RESTLESS IDEAS

CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL THEORY IN AN ANXIOUS AGE

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I dedicate this work to all my global sisters and brothers — near and far — in their struggles for recognition and social justice.

"What may appear as Truth to one person will often appear as untruth to another person. But that need not worry the seeker. Where there is honest effort, it will be realized that what appear to be different truths are like the countless and apparently different leaves of the same tree." —Mohandas Gandhi (1951: 109), "On the Meaning of Truth" (January 1, 1927) from *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, Shocken Books.

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PROLOGUE

THE CHANGING FACE OF CONTEMPORARY THEORY

THE WANING OF THE WESTERN WORLDVIEW

Today, perhaps more than at any time since the Second World War, we live in an age of uncertainty and anxiety, an age characterized by rapid social and technological change and by the erosion of many customary boundaries and borders — whether these are geographical, political, cultural, occupational, racial, sexual, public or private. For many of us, the world has become an increasingly uncertain and precarious place where the assumptions and expectations of earlier generations — whether of stable employment and secure residence, or the validity of customary beliefs and social norms, or even our hopes and prospects for the future — have become unsettled and thrown into doubt. And although these feelings of crisis and confusion are far from unprecedented and have periodically arisen at other times of profound historical change, the shocks and aftershocks of these uncertain times reverberate through all aspects of our lives. As Karl Marx (1969 [1848]) said many years ago when he described the social impact of the rise of industrial capitalism: "All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify." These shockwaves are felt throughout society: on factory shop floors, in corporate boardrooms and government offices — and even behind the cloistered walls of universities and colleges, at the desks of scholars and social theorists.

Social theory, like everything else in our anxious age, has been heavily impacted by the social, cultural, geopolitical, technological and environmental changes that are transforming our social worlds and redefining our ideas and our identities. Many of the assumptions and conceptual frameworks of past social theories are being critiqued by a new generation

of social thinkers whose ideas and experiences have, until recently, been overlooked or excluded by most Western theorists. Many theorists from this new generation are presently engaged in re-examining, nuancing and reworking earlier theories in order to reflect the complex, changing and different lived experiences from those that informed earlier theories. In many ways, this is an exciting yet challenging time to study social theory; there is much to consider and much to learn.

The most penetrating criticisms by the new generation of global social theorists target the "Eurocentric," or "Western," worldview, which, until fairly recently, was the dominant paradigm for constructing, teaching and learning social theory in North America, Europe and around the world. Most social theory — whether classical or contemporary — has remained embedded in this Eurocentric worldview. This worldview has come under increasing scrutiny, especially from social theorists and other scholars whose ideas have been shaped by their experiences of material, psychological and epistemic oppression and violence which

The Eurocentric Worldview: Reason, Liberty and Progress

The Eurocentric worldview emerged during the European Enlightenment (Age of Reason), which spanned the mid-seventeenth to the mid-eighteenth centuries. It was based on a number of assumptions and key concepts, the most distinctive of which are the following:

Rationalism: the belief that true knowledge of the world can only be gained through reason, rather than through religious faith.

Humanism: the belief that our understanding of the world and our moral and ethical values should be based on actual experience rather than on religious doctrine or mystical revelation.

Secularism: the belief that public life — government, education, the judiciary etc. — should be separated from all religious influence or authority and that religion should be relegated to the private sphere.

Modernity: the belief that modern societies — in contrast to traditional or "primitive" societies — have evolved institutions for greater technological innovation, greater economic growth and greater individual liberty.

Progress: the belief in so-called "human perfectibility": that through the application of reason to human affairs, the history of humanity is destined to show continuous linear advances in self-improvement and in the solution of natural and social problems. Humanity, rather than God, shapes its own fate.

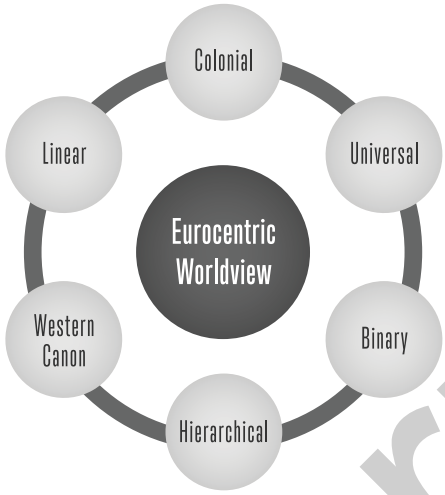
are unexpressed and unrepresented in this once dominant paradigm of social theory.

