

Beyond Free and Equal: Subalternity and the Limits of Liberal-Democracy

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Abstract

This project seeks to critically examine the hegemony and imperialism of liberal-democratic modernity, and the possibilities for forms of politics that are rooted in subaltern difference. I argue that one of the great challenges in resisting the hegemony of liberal-democracy is that it offers a broad family of both conservative and progressive/critical languages that can be adopted and used by elite and subordinate groups alike. The availability of critical or dissenting languages that are internal to liberal-democracy often entices subordinate groups to make use of them, but this only furthers the subalternization of other distinct normative or practical traditions. I aim to articulate an alternative form of politics that remains rooted in subaltern difference, and is not simply based on an internal or immanent critique of liberaldemocracy. This is a type of ethico-politics that seeks to actualize subaltern goods and traditions in its very practice or way of life, and to build its forms of resistance and transformation upon this practice. This dissertation (a) explores some of the key features of this kind of subaltern ethico-politics; (b) examines the ways in which contemporary modes of postcolonial and political thought, especially those with critical or emancipatory intent, often serve to contain and/or efface this form of subaltern praxis; and (c) addresses some of the broader questions and challenges this praxis poses for resistance to imperialism and coalition-building among diverse social movements today.

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1. The Imperial Frontiers of Liberal-Democracy: Subalternity, Social Movements, and the Ethico-Political

...liberal democracy is not the enemy to be destroyed. If we take 'liberty and equality for all' as the 'ethico-political' principles of liberal democracy...it is clear that the problem with our societies is not their proclaimed ideals but the fact that those ideals are not put into practice. So the task for the left is not to reject them, with the argument that they are a sham, a cover for capitalist domination, but to fight for their effective implementation.

—Chantal Mouffe (2005: 32)

To confront the hegemonic structure by denouncing the gap or contradiction between its official values and its actual practice—with greater or lesser success—is the most effective way of enforcing its universality.

—Etienne Balibar (1995: 62)

1.1 Introduction

Liberal-democracy functions today as both an imperial and an emancipatory script. While the theory and practice of liberal-democracy historically arose with, was disseminated globally by, and provided crucial justifications for modern imperialisms, it has also provided the basis for many forms of critique of and resistance to imperialism. Indeed liberaldemocratic languages have generated moral, humanitarian, economic, cultural, and political arguments on both sides of imperialism (Young 2001). This continues in the present, in a global order constituted by a more informal, US-led imperial system in which both its forms of governmental power, as well as the most recognizable forms of resistance to it, operate primarily through the languages of liberal-democracy (Kiely 2010; Ayers 2009; Vázquez-

Arroyo 2008; Brown 2006; Amin 2004; Rose 1999; Dean 1999; Hindess 2004, 2001; Helliwell & Hindess 2002; Scott 1999; Venn 2006). It is this dual functionality of liberal-democratic norms, values, and institutions today that gives it its *hegemonic* character; liberal-democracy is hegemonic, in other words, precisely because it often sets the terms fought over and mobilized by both elite and subordinate groups within the hegemonic relation.

But liberal-democracy does not itself set the parameters for all possible forms of critique, resistance, and politics in response to its progressive march. Rather, critique and resistance to liberal-democratization have always also arisen from within the various ethical-political traditions that liberal-democratization has sought to subalternize, in ways that neither simply subversively mimic or re-deploy liberal-democratic languages against themselves, nor primarily seek to gain control of liberal-democratic institutions. These forms of politics cannot be understood, then, as based on internal or immanent critiques of liberal-democracy, nor as performative contradictions. This dissertation seeks to bring to light this broad and amorphous category of subaltern politics (or at least one particular form of it), to argue that it has been largely ignored or misunderstood by prominent strands of political theory, and to show how it stretches the limits of many forms of political thought and practice.

1.2 Liberal-Democracy

In order to begin to think through this broad and amorphous category of actual and possible forms of non-liberal-democratic politics¹, it is first important for me to clarify how I am using the term ‘liberal-democracy’. There are of course many senses of this term, and they are all contested, especially since this term is very much in play today as an object of struggle, tied up as it is (either positively or negatively) with the realities, dreams, goals, aspirations, and commitments of many. I intend to use this term in a very broad sense, as a way of signifying a large family of normative languages or practical rationalities² whose forms of argumentation are centrally based upon and articulated through the modern autonomy of both individuals and peoples. In other words, this is a set of evaluative languages (languages of evaluation, critique, reasoning and justification), deeply intertwined with a wide variety of material practices, institutions, and structures, that are articulated around a central commitment to the modern freedom and equality of both individuals and peoples who ought to be able, as much as possible, to determine their lives for themselves. The freedom and equality of these individuals and peoples is ‘modern’ because it is to be realized or achieved within a modular bundle of structures, institutions, and socio-cultural features understood as characteristic of modernity (e.g. nation-states characterized by popular sovereignty, constitutional rule of law and representative democracy, industrialized economies, global norms and institutions, forms of scientific knowledge and the functional capacities they generate, forms of self-understanding, etc.). The constitutive

tension, then, within liberal-democracy (resolved both in theory and in practice in a wide variety of ways)

To say that a form of politics is non-liberal-democratic is not, of course, to say that it is anti-liberal-democratic. See Parekh 2006.

I therefore accept the turn toward recognition of the diversity of liberalisms, while still treating it as one family or tradition of normative languages among others. is that of how to reconcile the autonomy of equal individuals with the autonomy of equal peoples, within the context of modern structures and institutions.

Second, it will be important for my analysis to recognize a distinction between two prevalent forms of liberal-democratic languages. This is a distinction between what might be called ‘structural’ or ‘political’ languages of liberal-democracy, and ‘subjective’ or ‘ethical’ languages of liberal-democracy. The structural form of liberal-democracy provides a juridico-institutional language that aims to provide a framework for the proper functioning of modern, macro-level structures and institutions, while largely abstracting away from any particular form of subjectivity, identity, self-understanding, or cultural/social location. The subjective or ethical form of liberal democracy, on the other hand, provides an ethical framework to orient the micro-level values, self-understandings, practices, and behaviours— in short, the form of subjectivity—of subjects. Both of these aspects of liberal-democracy are crucial to keep in view, especially because of the tendency of the structural form to gloss over the subjective form; indeed, today liberal-democracy provides “not simply a state doctrine or a set of juridical conventions: in its vast implications, it defines, in effect, something like a form of life with vast implications for how we imagine ourselves to be human and worthy in this age” (Mahmood 2007: 149).³ I want to also suggest, however, that both of these aspects of liberal-democracy must be kept in view because together they constitute the crucial components of the hegemony of liberal-democracy.

Of course, many liberal-democratic languages combine both structural and ethical commitments by recognizing that its structural commitments do entail some kinds of ethical commitments and vice versa, and therefore do not attempt to retain strict dichotomies between public/private, political/ethical, and impartiality/partiality. Nonetheless, these liberal-democracy languages continue to privilege the autonomy of individuals and peoples as a higher order good. This third form of liberal-democratic languages could therefore be labelled ‘ethico-political’ languages of liberal-democracy.

1.3 Hegemony and Subalternity

Let me now say a bit more about my usage of the term *hegemony*, and its constitutive relation to *subalternity*. *Hegemony*, as I mean it, is a system of power constituted by relatively complementary and compounded structures and subjectivities, a practical system comprised of macro-scale institutions and micro-scale practices of the self, as well as the languages of reflection and interpretation intertwined with each, that

not only generates differential positions among dominant/elite and subordinate groups, but also discloses a characteristic range of consent and dissent, justification/affirmation and critique, problems and solutions, with which to understand, analyze and make judgements within the system (but which also functions to perpetuate the system). A key feature of a hegemonic relation, then, is its ‘form of problematization’, that is, the shared background vocabulary (knowledges and normativities) that ties together both its structures and subjectivities, and both enables and constrains the contestations within the system by providing not only the shared goods to be struggled over and appealed to by subjects within the relation, but also the corresponding limits of sensibility of these contestations. As James Tully explains:

When problems are raised and solutions discussed and relations of power contested and negotiated in a problematic practice, there are always some uses of words (grammar) that are not questioned in the course of the disputation and some relations of power that are not challenged in practice. These provisionally taken-for-granted uses of the shared vocabulary function as the intersubjective warrants or grounds for what is problematised and subject to the exchange of reasons and procedures of validation in the language games, just as settled relations of power and institutionalised practices of freedom function as the intersubjective conditions of the contested aspects of governance and novel forms of freedom. The background shared understandings are the conditions of possibility of the specific problematisation. They both enable and constrain the form of problematisation. ... these specific forms of problematisation and practices of governance [come] to be hegemonic and function as the discursive and nondiscursive bounds of political reason, and thereby to displace other possibilities. (Tully 2008a: 31-3)

From this understanding of hegemony, I want to suggest that hegemony in fact generates (at least) two positions of subordination to the hegemon or dominant/elite groups⁴.

The first I will call the *subintern* position, that is, a position that is *subordinate but internal* to the hegemonic relation. The subintern, then, is structurally subordinated to the dominant group(s), but shares with the latter a common background vocabulary and set of values that enable and activate the struggles within the hegemonic relation. In other words, the subintern identifies with (i.e. has *internalized*) the general form of problematization that s/he shares with those to whom s/he is subordinated. The second position, on the other hand, I will call the *subaltern* position, because this position is subordinated by the hegemonic relation, but does not identify with its form of problematization. In other words, the self-understanding and form of subjectivity of the subaltern qua subaltern is rooted in an alternative vocabulary and set of values and practices from that of the hegemonic relation, one that is in fact externalized by the hegemonic relation. Subalternity, in Gyan Prakash’s formulation, “signifies that which the dominant discourse cannot appropriate completely, an otherness that resists containment,” and which therefore “poses counterhegemonic possibilities” (2000: 288). The relation of the hegemon and subaltern, then, is properly characterized as one of

It is much more common to use such an understanding of hegemony to juxtapose the position of the hegemon only to the position of the subaltern, with each identified respectively with the position of dominance and subordination within the hegemonic relation. My framework below complicates this common picture by introducing two positions of subordination, one that is properly internal to the hegemony and one that is externalized by it.

‘dominance without hegemony’, to use Ranajit Guha’s (1998) famous phrase; the subaltern is subjected in a number of ways to the practical systems that comprise the hegemonic relation, but is not acculturated or socialized into its characteristic norms and modes of selfunderstanding and argumentation. The subaltern does not share the background vocabulary against which the struggles internal to the hegemonic relation take place.

Let me draw out a couple of implications of this understanding of hegemony that are relevant to my project. First, it is important to note that such an understanding of hegemony is especially pertinent to analyses of imperialism. Since at least one, or perhaps *the*, central aspect of imperial relations is that they involve relations of rule and dominance across deep difference, the establishment of imperial rule almost certainly entails the externalization of subaltern Others and the attempt to establish hegemonic relations. Because establishing and maintaining rule across pre-existing deep difference, and therefore largely in the absence of a shared background vocabulary and practices, requires dominance without hegemony; and because such forms of dominance tend to require tremendous force, effort, and resources to maintain on the part of the imperialists; and because hegemony significantly lightens this burden through the internalization of imperial norms, languages and practices on the part of imperialized subjects, bringing them into an acceptable (or at least comprehensible) range of consent and dissent; there is great incentive on the part of imperialists to establish hegemonic relations by turning as many subalterns as possible into subinterns. This drive is further reinforced, of course, by imperial ideologies of superiority, chauvinism, tutelage, condescension, and ethnocentrism toward their subaltern Others. As such, imperialists often deploy sophisticated means of education, acculturation, socialization, inferiorization, assimilation, and subjectification in order to spread imperial languages and practices to subalterns.

But even apart from the system of forces implemented by the imperialists in an effort to establish hegemony, there is also tremendous incentive for subalterns to turn themselves into subinterns. The disparity of power between hegemons and subalterns means that even in order to contest or resist the power relation, subalterns are generally constrained to learn the language of the hegemon and attempt to use it for their own ends. In order to appear on the hegemon’s registers, subalterns must often appeal to the hegemon’s goods and values, advancing novel, expanded, and/or innovative uses of these terms and deploying them in forms of immanent critique of the hegemon’s practices in a process of subversion and inclusion. Although this process of mimesis or imitation offers great potential for certain kinds of victories and successes,

it is inherently constraining and assimilative in that it limits subordinated groups to a family of goods and norms derived from the knowledges and normativities of the hegemon, however subverted and/or hybridized these may be. As such, this mode of contestation of power relations under (imperial) conditions of deep difference itself aids in the transformation of the power relation into a hegemonic relation. Furthermore, not only does this mimetic dimension of politics play a central role in the generation and establishment of hegemony in imperial contexts, but it also participates in the subalternization of alternatives that is the constitutive outside of this hegemony. Once again, as Etienne Balibar writes in the passage with which I began this chapter, “To confront the hegemonic structure by denouncing the gap or contradiction between its official values and its actual practice—with greater or lesser success—is the most effective way of enforcing its universality” (1995: 62).

1.4 Postcolonialism and the Challenge of Politics

Another implication of this understanding of hegemony, with its introduction of a third, ‘subintern’ positionality into the more conventional hegemon/subaltern dyad, is that it serves to recast some of the central forms of postcolonial politics and resistance that have emerged from the diverse intellectual movement that has done the most in the last several decades to foreground questions of imperialism and hegemony/subalternity—that is, the field of postcolonial studies. To be sure, this field has tended to be rather vague and merely suggestive with respect to the kinds of political and normative questions that most often preoccupy political theorists. As David Scott argues, the primary focus of postcolonial criticism has been on “the decolonization of representation, the decolonization of the West’s theory of the non-West” (Scott 1999: 13). While certainly politically provocative and challenging, this body of work has largely remained on the terrain of epistemological and historical questions, offering “the repudiation of grand narratives, the antisubstantivist or relational conception of selves, the contextualist approach to rationality, the foregrounding of the interpenetration of knowledge and power, the critique of the metaphysics of presence, and so on” (1999: 141). Postcolonial critics have therefore largely eschewed normative political theorizing, such that even though “an anticapitalism and antiliberalism have often circulated through postcolonial criticism, ...the *implications* of these for a theory of politics have been little more than gestural” (1999: 143). Nonetheless, I want to suggest that there are at least two forms of postcolonial politics and resistance that have been foregrounded by this literature, and that although these have been construed as ‘subaltern’ forms of politics, they are in fact better understood as ‘subintern’ forms. Or perhaps even more accurately, these can be regarded as forms of politics that are constituted by a process of subinternization of subalterns. Let me examine each of these forms of postcolonial politics in turn.

The first form of postcolonial politics has circulated in the writings of Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, and Gyan Prakash, has been developed further by Bill Ashcroft, and has more recently been critically analyzed by Ilan Kapoor and David Jefferess. This approach, which I will follow Jefferess in calling ‘resistance-as-subversion’, is based on the essential indeterminacy and ambivalence of imperial rule, and the corresponding potential for its subversion. Because imperial rule rarely corresponds to a strict command-obedience relationship, but is instead usually comprised of an attempt to disseminate hegemonic norms to imperial subjects, there exists a degree of flexibility and room to manoeuvre on the part of these subjects to reappropriate and subvert dominant norms and discourses. Focussing on the possibilities of subaltern agency, this approach foregrounds the way in which subalterns resist absorption by imperial rule through modes of adaptation and appropriation that allow them to ‘write back’ against imperial rule and to use the dominant discourse against itself (Ashcroft 2001: 13-4). Ashcroft summarizes this form of postcolonial resistance as follows: “Rather than being swallowed up by the hegemony of empire, the apparently dominated culture, and the ‘interpellated’ subjects within it, are quite able to interpolate the various modes of imperial discourse to use it for different purposes, to counter its effects by transforming them” (14).

For Edward Said, for example, resistance-as-subversion can be conducted through counter-discourses or ‘contrapuntal readings’ of the Western canon that expose the distance and tensions between “the metropolitan history that is narrated” and “those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts” (1993: 51). For Homi Bhabha (1994), alternatively, subversion is enacted through the process of mimicry of the colonizer by the colonized, which, although encouraged by the colonizer, opens up a space for hybridization of imperial norms that can then serve to threaten, mock, or ‘menace’ the very form of governance these norms are meant to secure. For Spivak, European colonialism should be viewed as enacting a kind of “enabling violation” that both produced the colonial subject, and allowed this subject to re-appropriate Enlightenment values that today we “cannot not want”. As such, the enabling violation of colonialism is an “enablement [that] must be used even as the violation is renegotiated” through a process of “ab-using the Enlightenment,” or using the Enlightenment from below (2004: 524 and n.3). And finally, for Gyan Prakash, “subaltern knowledges and subjects register their presence by acting upon the dominant discourse, by forcing it into contradictions, by making it speak in tongues” (2000: 293). Each of these forms of postcolonial agency and resistance, then, expose “the failure of colonial power to be performed as it is imagined” (Jefferess 2008: 4) by emphasizing “the disruption or modification of colonial modes of knowledge and authority” (20) on the part of subalterns or imperialized subjects.

The second form of postcolonial politics, which I will call the ‘alternative modernities’ approach, derives from the work of the Subaltern Studies collective. In much of their work, the figure of the subaltern has been used to critique the application and applicability of Western meta-narratives and other totalizing, Eurocentric languages

of representation, especially within historiography, to non-Western, post-colonial societies. For example, in the inaugural article of this series, founding member Ranajit Guha took issue with two dominant forms of historiography of Indian nationalism, both of which originated as the product of colonial rule in India (1988: 37). In keeping with the prevalent tendency in Marxist historiography to treat peasants as ‘pre-political’ subjects, these historiographies, each equally elitist, dismissed the involvement of peasants in the making of the Indian nation. Guha’s goal, then, was to show that peasants in India were indeed modern political actors, and to acknowledge and interpret “the contribution made by the people on their own, that is, independently of the elite to the making and development of [Indian] nationalism” (1988: 39). This was to be done by acknowledging “the subaltern as the maker of his own destiny” (Guha quoted in Chakrabarty 2002: 7), and by “insisting on the autonomy of the consciousness of the insurgent peasant” (Chakrabarty 2002: 15). Subaltern Studies developed a form of representation of Indian history, then, that aimed to better represent the “politics of the people” (Guha 1988: 40) and the particularities of Indian society, politics and history than did the colonial forms of historiography. Indeed, Dipesh Chakrabarty, another founding member of the collective, goes so far as to say that “It can be seen in retrospect that Subaltern Studies was a democratic project meant to produce a genealogy of the peasant as citizen in contemporary political modernity” (Chakrabarty 2002: 19). For many within this collective, the figure of the subaltern has been used to produce more appropriate forms of representation of the ‘alternative modernities’ of many non-Western, post-colonial societies (Chatterjee 1986, 1993, 2007; Gaonkar 2001).

