

5

Non-Western Ideas

Mojtaba Mahdavi

Learning Objectives

- 5.1 Demonstrate how non-Western ideas are as diverse as those of the non-Western world
- 5.2 Discuss Orientalism as a series of stereotypes about the non-West that attributes the alleged inferiority of the non-Western world to an oriental psyche/mindset that is irrational, violent, inferior, despotic, passive, or incapable of thinking
- 5.3 Explain how to provincialize Western-centric discourse of colonial modernity, and de-provincialize non-Western thinking
- 5.4 Demonstrate that there are multiple and alternative modernities beyond the Western model
- 5.5 Argue for glocal schools of thought that synthesize local and global ideas
- 5.6 Discuss the profound contribution of the non-Western world to knowledge production and critical thinking over the course of centuries

5.1 Introduction

Ideas travel across times and places. They shape, and are shaped by, other sets of interrelated thoughts that often originate in other times and places. Western ideas are partly informed by “non-Western” thoughts and vice versa. All ideas, in other words, are characterized by hybridity, or complex mixtures of old and new, near and far. Ideas develop in particular historical contexts, often in relation to imbalances in the distribution of social and political power. It is only in this sense that we may speak of “non-Western” ideas.

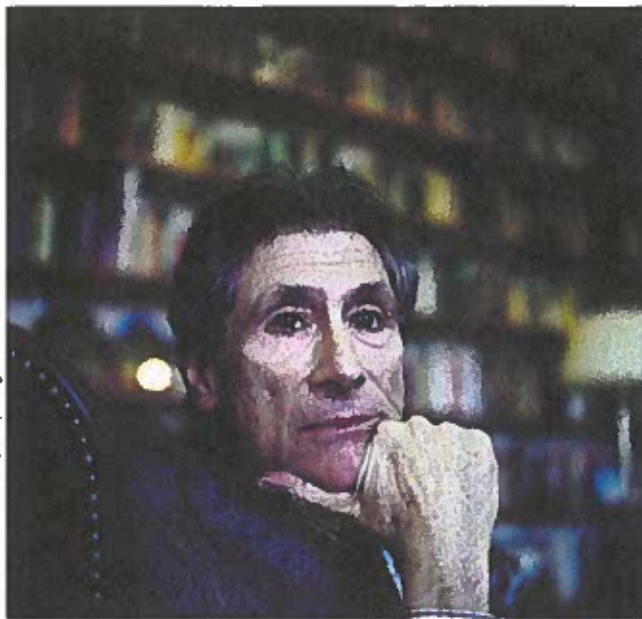
We must stop taking such a sweeping approach toward non-Western thoughts in order to defy broad generalizations. Non-Western ideas flow from two-thirds of humanity, from Latin America to Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, and are grounded in thousands of years of history, rich cultures, and robust debates among diverse schools of thought. Iran, Iraq (Mesopotamia), India, China, Egypt, Japan, and Indigenous civilizations in Africa and the Americas are examples of such diverse foundations of non-Western ideas. Non-Western ideas thus are not monolithic: they can be reactionary and regressive or progressive and emancipatory. They can promote ethical and moral ideas about care, hospitality, love, fairness, freedom, and justice or inhumane practices of violence, intolerance, racism, and patriarchy. This is also true of the Western thought that has variously advanced competing ideas about democracy, equality, feminism, liberalism, colonialism, socialism, nationalism, fascism, totalitarianism, racism, and so on.

How do we approach and understand such a complex and diverse set of ideas? Eurocentric, or Western-centric, discourses portray the West as the only, ultimate, and superior path to development and democracy. This proposition that “the West is the best” has often justified Western interventions around the globe as an historical mission to “civilize the rest.” It also undermines the value and positive contributions of non-Western ideas to humanity. In order to challenge such a Eurocentric approach, this chapter argues that we undertake two seemingly contradictory tasks of “provincializing,” or localizing some ideas, and “de-provincializing,” or universalizing, other ideas. More specifically, the provincialization, localization, and particularization of Western ideas is necessary to unmask the “Western-centric” discourse of top-down universalism and colonial modernity.