The Eurocentric worldview has allowed "the West" to mythologize its own history, knowledge and practices as a paragon of human civilization and as a rationalization and legitimization of its colonization of non-European cultures and communities around the world. However, the recent history of the West — the brutal conquest and colonization throughout the Global South; the Nazi holocaust; the genocide of Indigenous Peoples; the construction of nuclear bombs and other weapons of mass destruction; the unchecked extinction of many species; and the looming climate crisis — has served to discredit the naïve self-promotion of the European worldview. At the same time, this Enlightenment paradigm has lasted for several centuries and has provided motivation and direction for most intellectual projects at home and abroad. But times are changing, and today this Eurocentric worldview is being challenged by critical thinkers who bear no allegiance to a colonial narrative of knowledge and who have every interest in overthrowing this narrative. Nowhere are these intellectual struggles more apparent than in the quarrelsome world of social theory.

EUROCENTRISM AND ITS DISCONTENTS

Today, the Eurocentric worldview, which is embedded in all classical and many contemporary social theories, including most of those included in this book, is being challenged from several angles: by feminist critics, who expose the male-oriented, or androcentric, biases and assumptions that continue to frame the perspectives of many social theorists (*Kanter 1993 [1977]; Smith 1987;* Sydie 1994; Marshall and Witz 2004); by queer theorists, who question the heteronormative biases underlying much contemporary social theory (Green 2007; Seidman 1996; Namaste 1994); and by scholars from the Global South and Indigenous and racialized peoples in the Global North (Alatas and Sinha 2017; Al-Hardan 2018; Bhambra 2014; Chakrabarty 2000; Churchill 2002; Go 2016). These critics identify the numerous unexamined presuppositions of Eurocentric theory that limit its relevance and applicability for understanding the diversity of human experience around the world. Some of the more common criticisms of Eurocentrism are described below.

Figure 0-1: Common Criticisms of Eurocentrism



The Western Canon

A major criticism of the Eurocentric narrative and of the established works traditionally included in the "canon," or foundational literature, of classical and contemporary social theory is that this canon has been dominated by white Western (mostly male) theorists and has excluded non-European theorists from the Global South — both scholars from former colonies and Indigenous and other racialized scholars from within the metropolitan colonial states. Some of the more illustrious non-European pioneers of social theory include Ibn Khaldun (Tunisia); W.B. DuBois, Richard R. Wright, Booker T. Washington, Ralph Ellison (United States); Jose Rizal (Philippines); Said Nursi (Turkey); and Benoy Kumar Sarkar (India), among many others (Al-Hardan 2018). And, of course, there are prominent Indigenous social thinkers in North America, Australia, New Zealand and elsewhere, including Marie Battiste and Lee Maracle (Canada); Ward Churchill, Robert Allen Warrior and Vine Deloria (United States); Stephen Muecke and Marcia Langton (Australia); and Linda Tuhiwai Smith (New Zealand). Today, the traditional canon of social and sociological theory is being reconfigured, and the narrow roster of white Western males, or "old dead white guys" (see, for example, Bancroft and Fevre 2010; Inglis and Steinfeld 2000), has become the object of intense criticism from postcolonial theorists, feminists, queer theorists, critical race and Indigenous theorists and scholars from the Global South. These

social theorists from around the world seek to decolonize social theory, to fully recognize previously excluded women and racialized theorists and to widen the horizons of social thought and social research (Alatas and Sinha 2017). We shall meet some of these contemporary theorists as we progress through later chapters of this book.