More recently, Partha Chatterjee has continued this work of asserting the distinctiveness of the subaltern or bringing the subaltern into the picture in order to complicate more conventional understandings of political modernity. In his book *Politics of the Governed*, Chatterjee shifts from the more historiographical focus of Subaltern Studies to a focus on contemporary politics, but with a similar goal of showing how an attentiveness to subaltern politics brings to light more complicated pictures of alternative modernities. Chatterjee’s main argument is that political modernity in much of the world is today constituted not simply by a democratic politics of popular sovereignty, but a distinct ‘politics of the governed’; that is, a form of democratic politics that is shaped and conditioned by governmentality, or “the functions and activities of modern governmental systems that have now become part of the expected functions of governments everywhere” (2004: 3). While the former type of democratic politics focusses on questions of participation, the latter focuses on questions of well-being, and introduces into democratic politics a highly diverse category of demands, especially for “the differential treatment of particular groups on grounds of vulnerability or backwardness or historical injustice, or indeed for numerous other reasons” (2004: 4). Modern governmental systems have to deal with a “multiplicity of population groups...multiple targets with multiple characteristics requiring multiple techniques of administration” (2004: 36). For Chatterjee, then, an attentiveness to the politics of the governed is nec-

essary to understand the nebulous politics that constitutes democratic modernity(ies) in much of the world today.

The point I want to make in relation to both of these common ways of conceptualizing postcolonial politics is that each in their own way takes as given the successful subinternization of imperial subjects, and as a result contains postcolonial politics and resistance within an internal critique or expansion of hegemonic norms and discourses. With respect to resistance-as-subversion, postcolonial politics is limited to subversion of dominant discourses that there is no choice but to accept, or even desire. The focus and ultimate referent of this politics, then, continues to be the hegemonic norms, goods, and discourses of the imperialist, and the horizon of hope is restricted to the modification or reappropriation of these in a way that is more in keeping with the interests or realities of subordinated groups. Agency, in this case, while certainly foregrounded, is nonetheless only exercised within or in direct relation to these hegemonic discourses.

There are several concerns to be raised about resistance-as-subversion. One is that this approach tends not to distinguish between *coping*, or the kind of modification of norms that occurs en passant, through a process of adaptive assimilation into imposed norms, and *resistance*, or the conscious and deliberate attempt to resist, alter, or undermine a power relation (Moore-Gilbert 1997). Another is that while this approach tends to romanticize the capacity “to use the modes of the dominant discourse against itself and transform it in ways that have been both profound and lasting” (Ashcroft 2001: 13), it not only seems unable to define what a genuine transformation and de-imperialization of the imperial relationship would look like (Tully 2008b: 162-3), but it also downplays the overall relation of dominance and subordination that most often remains in place despite its modifications. In other words, this approach tends to pay insufficient attention to the myriad ways in which the overall power relation itself adapts to the ways in which it is modified by those subject to it, and thereby remains largely intact, if somewhat altered (Moore-Gilbert 1997). In much more concrete terms, Tully argues that the emphasis on the subversive agency of imperial subjects is not so much a resistance to contemporary imperialism, but is actually consonant with the governing logic of our contemporary mode of informal imperialism:

For all its considerable virtues, the problem with this response to contemporary imperialism is that it is not so much an alternative to contemporary imperialism but a move within the strategic and tactical logic of informal imperialism. It exploits the ‘play’ or ‘indeterminacy’ of relations of meaning and power in order to extend and modify them as they proceed.

...But, if the tactical forms of resistance recommended by post-colonial writers are viewed alongside the corresponding transformation in the way imperial power is exercised informally—as now governing former colonials through their constrained freedom of self-determination and low-intensity representation—then these forms of resistance appear to be the very ways that subalterns are already ‘conscripted’ to conduct them-

selves in post-colonial imperial relationships. In doing so, they unwillingly play a role in developing these imperial relationships. (2008b: 161-2)

Finally, and perhaps most importantly for my purposes, this approach appears to inadequately recognize that the hegemony of the imperialist is in fact established through this process of subinternization, and that the subaltern is simultaneously externalized and constituted as subaltern by this process. The implications of this are twofold. The first is that subalterns tend not to simply accept the ‘mimicry of politics’, or the mimetic dimension of struggling against a dominant power, but often in fact resist this mimesis by generating a ‘politics of mimicry’, in which they problematize and politicize their assimilation into dominant norms and languages. In other words, they struggle against the strong pull and incentives that exist for them to mimic the imperialist, and therefore resist their subinternization. The second implication follows from this, which is that subalternized practices and meanings continue to exist throughout the realm of everyday social life. These practices and meanings can and do remain unaltered, incompletely co-opted, or altered but not necessarily subordinated or reducible to the imperial relation. As such, not only can subinternization be resisted, but this resistance can be grounded in subalternity rather than in subinternity or the immanent critique of dominant discourses. While the first form of postcolonial politics does emphasize processes of hybridization, it tends to do so only in relation to dominant discourse itself; imperialized subjects remain fixated on the hegemon and its (Enlightenment) discourses, apparently lacking any option other than to adopt, make use of, and innovate in relation to, the dominant discourse.

As for the ‘alternative modernities’ approach, while it does appear to give a more central place to subalternity, it nonetheless also ends up subordinating the subaltern moment to the hegemonic discourse—in this case, the discourse of modernity. Because so much of the Subaltern Studies work has attempted to incorporate the subaltern into understandings of modernity in order to pluralize it, rather than to move beyond the category of modernity, this work has in many ways left unchallenged the deeply loaded character of the term, and has therefore retained as its central referents those (limited) features associated with and bundled under the concept of ‘modernity’. Guha’s peasant politics, then, are ultimately taken up insofar as they are a politics of Indian nationalism, and are a key part of Indian modernity; and Chatterjee’s subaltern ‘politics of the governed’ are limited to those forms of politics that are focussed upon, and make demands of, “the functions and activities of modern governmental systems” (2004: 3).

This tendency on the part of the Subaltern Studies collective to use the figure of the subaltern in an effort to conceptualize and represent the specificity of diverse modernities has recently been critiqued by other postcolonial thinkers. Why should the subaltern simply be recuperated into a notion of ‘modernity’, however ‘alternative’ it might be? Frederick Cooper, for example, is highly critical of members of the Subaltern Studies collective for continuing to deploy the term ‘modernity’ in their representations of the contemporary realities of post-colonial societies, arguing that this term is so loaded with analytic, normative, and teleological meanings that the

turn to ‘alternative modernities’ tends to “reinforce the metanarratives that they pretend to take apart” (2005: 9). Because this turn assumes “that the alternatives must be modernities... The package [of modernity] is still on its pedestal, and debate about a wide range of issues—from the equality of women in society to the desirability of free markets—will be conducted in relation to a presumed distinction between modern and backward rather than in more specific and less teleological terms” (2005: 10). In these discussions the concept of modernity is either too loaded (i.e. it effaces other possibilities), or empty of meaning (i.e. everything is a modernity). In either case, the concept of modernity is of limited use and the search should be “not for alternative modernities but alternatives to ‘modernity’ as a chronotype necessary for social theory” (John Kelly cited in Cooper 2005: 114-5). Cooper suggests that “we can examine the constraints imposed by the insinuation of Western social categories into daily life and political ideology in conquered spaces without assuming that the logic imminent in those categories determined future politics” (2005: 32). To analyze both postcolonial presents and futures in terms of modernity not only circumscribes what we can see in the present, but also enacts a closure of horizons for the future.

1.5 Political Theory and the Postcolonial Challenge

But it is not only strands of postcolonial thought itself that function to contain postcolonial or anti-imperial forms of politics within subinternal forms. Rather, these strands of postcolonial theory should be read alongside another complementary literature arising within political theory, one comprised of a series of engagements with questions of imperialism and postcoloniality⁵. Indeed, these literatures within postcolonial theory and

For an excellent overview of the field of imperialism and political theory, see Pitts 2010. political theory actually work together in a mutually reinforcing fashion to circumscribe and contain postcolonial politics within the hegemonic discourses of liberal-democratic modernity.

One strand of the literature on political theory and imperialism focuses on the history of political thought and its relationship to the history of European imperialism. Writers within this field, including Uday Mehta (1999), Jennifer Pitts (2005), and Sankar Muthu (2003), expose the centrality of imperial imaginations, practices and processes in shaping the history of liberal political thought, as well as vice versa, especially with respect to the thought of John Stuart Mill and Alexis de Tocqueville. Another central goal of this work, however, has been to recover alternative, more marginalized traditions of Enlightenment liberal thought—that is to say, subinternal liberal traditions—which, far from justifying imperialism, were in fact anti-imperialist in orientation. The work of Edmund Burke, Immanuel Kant, Jeremy Bentham, and Adam Smith, among others, then, have been central to this project of recovering the internal diversity of the liberal tradition, and to ensuring that liberalism is not regarded

as simply an imperialist ideology, but also as a great source of critique of imperialism. Indeed, the general background horizon of significance of this literature could easily be seen as the imperative of excavating more generous and capacious forms of liberalism that might be more palatable to contemporary postcolonial or antiimperialist sensibilities.

This historical strand of political thought is complemented by a contemporary strand of political thought that has sought to examine and address contemporary challenges of postcoloniality and imperialism. This literature ultimately aims to rescue modern liberaldemocratic thought from its historical and contemporary implications with imperial power relations, and to show that liberal-democratic modernity not only has the internal resources to address and correct these implications, but that it indeed provides the necessary and proper normative resources to address the challenges posed to political theory by postcolonial analyses and commitments, and to overcome imperial legacies and realities in the present. Because this contemporary literature in normative, liberal-democratic thought is more directly relevant to my project, let me examine in detail two prominent examples of work in this vein of political theory.

1.5.1 Postcolonial Liberalism?

One political theorist who has recently considered the challenges presented by postcolonial thought to normative political theory is Duncan Ivison. In his book *Postcolonial Liberalism*, Ivison attempts to reconcile liberal theory with what he calls ‘the postcolonial challenge’ to the state, with a particular focus on how this challenge plays out in struggles between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples. He wants to take seriously the challenges to liberalism posed by its postcolonial critics and by indigenous political struggles, and to then show that liberalism has the room and resources to withstand and accommodate these challenges. After briefly surveying the work of a number of postcolonial critics such as Taiaiake Alfred, Homi Bhabha, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Gyan Prakash, Edward Said, and Gayatri Spivak, Ivison extracts four areas of criticisms which, in his view, comprise the central challenge that postcolonialism poses for liberalism. These are: (1) the critique of liberalism’s abstract rationalism and universalism; (2) the critique of liberalism’s moral individualism; (3) the narrowness or insufficiency of liberal distributive justice; and (4) the need for more complex and multilayered forms of political identification and association than are offered by liberalism (2002: 47-8).

To be sure, Ivison acknowledges that the postcolonial theorists whose work he examines strongly resist the notion of a reconciliation between postcolonialism and liberalism. Indeed, he cites Dipesh Chakrabarty calling for a “radical critique and transcendence of liberalism,” in order to resist liberalism’s tendency to assimilate “all other possibilities of human solidarity,” and in order that “the world may once again be imagined as radically heterogeneous” (Chakrabarty cited in Ivison 2002: 43). Furthermore,

Iverson acknowledges other arguments offered by many postcolonial theorists for why liberalism ought to be critiqued and transcended. These include the argument that liberalism is historically rooted in a racist and Eurocentric worldview from which it cannot escape; that liberalism has always been a technique of control or a form of ‘governmentality’ of western imperial power over its subjects; that political liberalism is largely synonymous with economic liberalism or unfettered capitalism; and that liberalism continues to be inextricably complicit with the economic and political global imperialism of the West today. Nonetheless, Iverson very quickly dismisses most of these objections and continues his attempt to reconcile postcolonialism and liberalism, asserting that liberalism can be separated and rescued from its racist and Eurocentric past; that political liberalism is not synonymous with economic liberalism, and that, in fact, the former can be used to critique the latter; and that a commitment to liberal values remains the best way to promote both heterogeneity and justice.

Iverson then goes on to develop a form of liberalism and of the postcolonial state that, he feels, incorporates and accommodates these criticisms. This ‘postcolonial liberalism’ aims to articulate a form of liberalism in which indigenous perspectives and philosophies “can not only be heard, but given equal opportunity to shape (and reshape) the forms of power and government acting on them” (2002: 1). Political arrangements must not be imposed on indigenous peoples, but rather must emerge from actual deliberations between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples, such that these arrangements can gain the support of those subject to them. These deliberations are envisioned by Iverson as two-way learning processes in which the outcomes are neither fixed nor final—they are ultimately “without any guarantor and without any end” (2002: 23)—and emerge out of “the complexity of local environments and frameworks, and ...the dynamic forces therein” (2002: 2). Iverson therefore defends a mode of public reason which is “context-sensitive” and “embedded” (2002: 163), and which is “geared more to an ideal of...a *discursive modus vivendi*, as opposed to a Rawlsian ‘overlapping consensus’, or the Habermasian strategy of trying to derive principles of equal and universal participation in the practices of public reason from the logic of communicative action” (2002: 10).

But if postcolonial liberalism is committed to open-ended deliberations and a very broad and inclusive form of public reason that acknowledges and accommodates deep moral and political disagreements about justice, what prevents it from opening the door to nonliberal political arrangements (that could conceivably be the outcome of such deliberations)? In other words, what about ‘postcolonial liberalism’ is necessarily ‘liberal’? For Iverson, postcolonial liberalism remains rooted in liberalism because it begins with, builds on, and remains fundamentally committed throughout to, “three distinctive liberal values: that individuals and peoples are fundamentally equal; that they are free; and that social and political arrangements should be such as to promote the well-being of individuals and groups in the manner, generally speaking, that they conceive of it” (2002: 5). Furthermore, this approach is committed to a liberal capabilities approach, which is to ground and orient the negotiations among diverse worldviews.

Its commitment to liberal values, however, does not mean that postcolonial liberalism is committed to particular interpretations of these values. Ivison is adamant that each of these values “leaves tremendous scope for interpretation,” and that “Liberalism admits of a wide range of variations and combinations of all three” (2002: 56). As such, these values “condition, but do not necessarily determine” both what the political arrangements will be, and “the way people live their lives according to their own lights” (2002: 6). The content or substance of these conditioning goods is therefore always in dispute, but disputes over *these* particular goods nonetheless remain the core content of postcolonial politics. It is precisely for this reason that postcolonial subjects and critics, in Ivison’s view, inevitably fall back upon liberal concepts and values in their critiques of liberalism, and therefore are actually offering an immanent critique of liberalism:

Members of these groups often invoke the language of freedom and human dignity in relation to their plight, and the need to respect and foster difference, but just as often in opposition to liberalism, rather than appealing to it. The simultaneous invocation of the inadequacy and yet the indispensability of liberal values and concepts such as justice, equality and freedom seems to lie at the heart of the postcolonial project. So it is not a matter of simply discarding European thought but seeing how it can be taken hold of, translated and renewed ‘from and for the margins’. (2002: 30)

For Ivison, then, regardless of the form it might take, “the postcolonial state is one committed to treating its citizens with equal respect; with minimizing domination and promoting freedom; and to providing the conditions in which people can construct and pursue meaningful lives” (2002: 113).

Setting aside the fact that Ivison’s postcolonial liberalism leaves unquestioned the scale and parameters of the modern state, the main limitation of this approach that I want to draw out here is that, like the resistance-as-subversion approach discussed above, this approach emphasizes the re-appropriation of liberal-democratic norms rather than the existence of subaltern critico-normative traditions. Indeed this approach remains normatively monistic, because although it claims to make room for indigenous perspectives and philosophies, these traditions do not actually have to be engaged with directly. The reason for this is that liberal-democratic norms remain ‘meta-normative’—the freedom and equality of autonomous subjects provide the necessary and sufficient conditions to overcome imperialism and to protect subaltern difference, and as such an engagement with the actual content or substance of indigenous perspectives (or any others for that matter) is not necessary. All that is needed to protect subaltern difference, in other words, is a subinternal politics of liberal-democracy. Because liberal-democracy is treated here as a universal, second-order, emancipatory ideal, rather than as a form of power and an assimilating form of life, postcolonial liberalism does not appear to take either contemporary relations of imperialism or subaltern difference seriously.

1.5.2 Postcolonial Development?

Another political theorist who has recently tried to think through postcolonial themes and critiques is Thomas McCarthy in his book *Race, Empire, and the Idea of Human Development*. Unlike Ivison, McCarthy is not focussed here on the state, but on the scale of the global. McCarthy's chief concern is to think through challenges to notions of human development, progress, and universal history, in light of their frequent Eurocentrism and complicity with contemporary forms of 'neoracism' and 'neoimperialism'. Ultimately, his project is an attempt to defend a particular version of—in his words, a 'critical theory' of— human development and universal history as both necessary and desirable, while still taking seriously the role that other theories of development and progress have often played in rationalizing, justifying and legitimating unjust and imperial forms of power and domination.

In his brief survey of the postcolonial literature, McCarthy takes postcolonial and postdevelopment thinkers to be engaged in (a) a genealogical project of exposing "development theory and practice as a regime and thus as a central strategy of modern power rather than a path to emancipation from it"; and (b) a deconstructive project aimed at subverting a development paradigm that it regards as "inherently tied to the project of Western domination and so cannot be remedied by reconstruction" (2009: 181-2). These critical projects seek, then, to reveal and document the complicity of development and modernization discourses with neoimperial power, to subvert their Eurocentrism, and to expose the exclusions, homogenizations, and inevitable failures of their attempts to totalize history.

To be sure, McCarthy does not regard it as at all surprising that postcolonial theorists exhibit a great deal of scepticism toward discourses of development, given the many horrors perpetrated in its name (2009: 232-3). In his words, "one can easily understand why many postcolonial thinkers have rejected the fundamental assumptions of development thinking altogether and called for a 'decolonization of the mind,' in which we un-learn to think of history as a unitary process opening onto a uniform future" (2009: 221). However,

McCarthy ultimately believes that it is both impossible and undesirable for any of us— postcolonial thinkers included—to abandon a commitment to modernization and development altogether in the effort to overcome contemporary imperial relations. Despite their attempts to reject development thinking, postcolonial thinkers simply cannot escape questions about what reconstructive goals are being affirmed in their cultural politics of critique; that is, "in the name of what are these modes of resistance, transgression, and subversion exercised?" (2009: 183). These questions, in McCarthy's view, cannot be answered "consistently" or "sensibly" without recourse to modernization and development, and therefore inevitably lead right back to them.

