from comparative to world thought, a Spinozist framework would enable us to disclose the force of the "encounter" that a relational model of human personhood liberates as a fundamental capacity for *being affected*; that is, beyond the linear and unified spectrality that the Western referent would mobilize if retained.

It cannot be just a pure nomenclature effort. A West-less space requires resistance to any attempt to consider world thought as a new crystalized "tapestry" of molar and totalizing traditions. Such traditions merely provide the hemispheres of the globe with their cultural form and orientation, locating their possibility of synthesis only in the intellectual tools of comparison and commensurability. We would rather assume world thought as a frontier space than a further separation line between cultures taking the shape of a border. Instead, it would be a *constituent* front area, a space within itself, in which traditions constantly re-produce themselves beyond any accumulation and identity logics of belonging. Here traditions are not pre-given, nor ordered



in linear and teleological sequence, but are themselves the affective and relational expression of succession and variation of ideas and affects in multiple geopolitical and temporal locations.

To define world thought as a frontier space means to account for this “difference in nature and this correlation” within and between traditions. It assumes the constituent and processual nature of their being in common but also their difference. We thus propose to traverse and *produce* world thought resorting to the creative and relational attitude of a *nomadic thinking*. In the refined conceptualization of Rosi Braidotti, such an approach shuns any deference to the authority of the past, proposing “the fleeting co-presence of multiple time zones, in a time continuum that activates and deterritorializes stable identities,” while also enlisting “the creative resources of the imagination to the task of enacting transformative relations and actions in the present.

This ontological nonlinearity thus rests on a Spinozist ethics of affirmation and becoming that predicates the positivity of difference.<sup>37</sup> More, by escaping any synthetic reduction of the relation that connects us, a nomadic journey into the frontier area of world thought would fully expose the complexity of our co-presence, rejecting any dualistic understanding of the mind and body. This approach would require us to account for the diversity of practices in which mind and body articulate their difference and correlation. It would require avoiding, as Jenco advocates, a certain comparative tendency to privilege texts and verbal expression:

Practices that complement text-based interpretive traditions, or that constitute traditions of their own—practices like imitation, ritual, dance, or other forms of non-verbal expression—are rendered silent, passed over in favor of text-based reconstructions of individual utterances. As a result, the “voices” many cross-cultural theorists hope to capture as a means of overcoming Western universalism and its implicit violence may mislead rather than clarify.<sup>38</sup>

While different, these practices resonate as interrelated expressions of our present, partaking of that “melodic line of continuous variation” constituting emotions in their correlation with ideas. As a mode of poetic suggestion, we assume the creative force of nomadic thinking as capable of navigating across all these differences and correlations, moving beyond the *synthetic* attitude of comparative thought towards a *synesthetic* sensitivity and thought. This navigation requires full disclosure of that capacity of non-verbal expressions to pervade philosophical concepts and produce some fundamental alteration in our experience of the present.

Charles Baudelaire’s use of *synaesthesia* – where a sensation expressed by one of the senses triggers a sensation in another, allowing sensorial

differences to be overcome beyond the individualizing grip of rational consciousness and in favor of an overarching *correspondence* between objects, senses and the spirit in infinity—traces a possible route in this navigation:

There are perfumes as cool as the flesh of children,  
Sweet as oboes, green as meadows  
— And others are corrupt, and rich, triumphant,

With power to expand into infinity,  
Like amber and incense, musk, benzoin,  
That sing the ecstasy of the soul and senses.<sup>39</sup>

As a frontier area, world thought should be able to valorize a *synesthetic* thinking allowing verbal and non-verbal expressions of world traditions to extend the profound correlation of ideas and emotions in our togetherness. This is a *synesthetic* thinking able to attend to the diversity and incommensurability of texts, rituals, dances and concepts, while exposing the fundamental intricacy and prospect of resonance of mind, passions and body sensations in the production of the present. It is also productive of the nomadic force, to say with Braidotti, of a “collectively distributed consciousness” now unfastened from any Western and European subject of knowledge.

## NOTES

1. Andrew F. March, “What Is Comparative Political Theory?” *The Review of Politics* 71 (2009), 538.
2. March, “What Is Comparative Political Theory?,” 540.
3. Fred Dallmayr, “Beyond Monologue: For a Comparative Political Theory,” *Perspectives on Politics* 2, no. 2 (June 2004): 249–57.
4. Osama bin Laden, “Under Mullah Omar, 9 April 2001,” in *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama bin Laden*, edited by Bruce Lawrence (London and New York: Verso 2005), 96.
5. Megan Thomas, “Orientalism and Comparative Political Theory,” *Review of Politics* 72, no. 4 (2010): 653–77.
6. Bobby S. Sayyid, *A Fundamental Fear: Eurocentrism and the Emergence of Islamism* (London: Zed Books, 1997), 155.
7. Thomas, “Orientalism and Comparative Political Theory,” 659–60.
8. Thomas, “Orientalism and Comparative Political Theory,” 664.
9. Thomas, “Orientalism and Comparative Political Theory,” 665.
10. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), 98.
11. Said, *Orientalism*, 20–21.
12. Robbie Shilliam, “Non-Western Thought and International Relation,” in *International Relation and Non-Western Thought: Imperialism, Colonialism and*

*Investigation of Global Modernity*, ed. Robbie Shilliam (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2011), 13.