Universal

Another criticism made of Eurocentric theories of society is their "false universalism." Whether these are macrosocial theories, such as structural functionalism, structural conflict theory and systems theory, or microsocial theories, such as ethnomethodology and rational choice theory, the underlying assumption is that they are universally applicable to all societies — past, present and future. However, an increasing number of critical theorists from the Global South show that these supposedly universal theories are often unable to adequately conceptualize or interpret local, non-European cultures and communities. Eurocentric theories have often proven to be insensitive ("tone deaf") to the cultural, traditional and local conditions of human existence beyond the beltway of Europe and North America. This "pseudo universalism" has provided an ideological legitimation for European policies of imperialism and colonialism around the world. The epistemology of universalism is closely linked to the global history of colonialism. This false universalism has also been termed "metrocentrism" by recent critical theorists (Go 2013). Indeed, some critics of metrocentrism have even disparaged such anti-imperialist perspectives as postcolonial theory and Marxism for their own metrocentic premises: namely, that these critiques of metrocentrism carry their own brand of false universalism. In order to avoid the trap of metrocentric and universal theories (whether these are colonial, anticolonial or postcolonial perspectives), some theorists (Go 2014; 2016) insist on privileging the viewpoint of the colonized "underdog" — that is, adopting a "subaltern standpoint."

Linear

The adoption of a Eurocentric worldview has produced many distortions and misunderstandings of non-European societies, cultures and communities. For example, Eurocentric theories of society have invariably imposed their own linear concepts of "time" and "history" (as well as "territory" and "space") on other cultures that have not shared these concepts. For Europeans — and their North American cousins — history is seen as an evolving linear chronology in which the past is safely behind us,

the present is currently with us and the future remains unopened before us. History from this perspective is invariably considered a progressive development, though which humanity emancipates itself from superstition and ignorance and moves forward to ever greater enlightenment and individual liberty. For some cultures, history may be understood as circular, or cyclical, rather than linear. Some cultures may have conceptions of space and time that cannot be collapsed into a Eurocentric narrative. For others, the boundaries of the past, present and future may be experienced as more fluid and porous than the hard distinctions of the Eurocentric worldview, including movement between "dreaming time" and "real" time (McLean 2009).

Binary

Eurocentric conceptual frameworks have frequently imposed their own binary categories on cultures for which such categories are meaningless and even invasive. This may be seen in rigid binaries like male/female and homosexual/heterosexual, which ignore the full range of genders and sexualities. As LBGTQ theorist Scott Lauria Morgensen suggests, the Indigenous and sexual identities of two-spirited individuals cannot be easily inserted into a homo/hetero binary gender dichotomy, but their recognition and expression provide new opportunities for personal liberation and decolonization: "Thus Two-Spirit presents an Indigenous epistemology rooted in Native traditions, articulating Native modernities — that challenges colonial knowledges, alters power relations with non-Natives, and incites new registers through which Native people can join and hold non-Natives accountable to work for Indigenous decolonization" (2011: 86).

The problem with Eurocentric binary conceptual systems is that they suppress ambiguous or fluid spaces between the opposed categories, so that any overlap between categories of man/woman, child/adult or friend/stranger become impossible to identify. Unfortunately the history of social theory is closely aligned with — and has often reinforced — the history of colonialism, as may be seen in such fundamental binary categories as — colonizer/colonized, white/Black, settler/Indigenous, civilized/savage, primitive/modern, good/evil, superstition/reason, human/beast, among many others. Many recent critics regognize these close ties between social theory and colonialism and call for the "decolonization" of the narratives and conceptual frameworks of contemporary Eurocentric theories (Connell 2007; Smith 2012; Comaroff and Comaroff 2011; Ascione 2016).

Hierarchical

Hierarchy has always been an essential and ineradicable aspect of imperial and colonial social relations. European conquest and colonization have inevitably stratified and divided the colonized from the colonizers. In most cases this imperial legacy has also imposed a racial stratification on subjugated, or subaltern, populations: white colonizer over racialized colonized; settler over Indigenous Peoples. Imperial and colonial perspectives have also imposed other hierarchal classifications — including those based on class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, language and religion. Hierarchy is deeply embedded in the Eurocentric worldview.