While provincializing reveals ahistorical, colonial, arrogant, and ethnocentric thinking (Chakrabarty 2000), it is equally important to de-provincialize, universalize, and popularize some components of non-Western thinking to showcase both the non-Western origins of Western civilizations and non-Western perspectives on alternative modernities and alternative futures.

5.2 Can Non-Westerners Think? Beyond Western-Centrism

“Can the Subaltern Speak?” asks the renowned postcolonial scholar Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988). Kishore Mahbubani (1998) and Hamid Dabashi (2015) similarly ask, “Can Asians Think?” and “Can Non-Europeans Think?” These provocative questions draw our attention to the systematic marginalization



Edward Said.

of non-Western voices in science and in social and political thought. Such critical questions also “unveil epistemic racism hidden beneath the naturalization of certain ways of thinking and producing knowledge that are given the name Eurocentrism” (Mignolo 2015, x).

In his modern classic *Orientalism*, Edward Said demonstrates how Eurocentrism or Western-centrism has systematically created and constantly reproduced a series of stereotypes about the non-West, blaming the “oriental psyche” and/or the “Arab/Muslim mindset” for the supposed inferiority of the Orient. Said argues that Orientalism is a systematic body of knowledge formulated by and for the West/the Occident that offers a distorted image of the non-West/the Orient as being irrational, violent, inferior, despotic, and passive. Orientalism is a “systemic discipline,” to “manage—and even produce—the Orient, politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively” (Said 1978, 3).

Before Said, two Middle East scholars—Anouar Abdel-Malek (1963), an Egyptian sociologist, and A.L. Tibawi (1964; 1979), a Syrian historian—also challenged Orientalist literature as an instrument of imperialism and a biased interpretation of Islam and Arabic world. Similarly, in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963), Frantz Omar Fanon, a psychiatrist from the French colony of Martinique and a pioneer of postcolonial studies, argues that colonial powers reduce the cultures of colonized peoples to stereotypes, assigning them fixed and inherent qualities and representing their histories as barbaric and primitive in order to elevate Western supremacy and justify colonialism. The purpose was to convince Indigenous populations that the West would save them from darkness and from themselves.

Fanon called on local intellectuals to revive their precolonial histories and produce a “combat literature” that calls upon people to struggle against colonial oppression, and, in so doing, create new identities and cultures. For Fanon, national cultures are neither precolonial historical realities awaiting to be rediscovered nor something that can exist under the constraints of colonial domination. Rather, national cultures are developed through struggles for national liberation.



Frantz Omar Fanon.

In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon (1952) describes how racialized power relations reduced colonized Black people to their racialized and sexualized bodies, erasing them as people with minds, thoughts, ambitions, and feelings. Black people were consistently told that they did not have a civilized language, history, and culture. The systemic racialization and structural pressure for assimilation, Fanon argues, caused the internalization of oppression and an inferiority complex in which the oppressed lost their identity, agency, and dignity. It is in this context that Fanon calls for active resistance against and emancipation from the indignities and repression of Eurocentrism.

Similarly, Amílcar Cabral (1924–1973), a pan-Africanist, socialist revolutionary theoretician and the leader of the anticolonial movement of Guinea-Bissau and the Cape Verde Islands, advanced the idea of “Return to the Source.” In his speeches, he argues that a national culture can become an effective weapon in the national liberation struggle. Like Fanon, he was adamant that assimilation into the colonizer’s culture and society are not civilization (Cabral 1973; 2016).

Eurocentrism/Western-centrism is also evident in the devaluation, if not exclusion of, subaltern literature in conventional Western scholarship, resulting in the absence of any meaningful dialogue with non-European thinkers. For example, the prefix *ethno* is often attached to non-Western thought and artistic production, and these thoughts and products are treated as passive objects of Western anthropological investigation. “Why is it that a Mozart sneeze is ‘music’,” asks Hamid Dabashi, “but the most sophisticated Indian music ragas are the subject of ‘ethnomusicology’?” Similarly, “Why is European philosophy ‘philosophy,’ but African philosophy ‘ethnophilosophy,’ in the same way that Indian music is ‘ethnomusic’?” (Dabashi 2015, 32).