I cannot and need not go through all of his arguments here, but by way of a brief summary, McCarthy appeals to both empirical and normative arguments to substantiate his claim about the indispensability of modernization and development thinking.

First, the basic empirical claim is that there are simply ‘facts’ and circumstances of global modernity which cannot be denied, and “in which all contemporary societies willy nilly find themselves” (2009: 158). These facts of cultural and societal modernity consist of a fairly standard bundle including a global market economy, certain kinds of legal, social, cultural, and political institutions, transformations in technology and communications, certain accumulations of specialized (especially scientific) knowledges, particular modes of criticality and reflexivity, and so on. While these facts of modernity do provide internal grounds for pluralism and reasonable disagreement, and therefore allow for the development of multiple modernities, they also structure and constrain what is possible for all of us in the present. Certain kinds of traditional beliefs are no longer tenable, and whole classes of reasons have lost their discursive weight and are no longer available to us (2009: 157).

Furthermore, all contemporary societies are confronted with an array of basic problems they have to resolve if they want to survive—for instance, problems concerning how to relate to an increasingly integrated global market economy; how to administer an increasingly complex and functionally differentiated society; how to accommodate ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity in a single coherent set of social institutions; how to maintain political unity and legitimacy in the face of it, and so forth. From this perspective, many modern institutions appear to be not simply results of the peculiarities of Western history and culture but responses to macrohistorical challenges of a general nature, which include those arising from the ever-deeper immersion of all societies in transnational flows of capital, commodities, technology, information, communication, and culture. (2009: 158)

In short, global processes of modernization have not only affected the basic features of our world, and the problems that we are faced with, but also the very ways in which we can reflect upon them.

This empirical argument, in turn, leads to McCarthy’s normative argument regarding the indispensability of developmental languages. Not only do the facts of modernity render impossible the abandonment of the theory and practice of development, “but the pressing need for organized collective action on behalf of the poorest and most vulnerable societies also make it practically objectionable” (2009: 226). For McCarthy, because “development thinking is irrepressible,” it would be “dangerous to leave this field to those who misuse it” (2009: 242). Furthermore, it would be morally irresponsible for us not to acknowledge the “considerable advances in learning, problem solving, practical reasoning, functional differentiation, economic production, the rule of law, political organization, and other respects” (2009: 241-2) brought about by modernity, and not to make use of the “enhanced rational capacity and enhanced functional capacity” (2009: 163) that these provide to solve our most pressing global problems.

McCarthy’s main argument in relation to postcolonial thinkers, then, is that the question facing all of us today is not whether or not to be modern, but “how best to be modern in a world in which ‘we are all moderns now’” (2009: 165). Of course, there will and ought to be multiple modernities that move beyond Eurocentric models, for not

only will there be reasonable disagreement as to how best to incorporate or configure certain developmental advances, but there will also necessarily be “local adaptations of modernization processes [that] will produce alterations and innovations, elaborations of modernity in very different circumstances” (2009: 165). But even with the existence of multiple modernities, McCarthy stresses that (a) “there is little chance of radically different modernities arising and surviving in the world we live in” (2009: 223); and (b) that there remains a global, universal moment in which we have to recognize the undeniable fact that ‘we are all in this together’ and therefore have to consider our (universal) history and development together, and engage in a never-ending ‘struggle over the universal’ that nevertheless takes place within the constraints of the global discourse of modernity and the preconditions built into our discursive situation itself. In sum, McCarthy offers a picture of a future that continues lines of historical development sketched here—the directional accumulation of learning processes in many cognitive domains, from pure and applied science to historical, social, and cultural studies; the directional expansion of our problem-solving capabilities in a multiplicity of dimensions, from technique, architecture, and engineering to organization, administration, and planning; the directional development of practical reasoning correlative with this massive shift in our stock of ‘good reasons’ for doing one thing rather than another, and in this way rather than that; the expansion of individual freedom in connection with the growth of reflexivity and critique, which Kant and Hegel took to be the hallmark of modern culture; and the development of social, economic, and political institutions that embody that freedom, which the liberal tradition saw as the great accomplishment of modern society. ...I have added that development theory and practice must also incorporate the substantive freedoms—in Sen’s terms, the capabilities—that will make the personal and political freedoms formally achieved by liberalism concrete realities. And this means opening diverse paths to multiple modernities rather than following the same path to a single modernity. (2009: 240)

Like Ivison, then, McCarthy sidesteps the issue of subaltern difference. McCarthy’s approach, which can be viewed as a kind of normative wing of the ‘alternative modernities’ approach, leaves the bundle of modernity on its pedestal. His is a project of universal development and progress which remains aimed toward the fulfillment of the promise of modernity. In this project, non-modern, subaltern forms of difference have little to contribute; the problems and solutions of the contemporary world are to come from within the package of modernity, or at least must stay within its basic parameters, including (perhaps especially) the basic norms and ideals of liberal-democracy.

1.6 An Alternative Trajectory for Postcolonial Politics

To this point, I have traced how strands of both postcolonial and political theory that take up questions about the politics of imperialized groups have contained these politics within a subinternal mode. Significant strands of postcolonial theory have focussed on the subversion of imperial discourse, or the incorporation of subalterns into conceptions of modernity, while work within political theory has contended that postcolonial or antiimperial politics must/should remain within the basic parameters of modernization, development, and liberal-democracy. But is it true, as McCarthy argues, that a more positively-oriented, (re)constructive postcolonial politics will necessarily fall back upon modernization and development thinking? Is it the case, as Ivison suggests, that the fulfillment of liberal-democracy remains at the heart of the postcolonial project? Is the only form of agency or politics available to imperial subjects to conduct an immanent critique of modernity, development, the Enlightenment, and/or liberal-democracy? My aim in this final section is to suggest that certain, more politically-engaged, strands of postcolonial thought are charting another possible path, one that does not remain confined to subinternal resistance. Building upon the political trajectory being developed by Arturo Escobar and the modernity/coloniality research program, among others, I trace a postcolonial politics that privileges (1) subaltern difference, (2) social movements, and (3) a mode of political action that I call the ‘ethico-political’.

1.6.1 Privileging the subaltern

As I have understood it, subalternity is a kind of subordinate and exterior positionality in relation to a hegemonic power relation, a relation that is constituted by and operates through both structural power and the normalized form(s) of knowledge and subjectivity of those who participate in it. Subalterns, then, are both disempowered by, and expelled by, the hegemonic relation because they do not speak within the terms of its form of problematization and its rules for legitimate consent and dissent. It is not that the subaltern cannot speak per se, but that the subaltern cannot speak within the terms of the hegemonic relation, or in a way that is legible or recognizable to the hegemon, or at least not immediately so. To say this, however, is not to reify subalternity and suggest that political actors either are, or are not, subalterns. Rather, subalternity is a positionality or moment in relation to a hegemony, and therefore not only can actors, practices, subjectivities, knowledges, and normativities be subalternized, but each can also be subalternized in full or in part, depending on the constitution of the hegemonic relation itself, and in relation to multiple and criss-crossing hegemonies.

The intellectual tradition that has done the most in recent years to privilege the moment of subalternity with respect to Western imperialisms is the Latin American

modernity/coloniality (MC) research program. This research program explicitly foregrounds the hegemony of ‘modernity’ or the modern project, and has also created a general category for all that is subalternized by modernity—namely, coloniality. While this group of scholars agrees with Frederick Cooper’s argument (above) about the constraining effects of ‘modernity’, the former is much more comfortable than is Cooper with retaining the concept of modernity precisely in order to foreground its exteriorities. For the MC researchers, the category and positionality of the subaltern is not utilized merely to stretch our representations of diverse modernities, but to bring into focus the way in which the project of modernity actively marginalizes, suppresses and silences—in short, *subalternizes*—diverse cultures, traditions, practices, knowledges, normativities, ways of life, and indeed possibilities for the future.

Arturo Escobar (2004, 2007) has provided the most helpful surveys of the MC literature. Comprising the work of authors such as Walter Dignolo (2000, 2000b, 2002), Enrique Dussel (1998, 2000, 2002, 2008), Anibal Quijano (2000), Boaventura de Sousa Santos (1999, 2004b, 2005a, 2006), and Escobar himself (1995), the central premise of the

MC research program is that “the proper analytical unit for the analysis of modernity is modernity/coloniality—in sum, there is no modernity without coloniality, with the latter being constitutive of the former” (Escobar 2004: 217). ‘Coloniality’ is the constitutive underside of modernity and its condition of possibility, and is constituted by that which has been invalidated, shunned, suppressed, rendered inferior, and thus ‘disappeared’ from world history through the global hegemony of discourses centred on Western civilization. Westerncentric forms of knowledge have silenced the colonial other through their peculiar claims to universality, their systematic rejection of their own historical-geographical particularity, and their discrediting of other knowledges as unscientific. Escobar provides the following summary of the key interventions made by the MC literature into conventional, Eurocentric theories of modernity:

The conceptualisation of modernity/coloniality is grounded in a series of operations that distinguish it from established theories. These include: 1) locating the origins of modernity with the conquest of America and the control of the Atlantic after 1492, rather than in the most commonly accepted landmarks such as the Enlightenment or the end of the 18th century; 2) attention to colonialism, postcolonialism and imperialism as constitutive of modernity; 3) the adoption of a world perspective in the explanation of modernity, in lieu of a view of modernity as an intra-European phenomenon;

4) the identification of the domination of others outside the European core as a necessary dimension of modernity; (5) a conception of eurocentrism as the knowledge form of modernity/coloniality—a hegemonic representation and mode of knowing that claims universality for itself, ‘derived from Europe’s position as center’. In sum, there is a re-reading of the ‘myth of modernity’ in terms of modernity’s ‘underside’ and a new denunciation of the assumption that Europe’s development must be followed

unilaterally by every other culture, by force if necessary—what Dussel terms ‘the developmentalist fallacy’. (2004: 217)

It should be clear, then, that the MC researchers strongly disagree with claims like those made by McCarthy “that modernity is now everywhere, an ubiquitous and ineluctable social fact” (Escobar 2007: 183), and that radical alterity is therefore impossible. Once modernity is taken seriously as a totalizing, but always incomplete, project that utilizes the coloniality of power to enact significant subalternization processes, it becomes sensible to speak of an exteriority to modernity. To be clear, this exteriority should in no way “be thought about as a pure outside, untouched by the modern; it refers to an outside that is precisely constituted as difference by hegemonic discourse” (2004: 218). The point, in short, is that “there are practices of difference that remain in the exteriority (again, not outside) of the modern/colonial world system, incompletely conquered and transformed, if you wish, and also produced partly through long-standing place-based logics that are irreducible to capital and imperial globality” (2004: 221). In an effort to bring these practices to light, the MC research program is committed to what Boaventura de Sousa Santos calls a “sociology of absences”:

The sociology of absences consists of an inquiry that aims to explain that what does not exist is, in fact, actively produced as non-existent, that is, as a noncredible alternative to what exists. The objective of the sociology of absences is to transform impossible into possible objects, absent into present objects.

...Non-existence is produced whenever a certain entity is disqualified and rendered invisible, unintelligible, or irreversibly discardable. (2004: 238)

But the privileging of subaltern or colonial difference by the MC researchers is not simply a matter of counteracting Eurocentric representation, or an attempt to produce more accurate forms of representation of the contemporary realities of post-colonial societies and spaces. Rather, colonial difference is privileged in this framework not only as an epistemological space, but as a *political* space (Escobar 2004: 217). Indeed Escobar, following Santos, situates the MC program as an intervention into a world filled with modern problems for which there are no modern solutions. The rise of a new and very powerful form of neoliberal, U.S.-based form of imperial globality, complemented by the seeming exhaustion, supersession, or cooptation of a number of alternative visions of the recent past including national liberation, state socialism, Third Worldism, modernization and development—all of which operated by and large within a modernist framework—points towards the need to move beyond the paradigm of modernity. “In short, the modern crisis is a crisis in models of thought; modern solutions, at least under neoliberal globalization, only deepen the problems” (2004: 209). This predicament leads the MC researchers to privilege “subaltern difference as an important source for paradigms” (2004: 208) by taking seriously the epistemic force of local histories and thinking theoretically about the political praxis of subaltern groups (2004: 217). Escobar explicitly positions this MC research as a response to David Scott’s call for “a new conceptualization of postcolonial politics” that is able

to join together “the radical political tradition of Bandung ... to an ethos of agonistic respect for pluralizations of subaltern difference” (Scott cited in Escobar 2004: 208).

To be sure, Escobar stresses that the language of ‘alternative modernities’ is far too limiting for this purpose, because it “incorporates the projects of the non-moderns into a single project, losing the subaltern perspectives and subordinating them, for even in their hybridity subaltern perspectives are not about being only modern but are heteroglossic, networked, plural” (2007: 189). While all subaltern projects will surely have to contend with modern problems, constraints and forms of power, and while these projects may well make use of certain features that are identifiable as ‘modern’, nothing about their visions for the future or political projects will have to privilege, or be limited to, a package of attributes understood as ‘modernity’. Furthermore, no particular aspect of any bundle or package of attributes understood as ‘modern’ will be necessary, essential, or beyond question by subaltern projects. In short, if alternative modernities are constituted as ‘alternative’ through their incorporation of non-modern sources, and if these non-modern sources need not be subordinated to modern ones, then there is no reason that the alternatives must continue to be understood as ‘modern’ in any meaningful sense at all.

Another important aspect of a politics of subaltern or colonial difference is that it opens up space for forms of normativity and politics that fall outside of the hegemonic ethico-political languages of modernity, especially that of liberal-democracy. Saba Mahmood argues that it is precisely because of its hegemony that liberalism must be provincialized:

The precepts of liberal political philosophy were introduced into non-Western societies (including Muslim societies) through colonial rule and an expanding system of global capitalist power (through institutions of law, governance, trade, and commerce) over the course of two centuries. Liberal presuppositions about politics and society have over time become an intrinsic part of the sensibilities and institutions of these societies and form an important resource for indigenous critiques of Western power and domination throughout the colonial and postcolonial period. It is precisely because many aspects of liberal discourse have become a part of the language of resistance to Western forms of power that I think it is important to attend to its hegemonic qualities, its normative assumptions, and the ways in which it remains peculiarly blind to other kinds of political and social projects and moral-ethical aspirations. (2007: 149)

Because of liberalism’s complicity with imperial power, its subalternizing effects and its hegemonic qualities, many postcolonial theorists have argued for thinking beyond liberalism and liberal-democracy, and for inquiring into the ethico-political alternatives to liberal-democracy latent within diverse normative traditions and ways of life. David Scott, for example, argues that we should question “the view that the ideals of liberal democracy—those of liberty and equality—are an unsurpassable political horizon” (1999: 150). Similarly, Escobar suggests that the privileging of colonial difference, and the articulation of struggles across differences “may lead to the deepening of democracy—indeed, to questioning the very principles of liberal democracy” (2008:

15). The privileging of subaltern difference, then, provincializes the hegemonic form of problematization that characterizes liberal-democratic modernity, and the characteristic range of questions and answers, problems and solutions, to which it gives rise. This modern form of problematization focusses upon “the ways in which modern subjects (individuals and groups) should be treated as free and equal and cooperate under the immanent and regulative ideals of the rule of law and constitutionalism on the one hand and of popular sovereignty and democratic self-determination on the other” (Tully 2008a: 19). Subaltern difference cannot and should not be straightforwardly incorporated into this form of problematization, precisely because this approach seeks to privilege subaltern difference vis-à-vis liberal-democratic modernity. In this dissertation, I focus on the ways in which subaltern forms of difference such as those rooted in cultural and religious practices and traditions can serve as immanent sources for moving beyond the hegemony of this liberal-democratic form of problematization (and the material practices intertwined with it) that is centred around negotiating the freedom and equality of autonomous subjects.

1.6.2 Privileging social movements

But is a politics based on subaltern or colonial difference even possible? After all, as McCarthy argues, have not the institutions and discourse of modernity so globalized that we are now all constrained to use them? Does the ‘system’ not impose such considerable constraints, including normative constraints, that we must use its language and reform it from within? Mustn’t we now place our hope in the fulfillment of the promise of modernization and development, and the establishment of more humane postcolonial states and a postcolonial global order?

While the starting point and the horizon of hope for modern liberals such as McCarthy and Ivison tend to be the existing macro-institutions of modernity and the constraints they impose, postcolonial and anti-imperial thinkers tend to privilege social movements as the starting point and horizon of hope. Not only does the privileging of the ‘social’, or the realm of everyday life, rather than the formal-institutional realm, tend to allow for greater room to manoeuvre and therefore for more robust expressions and practices of subaltern difference, but for many postcolonial thinkers, any hope for significant reforms or transformations of modern institutions originates with social movements that are on the exterior of that system and that work from the ground up, not with dynamics already internal to that system and that are imposed from the top down. Indeed, a number of recent books that place a central focus on the political implications of postcolonial thought privilege social movements as the chief agents of hope for a postcolonial, anti-imperial politics, pointing especially to the movement of movements that gather occasionally at the World Social Forum and its regional processes (Krishna 2009; Jefferess 2008; Kapoor 2008; Dussel 2008;

Venn 2006; Escobar 2004, 2007, 2008; Krishnaswamy & Hawley 2008; Hardt & Negri 2000, 2004).

As Escobar suggests, both the privileging of subaltern difference and the search for alternatives to imperial globality and Eurocentric modernity raise two important questions: first, “what are the sites where ideas for these alternative and dissenting imaginations will come from?”; and second, “how are the dissenting imaginations to be set into motion?”