Colonial

Many critics of both classical and contemporary European and North American social theory point to the role of the Eurocentric paradigm in the project of colonialism. While gender and queer theorists expose the androcentric and heteronormative biases of Eurocentric theory, its deepest roots — according to postcolonial, Indigenous, and critical race theorists — are to be found in its "imperial or colonial episteme," or colonial worldview (Go 2016). Some commentators note that there is a well-defined infrastructure maintained by the gatekeepers of most disciplines to regulate the portals of publication and public recognition (Crane 1972). However, postcolonial, Indigenous and critical race theorists are contesting much social theory for its implicit prejudices and biases and for the gaps and silences around the colonial origins of this discourse. Among the many targets of postcolonial criticism are the "origin narratives" of Eurocentric theory. A popular origin narrative is the "Protestant ethic" myth, which — from the time of Max Weber to contemporary modernization theory — has attributed the Industrial Revolution, of the late eighteenth century, to a uniquely Western combination of economic enterprise and moral discipline, originally centred in Britain and later to spread throughout Europe and North America and eventually the rest of the world. For postcolonial critics, this narrow and insular historical perspective, focused exclusively on the apparent self-sufficient rise of industrial capitalism in the West, ignores the role of colonialism in funding and financing the Industrial Revolution — with capital accumulated through trade and commerce in enslaved peoples, sugar, tea, tobacco and cotton — among many other colonial cash commodities. Postcolonial critics argue that the modernization of the West was only achieved through

the exploitation of colonial land, labour and natural resources, such as gold, silver and copper. Scholars from the Global South (such as Eric Williams 1944; Walter Rodney 1972; C.L.R. James 1938) who emphasize these interconnections until recently remained outside the established canon of Eurocentric social theory.

Besides the failure to acknowledge the economic and material role of colonialism and slavery in the rise of Western industrial capitalism, postcolonial critics also challenge the ethnocentric biases and racial stereotypes typically used to portray non-European cultures in most classical and many contemporary social theories. Palestinian-American philosopher Edward Said (1978) developed a postcolonial critique of Eurocentric narratives of Eastern or Asian societies in his most famous book, *Orientalism*, and his critical framework has encouraged later theorists to contest and challenge the (sometimes explicit but often implicit) ethnocentric and racist preconceptions embedded in many contemporary social theories. Indigenous and critical race theorists also critique Eurocentric theoretical narratives for viewing non-European cultures and communities only through "Western eyes," because these perspectives have frequently misunderstood and distorted local alternative realities. The "East," or the "Orient," has typically been portrayed as "mysterious" or "inscrutable" in Western texts, and European studies of Asian societies traditionally made references to what was perceived as Oriental backwardness, degeneracy and inequality (Said 1978). Similarly, Indigenous cultures have long been described by colonial anthropologists and sociologists as "primitive," "savage," "barbaric" and "uncivilized." At the very least, many premodern non-European societies, cultures and communities have been defined as "foreign," "alien" and "different" — or more basically, as the "Other." Said and other critical scholars (Hailey 1944; Gough 1960; Asad 1973; Pathy 1981; Steinmetz 2013) emphasize that these Eurocentric traditions of theory and research are inextricably tied to the culture, ideology and discourse of colonialism — the colonial episteme. The sad fact is that, over the centuries, these and other racialized stereotypes and caricatures have distorted the reality and diminished the humanity of the West and have legitimized the occupation and dispossession of colonized populations. Ideas have real consequences, and the Orientalist fictions of colonial discourse have always served to rationalize and reinforce the harsh and often brutal policies and practices of colonialism and imperialism.

THE CRUMBLING CANON OF SOCIAL THEORY: THE CLASSICS

The task of identifying the canon of social theory has become increasingly politicized. The more conservative custodians of social theory continue to insist upon the centrality of the classics — especially the holy trinity of Marx, Durkheim and Weber. For these commentators, the long-established classics still represent the highest standards of scholarship within social theory. This attitude is articulated by Mouzelis (1997: 1): "I consider the writings of Marx, Durkheim, and Weber indispensable, in the sense that we shall not be able to put them on forgotten library shelves as easily as chemists or physics do with their own classical texts. This is because they inform current research, scholarship and debate." Theorists who strongly defend the traditional definition of the canon often oppose any attempts to broaden it. Attempts to incorporate women, Black, Indigenous and other social theorists of the Global South into the classical tradition are resisted on a number of grounds; for example, appeals for the inclusion of neglected theorists may be dismissed as evidence of a "creeping relativism," often seen to be driven by external political pressures ("political correctness") or by a general lowering of standards within the discipline.