Western-centrism/Eurocentrism, in sum, equates modernity, rationality, and progress with the superior West, and it associates tradition, backwardness, and barbarism with the exotic and inferior non-West/Rest. It is in this context that diverse forms of colonialism were created and revived. This Western-centric perspective rests on three central assumptions:

1. The modern West, by definition, is developed and provides a singular model to be emulated by the backward Rest.
2. The causes of underdevelopment are rooted in the traditional cultures and institutions of the Rest.
3. The non-West must abandon its traditions and adopt Western practices in order to avoid political and cultural conflicts.

These assumptions, needless to say, ignore the diversity of thoughts and alternative paths that could shape better futures for both “the West and the Rest” (Mahdavi and Knight 2012).

5.3 Alternative and Multiple Modernities

Because there are multiple cultural traditions, diverse institutional settings, and many lived experiences around the globe, there are several paths to development. As Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt explains, the idea of “modernity and Westernization

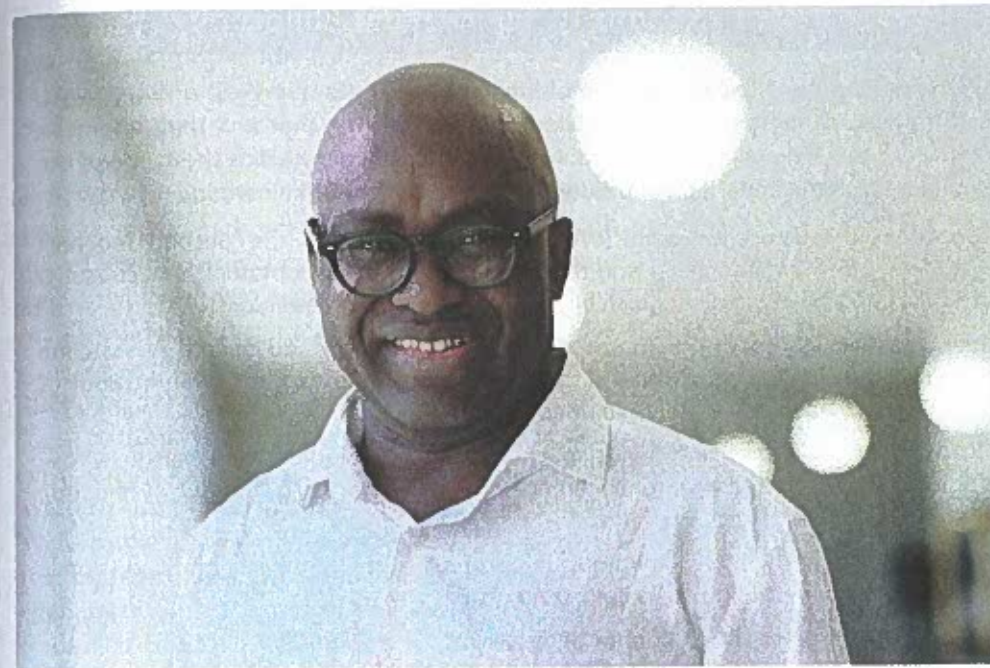
are not identical; Western patterns of modernity are not the only 'authentic' modernities." Instead, there are multiple modernities (Noah 2000, 2–3). Raewyn Connell provides a more in-depth analysis of "multiple conceptions of modernity" by studying different visions of global history and modernity in the Global South. Her work reminds us that "we should think of modernity as always having been global" (Connell 2013, 59).

Contemporary Indian historian and postcolonial thinker Dipesh Chakrabarty offers a radical critique of the universalization of European history that places Western history at the centre of human development and insists that all societies are heading in the same linear direction sooner or later. Chakrabarty argues that the non-Western world has been denied its own vision of history and society, and thus must begin "unthinking" history as a linear developmental process with a singular future. This involves accepting the notion of multiple histories and experiences without enforcing singular principles. Chakrabarty argues that "there are at least two everyday symptoms of the subalternity of non-Western, third-world histories. Third-world historians feel a need to refer to works in European history; historians of Europe do not feel any need to reciprocate" (2000, 28). European thought, he advises, should be placed within its own historical context—as an outcome of a specific history that does not apply to all societies.