(2004: 220). Escobar suggests that both of these questions lead to a privileging of the praxis of contemporary social movements:

...[the MC analysis] suggests the need to move from the sociology of absences of subaltern knowledges to a politics of emergence of social movements; this requires examining contemporary social movements from the perspective of colonial difference. At their best, today’s movements, particularly antiglobalization and global justice movements, enact a novel logic of the social, based on self-organizing meshworks and largely non-hierarchical structures. They tend to show emergent properties and complex adaptive behaviour that movements of the past, with their penchant for centralization and hierarchy, were never able to manifest. (2004: 210)

Contemporary social movements appear to be privileged sites within postcolonial thought for a couple of different reasons. First, rather than needing to build a politics around a common hegemonic project that is to be imposed on all, social movements are able to operate according to a politics of ‘affinity’ in which a variety of place-based, contextsensitive struggles are able to build networks and coalitions of solidarity and convergence while still letting their constitutive diversity stand and flourish. Social movements tend to be able to maintain greater critical distance from hegemonic discourses and false universalisms which allows for greater diversity, better understanding of the concrete operations of power relations, increased levels of innovation and experimentation with alternatives, and more context-appropriate responses and transformations. In short, much more than formalinstitutional and macro-scale modes of political engagement, social movements are able to engage with a ‘politics of place’ that is much more in keeping with postcolonial commitments to subaltern difference and postcolonial sensibilities regarding contextsensitivity:

The politics of place is an emergent form of politics, a novel political imaginary in that it asserts a logic of difference and possibility that builds on the multiplicity of actors and actions operating at the level of everyday life. In this view, places are the site of live cultures, economies, and environments rather than nodes in a global and all-embracing capitalist system. In GibsonGraham’s conceptualization, this politics of place—often favoured by women, environmentalists and those struggling for alternative forms of livelihood—is a lucid response to the type of ‘politics of empire’ which is also common on the Left and which requires that empire be confronted at the same level of totality, thereby devaluing all forms of localized action, reducing it to accommodation or reformism. As Gibson-Graham does not cease to remind us, ‘places always fail to

be fully capitalist, and herein lie their potential to become something other'. (Escobar 2004: 223)

This type of politics is not necessarily based on 'place' in the geographic sense, but in the broader sense of being situated within a irreducibly diverse field of immanent practices and meanings which can be drawn upon as a source of alternative or transformational practices.

The place-based character of many contemporary social movements is also closely related to the second key advantage of privileging a social movement politics. This is that social movements need not be limited to what Richard Day (2005) calls a 'politics of demand'; that is, they do not need to focus solely on making demands of the state in the form of rights, representation, recognition, and/or integration. Rather, social movement struggles also routinely focus on a 'politics of the act'—that is, a politics that seeks to actualize a different way of life here and now through concrete, transformative practices. Because social movements need not remain fixated on the state or global institutions, they need neither be contained within, nor directly oppositional to, the dominant, official languages and norms of the political association. They can be oriented toward any number of non-statist and nonhegemonic goods, and are therefore able to enact forms of politics grounded in a wide variety of non-statist, non-juridical, subaltern normativities. Social movements can travel at oblique angles to the state and its hegemonic discourses by prioritizing micro-political practices in the here-and-now that keep subaltern difference alive, experiment with alternative worlds, and either prefigure or actualize concrete transformations.

1.6.3 Privileging the 'ethico-political'

The final step in the brief trajectory I am trying to sketch out for an emergent form of postcolonial politics is the privileging of an alternative mode of normativity and political action that is captured by the term 'ethico-political'. This term, while under-theorized, has become quite common in the postcolonial literature, seemingly as a way of searching for a new mode of postcolonial or anti-imperial struggle in the wake of the failure or co-optation of the modern liberation projects that oriented earlier phases of anti-imperial politics. As David Scott argues, transformed global conditions are now placing new demands on postcolonial critics which call for a new kind of postcolonial project. These conditions, which include "the collapse of the Bandung and socialist projects and...the new hegemony of a neoliberal globalization," have now weakened "the cognitive-political vocabularies of nation and socialism in which oppositional Third World futures were articulated, [such that] it is no longer clear how alternatives are to be thought, much less defended" (1999: 14). Unlike the modernist liberation struggles that largely focussed on an institutionalized political or economic telos often in abstraction from ethics, today the challenge is "the ethical-political prob-

lem of criticizing the present in relation to the project of possible postcolonial futures” (1999: 143).

Ethico-politics, I want to suggest, can be understood to point to a form of politics that combines micro-political practices of self-transformation, or ‘ethics’, with a concern for bringing about macro-political, or structural-institutional change from the bottom up, in the places where structures are locally manifest. In fact, this approach resists treating political or economic structures as impersonal, material systems or apparatuses that stand above and are imposed upon those who are subject to them, and can only be transformed in a legislative or otherwise top-down fashion by seizing or winning power on a large scale. Rather, ethicopolitics brings ethics and politics together by re-casting both selves/subjectivities and structures as both comprised of assemblages of concrete, performative, locally-manifest, normatively-oriented *practices*. A practice, according to Fuyuki Kurasawa, “represents—and simultaneously produces—a pattern of materially and symbolically oriented social action that agents undertake within organized political, cultural, and socioeconomic fields” (2009: 87). Practices are both structured and structuring, and are therefore always susceptible to modification or transformation through re-orienting, ethico-political praxis.

Highlighting just such a mode of postcolonial political action is the main goal of David Jefferess’ recent book, *Postcolonial Resistance*. Jefferess argues that resistance has traditionally been conceptualized within postcolonial thought in two dominant ways, namely: “(1) resistance as the subversion of colonial authority, or the failure of colonial power to be performed as it is imagined, and (2) resistance as opposition against the colonizer, framed in terms of a Manichean conflict, and largely confined to the rules of recognition of colonial knowledge” (2008: 4). In contrast to these two forms of resistance, Jefferess posits as an alternative “an ethic and a politics of transformation” (2008: 4). Rather than settling for a choice between the subversion of colonial or imperial norms through practices of mimicry (i.e. the subversive re-deployment of hegemonic norms and languages), or the complete overthrow of the hegemon in an oppositional binary, Jefferess draws upon Gandhi and South African initiatives toward reconciliation as models of resistance-as-transformation.

“Resistance, in this sense, transforms the structure of power assumed within colonial discourse by recognizing, and fostering, an order in which the relationship between Self and Other is one of mutual interdependence rather than antagonism” (2008: 17); it is concerned, in other words, with “forms of social and cultural ‘resistance’ that are performed as an affirmation of an alternative to the direct and structural violence of colonialism rather than merely a refusal or manipulation of, or protest against, colonial power” (2008: 21). Transformation is a form of praxis wherein “the agent of resistance...is not positioned outside of power, seeking to dismantle or destroy, but is positioned as a product of power, participating in the transformation of consciousness and structures from within” in a process that is simultaneously material and discursive, structural and ideational (2008: 185).

Of course, the type of praxis Jefferess is pointing to here is part of a long history of anti-imperialist social movements. This tradition of anti-imperial praxis has resisted, and continues to resist, the hegemonic aims of the project of Western modernity, and does so not simply by seeking to gain the forms of autonomy, liberation, freedom and equality offered by this project, but by challenging the ethicality of the way of life this project disseminates across the globe. As such, this ethical-political tradition of anti-imperialism has always emphasized the importance of micro-politics, ethical practices, and alternative subjectivities as a way of both defending the ways of life that the modern project seeks to subalternize (including diverse political, economic, and cultural traditions), but also as a way of actively resisting the homogenization, destruction and misery that this project leaves in its wake. This tradition recognizes not only the violence and assimilation that would be required for all to be transformed into modern liberals, but also the relative futility of simply using liberal norms against themselves as a means of resisting the way of life that is structured and spread by capitalist, liberal-democratic modernity. As such, this tradition emphasizes the importance of living differently, and of actualizing its alternative commitments in the very process or form of its political struggle. In this way, it refuses or troubles instrumental rationality and the means-ends distinction that is so central to modern struggles for political and economic liberation. But while this tradition resists imperialism, modernization, and liberal-democratization, it does not define its praxis solely in opposition to these. In other words, it is not defined negatively against these global projects and forces, but is positively oriented toward any number of alternative ethical goods rooted in any number of subaltern ethical-political traditions.

As Jefferess suggests, Gandhi is only the most recognizable figure in this transformative, ethical-political tradition, arguing famously that Indian self-rule is actually a form of ethics that is deeply at odds with Western modernity, not a form of modern political autonomy or independence. But there are many others operating in this tradition today, for example within the movement of movements fighting against neo-liberal globalization and congregating occasionally at the World Social Forum and other Social Forums around the world; and within a variety of environmental, religious, queer, anarchist, indigenous, feminist, peace, food and water justice, and co-operative movements. Furthermore, there are many contemporary thinkers, writers and researchers who are working in this ethicalpolitical, anti-imperialist vein. One example can be found in the work of Mohawk scholar and indigenous activist Taiaiake Alfred. Alfred's book, *Wasáse: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom* (2005), is explicitly a Gandhian-influenced approach to indigenous politics, which emphasizes the revitalization of indigenous ethics and culture, self-sufficiency and social transformation, direct action and non-cooperation, and an emphasis on contemporary indigenous practice, rather than on political struggles for recognition from the Canadian state. He writes:

...fighting for our survival in the twenty-first century is less about defeating the aggression of an external enemy than it is about finding new ways to love the land, and new ways to love ourselves and our people. ...When I think of liberation, I think of

how our grandparents and great-grandparents lived. It seems so clear, when we reflect on the words of our ancestors, that liberation is all just a matter of getting back in touch with a way of life that has respect, sacrifice, love, honesty, and the quest for balance at its core. (2008)6

Another, quite different, example can be found in the work of J. K. Gibson-Graham, two feminist economic geographers engaged in community experiments and writing about ‘postcapitalist politics’. They describe the ‘new political imaginary’ in which they are working as follows:

It seems that the making of a new political imaginary is under way, or at the very least a remapping of the political terrain. Coming into being over the past few decades and into visibility and self-awareness through the Internet, independent media, and most recently the World Social Forums, this emergent imaginary confounds the timeworn oppositions between global and local, revolution and reform, opposition and experiment, institutional and individual transformation. ...This conceptual interpenetration is radically altering the established spatiotemporal frame of progressive politics, reconfiguring the position and role of the subject, as well as shifting the grounds for assessing the efficacy of political movements and initiatives. (2006: xix)

Gibson-Graham then go on to describe their own ethico-political work as focussing on postcapitalist economic politics, and in particular “the need for a new language of economy to widen the field of economic possibility, the self-cultivation of subjects (including ourselves) who can desire and enact other economies, and the collaborative pursuit of economic experimentation” (2006: xxiii). Theirs is a practice of ‘economic’ difference, which Escobar places alongside practices of ‘cultural’ and ‘ecological’ difference, all of which remain on the exteriorities of modernity but aim to build worlds and knowledges otherwise (2007: 198). Indeed, all of the above thinkers and activists in this transformative, ethico-political tradition are engaged, in various ways, in what Walter Mignolo describes as “new forms of projecting and imagining, ethically and politically, from subaltern perspectives” (2000: 743).

The ethico-political mode of political action that I have been sketching, then, can be summarized as follows. First, this form of politics can be understood as ‘ethical’ in several of the following senses: (a) it is oriented toward and seeks to affirm some public good(s), rather than be merely critical, reactive, or oppositional; (b) it is oriented toward public goods that are often construed as ‘ethical’ rather than properly ‘moral’ or strictly ‘political’ by Kantian and neo-Kantian forms of political thought; (c) it resonates with a Foucaultian understanding of ethics that foregrounds the micro-practices that comprise forms of subjectivity and governing the self, and contrasts its emphasis on practice with forms of doctrine or law; (d) it emphasizes transformative practices that are intended to actualize, or bring into being, an alternative way of life and an alternative form of subjectivity; and/or (e) it troubles or refuses instrumental rationality and the means-ends distinction by seeking to actualize its commitments in the very process or form of its struggle. Second, it is ‘political’ in the sense that it has some sort of collective dimension, is to some degree active, intentional and organized,

and seeks some kind of modification or transformation of social norms and/or relations of power. In short, this ethico-politics emphasizes transformative praxis over making demands for the expansion/extension of hegemonic norms and inclusion into dominant institutions.

1.7 Chapter Outline

The remaining chapters of this dissertation explore in greater detail the key features of the kind of subaltern ethico-politics described above; the ways in which contemporary modes of political thought serve to contain and/or efface this form of praxis; and some of the broader questions and challenges it poses for resistance to imperialism and coalition-building among diverse social movements today. In the following two chapters, I focus on two of the dominant approaches within political theory for understanding and taking up a politics of religious and cultural difference. In both cases, my aim is to show how these approaches are premised upon the subinternization of cultural and religious difference, and serve to foreclose the possibility of a subaltern ethico-politics. The first of these dominant approaches, which attempts to take up the challenge of religious and cultural difference by re-shaping the norms of public reason, is the focus of Chapter 2. Here I engage with the recent ‘postsecular’ turn in the thought of Jürgen Habermas, which explicitly aims to take seriously the enduring presence of religion in public life, and to move beyond older theories of modernization and secularization which assumed either the complete privatization of religion or the eventual demise and disappearance of religious ways of life altogether. In response to these discredited theories, Habermas proposes a new relationship between religious citizens, secular citizens, and the state that is largely based on a form of public reason that is more responsive and inclusive of religious contributions. Starting from within the terms of Habermas’s theory of postsecularism, I attempt to work my way out, revealing how religious difference is subordinated to the imperatives of legitimation and modernization in this framework, in ways that both position religious difference as a threat to be contained and restructured, and obscure the forms of power and violence implicated in these liberaldemocratic imperatives. I conclude this chapter by arguing that a more genuinely postsecular approach to public reason would have to be more critical, comparative, and ethical than Habermas’s approach in order to take seriously both religious difference and contemporary forms of liberal-democratic power.

Chapter 3 engages with the other dominant theoretical approach to cultural and religious difference, which is a cultural rights-based approach that seeks to accommodate cultural difference through institutionalized forms of recognition and self-determination. This chapter aims to expose the conceptual, normative, and practical limits of this dominant approach to (multi)cultural politics, which I call the top-down approach, by contrasting it with an alternative, bottom-up approach to the politics of recognition and self-determination. My account of the latter continues to fill out the

picture of a subaltern ethico-politics begun here, and draws heavily upon the work of Gandhi to do so. By directly juxtaposing these dominant and subordinate approaches to cultural politics, I aim to highlight both the constraining and subinternizing effects of the dominant approach, and the possibilities of a significantly re-oriented and expanded field of cultural politics.

Chapter 4 picks up on a discussion begun in Chapter 3 on the work of Michel Foucault, and his central role in the bottom-up tradition. While Foucault's work has been pivotal in influencing and shaping the theoretical apparatus used by approaches from below, especially in postcolonial thought, many of these latter thinkers have not directly engaged with the normative commitments that Foucault affirmed in his later work, and the implications of these for postcolonialism's own commitments. Indeed, in his later work, Foucault affirms a number of commitments, including a commitment to an autonomous subject, that converge with liberal-democratic forms of thought, either because they already occupied a place within the latter tradition, or because they have since been incorporated into that tradition. This convergence, I suggest, poses a yet unresolved tension within those strands of postcolonial thought that are committed to the affirmation of forms of subaltern difference, often over and against the hegemony of liberal-democratic forms of thought. This tension is especially acute with respect to the question of whether postcolonialism's own turn to ethics is or ought to be premised on the kind of ethics of autonomy emphasized by Foucault.

Chapter 5 reveals how the tension over an ethics of autonomy described in Chapter 4 plays out in the context of the deep diversity of social movements contesting forms of globalization and imperialism today. Here I analyze several theoretical approaches that attempt to conceptualize, frame and orient this deep diversity of struggles using different understandings of the relationship between ethics and politics. Nancy Fraser's approach, rooted in a neo-Kantian Critical Theory tradition, argues that social movements must converge on a politics that transcends their deep ethical diversity. Chantal Mouffe and Richard Day, on the other hand, rooted in a radical democratic and post-anarchist tradition respectively, argue for the inseparability of ethics and politics—that all forms of politics are intertwined with a form of ethics, and are therefore properly understood as ethico-political—and the corresponding irreducibility of ethico-political difference. Nonetheless, I suggest that an ethico-political meta-norm of autonomy remains operative in the work of both authors, mainly because each conceptualizes difference through the lens of an oppression/autonomy binary. In the end, I turn to Saba Mahmood's work on Islamic women's piety movements to illustrate the kinds of challenges that subaltern, ethico-political social movements might pose to the limits of both dominant and subintern forms of 'progressive' politics.

Finally, I conclude the dissertation by utilizing the framework developed in the preceding chapters to reflect on two distinctive forms of politics rooted in my own Sikh community and tradition. The first is a modern, subintern politics that largely abstracts away from the content of Sikhi in the course of struggling for inclusion or accommodation into liberal-democratic norms and institutions. The second is a

subaltern ethico-politics that struggles to live a Sikh way of life in the face of the broad array of assimilative forces of modernity. I argue that the latter is emerging in the cracks and interstices of the modern project, indeed transgressing the boundaries which that project seeks to impose. In doing so, it points beyond itself, toward the possibility and actuality of diverse modes of praxis, grounded in subaltern traditions, that only taken together in their irreducible diversity can begin to constitute a post-imperial pluriverse.

2. Pluralism beyond Postsecularism: Imperialism, Liberal Democracy and the Politics of Religious/Secular Diversity

2.1 Introduction

Some years ago, Bhikhu Parekh (1997) argued against Will Kymlicka that a monistic liberal theory of multiculturalism is insufficient for understanding and addressing contemporary cultural politics because such a theory takes a single normative tradition as authoritative. In his response, Kymlicka accused critics like Parekh of espousing an empirically incorrect “clash of civilizations” thesis:

...it is much more interesting and exciting if we can present multiculturalism as a “clash of civilizations,” in which the majority seeks to impose its Western liberal democratic traditions on minorities who resist in the name of some other world-historical culture with its distinctive political traditions. It is tempting for philosophers to present multiculturalism this way, but it is false. For better or worse, the heart of multiculturalism in the West is about how to interpret liberal democratic principles, not about whether those principles are legitimate. (Kymlicka 1997: 82)

More recently, however, liberal-democratic theorists have been pushed to go beyond Kymlicka’s somewhat dismissive response to the challenge of deep normative pluralism. This challenge has been posed particularly forcefully around questions of religious pluralism, which, perhaps more clearly than many other forms of diversity, involves the interplay among distinct normative frameworks, forms of reason, and subjectivities, and does not readily allow for one normative tradition to be declared authoritative. The ethical-political languages and practices of religious citizens often do not neatly coincide with liberal-democratic languages, commitments and practices. Indeed, liberal-democratic forms of subjectivity and subjectification are often resisted as an expression of religious piety, or in an effort to protect against strong forces of modern secular assimilation.