For conservatives, the traditional classics represent the highest standards of research and scholarship. Demands for the inclusion of such figures as Charlotte Perkins Gillman or African American sociologist W.E.B Du Bois, for example, are seen, not as opportunities to deepen and widen the focus of social theory but as special pleading by political groups and movements. One defender of the status quo (Mouzelis 1997: 3), disparages these efforts: "I do not at all see why W.E.B. Du Bois or Charlotte Perkins Gilman should be admitted to the club.… Until I am presented with more convincing arguments, I am bound to assume that [t]his proposal is based less on intrinsic/cognitive and more on extrinsic values. (For those unfamiliar with their names, Du Bois is black and Gilman is a feminist)."

However, it is clear that these reactionary attempts to discourage a more inclusive and global understanding of social theory — and social theorists — are doomed to failure. Gerald Davis and Mayer Zald observe: "The radicalization of the curriculum and the pressure from suppressed groups for recognition of 'their' classics forced an examination of how the canon was constructed, why some forms of literature or art were included, and others excluded, why few women and African-Americans

authors or artists were included in the then acceptable curricula" (2009: 638). Today, most theory textbooks and journals include the contributions of non-European theorists; the Eurocentric paradigm has already lost its paramountcy, and its theoretical canon is rapidly crumbling (see, for example, Connell 2007; Go 2016; Rodriguez, Boatcă, and Costa 2016; Benzecry, Krause, and Reed 2017).

In so many ways, the conservative defenders of the traditional canon are swimming against the tide of recent history. There is a rising swell among theorists across the social sciences and humanities in favour of a more inclusive definition of the classics. This new wave signals the mounting challenges from contemporary theoretical perspectives, such as postmodernism and poststructuralism, as well as from feminist and queer theorists; standpoint and intersectionality theorists; and from the interdisciplinary areas such as gender studies, cultural and multicultural studies, global studies and Indigenous, critical race and postcolonial studies. Many of these critics conclude that traditional social thought remains severely compromised by androcentric perspectives and by Eurocentric assumptions of Western superiority, what some call the "imperial gaze." One writer declared: "Sociology was formed within the culture of imperialism and embodied a cultural response to the colonized world. This fact is crucial in understanding the content and method of sociology as well as the discipline's cultural significance" (Connell 1997: 1519). The broadening scope of theoretical perspectives, which now includes the contributions of theorists from the Global South and from marginalized Indigenous and minority cultures within the Global North, greatly enhances the relevance of social theory both at home and abroad. The present generation of theory is more cosmopolitan, interdisciplinary and global than ever before. Instead of the narrow Eurocentric worldview that prevailed for much of its history, social theory now provides us with a far more accurate picture of the world and a more reflexive methodology that registers the diversity and variety of social life on our planet.

There has never been a better time than the present to broaden our understanding of our shared global heritage of social theory, to include some of the formerly excluded classics of past social thinkers and to open the doors to current social theorists from the Global South. Several scholars are already reclaiming some of these neglected masterpieces from Western societies and beyond (see Abdo-Zubi 1996; Alatas and Sinha

2001; Alatas 2006; Churchill 1996). Indeed, this process is underway in many other disciplines as well (Naidoo 1996; Ramose 2002; Thiong'o 1981/1986). In many ways, social theory may be viewed as a debate between different theorists. For example, Karl Marx's work may be seen as a critical response to at least three different traditions of theory: French utopian socialism, British political economy and German historical idealism. While Marx ridiculed these early utopian socialists for what he considered their wholly unrealistic goal of returning modern capitalist society to a pre-industrial state of harmony and for their attempts to rise above class conflict, he appropriated their ideas of "class conflict" and "class struggle." Similarly, although he dismissed much of the classical tradition of political economy, Marx appropriated the "labour theory of value" into his own more critical "theory of surplus value." Also, Marx replaced Hegel's theory of "historical idealism" with his own theory of "historical materialism" (sometimes called "dialectical materialism"). In a memorable phrase, Marx proclaimed that he had "turned Hegel on his head" and had "extracted the rational kernel from the mystical shell" of Hegel's dialectical theory of history (Marx 1961: 20). All theories are originally formulated as responses — sometimes explicit, often implicit — to past as well as prevailing theories. Most classical theorists "settled their accounts" with their predecessors and with their contemporaries. In this sense, theories are all about argument, debate and deliberation; they never fall out of a clear blue sky.