Similarly, the contemporary African/Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbembe argues that an emancipatory decolonized world requires "provincializing Europe" and its obsolete universal claims, and envisioning a new and alternative ways to organize societies (Mbembe 2021). He uses both European and African thought to demonstrate common ways of thinking about humanity. He suggests that African modernity, what he calls "Afropolitanism," offers a new vision of a decolonized world grounded in ideas about "world-making" and the "will to community" that surpass Western models of individualism and national sovereignty based on an exclusive notion of nation-state. Mbembe shares Frantz Fanon's idea that colonization is a co-production of colonizers and colonized. Also like Fanon, he is critical of postcolonial elites who blindly embrace European models of capitalist development, sovereignty, and self-determination. Postcolonial Africa, Mbembe argues, is a laboratory for the incompatibility of more recent Western ideas such as neoliberalism and market supremacy with human dignity and democracy.

The concept of **alternative (or multiple) modernities** shares three points of departure to begin to imagine different futures:

1. Western modernity is two-faced. Its two faces embody a series of oppositions, such as human emancipation and colonialism; human rights and genocide; democracy and dictatorship; freedom and incarceration; and the quest for gender, race, class, and environmental justice and the proliferation of new forms of sexual, racial, class, and environmental injustices.
2. Western modernity is not universal, but only one among several other visions and paths to development.
3. The West does not have a monopoly over claims to modernity but is indebted to many other cultural traditions and the intellectual legacies of many other civilizations.



Achille Mbembe.

Sueddeutsche Zeitung/Alamy Stock Photo

5.4 "The Oriental West"? A Global Modernity

In *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilization*, John Hobson seeks to undermine the Eurocentric notion of the triumphant West, demonstrating instead that the West "did not autonomously pioneer its own development in absence of Eastern help" and that "its rise would have been inconceivable without the contributions of the East" (2004, 2–3). Eurocentric historical approaches portray the East as a passive bystander in relation to a progressive West, thereby diminishing the significance of interaction and hybridities of thought and culture. For example, it is well documented that Muslim contributions to modern science were necessary foundations for the Western Renaissance and scientific revolution. It is sometimes argued that this transformation began in Ancient Greece, but the West returned to Greek scholars only through Arabic translations and interpretations produced in the Muslim world (Hobson 2004, 23). Further, medieval Islamic scholarship demonstrates that Muslims not only translated the Greek works, but also produced new knowledge that made Western science possible. Their contributions to reasoning and rationality communicated the tools of critical thinking that fuelled the European Enlightenment.

Centuries before the evolution of the modern social sciences, Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406), a fourteenth-century Muslim historiographer and social scientist, developed a positive rather than normative approach to the study of state and society. This

It is impossible to catalogue the cross-fertilization of ideas between the non-West and the West, or the complex paradigmatic shifts in Western philosophy and science that find their origins in earlier non-Western societies. We revisit a few here, however, in order to underline the scope of the contributions, beginning with the enduring contributions of the medieval Islamic world.

- Muslim philosopher and scientist Al-Farabi (870–950) is referred to as the “Second Teacher” (following Aristotle as the “First Teacher”) and the “father” of Islamic Neoplatonism because he was the first Islamic philosopher to distinguish between philosophy and religion.
- Renowned philosopher-scientist Ibn Sina, or Avicenna (980–1037), advanced Aristotelian philosophy and medicine and published some of the earliest medical texts: *Kitab al-Shifa* (*Book of the Cure*) and *Al-Qanun fi al-tibb* (*The Canon of Medicine*).
- Al-Ghazali (1056–1111) was a prominent Muslim philosopher, theologian, and mystic whose masterpiece in the history of philosophy, *Incoherence of the Philosophers* (*Tahâfut al-falâsifa*), was later advanced in fourteenth-century Europe.
- Ibn Rushd, or Averroes (1126–1198), also sought to integrate Aristotelian philosophy and Islamic thought, debunking the incompatibility of religion and philosophy.
- Al-Kindi (800–870), known as the “Philosopher of the Arabs,” translated works of Aristotle, the Neoplatonists, and Greek mathematicians and scientists into Arabic.