Jürgen Habermas has recently taken up this challenge of deep religious pluralism through a ‘postsecular’ theory of the public sphere and public reason. He has argued that religious fundamentalisms and religiously-motivated violence, as well as other

resurgent signs of religion in public life, demonstrate the need for a re-envisioned relationship among religious citizens, secular citizens, and the liberal-democratic state. In this new postsecular relationship, according to Habermas, greater room should be made for religion in the informal parts of the public sphere, where religious citizens should be able to express their views in religious idioms, as long as their arguments are eventually translated into secular language before entering the formal or official public institutions, which must remain strictly secular.

I want to suggest, however, that Habermas's theory of postsecularism remains rather hostile to deep religious pluralism in two key ways, and is therefore likely to exacerbate religious/secular tensions rather than alleviate them. The first is that religious pluralism is subordinated in Habermas's framework to the task of legitimating a strictly 'neutral' liberal-democratic state, a project that, it turns out, provides an impetus for significant suppression of, and in some cases outright hostility towards, deep diversity. And second, central to Habermas's 'postsecularism' is a commitment to global processes of modernization which all citizens must undergo in order that they come to accept the authority of modern science and modern liberal-democratic politics and morality. In other words, a key aspect of Habermas's approach to religious pluralism is for all to adopt a single, second-order form of moral and political self-understanding (or at least a single family of moral and political self-understandings), one that is itself part of a much larger bundle of political, economic, and cultural components of modernization. Both of these aspects of Habermas's approach function to construe religion as a dangerous threat and source of violence, while effacing the violence of the processes of state-building, state-legitimation, and imperial modernization to which he is committed. As such, I argue that any approach that aims to take seriously the challenges of religious pluralism must move beyond the truncated pluralism of Habermasian postsecularism, which continues to necessitate the establishment of a liberal consensus as the basis for peaceful co-existence and dialogue among secular and religious citizens⁷. I then attempt to sketch out the beginnings of an alternative approach to public reason under conditions of both deep religious diversity and ongoing imperialism. Here I ask what some starting points might be for an approach to public reason from the perspective of those who are concerned to engage subalternized forms of reason. This alternative approach, as I will explain, has *critical*, *comparative*, and *ethical* dimensions, and is oriented toward peaceful co-existence and cooperation in the midst of a deep diversity of normative traditions. To aim for the latter, rather than the former, is not to espouse a clash of civilizations thesis, but is one way to carry on the aspirations of past and present struggles for de-colonization and deimperialization.

I recognize that to continue to dichotomize secular and religious citizens in this way, as Habermas does, is fraught with problems. Indeed, part of my argument will be about how liberal secularism seeks to reconstitute religious traditions so that they are reconciled to liberal rule, thus constituting forms of religion that are themselves secular. As such, while I do maintain Habermas's distinction at times for the sake of simplicity, what I mean by 'secular' includes not only non-belief (as Habermas appears

to mean), but also forms of religious belief that are reconciled to liberal secular rule in the public sphere. As such, the conjunctive term ‘liberal-secular’ is more appropriate. By the same token, what I mean by ‘religious’ is those forms of religion that are not reconciled to liberal secular rule in the public sphere.

2.2 The Postsecular Turn

The notion of ‘postsecularism’ in political theory is emerging today largely in relation to the work of Habermas and others who are using this term to signal a renewed engagement with religion arising out of a recognition of the persistence and perhaps even resurgence of religion and religious political movements in particular in many places throughout the world today⁸. This reality flies in the face of modernization theories that for so long predicted (and in fact continue to predict) the eventual decay and demise of religion as an inevitable result of the historical advancement of social, cultural, political and economic modernization. Political theorists are increasingly coming to terms with the notion that religion is not going anywhere, and is in fact pressing new claims on public spheres and political institutions globally, and that greater work needs to be done to re-envision the relationship between religion and politics.

The theoretical entry point for Habermas’s recent work on religion and politics is an engagement with Rawls’s discussion of religion in relation to his political liberalism, and with what Habermas regards as the most compelling critiques of Rawls’s position. In brief, the earlier Rawls endorsed the exclusion of religious discourse from the political public

For a number of essays by leading thinkers on the theme of postsecularism, see Vries and Sullivan 2006. For a selection of recent publications on these themes from within philosophy, political theory, social theory, and feminism, see Abeysekara 2008, Asad et al. 2009, Biggar and Hogan 2009, Bracke 2008, Braidotti 2008,

Connolly 1999, Habermas et al. 2010, McLennan 2010, Mahmood 2005, Scott and Hirschkind 2006, Taylor 2007, Warner et al. 2010. Furthermore, many of these themes are being discussed by leading thinkers on the SSRC blog *The Immanent Frame*. sphere, arguing that, if political institutions are to maintain their neutrality, and political decisions are to maintain their legitimacy, citizens in this sphere owe each other ‘generally accessible reasons’—that is, secular reasons—in the justification of their political claims. However, Rawls later revised this more narrow position in favour of a more inclusive political public sphere in which non-officials are able to appeal to their reasonable comprehensive doctrines, religious or otherwise, as long as they also offer “proper political reasons” to support their claims.

After surveying a couple of compelling critiques of Rawls’s position on the place of religion in the public sphere, chiefly those offered by Weithman and Wolterstorff, Habermas argues that, even in its revised version, Rawls’s secularism remains overly restrictive. Religious citizens ought to be able to articulate their claims in religious lan-

guage, according to Habermas, without the duty to themselves translate these claims into secular language. While Habermas agrees with Rawls that the official political public sphere must remain secular, in the sense that politicians and other public officials may only make use of ‘generally accessible justifications,’ in the informal public sphere the faithful may make use of religious idioms, as long as they accept the ‘institutional translation proviso’; that is, they must accept “the principle that political authority is exercised with neutrality towards competing world views,” and that, as such, “only secular reasons count beyond the institutional threshold that divides the informal public sphere from parliaments, courts, ministries and administrations” (2006: 9). Religious citizens, in other words, must accept that if they put forth their political claims in religious language, then these claims must be translated into secular justifications if and when they are taken up within political institutions. The burden of translation, however, has shifted here from the faithful themselves to their fellow citizens and public officials: “the secular citizens must open their minds to the possible truth content of those presentations and enter into dialogues from which religious reasons then might well emerge in the transformed guise of generally accessible arguments” (2006: 11).

Habermas justifies this expanded place for religion in the public sphere using two lines of argument, one ‘normative’ and one ‘functional’. The normative, or procedural, argument has two parts, and is based on the liberal state’s commitment to freedom of religion, the autonomy of religious citizens, and their right to be full participants in the public sphere. The first part of this argument is basically that freedom of religion requires that believers themselves not be forced to provide secular justifications for their political claims. While all citizens are expected to have accepted the constitution of the neutral, secular state for good reasons, and therefore to also have accepted the ‘institutional translation proviso’, this does not further require that all citizens must always “justify their political statements independently of their religious convictions or world views” (2006: 8). For some, Habermas concedes, such a requirement would impose a duty that is “incompatible with pursuing a devout life” (2006: 7); “many religious citizens would not be able to undertake such an artificial division within their own minds without jeopardizing their existence as pious persons” (2006: 8). As such, to require all citizens to personally “supplement their public statements of religious convictions by equivalents in a generally accessible language” would be to “over-generalize secularization” from the institutional level to the personal level, and would thereby jeopardize the neutrality of the state towards competing world views (2006: 9). Furthermore, this inclusion of religious language is also necessary for the legitimacy of the state because it allows those whose faith prevents them from being able to provide secular reasons for their political claims to nonetheless be able to “grasp themselves as participants in the legislative process” and as “authors of laws to which as its addressees they are subject,” by “trusting that their fellow citizens will cooperate for accomplishing a translation” (2006: 10).

Second, Habermas provides a “functional” or instrumental argument for the inclusion of religious language in the informal public sphere. By this argument, religious

contributions are regarded as “key resources for the creation of meaning and identity” from which “normative truth content” can be salvaged (2006: 10). Habermas writes:

Religious traditions have a special power to articulate moral intuitions, especially with regard to vulnerable forms of communal life. ...this potential makes religious speech a serious candidate to transporting possible truth contents, which can then be translated from the vocabulary of a particular religious community into a generally accessible language. (2006: 10)

In short, the unofficial public sphere should remain open to religious idioms because these can ‘transport’ truth content which can later be mined and retrieved from these parochial confines.

While the above outlines the basic institutional or operational aspects of Habermas’s postsecular vision, he argues that both religious and secular citizens must undergo certain “epistemic adjustments” in order to each attain the proper attitude necessary to actualize postsecularism. With respect to religious citizens, there are three requirements or necessary adjustments that must occur, which Habermas explicitly ties to the “modernization of religious consciousness” (2006: 13). First, religious citizens must come to terms with the fact of pluralism of religions and worldviews. They must come to recognize that theirs is not the only game in town and must learn to relate to the truth claims of others without experiencing this as a threat to their own truth claims. Second, religious citizens must adapt to the authority of the sciences and reconcile their faiths with science, such that “the autonomous progress in secular knowledge cannot come to contradict their faith” (2006: 14). This is because the sciences “hold the societal monopoly of secular knowledge” (2003: 104). Finally, they must accept “the priority that secular reasons enjoy in the public arena,” and will “succeed” in this “only to the extent that they convincingly connect the egalitarian individualism and universalism of modern law and morality with the premises of their comprehensive doctrines” (2006: 14). In short, this last requirement means that religious citizens must “agree to the premises of a constitutional state grounded in a profane morality” (2003: 104).

These adjustments, which Habermas characterizes as the “arduous work of hermeneutic self-reflection” (2006: 14), must be undertaken from *within* religious traditions, as a response to “the cognitive challenges of modernity” and “in the light of modern living conditions for which no alternatives any longer exist” (2006: 14). The “new epistemic attitude” that must arise needs to be grounded in “a reconstruction of sacred truths” that must really convince people of faith that what they have undergone is a genuine learning process (2006: 14).

To be sure, the state would no longer be ideologically neutral, and would therefore be illegitimate, if these changes were required only of religious citizens (2006: 13). As such, Habermas assures us that secular citizens must also undergo a learning process that he claims is “no less cognitively exacting” (2006: 15) than the adaptations required on the part of religious citizens, because what is required is “a self-reflective transcending of a secularist self-understanding of Modernity” (2006: 15). In this case, secular

citizens must abandon their conviction that “religious traditions and religious communities are to a certain extent archaic relics of pre-modern societies that continue to exist in the present,” but “will inevitably melt under the sun of scientific criticism” and “the pressures of some unstoppable cultural and social modernization” (2006: 15). Instead, secular citizens must be expected “to take religious contributions to contentious political issues seriously and even to help to assess them for a substance that can possibly be expressed in a secular language and justified by secular arguments,” and be willing to translate the content of religious contributions into generally accessible language, if they contain any “morally convincing intuitions and reasons” (2006: 15). Taken together, then, religious and secular citizens must undergo “symmetrical” and “complementary learning processes” that enable the development of a (still) secular, neutral, liberal state that stands over a (now) postsecular society comprised of religious and secular citizens.⁹

2.3 Two Limits on Postsecular Pluralism

Although Habermas intends for his postsecular framework to be more inclusive of religious pluralism than older theories of secularism, I want to suggest that his approach continues to subordinate religious pluralism to two other imperatives, namely (1) the project

Habermas’s theory of postsecularism has received a great deal of recent attention among social and political philosophers and theorists. See the special section of *Constellations* 14(2), as well as the special issue of *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 35(1-2), both entitled ‘Religion and the Public Sphere’, for extensive engagements and analyses focussed on Habermas’s postsecular turn. Although some parts of these various analyses converge with my own, none share the specific set of postcolonial concerns I will lay out in the remainder of the chapter. of legitimating the neutral, liberal-democratic state; and (2) the ‘inevitable’ and homogenizing processes of global modernization. Both of these processes, I argue, effectively cast religion as a threat and source of violence, one that must be overcome by remaking all religious forms to more-or-less conform with a second-order self-understanding that is modern, scientific, secular, and liberal-democratic. As such, not only does Habermas offer an overly conformist and limiting approach to religious diversity, but his approach effectively attributes conflict to religion while effacing the myriad forms of violence associated with large-scale processes of state-building and -legitimation, imperialism, modernization, scientization, secularization, and liberal-democratization.

2.3.1 Legitimizing the Liberal-Democratic State

First, it is important to recognize that Habermas's approach to religious pluralism is subordinated to a larger project of legitimating the modern, liberal-democratic state. By making the state fully neutral, and therefore (by his reasoning) fully inclusive of all its citizens, these citizens can remain fully self-governing (i.e. subject only to laws of which they are the authors, and which they impose on themselves). According to Habermas, if the liberal state attempts to impose unequal burdens on religious citizens, not only will it be illegitimate, but it may fan the flames of resentment, irritation, humiliation, and eventually violence among them. As such, the key, for him, is for "the neutral state, confronted with competing claims of knowledge and faith, [to abstain] from prejudging political decisions in favour of one side or the other" (2003: 105). If conflicts between secular and religious worldviews are allowed to "penetrate as far as the foundations for a normative integration of citizens, the political community disintegrates into irreconcilable segments so that it can only survive on the basis of an unsteady *modus vivendi*" (2006: 13). As such, a democratically enlightened, postsecular common sense must be shared by both religious and secular citizens, and must provide a "uniting bond of civic solidarity" (2006: 13) based on an allegiance to the secular constitutional principles of decision-making of a postsecular society (2003: 105). Furthermore, the institutions of the state must operate exclusively in an idiom that is strictly secular, because only then can the state be 'generally accessible' to all. In sum, the legitimate and stable state will be a neutral, secular state governing a postsecular society in which all citizens share a postsecular common sense and an allegiance to secular constitutional principles.

Let me make two points about this. First, it is not clear to me that Habermas's argument here is persuasive, even on its own terms. After all, one of the reasons Habermas cites for his turn to the 'postsecular' in the first place is that some religious citizens simply cannot be made to provide secular reasons for their political claims without violating their freedom of religion—that these citizens cannot feel the pull of secular reasons, and to force them to do so might jeopardize their existence as pious persons. But for that very same reason, then, the secular reasons circulating within the official public sphere are not in fact 'generally accessible reasons'. Habermas uses 'generally accessible reasons' and 'secular reasons' interchangeably, but his own argument seems to be premised on the claim that secular reasons are not, in fact, generally accessible. And since the 'general accessibility' of reason in the official public sphere is one of the key bases for the claim of universality, neutrality, and legitimacy of the liberal-secular state, this latter claim seems to fall apart, and the argument comes to appear as a particular masquerading as an impartial universal. It thereby cannot earn the allegiance of religious citizens, and by extension the legitimacy and social cohesion, that it claims¹⁰.

Second, if this point is true, then Habermas's theory of postsecularism seems to run into a problem much larger than that of theoretical cogency. If it is true that

Habermas's form of legitimating and stabilizing the political community proceeds by establishing a particular and exclusive medium as the very ground of the legitimacy of the political community, then his approach replicates the logic of identitarian nation-building and the problem of the 'enemy within' that it generates. As Michael Mann has argued,

...if sovereignty and moral legitimacy are vested in the mass of the population of a given territory, then two problems may follow. First, the citizen body is conceived of as sharing distinctive virtuous characteristics, ethnic and/or political, which may distinguish it from non-citizen inhabitants or neighbours who are not entitled to citizenship. 'We, the people' may generate the sense of the alien 'other'. Second, if sovereignty is also conceived of as territorial— which is the normal feature of modern states—then the 'other' may be physically excluded from the territory of the people. (1999: 21)

When democratic legitimacy requires the establishment of a bounded, unified and inclusive public, whose citizens must all share certain features (in this case, a certain selfunderstanding) and must all be said to have equally consented to the dictates of the state, the (rather inevitable) presence of permanent, dissenting minorities becomes a serious threat to the state. After all, these minorities now become a perpetual source of objection to its democratic legitimacy. As Charles Taylor explains, the requirements of democratic legitimacy place minorities in an anomalous position, which can generate an all-too-

See Lafont 2007 and Cooke 2007 for similar critiques of Habermas's argument. irresistible pull on the part of majorities to seek to resolve the permanent threat by recourse to the removal, emigration, or worse, of the dissenting minorities (1998: 47).

This issue of the liberal-democratic anomaly has also recently been explored by Arjun Appadurai in his book *Fear of Small Numbers* (2006). Appadurai argues here that many incidents of large-scale state and communal violence in recent years must be understood in the context of liberal-democracy:

The tip-over into ethnonationalism and even ethnocide in democratic politics has much to do with the strange inner reciprocity of the categories of 'majority' and 'minority' in liberal social thought, which produces what I call the 'anxiety of incompleteness'. Numerical majorities can become predatory and ethnocidal with regard to small numbers precisely when some minorities (and their small numbers) remind these majorities of the small gap which lies between their condition as majorities and the horizon of an unsullied national whole, a pure and untainted national ethnos. This sense of incompleteness can drive majorities into paroxysms of violence against minorities... (2006: 8)

In liberal-democracies, according to Appadurai, majorities often become seized by "fantasies of purity, authenticity, borders and security" (2006: 23) which are rooted in the logic of liberalism, and can lead to many forms of state and communal violence. By this view, liberalism cannot be regarded as "immune from the conditions that produce majoritarian genocide" (2006: 58); on the contrary, it must itself be viewed as a crucial condition for such violence in many cases.

There are two key points to draw out of these analyses. The first is that many contemporary forms of conflict and violence that Habermas and many others regard as ‘religious’ in nature, are in fact deeply related to modernization and secularization. Many forms of (what are commonly understood as) ethnic and/or religious conflict are deeply tied up with the logic and imperatives associated with the modern problem of liberal-democratic legitimation (clearly articulated by Habermas) and the nation and state-building projects that they generate. Religion is often mobilized politically precisely in the interest of state legitimation, such that “the new forms of religious violence are becoming, paradoxically, quite secular” (Nandy 1988: 189). Indeed, it is often the case that “the planners, instigators and legitimizers of religious and ethnic violence can now be identified as secular users of non-secular forces in the society” (Nandy 1988: 190).