13. Shilliam, "Non-Western Thought and International Relation," 16.

14. Shilliam, "Non-Western Thought and International Relation," 21.

15. Bonnie Honig, *Democracy and the Foreigner* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

16. Michel Foucault, *Dits et Ecrits*, Tome I, texte n. 4 (Paris: Gallimard, 1961/2001). Quote translated by Andrea Teti in "Orientalism as a Form of Confession," *Foucault Studies* 17 (2014): 189.

17. Fred Dallmayr, "The Legacy of Europe," paper delivered at "Europe: Lost in Translation?" Conference, Berlin, May 15, 2014. See also, Fred Dallmayr, "Self and Other: Gadamer and the Hermeneutics of Difference," *Yale Journal of Law & the Humanities* 5, no. 2, Article 9 (1993).

18. Critical engagements with the idea of Europe as never identical to itself include most notably Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Das Erbe Europas: Beiträge* (Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1989); Jacques Derrida, *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992); and Rodolphe Gasché, *Europe, or the Infinite Task: A Study of a Philosophical Concept* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009).

19. See Aleida Assmann, "Canon and Archive," in *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, eds. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2010); and David Zeitlyn, "Anthropology in and of the Archives: Possible Futures and Contingent Pasts. Archives as Anthropological Surrogates," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 41 (2012): 461–80.

20. A well-known attempt to expose the internal complexity of "non-European" traditions, showing the impasses of pure identity, goes back to Edward Said, and particularly his reading of Freud's late work: Edward Said, *Freud and the Non-European* (London: Verso, 2004). For an inspiring discussion linking Said's essay on Freud and the non-European to Derrida's reflections on Europe as an "open project," see Engin F. Isin, "We, the Non-Europeans: Derrida with Said," in *Conflicting Humanities*, eds. Rosi Braidotti and Paul Gilroy (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 229–44.

21. Carl Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of the Jus Publicum Europaeum* (New York: Telos Press Publishing, 2003), 281.

22. Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth*, 289.

23. Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth*, 290.

24. Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth*, 291.

25. Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth*, 292. A sentence in the English translation of this passage has been modified by the author (originally appearing as "in a position to displace an eastern continent"), hoping to reflect Schmitt's own words better in the German text.

26. See Carlo Galli, *Genealogia della politica: Carl Schmitt e la crisi del pensiero politico moderno* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1996).

27. William E. Connolly, "Europe: A Minor Tradition," in *Powers of the Secular Modern: Talal Asad and His Interlocutors*, eds. David Scott and Charles Hirschkind (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 80.

28. Connolly, "Europe: A Minor Tradition," 81.
29. Willi Goetschel, "Voices from the 'Jewish Colony': Sovereignty, Power, Secularization and the Outside Within," in *International Relation and Non-Western Thought: Imperialism, Colonialism and Investigation of Global Modernity*, ed. Robbie Shilliam (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2011), 64.
30. Goetschel, "Voices from the 'Jewish Colony,'" 83.
31. Benedictus de Spinoza, *Ethics* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Edition Limited, 2001), 2p13L7s, 61.
32. Gilles Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1988), 17–18.
33. Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*.
34. Gilles Deleuze, "Lecture Transcripts on Spinoza's Concept of Affect, Cours Vincennes 24 January 1978," eds. Emilie and Julien Deleuze, <https://www.webdeleuze.com/textes/14>, translated by Timothy S. Murphy, (accessed August 22, 2017).
35. Antonio Negri, *The Savage Anomaly* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), xvii.
36. Connolly, "Europe: A Minor Tradition," 84.
37. Rosi Braidotti, "Complexity against Methodological Nationalism," in *Nomadic Theory: The Portable Rosi Braidotti* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 209–10.
38. Leigh Jenco, "'What Does Heaven Ever Say?' A Methods-Centered Approach to Cross-Cultural Engagement," *American Political Science Review* 101, no. 4 (2007): 9.
39. Charles Baudelaire, "Correspondences," in *The Flowers of Evil*, trans. William Aggeler (Fresno, CA: Academy Library Guild, 1868/1954).