The contributions of Muslim astronomers, mathematicians, and chemists are also noteworthy:

- Al-Khwarizmi (780–850), a Muslim astronomer and mathematician, integrated Hindu-Arabic numerals and algebra into European mathematics.
- Jabir Ibn Hayyan, or Geber (721–815), the “father of Arab chemistry,” was one of the founders of modern pharmacy, pushing the study of chemistry away from superstition and into the realm of science.
- Al-Razi (854–925), a celebrated alchemist and physician, wrote many books advancing medical and scientific knowledge.
- Omar Khayyam (1048–1131), a Persian astronomer, poet, and mathematician, devised the solar calendar, the world’s most accurate calendar, as well as the geometric formulas for solving cubic equations. He also wrote the *Rubaiyat Omar Khayyam* (*Quatrains of Khayyam*), which, centuries later, inspired many Western poets, including Robert Frost, Mark Twain, and T.S. Eliot.

approach focused on the interplay of political and economic factors rather than spiritual factors (such as divine intervention) in explanations of social organization and historical change. Like Aristotle, Ibn Khaldun argues that humans are political “by nature” and that “social organization (*‘umrân*)” is essential to satisfy the basic needs of sustenance and defence. Because aggression and injustice are also part of human nature, however, he argues that it must be restrained by the power and authority of what he calls “kingship” (*mulk*). Such authority can be established only with the aid of solidarity, social cohesion, or “group feeling (*aşabiyya*)” (Ibn Khaldun 1969, 67–70; Alatas 2013, 53–55, 74–88).

In his masterpiece the *Muqaddimah* (*Introduction*), Ibn Khaldun also theorizes a “science of civilization” (*‘ilm al-‘umran*, or *Umran*), as a cyclical process in which authorities rise, become strong, decline, and collapse with the rise of another power. He attributes the main causes of the rise and decline of states and civilizations to “essential differences in social organization” and, more importantly, “*aşabiyya*,” which means the erosion of social solidarity that eventually results in the decline of civilizations (Ibn Khaldun 1969; Alatas 2013, 55–56).

According to the distinguished political economist Robert Cox, engaging with the work of non-Western thinkers such as Ibn Khaldun allows Western-conditioned minds to explore alternative understandings of collective existence and to challenge the dominance of the state-centric Western accounts of the political world. In our modern context, one could make the following conclusions from Ibn Khaldun’s approach:

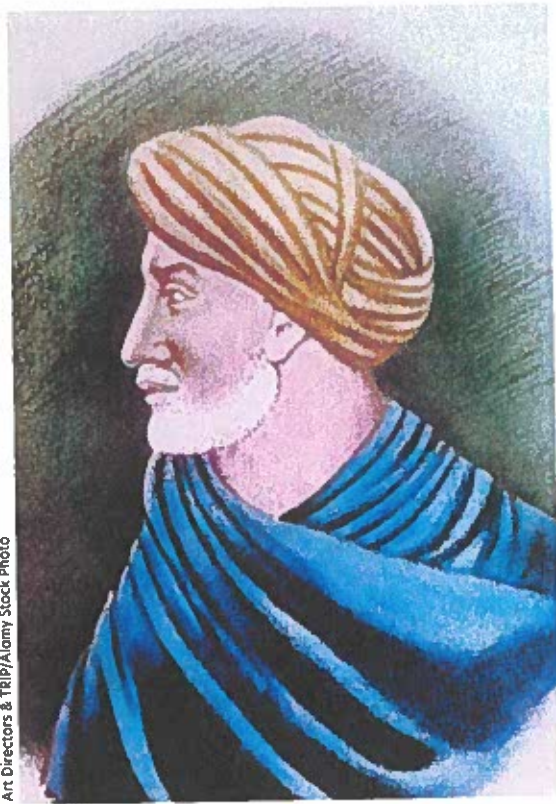
- Reason is the explanatory principle of history, which makes all events intelligible.
- *Asabiyya* is essential to the creation of the state as “a higher form of collective existence.”
- Cultures shape state forms.
- The particular “development of a state contains the seeds of its own destruction” (Cox 1996, 163).