But secondly, the imperative of state legitimation need not make use of religion or other “non-secular forces” in order to (attempt to) generate a unified demos. Rather, secularity (secular identity or self-understanding) itself can, and often does, function as the ‘common ground’ required for legitimation. When this occurs, non-conforming religious and ethnic identities actually become a threat to the legitimacy and unity of the political community. As Nandy explains,

As the modern nation-state system and the modern thought machine enter the interstices of even the most traditional societies, those in power or those who hope to be in power in these societies begin to view statecraft in fully secular, scientific, amoral and dispassionate terms. The modernist elites in such societies then begin to fear the divisiveness of minorities and the diversity which religious and ethnic plurality introduces into the nation-state. These elites then begin to see all religions and all forms of ethnicity as a hurdle to nation-building and state-formation and as a danger to the technology of statecraft and political management. (Nandy 1988: 191)

Secularity, interwoven as it regularly is with the bundled ideologies of modernization, development, state management and objective science, is often mobilized as the official and proper language and rationality of the state, thereby producing an implicit or explicit political hierarchy among political actors in which secular non-believers constitute the highest category of citizens—those ultimately expected “not only to rule this society but also dominate its political culture” (Nandy 1988: 181)¹¹.

As we have seen, secularism plays a similar role and establishes a similar kind of implicit hierarchy among citizens in Habermas’s framework, even after his turn to postsecularism. In this framework, it is secular citizens who retrieve the residual truth content from religious idioms, and who translate from these religious idioms into their own secular idiom; and because this idiom also happens to be the official idiom of the state, these secular citizens also become the only ones able (because they are the only ones ‘neutral’ enough) to operate and administer the state. Consider, for example, that within Habermas’s framework it would be quite illegitimate for a religious person to be democratically elected to public office, insofar as s/he were to actually think or speak in a religious idiom¹². Indeed, this postsecular framework,

no less than the secular framework it was meant to replace, establishes a particular identity group of citizens—that is, secular citizens—as a structurally privileged ruling class, while positioning those outside of this group as permanent threats, because the latter serve as constant reminders of the falsity of this ruling class’s claims to neutrality and universality.

With a focus on South Asia, Nandy articulates the political hierarchy generated by traditional notions of secularism as a four-fold classification: (1) those who are believers neither in public nor in private; (2) those who choose not to appear as believers in public despite being devout believers in private; (3) those who are believers in public not in private; and (4) those who are believers in private as well as in public (Nandy 1988, 181-3).

A similar, and quite concrete, example has arisen in the aftermath of the Bouchard-Taylor Commission’s report on reasonable accommodation in Quebec. This report recommended that high ranking public officials should appear ‘neutral’, and that the Government of Quebec should therefore prohibit such officials from wearing any religious signs or clothing while at work. Such a prohibition would, however, effectively ban many observant Muslims, Jews, Sikhs and others from obtaining such posts.

Clearly, Habermas rejects forms of citizenship and national belonging based on ethnic identity, and argues that civic solidarity should instead be rooted in a form of secular ‘constitutional patriotism’; however, his ideal of secular neutrality as a way of legitimating the state utilizes the same logic, and therefore runs the same risk of engendering fantasies of purity, as any ethno-national identity, and therefore of providing the impetus for the suppression of pluralism in the interest of state legitimation. The notion, shared by Habermas and identitarian nationalists alike, that legitimation requires all citizens of a state to share a certain identity or form of self-understanding that transcends their diversity, lest the entire political community be threatened, is perhaps the problem here, rather than the solution. Religious citizens are placed in a rather precarious position in Habermas’s postsecular society, not only because his approach effectively institutionalizes the identity of only some citizens, such that secular citizens become identified with/as the secular state, but also because his approach gives this secularity the gloss of ‘neutrality’. Religious citizens who, by Habermas’s own admission, may not be able to personally identify with secular reasons “without jeopardizing their existence as pious persons” (2006: 8) are both effectively excluded from participating in the governance of this society, and positioned as a perpetual challenge and threat to the legitimacy of the secular state, thereby increasing the likelihood that they will also be targeted as an anomaly. That secularity is then also given the gloss of neutrality makes this outcome all the more probable and volatile. As Nikolas Kompridis argues in relation to Habermasian critical theory, “strong notions of impartiality may be part of the problem, not part of the solution to the challenges of value pluralism and deep diversity” (2007: 279). The attempt to erase liberal operations of power by declaring liberal norms to be impartial, neutral, and/or rationally

necessary polarizes diverse identities and fuels antagonism by shielding these norms from visibility and political contestation (Mouffe 2000).

The kind of analyses of liberal-democratic legitimation I have cited serve to trouble the assumption by many liberal-democrats that modern, secular, liberal-democratic languages and institutions provide the proper means and necessary pre-conditions for securing peace and pluralism. By emphasizing liberal-democracy's compulsive preoccupation with legitimation, bounded communities, universal consent, national unity, complete inclusion, ideological neutrality, universal idioms and a singular general will—most of which can be regarded as unattainable *fantasies*, while at the same time being made into political *necessities*—these analyses suggest that the political imperatives generated by the modern, secular, liberal-democratic state could (and often do) serve to engender violence and to suppress the very pluralism for which they claim to provide the preconditions. At the very least, these analyses reveal that many contemporary forms of violence often crudely identified as religious are not simply regressions to the primitive or anti-modern, but are distinctly modern and, in many ways, secular (Mann 1999; Nandy 1988; Taylor 2006). As such, they make it unclear whether the fulfillment of the project of liberal-democratic legitimation serves to promote or suppress a peaceful and flourishing pluralism.

2.3.2 Imperial Modernization

Second, I want to suggest that Habermas's theory of postsecularism remains overly restrictive of religious diversity because it re-inscribes an imperial approach to religious pluralism, characteristic of which is the attempt to deal with pluralism through a kind of civilizing process, reinforced by a story of historical progress, in which plural forms of subjectivity are reshaped in order that they all come to conform to an ostensibly necessary set of civilized, reasonable, liberal doctrines. This set of doctrines is always realized first in, and is therefore articulated and determined by, the imperial centre, but is nonetheless construed as neutral, impartial, and necessary.

Let me briefly explicate several imperial features of this approach¹³. First, this approach reflects *imperial pretensions*, because its approach to pluralism is premised on transcending pluralism by mandating the universal adoption of a more or less singular moral and political identity, or by remaking all identities in order that they are rendered compatible with the proper 'meta-normative' moral and political form of self-understanding. By this approach, non-liberal forms of life are construed as the main source of conflict and the chief obstacle to peaceful co-existence, and as such the central goal and solution to pluralism is to bring about its liberalization, modernization, secularization, civilization, and/or development. This approach is unable, then, to engage with other normative traditions on an equal footing, as it construes other traditions as 'particular' while declaring itself to be 'universal' (Tully 2008b: 148-9).

Furthermore, this approach is reinforced by an *imperial meta-narrative*, or philosophy of history, which says that the adoption of this universal form of moral and political subjectivity is necessary because it is driven by a teleological global process of

For the most comprehensive and systematic account of the imperial features of Habermas's broader project, see Tully 2008b. Much of my analysis in this section is deeply informed by and indebted to Tully's incisive critique of Habermas. modernization. As we have already seen, Habermas argues that the epistemic demands placed on religious citizens by postsecularism are the demands of a modernizing process for which there is no alternative. As such, these are cast as *necessary* 'adjustments'. Habermas also explicitly identifies these adjustments as a "democratically shaped and enlightened common sense" that plays a "civilizing role", and is required in order to be deemed "reasonable" (2003: 104).

Despite the incredible amount of work (including, to be sure, violence) that clearly would be required to civilize, enlighten and modernize all other forms of life, however, this approach reflects *imperial privilege* by then being able to declare (both prospectively and retrospectively) its preferred form of moral and political subjectivity to be 'neutral' and 'impartial'. This approach prepares its own ground for this declaration by presenting itself in advance as securing the necessary rational pre-conditions for pluralism, while then remaking all forms of pluralism such that they are 'epistemically adjusted' to recognize the 'neutrality' and 'impartiality' of its propositions. This imperial privilege is further evidenced by the ability to occlude your own (imperial) history and project, by construing pluralism as the chief source of conflict and violence, rather than the imperial project itself and its violent history of attempting to remake all others in accordance with a particular form.

Evidence of these imperial features of Habermas's approach can indeed be observed from within the terms of Habermas's theory of postsecularism. For example, while Habermas insists that the adjustments for secular and religious citizens required by his framework are symmetrical, they actually appear markedly asymmetrical upon closer examination. While secular citizens are required to shed their strictly dismissive views of religion and open their minds to new truth claims, they are not, in fact, required to open their minds to *religious* truth claims. Rather, all that is required is that some among them be willing to look for kernels of secular insight within religious truth claims, and if they are found, to translate them into secular terms for the other secular citizens. In the end, then, secular citizens are only asked to develop an openness to new truth claims that are nonetheless guaranteed to be translated into the secular terms that these citizens already accept. As such, while these citizens may be required to face truth claims that stretch and modify their worldviews, they are not required to take seriously truth claims that challenge their worldviews more comprehensively.

Religious citizens, on the other hand, have to undergo a 'learning process' much more demanding and potentially comprehensive than that required of secular citizens. In Habermas's view, all religious worldviews must be reconstructed to accept the trump-

ing authority of modern science, as well as the morality, law, approach to pluralism, and institutions of liberal-democracy. This process would entail that religious citizens accept the strict secularity of the(ir) state, as well as the institutional translation proviso, which essentially constitutes an acceptance on their part of their own exclusion from participation in the formal governance of their society. Habermas himself likens this process to the Reformation and Enlightenment (2006: 13), acknowledging that this process might well require a deep and comprehensive restructuring of the worldviews in question.

Is this a set of symmetrical demands on both secular and religious citizens? I want to suggest that a genuinely symmetrical process here would either have to require the same of both religious and secular citizens—that they each open their minds to the possibility of learning from the other—or might actually have to place a greater burden on secular citizens, in order to compensate for the fact that their secularity happens to coincide with the strict secularity of the state in Habermas’s framework. (Of course this is not a coincidental relationship, but this is largely how Habermas portrays it.) Instead, however, Habermas’s theory places a much greater burden on religious citizens, demanding that they conform to a number of doctrines now no longer portrayed as ‘secular’, but as ‘reasonable’.

These features of the burden placed on religious citizens—its ostensible necessity, universality and impartiality, its civilizing mission, and its asymmetry—reveal a number of the imperial aspects of Habermas’s (post)secular liberal state, in which ‘They’ need to be made compatible with ‘Us’, because ‘our’ norms continue to provide the necessary and unquestionable pre-conditions for peace, pluralism and justice, and the overarching framework within which pluralism must be managed and accommodated. Saba Mahmood articulates this central preoccupation of liberal secularist politics with regulating and restructuring religious life as follows:

The political solution that secularism proffers...lies not so much in tolerating difference and diversity but in remaking certain kinds of religious subjectivities (even if this requires the use of violence) so as to render them compliant with liberal political rule. Critics who want to make secularism’s claim to tolerance more robust must deal with this normative impetus internal to secularism, an impetus that reorganizes subjectivities in accord with a modality of political rule that is itself retrospectively called ‘a religiously neutral political ethic’. (2006: 328)

In short, I am suggesting that Habermas’s postsecular approach contains the imperial pretension of seeking to reorganize all forms of religious subjectivity in accordance with a singular form of political rule; the imperial meta-narrative that casts this transformation as a necessary, inevitable historical process of modernization; and the imperial privilege to be able to construe the outcome of this process as ‘neutral’, to efface the imperial violence that this process requires, and to in fact attribute this violence to religion itself.

This leads to the final imperial feature of Habermas’s approach, without which the other features would not be identifiable as imperial in the first place. This is the *im-*

perial context and configuration of power relations in which Habermas's intervention arises and must be situated. This context is marked by a long history of formal and informal imperial relations between the West and non-West, as well as within the West (especially with regard to indigenous peoples); the structures of exploitation and domination to which these relations gave rise and which largely remain in place today; the vast disparities of power, wealth, and force between the West and the non-West, between the Global North and Global South, and between modernity and coloniality; long traditions of disregard, disrespect and contempt for non-Western, non-modern, and subaltern knowledges, normativities, languages, practices and ways of life; and ongoing, unfinished projects of globalization, modernization, liberalization, democratization, development, securitization and anti-terrorism, which continue the centuries-long project of promoting Western interests and Western-style (or at least Westernfriendly) capitalist modernity while subalternizing all peoples, cultures, knowledges, and ways of life that stand in its way.

There is now an extensive and expanding literature on the 'new' imperial character of our contemporary global order and its continuities with older forms of imperialism (Harvey 2003; Wood 2003; Hardt & Negri 2000; Chomsky 2005; Kiely 2007, 2010; Ayers 2009;

Tully 2008b; Hobsbawm 2008; Stewart-Harawira 2005; Brown 2006; Anghie 2004; Petras & Veltmeyer 2001). Most relevant here are the ways in which this literature documents the specifically (neo)liberal-democratic character of contemporary imperialism. (Neo)liberaldemocratic imperialism is centrally comprised of a global project and resultant processes of liberal-democratization in which a modular, capitalist-friendly, low-intensity form of liberaldemocracy is spread throughout especially the post-colonial world, to operate under the wider umbrella system of liberal international law. This project, which requires a wide range of economic, political, social transformations within the societies to which liberal-democracy is being exported or promoted, is carried out using both hard and soft power, by a massive industry of corporations, experts, planners, technocrats, politicians, soldiers, investors, donors, natural and social scientists, development and aid workers, charities, NGOs, missionaries, global institutions, humanitarian organizations, and post-colonial elites, among many others. Although the work of all these actors is far from coherent and coordinated, they largely operate with a relatively similar universal teleological standard and bundle of development and modernization, even if this standard is regarded as 'thin' and as consisting of only the basic conditions for diverse societal trajectories or modernizations. As Alison Ayers argues and documents, this massive project of social engineering is especially concerned with bringing about transformations in three domains, each of which plays a role in Habermas's own theory: "the minimal, 'neutral' state, the constitution of 'civil society' and the promotion of the liberal 'self'" (2009: 1).

Practices of political theorizing cannot be abstracted from this imperial context, for not only do their meanings and effects derive from it, but the institutions in which these theories are generated, compensated, and promoted are clearly tied up with this

imperial structure. As such, it is important to examine both how Habermas himself situates his ‘postsecular’ intervention, but also how it might function within this imperial context. First, while he largely pitches his turn to postsecularism as a theory regarding the internal relations of ‘the constitutional state’ (in the abstract), Habermas also situates this theory squarely within a wider and more concrete global context that is constituted by global alignments, tensions and political struggles over modernization and religious/secular relations. Postsecularism, he makes clear, is an intervention in response to a global context of reinvigorated religious fundamentalisms in the Middle East, Africa, Southeast Asia, the Indian subcontinent, and the United States, as well as against the backdrop of the threat of a global ‘clash of civilizations’ (2006: 1-2). But while he initially situates his theory of postsecularism within this context, he then proceeds to discuss postsecularism largely in relation to an abstract theory of ‘the constitutional state’, and does not explicitly relate his theory back to its global context. Nonetheless, from the rest of Habermas’s writings we can situate this postsecular turn, as well as Habermas’s theorization of ‘the constitutional state’ more generally, within a larger Kantian/neo-Kantian story of global processes of cultural, economic, and political modernization and the progressive development of an international community of roughly identical, Western-style republican constitutional states (see Tully 2008b). As such, Habermas’s abstract discussion of the relationship between religion, the state and the public sphere must be read against the background of this meta-narrative, which in turn infuses his theory of postsecularism with a degree of universal normativity.

Second, it is important to understand how an intervention of this kind operates in an imperial context. I want to suggest that Habermas’s approach (and those like it) operates as part of a much larger imperial apparatus. It provides the primary discourse of justification and legitimation that mobilizes and enables this apparatus, by perpetuating the notion—with all the structural and institutional force that it marshals and with which it is intertwined—that elite Western forms of knowledge and theory are sufficient to determine what is universally normative for all, because they uniquely comprehend the rationally necessary pre-conditions for freedom, equality, pluralism and justice. Within the context of concrete imperial power relations, this kind of intervention not only replicates in its very form of argumentation this imperial power, but also serves to justify and reinforce imperial power by asserting the epistemic superiority of the West, the self-sufficiency of its justifications, its declaratory and legislative power over the rest, and the normativity of its (unfinished) global modernization project.

In her article “Secularism, Hermeneutics, and Empire: The Politics of Islamic Reformation,” Mahmood traces the ongoing imperial context and concrete effects of this form of secular/postsecular thought on the relationship between religion, secularity, and the state. She examines programs and documents by the U.S. State Department that outline the

U.S. Administration’s plan to bring about reform within Islam, and to promote the liberal wing of Islam globally, with over 1 billion dollars allocated to ‘transforming Islam from within’. According to Mahmood,

The convergence of U.S. imperial interests and the secular liberal Muslim agenda needs to be understood...not simply as a fortuitous coming together of political objectives and an indigenous social formation, but...from the standpoint of normative secularity and the kind of religious subjectivity it endorses. ...Thus, when viewed from the perspective of the current U.S. imperial adventure in the Muslim world, secularism reveals itself in its civilizing and disciplinary aspects rather than as a circumscription of religion or a prophylaxis that immunizes politics from religion within the context of the nation-state. (2006: 329-30)

By placing this form of liberal secularism in its global and imperial context, Mahmood issues a reminder of the relationship that can exist between this form of liberal-secular (and now postsecular) thought and imperialist practice. From her analysis, we can see a convergence between the project of the U.S. Administration and Habermas's theory of postsecularism in their common emphasis on reconstructing religious forms of subjectivity in order to render them compliant to a particular form of liberal political rule, while at the same time asserting that these necessary transformations of religious traditions should occur from *within* these traditions. This type of convergence reveals some of the dangers of Habermas's theory, and illustrates precisely how political theories generated in an imperial context can both reflect and serve to legitimate imperial practices. Although Habermas does explain that the unfinished global process of modernization and the spread of the liberal-secular public sphere should occur through multilateralism and the expansion and application of international law, rather than by unilateral and 'imperialistic' means (2006b), it remains unclear what means his approach might regard as acceptable for the modernization and transformation 'from within' of religious consciousnesses. But perhaps the more crucial aspect here in the convergence between Habermas's approach and that of the U.S. Government is simply that both presume to know, in advance, the end-point at which all religious traditions should eventually arrive; after all, which imperial power could resist some form of interventionism when it presumes to already possess knowledge about the eventual and inevitable outcomes of the process of development of its (threatening) Others? In capturing the imperial logic and operation of many forms of liberal secularism/postsecularism, Mahmood issues a reminder of the imperial character of this logic, and the imperial violence that is both its historical legacy and present reality.