Much as theorizing may be thought of as a debate or an argument — with a partner or against an opponent — the same holds true for definitions of the canon. Although the chronology of social theory may appear — at least to the outside observer — as a simple matter of historical record, the inclusion of theorists in this record has remained a "contested terrain." Indeed, it would be accurate to say that the canon is "constructed" rather than simply "discovered" or "reclaimed." This is because the criteria used to construct the canon are unavoidably ideological and are liable to change from one generation to the next. The canon of social theory, therefore, is not only a living legacy, subject to periodic change and transformation; it is also a reflection of the struggles and conflicts of different social groups for recognition and respect. The early histories of social thought published at the turn of the twentieth century faithfully reflected, for the most part, the worldview of the predominantly white, androcentric, ethnocentric, patriarchal, heterosexual, middle-class

professoriate of that time. The construction of the canon during this period expressed the predilections and prejudices of the educated elite in Europe and North America. For many years, even the works of Karl Marx were either trivialized or excluded from many standard histories of social and economic thought (Williams 1964). Indeed, Marx was contemptuously dismissed by one famous economist as a "minor post-Ricardian" (Samuelson 1962; and Brewer 1995). To be fair, Paul Samuelson added the following qualification: "Marx's bold economic or materialistic theory of history, his political theories of the class struggle, his transmutations of Hegelian philosophy, have an importance for the historian of 'ideas' that far transcends his facade of economics" (14).

Today, postcolonial, Indigenous and critical race theorists, as well as feminist, gender and queer theorists, have all begun to deconstruct and reconstruct the traditional canon of social theory. Past social thinkers who were previously overlooked because they were women or came from non-Western cultures are now being taken seriously and incorporated into an expanding global conception of our shared intellectual heritage. Once again, the historical canon has become an object of contestation, negotiation and revision. Earlier criteria for inclusion in the canon are being expanded; the criteria for constructing the classics are more open and cosmopolitan than ever before. The intellectual excitement of these times is well captured by Davis and Zald: "The classics and the canon evolve. … We have no idea whether there are hidden jewels out there, just waiting for some scholar to make claims about their importance for current or future thinking" (2009: 644).

This is the spirit of the present text. In addition to the usual list of social thinkers included in the contemporary tradition, this book also includes feminists, postcolonial, Indigenous and critical race theorists. But even the best-intentioned efforts at reconstructing the historical canon of social theory still suffer from what has sometimes been called the "Anglocentric gaze": an over-reliance on Euro-American sources to the virtual exclusion of other cultural contributions. As one eminent critic (Collins 1997: 1564) suggests, "What we need is to broaden out to the formation of canons in other disciplines and in other parts of the world.… Perhaps someday there will be a genuinely cosmopolitan account." When viewed through the eyes of another culture or another gender, such classical theorists as Marx, Durkheim and Weber exemplify the many cultural and gender prejudices of their age. While this is not a

justification for consigning their works to the ash heap of history, it is a reason to recognize their limitations. As in all things, we can only take one step at a time — even when dismantling the past legacy of Eurocentrism, Orientalism and androcentrism.

THE EXPANDING HORIZONS OF CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL THEORY

The recent rise of critical and global perspectives has led to a major re-evaluation of Western social theory. Eurocentric theories that claimed to be universal in their scope increasingly appear parochial and provincial in their theoretical focus and methods of inquiry. Postcolonial critics in particular insist that many of the conceptual frameworks and methodologies of Eurocentric theories have little or no relevance for the experiences and perspectives of many groups and individuals residing in the Global South. Eurocentric theories were narrowly constructed within the local contexts of Europe and North America even though they tacitly assumed a universal and global validity. Today, these assumptions are being challenged by postcolonial theorists and others who not only reject the false universalism — or metrocentrism — of Eurocentric concepts and methods, but also the underlying colonial worldview — or colonial episteme — which has until now remained largely unquestioned. The Western copyright on social theory is no longer privileged within the discipline. Postcolonial theorists, in particular, contest and challenge the hegemony of Eurocentric theory in a number of different ways.