As Cox argues, early non-Western thinkers lend different perspectives, both on the rise of Western modernity and on issues that continue to challenge contemporary societies, such as the relationship between the state and religion, social inequality, social polarization, and the decline of trust. Rajeev Bhargava (2013), for example, examines the religious policies of two Indian emperors—the Buddhist Mauryan emperor Asoka (274–232 BCE) and the Muslim Mughal emperor Akbar (1556–1605)—to make the case that the idea of secularism can be traced back to premodern India.

Similarly, modern formulations of equality and justice are present in the thought of Mazdak in early sixth-century Persia and Abu Dhar al-Ghifari in seventh-century Arabia. Mazdak, a Zoroastrian reformist and egalitarian prophet, challenged the authority and hierarchy of the clerical establishment and promoted economic and social equality. God has created us equal, he argued, and everyone is entitled to have equal opportunity and an equal share of the earthly possessions. Mazdak’s revolutionary teachings, called Mazdakism, mobilized the masses and angered the political and



Omar Khayyam (1048–1131) developed a solar calendar that led to the development of the Persian calendar, which remains in use today.



Ibn Khaldun.

religious establishment, resulting in the brutal massacre of Mazdak and his followers.

The socialist spirit of Mazdakism, however, remained alive and inspired future generations, including advocates of Islamic liberation theology such as Iran's twentieth-century Muslim critical thinker Ali Shariati (1933–1977). Shariati was equally influenced by Abu Dhar al-Ghifari, described as the first “Muslim/theist socialist” and one of Prophet Mohamad’s companions, known for his strict egalitarian values in opposition to economic injustice in the post-prophet era. Inspired by the modern Western idea of socialism and Iran’s and Islamic traditions, Shariati ridiculed religious reasons for injustice and its message that the poor should remain silent, patient, and passive:

Have patience, my religious brother! Leave the world to those who are of it. Let hunger be the capital for the pardon of your sins. Forebear the hell of life for the rewards of paradise in the Hereafter. [. . .] Keep your stomach empty of food, O brother, in order to see the light of wisdom in it. “What is the remedy?” Whatever befalls us. The pen of destiny has written on our foreheads from before: The prosperous are prosperous from their mother’s womb and the wretched are wretched from their mother’s womb. (Shariati 1987, 15)

Shariati also used modern Hegelian-Marxian and religious/Islamic perspectives to reinterpret the story of Cain and Abel, the children of Adam and Eve, as a modern egalitarian Islamic philosophy of history. In his work, he argues that history represents a constant flow of events that is dominated by contradictions, beginning with the struggle between Cain and Abel. The murder of Abel by his brother Cain symbolizes the end of primitive communism, equality, and brotherhood, and its replacement with the slavery, rivalry, and greed characteristic of class-based societies. The war between Cain and Abel, Shariati argues, represents the permanent war of every generation in the larger historical context. Although this battle continues in all human societies, Shariati contends that it will come to an end by the triumph of truth, justice, and equity (Shariati 1991, 68–85). His work is just one example of the integration of Western and non-Western ideas that avoids ethnocentrism, exclusion, and self-marginalization, and gestures to glocal (both global and local) alternatives.



Ali Shariati.

5.5 Travelling Ideas: A Hybrid, Glocal Approach

In their quest for socio-political development, non-Western intellectuals have explored “whether the solution was Westernization, some sort of hybrid form of modernization, or more faithful adherence to traditional practices and norms” (Kohn and McBride 2011, 9–10). The most successful path appears to be a hybrid glocal approach that moves beyond a Western-centric universalism and regressive local practices. This third synthetic and dialogical approach makes way for the rise of alternative and multiple modernities.