2.4 Beyond Habermasian Postsecularism: Public Reason in an Imperial Context

To this point, I have pursued two lines of critique of Habermas's theory of postsecularism which problematize this theory as overly monistic in its attempt to transcend deep normative pluralism; inattentive to the relations of power and violence that are implicated in its project of legitimation; and, in several key ways, imperialist in its

global orientation. These lines of critique not only trouble the internal logics of this theory, but raise a number of further questions regarding practices of public reasoning within contexts of both deep normative pluralism and ongoing imperial power relations. One of the central challenges here is that dominant modes of public reasoning in a context of modern imperialism often serve to reflect, reinscribe, conceal, justify, and legitimate relations of power, violence and domination. Unsurprisingly, modes of public reasoning generated in the Global North and within modern institutions without a robust attentiveness to, and interrogation of, its forms of power/knowledge, are likely to reflect and reinforce the structural positions from which they are generated, including the benefits, assumptions, pretensions, privileges, blindspots, and complicities of the modern epistemologies, normativities, metanarratives, and ways of life with which they are intertwined, and the processes of subalternization that correspond with these.

Against this background, I would like to ask what might be some of the characteristics of a more genuinely postsecular mode of public reasoning, one that aims to take seriously religious difference as a form of subalternized difference. Such an alternative approach should be attentive to both deep normative pluralism and the operation of both formal and informal imperial power relations, without devolving into some sort of facile relativism or de-politicized quietism on the one hand, or into a clash of civilizations thesis on the other. What possibilities exist for practices of public reason beyond those that simply project from within modern imperial frameworks and subjectivities an overarching, metanormative consensus that is required for pluralism and peace? Obviously this is a very large and complicated question, one that will necessarily have many different answers, but here I want to propose three likely starting points for such an alternative mode of public reasoning, one that would be *critical*, *comparative*, and *ethical* in character. Let me explicate each of these dimensions in turn.

The first dimension of this approach is its *critical* dimension. This approach is ‘critical’ in the sense that it incorporates a wider range of structural forms of analysis and critique of the present that foreground questions of power and domination on a wide variety of (local to global) scales. These forms of analysis are important because they resist widespread tendencies within discussions of deep normative pluralism to construe the key issues solely in terms of ideational conflict, or the differences and tensions among ‘worldviews’ or religious/secular beliefs, and instead highlight the many other factors that can co-determine conflicts that might appear to be inter-religious or religious/secular in nature. Furthermore, they bring to light the various critical-normative resources that are appropriate to, and seek to address, each of these causal factors.

Unfortunately Habermas himself has the tendency to construe the politics of religious/secular diversity as a politics of conflicting worldviews or self-understandings, at least in part because his theoretical framework does not sufficiently incorporate certain forms of critical, structural analysis. I have argued that his project is insufficiently critical with respect to (1) the institutional-ideological imperatives generated by liberal-

democratic legitimation, and the homogenizing, exclusionary, and hierarchical effects of the nation and state-building projects in which it is implicated; and (2) imperialism and global configurations of structural power and domination, and the relations of violence, inequality, dependency and exploitation to which they give rise. That these forms of critical analysis have been occluded is not particularly surprising, seeing as this occlusion is a common effect of the modernism, methodological nationalism, and moral universalism characteristic of liberal-democratic thought. Nonetheless, because liberal-democracy functions as both a logic of domination and of emancipation, it is crucial for critical theorists to incorporate a critical analysis of liberal-democratic forms of power and domination—that is, of forms of power, violence, and domination that are generated, justified and/or legitimated by liberal-democratic rationalities, subjects, and institutions.

One of the key points here is that it is often important to abstract away from the specific content of normative languages, and to instead focus on and examine how they function as a discourse within contemporary power relations. Fanon's functional analysis of how Christianity operates in the colonial context is exemplary: "The Church in the colonies is a white man's Church, a foreigners' Church. It does not call the colonized to the ways of God, but to the ways of the white man, to the ways of the master, the ways of the oppressor" (1963: 7). A more recent example, and one that is directly relevant to our discussion here, is Wendy Brown's analysis of "the discursive function of tolerance in legitimating the often violent imperialism of international liberal governmentality conjoined with neoliberal global political economy" (2006: 202). Emancipatory languages, especially those that have achieved a hegemonic status, often function as a tool of governance that serves to maintain and enhance the power of those who speak and identify with those languages over those who do not, regardless of their emancipatory content. This dynamic is typical of imperial power relations, in which the imperialized are often constrained to use the emancipatory languages of the imperialists in ways that, while they may alter the imperial relationship, often serve to maintain a broader imperial structure and the dominant structural position of the imperialists. Critical analysis of the functioning of dominant languages within contemporary structural power relations is therefore crucial, rather than simply analysis of the ideational 'truth' content of diverse worldviews.

From the perspective of colonial or subaltern difference, these critical analyses give rise to a number of scepticisms about key emancipatory aspects of the modern project which must also have a place within public reasoning in imperial contexts. Nandy argues that subaltern approaches incorporate three forms of scepticism about modernity: (1) scepticism toward the modern nation-state; (2) scepticism toward modern science; and (3) scepticism toward history, especially "the so-called larger forces of history, unless the awareness of such larger forces is matched by an awareness of their implications in everyday life." He also argues for a fourth form of scepticism, one that underpins the previous three, namely "a general scepticism towards all ideas which are used as sources of legitimacy by the winners of the world" (1987: 121-3). What is particularly

striking about this list is that these are precisely the four areas about which Habermas wants to require consensus and disallow any scepticism at all.

Another important aspect of this expanded range of critical languages is the deep diversity of such languages, both modern and non-modern. While some continue to believe and argue that critical reflexivity is itself a quintessentially modern characteristic (McCarthy 2009: 155-6), Nandy emphasizes that there are clearly both critical modernisms (those forms of criticism that “try to abide by or use as their reference the values of European Enlightenment”) and critical traditionalisms (those forms of criticism that criticize the present using resources internal to non-modern traditions) (Nandy: 1987).¹⁴ Critical traditionalisms exist both because “critical rationality is the monopoly neither of modern times nor of the Graeco-Roman tradition” and because “some aspects of some exogenous traditions of criticism can be accommodated in non-Western terms within the non-Western civilizations” (Nandy 1987: 116-7). The emphasis on critical traditionalisms gives a certain primacy to

...the political consciousness of those who have been forced to develop categories to understand their own suffering and who reject the pseudoindigeneity of modern theories of oppression using—merely using—native idioms to conscientize, brainwash, educate, indoctrinate the oppressed or to museumize their cultures. The resistance to modern oppression has to involve, in our part of the world, some resistance to modernity and to important aspects of modern theories of oppression. The resistance must deny in particular the connotative meanings of concepts such as development, growth, history, science and technology. These concepts have become not only new ‘reasons of the state’ but mystifications for new forms of violence and injustice. (Nandy 1987: 117)

Finally, this expansion of the criticality of public reasoning involves a second sense of the word ‘critical’. Practices of public reason under conditions of deep normative pluralism and imperial power relations should be more *self*-critical, in the sense of acknowledging the limits of one’s own perspective or horizon. This ‘limit-awareness’¹⁵ recognizes that forms of analysis and critique (including structural critiques) arise within particular contexts or ‘problem-spaces’, are themselves inevitably tied to particular normative horizons, as well as particular forms of subjectivity and self-understanding, and

Of course, the crucial point to keep in mind with this distinction is that it is not meant to reinforce the dichotomy between modernity and tradition, but to re-cast modernity as one tradition (or one family of traditions) of reflection and evaluation among others.

For a related use of ‘critique’ in this sense, but one that identifies with the European Enlightenment tradition, see Foucault 1994d. are therefore always partial and aspherical. While the first sense of criticality (above) might involve attempts to abstract away from first-order forms of subjectivity or self-understanding in order to incorporate second-order analyses (including structural, material, or institutional analyses), this second sense of criticality entails taking full account of the form of subjectivity and self-understanding of the participant in public reasoning her/himself, and the in-

evitable role this plays in the critical-normative resources that s/he brings to bear in her/his (even second-order) analyses.

Habermas's theory of postsecular public reason is insufficiently critical in this sense because it does not adequately recognize the particularity and limits of modern science, liberal-democracy, the secular state, and the various other features he includes in 'modernity', as well as the link between these and his own social location and form of subjectivity. Habermas projects these as universally authoritative, bestowing upon them a privileged, meta-normative status that paradoxically allows them to be both historical developments and cultural neutralities, thereby effacing not only their particularity but also the strong subalternizing effects of this universalization on all non-modern traditions. What is missing here might be referred to, in short, as a sufficient anthropology of Western, liberalsecular modernity.

The second dimension of this approach is its *comparative* dimension. Public reasoning should be 'comparative' in the sense that it involves the work of understanding, translating among, and comparing diverse ethico-political traditions and frameworks. A comparative approach to religious/secular pluralism takes as constitutive and irreducible the plurality of normative traditions, and rejects the pursuit of a transcendent (or even quasitranscendent) moral and political identity that is to serve as the unifying and ordering ground of pluralism. It seeks to shift the emphasis away from the question of how to transform all normative traditions in order that they are rendered compatible with modern liberaldemocracy, and instead inquires into the ethico-political alternatives to liberal-democracy latent within diverse religious and other normative traditions (Chakrabarty 2000). For example, Talal Asad (2007, 2003, 1993), a leading anthropologist whose pioneering work on secularism has been some of the most important and influential of the last several decades, argues in a recent interview: "Of course there are people who are trying to rethink the Islamic tradition in ways that would make it compatible with liberal democracy. But I am much more interested in the fact that the Islamic tradition ought to lead us to question many of the liberal categories themselves" (2007: 213). Asad goes on to say:

...instead of simply—and rather defensively—saying, 'There are Islamic traditions that are very liberal, you know. We can also become liberal.' It is in fact much more interesting to ask, 'What does liberalism mean by tolerance, or by pluralism? Is the meaning of individualism totally clear, is it totally desirable? Does an exploration of Islamic traditions give us a deeper, more critical understanding of individualism, or tolerance, or pluralism?' I would like to see more of this kind of questioning, rather than people trying to prove their liberal credentials. (2007: 213-4)¹⁶

Similarly, in his highly influential book *Provincializing Europe*, Dipesh Chakrabarty calls for a "radical critique and transcendence of liberalism," in order to resist liberalism's tendency to assimilate "all other possibilities of human solidarity," and in order that "the world may once again be imagined as radically heterogeneous" (2000: 42-6). For Chakrabarty,

The point is not to reject social science categories but to release into the space occupied by particular European histories sedimented in them other normative and theoretical thought enshrined in other existing life practices and their

For other research in a similar vein, see Mahmood (2009, 2007, 2006, 2005). Also see pioneering work in

‘comparative political theory’ by Fred Dallmayr and Roxanne Euben. archives. For it is only in this way that we can create plural normative horizons specific to our existence and relevant to the examination of our lives and their possibilities. (2000: 20)

A comparative approach to public reason involves, then, both provincializing liberal democracy as hegemonic ethical-political horizon, and bringing into the conversation alternative ethical-political horizons rooted in alternative normative traditions (both religious and non-religious).

Finally, a comparative approach will involve both practices of immersion, the goal of which is to generate greater understanding of other traditions¹⁷, as well as practices of translation among traditions¹⁸. The importance of practices of translation is emphasized by legal scholar Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2004), who argues that a monistic general theory could never, in itself, take pluralism seriously. Rather, for Santos, taking pluralism seriously requires an emphasis on practices of translation among various normative frameworks. He writes: “To my mind, the alternative to a general theory is the work of translation. Translation is the procedure that allows for mutual intelligibility among the experiences of the world, both available and possible” (2004: 341). For Santos, translation is crucial because it enlarges “reciprocal intelligibility without destroying the identity of what is translated,” thereby maintaining a “contact zone” for mutual solidarity and permeability.

I am grateful to Nikolas Kompridis for emphasizing this point to me regarding the centrality of practices of immersion, over and above practices of translation (which can only occur meaningfully after practices of immersion and understanding have occurred).

To speak of distinct traditions is, of course, not to essentialize these traditions, nor is it to draw clear boundaries between traditions, or to deny their ‘hybridity’ or cross-fertilization. It is, rather, to incorporate a sufficient form of critical holism to appreciate the non-identity and irreducible diversity of critical-normative traditions without reifying them (Kompridis 2005: 324), and to recognize the boundaries and distinctions between distinct historical lineages and assemblages are always contested in ways that continually raise the question of the inside/outside of particular traditions.

Through practices of translation, “diversity is celebrated not as a factor of fragmentation and isolationism but rather as a factor of sharing and solidarity” (2004: 342). Of course, this notion of translation is far from Habermas’s, who argues only for a one-way translation of the truth content of religious idioms into secular idioms.

The third dimension of this approach to public reason is its *ethical* dimension. In one way, the ethical dimension of public reasoning has already been touched upon

in the above discussion on critical self-awareness. Forms of public reason are not detached doctrines or abstract truth claims, but arise from and are grounded in an ethical substratum of practices that comprise a particular form of subjectivity or way of life. These ethical traditions provide their own immanent sources and practices of “internal consistency” (Nandy 1987: 122) between forms of reason and forms of practice, words and deeds, ideas and actions. Public reasons are embedded in, and immanent to, this ethical substratum, as is the exchange of public reasons itself, through which we negotiate and work on the shared aspects of our way(s) of life.¹⁹ One of the great dangers, from this ethical perspective, is precisely when modes of reason become detached from their grounding in ethical conduct—and the

A number of political theorists have recently begun to place a great deal of emphasis on the kind of ethos necessary for contemporary democracy. Most prominent among them are William Connolly (2006, 2005, 1999), Chantal Mouffe (2000a, 2000b), and Stephen White (2009). What is problematic about Mouffe and White in this respect is that their search is for the proper (relatively thick) ethos that all citizens will share, and that will allow for liberal-democracy to function optimally. As such, these remain attempts to secure a singular, political form (or family of forms) of self-understanding and practice that transcends the diversity of citizens and therefore unifies and binds them together. Such projects, then, remain attempts to bring all identities in line with the proper, overarching political ethos. Connolly’s efforts, although much more pluralistic, also retain a general preoccupation with the inculcation of a second-order ‘sensibility’ and ‘ethos of engagement’ that he regards as the proper shared ethos of a pluralistic democracy. The approach I am sketching departs, at least for a moment, from such efforts to find a proper overarching political ethos, by shifting the emphasis away from the kind of ethos that is purportedly necessary for the establishment of a particular kind of political community; instead, it seeks to treat various ethical traditions (including forms of political ethics) relatively autonomously in order to stand in solidarity with the recovery, revitalization, and actualization of subalternized ethical-political traditions. practical, regulatory mechanisms of self-consistency and self-correction this grounding provides—to appear instead as doctrines or ideologies that float above the ethical world and can be grafted upon any ethical world. This is precisely the concern about modernity that Uday Mehta finds expressed in the anti-imperialism of both Gandhi and Burke:

Gandhi, like Edmund Burke, was troubled by forms of existence that offered incentives and incentives to modes of living that were indifferent to the demands and conditions of self-knowledge and human integrity. ...What troubled them about modernity was less its ideals, such as freedom, equality, or the hope to relieve exploitation, than the way that those ideals had become indifferent to the integrity of the self in the conduct of everyday life. (2011: 420-1)

Indeed, it is precisely when political ideals become abstracted and unhinged from society and social mores that these floating doctrines often come to serve as justifications for the suspension of ethicality, for the separation of means and ends, and the

imposition of truth by violence. Instrumental rationality is born of these abstracted and unmoored understandings of truth, common among modern forms of science, rationality/philosophy, ideology, and religion.

An ethical approach to practices of public reasoning resists forms of instrumental rationality that justify the suspension and violation of these goods/commitments in the interest of some future ethico-political telos or the establishment of some purportedly necessary set of pre-conditions to peaceful living. Rather than emphasizing the need for a doctrine and/or set of neutral procedures that, if adopted universally, would provide the ground for peaceful co-existence and legitimacy in the midst of deep diversity, this approach prioritizes the ethicality—that is, the consistency between words and deeds, principles and practices—of diverse beings, and, by the same token, the de-instrumentalization of their diverse traditions. It rejects, in other words, the view that religion, pluralism, and nonliberality are themselves an essential threat and source of violence, and instead shifts this burden to modern forms of instrumental rationality, justifications and rationalizations of selfinterested and unethical behaviour, and the ideologies of war, violence, modernization, development, economic growth, state-building and imperialism that make deadly use of these. Rather than prioritizing the imperatives of a universal form of *legitimation*, then, this approach prioritizes the *ethicization* of our shared practices. It is in this spirit that Nandy calls for the “recovery of religious tolerance”, in which religion, rather than simply secular or postsecular politics, is regarded as a source of peace, tolerance and pluralistic coexistence and cooperation: “Religious tolerance outside the bounds of secularism is exactly what it says it is. It not only means tolerance of religions but also a tolerance that is religious” (Nandy 1988: 192).

Not only is this ethical integrity regarded as a key ground for peace, then, but it is also viewed as an important ground for dialogues, challenges, and conflicts across diverse traditions. By this view, it is ethicality, more than right reason or correct doctrine or proper self-understanding or shared identity, that gives normative force to the diverse doctrines, perspectives, and arguments of interdependent beings who share a political life and who therefore inevitably make claims upon one another, but who do not necessarily share a comprehensive doctrine, a common idiom, a moral/political identity, a specific discourse ethics, or a strictly political conception of justice. Ethicality, by this view, is a crucial element in the development of relations of cooperation, coordination, mutual trust and belonging, not only among diverse subjects, but also between these subjects and their institutions of governance. Indeed forms of governance, including state institutions, must earn and maintain their legitimacy through their own ethical practice, in relation to their own specific (although always contested and never fixed) forms of normativity. These institutions do not become legitimate and gain the loyalty, cooperation, participation, obedience and belonging of their citizens simply because they are ‘sovereign’, or because they are founded on the correct doctrine(s), or because they declare themselves to be ‘neutral’ or ‘impartial’ among their citizens.