Globalization of the Canon

For most social theorists today, especially those from the Global South, the Eurocentric canon of classical and modern social theory is viewed as wholly unrepresentative of the past and present diversity of social theory. At the same time, contemporary critiques of the Eurocentric canon are also critiques of European colonialism, which elevated European thinkers to the privileged status they have occupied over the past few centuries. The power and influence of the European canon has always reflected the power and influence of European colonialism. This globalization of the Eurocentric theory canon has passed through a number of different stages, or "waves," and each successive wave has expanded the inclusion and incorporation of theorists from around the world. According to some recent commentators (Go 2016; and Al-Hardan 2018, for example), the first wave, anticolonial theorists, included W.B. DuBois

and other original founders of the Atlanta School of Sociology (United States) and Pan-African "Negritude" thinkers such as Aimé Césaire (Martinique), Léopold Senghor (Senegal) and Franz Fanon (Algeria). The second wave, postcolonial theorists, included Edward Said (a Palestinian American), Homi K. Bhabha (India) and Gayatri Spivak (India), and the third wave, de-colonial theorists, includes Syed Fari Alatas (Malaysia), Dipesh Chakrabarty (India), Raewyn Connell (Australia), Gurminder Bhambra (United Kingdom), Bonaventura de Sousa Santos (Portugal) and Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez (Spain), among many others. Together, these theorists have transformed the face of contemporary social theory, expanding and globalizing the scope and scale of its intellectual inheritance.

At the same time, many contemporary critics argue that the transformation and globalization of social theory needs to go far beyond the simple addition of global theory texts to the crumbling Eurocentric canon. As Ina Kerner (2018: 554) suggests,

> decentering the canon by addition of non-Western theories appears as an important, but not a sufficient step to tackle and possibly to even fix the problems Eurocentrism entails. This is because … enlarging the canon this way cannot guarantee to result in more than adding-the-non-Western-and-stir — for it does not necessarily engage in … further tasks that, against the backdrop of my broad conception of Eurocentrism, seem crucial, as well.

The decolonization of social theory also requires a critique of the underlying "colonial episteme" — a worldview that has inscribed binary, linear, hierarchical, parochial and provincial assumptions and concepts into its discourse. And, of course, decolonization has to include a counter-narrative of colonial history in which the perspectives of the colonized are fully recognized and represented. Only then can we more fully comprehend the ways in which colonial discourse has contributed to and reinforced the oppressive practices and policies of colonialism and imperialism.

Counter-Colonial History

Postcolonial critics insist that social theory needs to address and correct the sanitized history of Western colonialism. Classical social theory, in particular, has long overlooked the extent to which the colonization and exploitation of overseas territories and Indigenous communities enriched European imperial states, funded their industrial and technological revolutions and contributed to their political and cultural hegemony. This neglect has led to what Manuela Boatcă (2013) describes as "the systematic omission of exogenous factors such as colonial rule and imperial exploitation from social scientific explanations — [which]has alternately been referred to as typical of the 'gestures of exclusion' (Connell 2007: 46) of metropolitan theory and as responsible for the 'silences,' 'absences' (Sousa Santos 2004: 14ff.) or 'blind spots' (Hesse 2007) of mainstream sociological analysis." The absence of the history of colonization and exploitation from the "origin narratives" portrayed in Eurocentric theory is particularly evident in the works of theorists such as Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, Adam Smith, Emile Durkheim and Max Weber — especially Weber, who attributed the rise of industrial capitalism to the rationality, moral discipline and economic enterprise of the Protestant ethic, without any acknowledgement of the role of conquest, colonization and exploitation in funding these historical innovations. For this reason, postcolonial critics of Eurocentric theory seek to provide a counter-colonial history from the perspective of the colonized, subjugated and exploited by showing how "the development of capitalism and modernity is not a tale of endogenous development in Europe, but of structural interconnections between different parts of the world that long predated Europe's ascendance and, moreover, provided the conditions for that ascendance" (Seth 2014: 312).This project involves a critique, not only of the Western canon, but also of the colonial, or imperial, episteme: the Eurocentric worldview, which has portrayed Indigenous populations in racial stereotypes of "primitivism," "irrationality," "innocence," "savagery" and "barbarism." The Eurocentric history of colonialism underlying most classical and much modern social theory has served to reduce the "subaltern" (or the oppressed) identity to silence and invisibility, while celebrating the rationality, modernity and universality of the Western worldview (Sousa Santos 2014).