By uncovering local expressions and practices, progressive ideas (such as freedom and social justice) are understood as being both deeply local and global as foundations to build alternative conceptions of modernity. As Japanese scholar Ryoko Nakano (2011) argues, we need to recover traditions of thought where the normative divide between Western universalism and Eastern cultural particularism can be filled rather than reproduced. For example, some Japanese intellectuals have interpreted Christianity through the lens of Confucian, Daoist, and Samurai ethics to theorize a unique form of Japanese humanism. Similarly, Ho Chi Minh, the Vietnamese revolutionary leader, reconfigured Confucian ideas about virtue to make “revolution as a process of self-cultivation and transformation for both leaders and citizens.” The same applies to Frantz Fanon, who saw anticolonial struggle as a liberatory process that would create new and free subjects (Kohn and McBride 2011, 9–10).

In a different vein, Amílcar Cabral, one of Africa’s foremost anticolonial revolutionary leaders, as well as the Mexican Zapatista movement, drawing on Indigenous traditions, place land as a central element of their political analysis. This innovative thought sheds light on “the relationship between a people and the physical territory they inhabit” and signifies another contribution of the Global South to the field of political theory (Kohn and McBride 2011, 11).

Further, in Western Marxism the major structure of domination is capitalism, and the main agent of socio-political changes is the proletariat, or modern working class. However, Peruvian Marxist José Mariátegui and Argentinian philosopher and liberation theologian Enrique Dussel have argued for a departure from Western Marxism by criticizing all forms of domination, not just capitalism, and situating Indigenous Peoples in alliance with the campesino (peasant farmer), the slum-dweller, and workers as the primary drivers of political change in postcolonial societies (Kohn and McBride 2011, 11). Similar to Fanon’s concern about assimilation, Dussel argues that many scholars in the Global South are trained to believe that Western philosophy is superior and thus undermine Indigenous thought emanating from their own societies (1985, 12). These “colonial philosophers of the periphery gaze at a vision foreign to them, one that is not their own. From the centre, they see themselves as nonbeing, nothingness.” They “had forgotten their past. The Arab world did not return to its own splendid philosophy dating back to the ninth century. India was ashamed of its sages, and so was China, though both nations had produced treasures of thought for more than three millennia.” Dussel argues that “progressive Western philosophy that is exported to the periphery” should be “modified to reflect local circumstances”; otherwise, it will obscure rather than assist these societies (Dussel 1985, 15).

Achille Mbembe, introduced earlier in this chapter, argues that decolonization “requires adopting intellectual pluriversity,” a process of knowledge production that does not necessarily abandon the notion of universal knowledge for humanity, but instead encourages openness and dialogue among different traditions (Mbembe 2016, 37). Bhambra further argues for a provincialized cosmopolitanism that is sensitive to the non-Western voices and flattens the hierarchies of knowledge implicit in global cosmopolitanism, which privileges Western thought. Such an inclusive cosmopolitanism would require decentring Europe and developing original and critical thinking aligned to the world in which we live (Bhambra 2010). Likewise, Walter Mignolo, an Argentinian and outspoken voice of subaltern studies, advances the idea of a “critical and dialogical cosmopolitanism” that recognizes and respects diversity as a [cosmopolitan] universal project” (Mignolo 2000, 744).

Each of these scholars shares a common view that contemporary political analyses necessarily must confront the legacy of Eurocentrism and colonialism that is deeply embedded in the way we think about politics. Indeed, Hamid Dabashi argues that “the very notion of the nation-state, as we understand it today, is itself a colonial legacy that has profoundly contributed to subnational categories of resentment and supranational geopolitics of aggression and violence.” The ideas of a nation, defined as a people with a “collective consciousness” rooted in shared language, history, and culture, is not new, but the idea of a nation-state “within the current domain of postcolonial” has left behind structural violence and chauvinistic nationalism imbedded in “the false consciousness of nationalism as an ideology of false pride” (Dabashi 2020, 10–11).

Ali Shariati (1933–1977), one of the most sophisticated and influential socialist Muslims in modern Iran, theorized a glocal democratic socialism driven by a spiritual ontology. Shariati’s “trinity of emancipation”—that is, freedom (*azadi*), equality (*barabari*), and civil spirituality (*’erfan*)—is a novel contribution to the idea of an alternative modernity. He argues that structures of domination have rested upon *zar-zur-tazvir* (gold-coercion-deception) or *tala-tigh-tasbih* (gold-sword-rosary), meaning material injustice (*estesm’ar*), political dictatorship (*estebd’ad*), and religious and other forms of cultural alienation (*es-tehm’ar*). Shariati then offers an alternative “trinity of freedom, social justice, and civil spirituality” (*azadi, barabari, ’erfan*) (quoted in Mahdavi 2017, 281). Shariati argues that freedom without social justice degenerates into a freedom of market, not a freedom of human beings. Social justice without freedom undermines human dignity, and spirituality without freedom and social justice translates into deception and false consciousness. In the search for alternative modernities, Shariati offers the following foundations:

- freedom and democracy without capitalism and neo-liberal market fundamentalism;
- social justice and socialism without authoritarianism and materialism; and
- civil spirituality and ethics without official organized religion and clericalism. (Mahdavi 2017, 284)

5.6 Conclusion

Critical thought, according to the Indian-born political theorist Bhikhu Parekh, requires “bold and talented minds” and “a climate of tolerance” (Parekh 1992, 560). This chapter has provided a broad overview of the history, diversity, and

dynamics of non-Western thought, from Asia to Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East.

Ideas do not develop in a vacuum: some ideas dominate because of colonialization and the alienation of non-Western intellectuals from their societies, while other ideas recover lost histories and imagine different futures. Contemporary non-Western thinkers offer a hybridity of ideas that synthesize elements of the local and global thought. This glocal approach has fuelled imaginaries of—and the possibilities for—alternative modernities. In this twenty-first century, we can anticipate that numerous shifts that will continue to challenge the monopoly of Western discourses of modernity, not the least, the rise of China as a dominant global power, climate change, and population migrations. Diverse voices in the non-West will continue to redefine modernity in their own terms (Eisenstadt 2000, 24).

This chapter also has argued that, contrary to Western-centric and Orientalist discourses, the non-Western world has profoundly contributed to knowledge production and critical thinking over the course of centuries. Both the West and the non-West have produced diverse progressive and regressive ideas, which were developed in particular socio-historical contexts, but also have travelled to different times and places. In this sense, ideas are always glocal, combining both global currents and local histories and vice versa. Just as we are all glocal beings, we must open our minds and hearts to learn from one another, be critical of the self and the other, and think globally but act locally.

Jalal ad Din Muhammad Rumi (1207–1273), also known as Rumi or Mawlana, was a Muslim mystic, poet, and scholar of thirteenth-century Persia/Iran. Glocal thinking is best expressed in this example of his poetry:

I am not from East or West / My place is placeless
/ My trace is traceless / I belong to the beloved.

Similarly, Sa’adi Shirazi (1210–1291) is a thirteenth-century Iranian poet whose poem “Oneness of Humanity” is inscribed on a large handmade carpet on the wall of a meeting room in the United Nations building in New York. Sa’adi’s poem advances an idea of a global citizenship and represents a glocal approach toward imagining a world beyond racial, religious, ethnic, sexual, and class discriminations. It reads:

Human beings are members of a whole
In creation of one essence and soul
If one member is afflicted with pain
Other members uneasy will remain
If you have no sympathy for human pain
The name of human you cannot retain.



Jalal ad Din Muhammad Rumi.

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Summary

This chapter

- located the origins of many important elements of Western modernity in the ancient civilizations of the non-West;
- described and critiqued discourses of Orientalism that cast the non-West as inferior and erased the contributions of centuries of thought and social organization;
- explained that modernity and Westernization are not the same and that there are multiple and alternative modernities beyond the Western model; and
- highlighted how and why to provincialize Western-centric discourses of colonial modernity and de-provincialize non-Western thinking to showcase non-Western perspectives on alternative futures.

Discussion Questions

1. Are Westernization and modernity identical? What does alternative and multiple modernities mean in the twenty-first century?
2. Examine a global method of thinking that synthesizes elements of local and global ideas. Provides some examples from the Global South.
3. What does it mean to provincialize Western ideas and de-provincialize non-Western ideas? Can you give examples?

Further Readings

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Information on Ali Shariati.

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