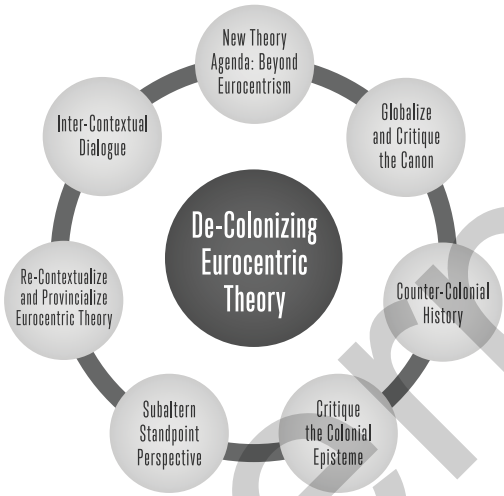
Subaltern Standpoint Perspective

Postcolonial critics also challenge and contest the colonial episteme, the "imperial gaze," which has, until now, structured the conceptual framework and methodological focus of most Eurocentric theory. This decentring, deconstruction and decolonization of the colonial episteme requires that the experiences, perspectives and agency of the "subaltern" — marginalized, oppressed, colonized or Indigenous communities and individuals — be fully represented in the discourse of social theory. However, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) suggests, the very act of attempting to "give a voice to those who have been silenced" is, in itself, a colonial and patronizing project that is, in its own way, a form of "epistemic violence" against the subjugated and the silenced. Trying to give a voice to the oppressed is tantamount to withholding the right of the subaltern to speak in their own voice, a common error committed by intellectuals, who tend to romanticize subaltern identities and statuses. The recognition of an alternative subaltern standpoint also requires that Eurocentric theory be recognized for what it actually is: a product of a limited local cultural context, rather than a universal worldview with global validity. In practice, therefore, decentring the colonial episteme implies a "recontextualization" of Eurocentric social theory — an acknowledgement that its validity is limited to the local, parochial and provincial contexts of its original formulation and elaboration. This recontextualization is sometimes referred to as the "provincialization" of social theory (Chakrabarty 2000), a recognition that all theory is local and that no theory is universal — in either its validity or in its scope of application. "This does not necessarily mean that they are 'merely' European and therefore parochial, but it does require that scholars remain alert to the possibility that the analytical categories which the social sciences presume to be universal — land, labor and capital, state, individual, civil society, and so on — may not in fact transcend the European history from which they originate" (Seth 2014: 316).

This recontextualization of theory also recognizes that the "knowledges" generated by any theory are always partial, provisional and perspectival and never universal or incontrovertible. The postcolonial critique of the colonial episteme, therefore, is a demand for recontextualization and reflexivity when assessing the meaning and truth of Eurocentric theory or any other tradition of social theory. For postcolonial theorists, there are no "master narratives" that can offer universal causal explanations of

social or cultural phenomena. All theoretical narratives reflect the local birthmarks of their origins and should be engaged with accordingly.

Figure 0-2: Elements of Contemporary Social Theory



BEYOND EUROCENTRISM

The primary goal of the present volume is to provide a readable and accessible introduction to some of the more influential social theories of our time. Although most of these theories may be critically appraised as Eurocentric in their content and methods of analysis, they are all integral to the contemporary canon of social theory and for this reason are worthy of our interest and attention. However, they should be studied not as scriptures of a sacred theoretical canon but as malleable conceptual frameworks that may be altered, modified and adapted for use in very different societal, cultural and interpersonal contexts. Although such key concepts as "system," "structure," "network," "function"; metropole/colony; and core/periphery, for example, originated in the West, they may also — with some cultural translation — have value for analyzing aspects of social relations and social interaction elsewhere.

In addition to the landmark Eurocentric theories that have built the academic infrastructure of contemporary social theory throughout the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, we also include some of the critical perspectives that question and challenge their scope, scale and

relevance within a global context. Today, many of these critical global perspectives articulate the experiences and perceptions of subaltern, marginalized populations in former colonial regions of the Global South and of Indigenous and other minoritized populations in the Global North. These postcolonial, poststructuralist, Indigenous and critical race perspectives are striking examples of the expanding horizons of contemporary social theory. And if social theory often appears to be a quarrelsome and critical mode of discourse, this is because it remains a reflective mirror of the turbulent social world that conceived and delivered it.

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