2.5 Conclusion

I have argued in this chapter that Habermas's recent attempt to theorize the politics of religious/secular diversity goes only marginally beyond the theories of secularism and secularization to which 'postsecularism' is meant as a corrective. In particular, Habermas's theory retains some key features of liberal secularism that position deep normative pluralism as a threat to the political community, a threat that is to be overcome through the establishment of a global liberal consensus. By continuing to assert that secularity and secular idioms will provide the official, neutral, common ground of the political community, and that all religious traditions must undergo global modernization processes that will render them fully compliant to the authority of modern science and liberal-secular constitutional order, Habermas effectively treats religious diversity as itself the primary source of conflict and contemporary 'clashes among civilizations'. In doing so, I have argued, Habermas ignores the key role played in many contemporary conflicts by liberal-democratic legitimation, the imperative it creates for a singular idiom or identity to serve as the very ground of the political community and the way this produces anomalous minorities, as well as the key role played by Western imperialism and its ongoing project of global modernization. By effacing the role of liberal-democratic legitimation and liberal-secular modernization in engendering conflict, and indeed by building these liberal forms of power into the very structure of his theory of postsecularism, Habermas's postsecular turn does not offer an adequately pluralistic and non-imperial approach to contemporary religious diversity. I have suggested that a critical, comparative, and ethical approach might serve as a better starting point for the practices of public reasoning that ought to comprise the politics of deep normative diversity in a continuing age of imperialism.

3. Recognition and Self-Determination: Approaches from Above and Below

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I seek to broadly distinguish two families of approaches to the politics of cultural difference, and in particular to the politics of recognition and self-determination. The first is the approach from above, which takes up questions of recognition and self-determination in a top-down fashion, from the perspective of the modern state or international institutions, and within the dominant normative language(s) and framework(s) of liberal-democracy. This approach tends to be state-centred, universalistic, and normatively monistic, and regards recognition and self-determination as institutional preconditions or protections for cultural difference. The central challenge here is one of cultural accommodation, which is achieved by expanding liberal-democratic norms to be more respectful and inclusive of cultural difference. The second is the approach from below, which takes up a politics of cultural difference in a bottom-up fashion, from the perspective of nonstate or civil society actors, grassroots activists, subalternized and marginalized peoples, and counter-hegemonic social movements. This approach tends to be much less state-centred, more radically diverse, and less constrained by hegemonic social, political, cultural, and economic norms. It tends not to view modern institutions as providing the pre-conditions for cultural difference, but rather regards cultural difference as something that is practiced here and now. Rather than cultural accommodation within modern institutions, the central challenge here is regarded as cultural imperialism, which is often propagated through modern liberal-democratic norms and institutions. In contrast to the relatively univocal and monological character of the top-down approach which is often articulated in the authoritative voice of a Judge or Legislator who observes and manages the demos from above according to dominant institutional norms, the bottom-up approach tends to be articulated in the relatively provisional voice of a much less powerful social actor who is participating in a multilogical social struggle with many other (differently-situated) social actors, and is able to appeal to a much wider spectrum of non-institutional, ethical-political goods and norms.

Although specific differences between these orientations have for many years animated disagreements and struggles within debates over recognition and self-determination, they increasingly appear to be coalescing as relatively distinct theoretical approaches to these issues. Indeed a growing number of literatures spanning many fields of study are using the terms ‘from above’ and ‘from below’ to distinguish and contrast a more elite-driven, institutionally-focussed approach, with a more grassroots, social movement-based approach that offers a more radical critique of, and transformational aspirations toward, both institutional and non-institutional norms²⁰. In drawing the distinction between a

A largely parallel distinction to that between approaches from ‘above’ and ‘below’ is often drawn between

‘mainstream’ and ‘critical’ approaches. For multiculturalism from below/critical multiculturalism, see Bannerji (2000), Gunew (2004), Santos, Nunes and Meneses (2007), Shohat and Stam (2008), Goldberg (1994), May

(1999), Kanpol and McLaren (1995), McLaren (1997), Day (2000), Hesse (2000). For globalization and international law from below, see Santos and Rodriguez-Garavito (2005), Santos (2004, 2001), Rajagopal (2003), della Porta, et al. (2006), Brecher, Costello and Smith (2000), Appelbaum and Robinson (2005), Krishnaswamy and Hawley (2008). For critical cosmopolitanism and citizenship from below, see Tully (2008b), Mignolo (2000b), Delanty (2006), Kurasawa (2009, 2007, 2004), Breckenridge, et al. (2002), Conway (2004). For critical development studies, see Munck and O’Hearn (1999), Escobar (1995), Kapoor (2008). For critiques of mainstream politics of recognition, see Povinelli (2002), Markell (2003), Coulthard (2007), Tully (2008a, 1995), Hanssen (2000), Düttmann (2000). politics from above and from below, these literatures have been less concerned to assert that these two forms of politics are, in principle, incommensurable, than to respond to and contest an increasing consolidation of global political, economic, and military power, and a correspondingly growing gap and disconnect between elite and subordinated groups on many scales, including material well-being, access to and share of power and resources, democratic accountability, and social, economic and political languages, values and priorities. Elites are often so far removed (both literally and figuratively) from subalternized peoples and marginalized populations that the interests and perspectives of the latter are routinely ignored, disregarded, trivialized, taken up only in a tokenistic fashion, or de-radicalized, coopted, and made to fit neatly within ruling frameworks. As such, the relative emphasis of a politics of recognition and self-determination from below tends to be on building or practicing alternative cultures of politics from the ground up, rather than on reforming prevailing institutional norms in order to better manage cultural difference from above.

In this chapter, I attempt to apply this distinction to the politics of recognition and self-determination by sketching out some key differences between a politics of recognition and self-determination from above and from below. Of course, I sketch out only one of many possible ways of articulating these differences. Because the top-down

approach is the more prevalent one in the literature, my primary aim here is to use the contrast between these approaches to provide an articulation of the less familiar bottom-up approach and to initiate a discussion of its distinctive features and contributions. My discussions of how recognition is understood from each perspective and how self-determination is understood from each perspective begin and end the chapter respectively (Sections One and Four). In between, I articulate some intermediary and interrelated concepts, and explain how each tends to be taken up by the top-down and bottom-up approaches. Section Two deals with the concepts of freedom and power (and the relationship between them), and Section Three discusses their respective understandings of cultural claims and cultural diversity. By articulating each of the two approaches in relation to recognition, freedom, power, cultural claims, cultural diversity, and self-determination, I hope to show that the approach from below poses some important challenges to the conventional top-down approaches, especially by exposing the limits and blindspots of the latter with respect to many forms of subaltern, non-liberal and counter-hegemonic politics, and as such deserves to be taken seriously by theorists of recognition and self-determination.

3.2 Two Understandings of Recognition

Recognition from above is a form of liberal-democratic politics that conceptualizes recognition as a form of cultural justice that is bestowed by the state in the form of institutional rights, accommodations, affirmations, or representation to minority cultural groups²¹. By this approach, recognition is something that is owed to cultural groups as a means to some other higher universal good, such as individual autonomy (Kymlicka 1995a;

2007), dignity (Taylor 1994), respect (Honneth 1995; 2007; Fraser and Honneth 2003), or participatory parity (Fraser 2009; Fraser and Honneth 2003). Because their cultural specificities are ignored, hindered, threatened, marginalized, or disparaged, these groups

For several collections of articles focussed largely on the politics of recognition from above, see Gutmann

(1994), Kymlicka (1995b), Eisenberg and Spinner-Halev (2005), Laden and Owen (2007). experience some denial or violation of one or more of the universal goods above. Forms of recognition are required to compensate or correct for these harms—harms that are primarily symbolic in nature—with the end result that cultural groups are able to retain their cultural particularities without being denied the universal goods that are owed to all people.

Two prominent examples of this approach to recognition are offered by Will Kymlicka and Nancy Fraser. For Kymlicka (1995a, 2007), cultural recognition is needed in order to protect and promote individual autonomy. Because culture provides the context for meaningful choice-making, cultural rights are needed to protect and sta-

bilize the systems of meaning individuals require in order to be autonomous beings. Self-government rights, polyethnic rights, and special representation rights can all be used, then, as institutional mechanisms for the recognition of cultural difference. For Fraser (1997, 2009; Fraser & Honneth 2003), recognition is the dimension of social justice that addresses cultural injustices, or injustices located within the social patterns of interpretation, evaluation and communication that render certain individuals less capable of being full participants in society than others. Forms of recognition of cultural or identity-related differences are warranted in order to uphold the principle of participatory parity, according to which social arrangements must permit all individuals to participate as full and equal peers in social life.

Recognition from below, on the other hand, starts from a very different understanding of recognition. Rather than beginning with a normative understanding of recognition as an institutional goal to be demanded or fought *for* by appealing to a single normative good, this orientation begins with an ontological understanding of recognition as something to be struggled *over* in any social or political relation. Recognition, here, is primarily understood not as a right or a form of accommodation offered by or demanded of the state, but as an irreducible dimension of all relations of power and governance. All such relations involve norms of mutual recognition by which the actors involved recognize themselves and each other in any number of ways (often simultaneously)—as masters, slaves, women, men, equals, parents, children, workers, gays, citizens, the poor, terrorists, consumers, Christians, Kurds, francophones, indigenous peoples, colonizers, humans, individuals, bosses, atheists, prisoners, and so on (endlessly). This recognition dimension is implicated in any contest over prevailing social norms, as those involved struggle over and through the modes of mutual recognition intertwined with the norms in question. Even when a contest is focussed on material or structural issues, the forms of mutual recognition that mediate the material relations in question are either appealed to, challenged, or modified as part of the contest. As James Tully summarizes this alternative approach to recognition:

...it is more accurate to start with ‘struggles over recognition’ in the ‘broad’ or ‘ontological’ sense to refer to the ‘recognition dimension’ of any type of struggle over prevailing norms of recognition and their effects in the realm of distribution and redistribution (and in *any* field in which humans recognise each other and interact under various descriptions), and then narrow the reference as the specific cases under consideration warrant. (Tully 2008a, 294; original italics)

This understanding of recognition from below helps to bring into view the infinite multiplicity of forms of recognition and struggles over recognition that occur in all realms of social life—from the most public to the most private, the most powerful to the most subalternized—and to provincialize the statist, liberal-democratic form of recognition (recognition from above) as only one form among many (always shifting) forms of recognition. Furthermore, by understanding ‘recognition’ as only one dimension of any political struggle, this approach emphasizes that subaltern and counter-hegemonic forms of politics “must engage with both material and discursive relations simultane-

ously” in order to address both the subjective and structural aspects of hegemonic power relations (Jefferess 2008; see also Coulthard 2007 and Tully 2008a)22.

3.3 Two Understandings of Freedom & Power

The top-down approach to the politics of cultural difference treats recognition as a type of freedom to be demanded of, and provided by, the state. Whatever universal good is ultimately being appealed to, the harm being inflicted in cases of cultural injustice is regarded as a type of unfreedom—the inability of an individual or group to live the (culturally particular) life they want to live. In many ways, this unfreedom is related to being a minority culture in relation to a majority culture. In Iris Young’s words, recognition claims are claims for “freedom of cultural expression”. In Young’s account of this approach,

Persons suffer specifically culture-based injustice when they are not free to express themselves as they wish, associate with others with whom they share forms of expression and practices, or to socialize their children in the cultural ways they value, or when their group situation is such that they bear significant economic or political cost in trying to pursue a distinctive way of life. (2007: 63)

To overcome this unfreedom and the forms of power that cause it, cultural groups appeal to the state to use its power to protect and provide the conditions for cultural freedom. In order to “guard the autonomy of their ways of life and value systems” and to “preserve and protect

This is not to say that material and discursive, or structural and subjective, relations can somehow be neatly separated or disentangled from one another. Clearly, each has significant enabling and constraining effects on the other, so they are always mutually implicated. their cultural specificities,” cultural groups seek “legal recognition and resource allocations from the state and its agencies” (Benhabib 2002: viii, 1).

This way of conceptualizing the politics of recognition tends to rely on a fairly traditional liberal understanding and problematic of power and freedom, in which the coercive power of the state is used to limit other forms of power which threaten the freedom of autonomous individuals, and to thereby establish a protected sphere of freedom. More substantively, the state may also have to provide the more positive or enabling (pre)conditions for freedom which ensure that culturally diverse citizens have equal, meaningful opportunities or capabilities to choose their lives for themselves. By this approach, individuals (and the groups that they form) ought to be free to be who they are and to live their lives as they see fit; if there are forces (including those wielded by the state itself) that repress, distort, hinder, or otherwise prevent this, then the state should step in to prevent or compensate for this hindrance by providing positive or negative protections to the unfree individual or group.

Power, then, is in many ways treated as a substance that can be structured or arranged from the top down in order to establish freedom. Although freedom is usually

understood here as a kind of opportunity concept that begins where the coercive, determining force of power ends, it is nonetheless a kind of juridical or legislative product of the power of the state, because it is this power that serves as freedom's guarantor. Cultural freedom, then, is something 'owed' and 'granted' by the state, and is therefore dependent on the latter; after all, it is the state that provides either the necessary preconditions or a necessary layer of protection for the survival of cultural difference. And because state power is largely treated by this approach as a determining force that is performed as it is imagined, freedom is taken to be achieved here once it appears in state law/legislation, policy, or institutional arrangement. This is precisely why, as Young points out (critically), "Most of the issues that arise both in theoretical writing and public discussion about the politics of cultural difference concern state policy, regulation, or the organization of state institutions" (2007: 84). The main question that arises within top-down approaches to recognition, she argues, is "what shall the state permit, support, or require, and what shall it discourage or forbid?" (2007: 84)

The bottom-up approach tends to begin from a rather different understanding of freedom and power. As with the concept of recognition, this approach initially defers a normative, institutional understanding of freedom in favour of a broader, ontological sense of the term. Here, freedom is understood as permanently coupled with, rather than oppositional to, power, and power is, in turn, understood as a co-operative or interactive, rather than strictly coercive and determining, relation among actors. In recent years, Foucault has perhaps provided the most influential account of this alternative understanding of freedom and power. Because of the centrality of Foucault's views to the bottom-up forms of postcolonial politics with which I am most concerned, I will examine them at length in Chapter 4. For now, however, let it suffice to say that Foucault clearly differentiates his notion of power from the more statist, liberal notion, declaring that power is neither a "substance," nor a "mysterious property" (1994a: 324); rather, it is a certain type of "relationship in which one person tries to control the conduct of the other" (1994b: 292). Power does not act directly upon others, but operates at a distance, upon the actions of others. As such, implicit in this understanding of power is its permanent coupling with at least some degree of freedom. Despite the oppositional relationship that is often attributed to them by the top-down approach, Foucault contends that "there is not a face-to-face confrontation of power and freedom as mutually exclusive facts (freedom disappearing everywhere power is exercised)"; rather, freedom is permanently coupled with power, serving as "the condition for the exercise of power (at the same time its precondition, since freedom must exist for power to be exerted, and also its permanent support, since without the possibility of recalcitrance power would be equivalent to physical determination)" (1994c: 342). Freedom is therefore planted at the heart of power; it is the ontological condition of any attempt by some to conduct the conduct of others. Furthermore, it is this permanent coupling of power and freedom that makes power a co-operative, rather than strictly coercive, relation, as it always entails a degree of consent and compliance of those subject to the power relation²³.

But Foucault's story is further complicated here by the fact that the free subject upon whom power acts is itself shaped by power relations. The resistant subject is not the formal or abstract subject most common in the top-down approach, but a situated subject whose mode of subjectivity is itself constituted within power relations. This is Foucault's paradox of subjectivation: that our very capacities for action and resistance to power relations are themselves enabled and constrained by power relations. As such, this approach not only problematizes the external forces that try to govern our conduct, but the modes of subjectivity by which we govern our own conduct.

Although Foucault's is the most influential recent articulation of this alternative, coupled understanding of freedom and power, it nonetheless has a long history in radical,

By casting power as a *co-operative* relation here, I certainly do not mean to imply that those subject to power relations can simply stand back from the relation and choose whether or not to participate in it in some straightforward way (as in a voluntarist conception). Indeed, this approach recognizes that a central feature of any 'hegemonic' relation, by definition, is that the form of subjectivity (and therefore the desires, choices, etc.) of those subject to the relation is itself implicated in the power relation. counter-hegemonic theory and praxis in the both West and non-West. For example, at roughly the same time as Foucault, Gene Sharp (1973) articulated his consent theory of power, drawing upon the work of the sixteenth century French thinker Étienne de La Boétie. And earlier than both, Marcuse emphasized a similar relation between freedom and power in the opening lines of his *Study on Authority*:

The authority relationship, as understood in these analyses, assumes two essential elements in the mental attitude of he who is subject to authority: a certain measure of freedom (voluntariness: recognition and affirmation of the bearer of authority, which is not based purely on coercion) and conversely, submission, the tying of will (indeed of thought and reason) to the authoritative will of an Other. Thus in the authority relationship freedom and unfreedom, autonomy and heteronomy, are yoked in the same concept and united in the single person of he who is subject. (2008: 7)

Of course, a coupled understanding of freedom and power was developed even earlier by Gandhi, who emphasized the central role of Indians in enabling and maintaining British rule in India. In *Hind Swaraj* and elsewhere, he emphasizes the co-operative aspect of this ruling relation and rejects the coercive understanding of British power: "The English have not taken India; we have given it to them. They are not in India because of their strength, but because we keep them" (1997: 39). And again: "Some Englishmen state that they took, and they hold, India by the sword. Both these statements are wrong. The sword is entirely useless for holding India. We alone keep them" (1997: 41).

Often grounded in the praxis of social movements, thinkers from the bottom-up tradition emphasize this coupled understanding of freedom and power because it highlights the degrees of freedom and power available to those who often feel powerless, and who have little hope of gaining rights and recognition by the state, by calling atten-

tion to the ways in which prevailing power relations rely upon their own consent and co-operation for their maintenance. While these relations often appear coercive and fully determined, the bottomup approach stresses the indeterminate aspects of power, and in doing so reveals much more room for agency, resistance, non-cooperation, and transformation of the power relationship than may initially have been apparent. Rather than being a product of a top-down institutional arrangement, then, freedom here lies within the capacities of the subject itself. As Horsburgh writes in his classic account of Gandhian satyagraha, the oppressed subject “lies under a yoke, but the yoke does not reduce him to complete helplessness. His struggle need not be restricted to the removal of the yoke. Much that he wants to do with the freedom he is seeking can be done, here and now, while he is struggling to win that freedom” (1969: 178).

Indeed, one of the main freedoms available here and now, according to Gandhi, is the freedom to disobey the laws or decrees of the state. While the top-down approach largely occludes the freedom to disobey the state—both by treating freedom as a product of the state, and by treating state power as a determining force—Gandhi suggests that the laws are never fully binding, and are certainly less binding than the dictates of conscience. Top-down approaches often naturalize both fear and the avoidance of pain and suffering as our primary instincts and motivations, which makes the coercive power of law appear binding and determining, and obedience appear necessary. By overcoming fear, however, the ‘coercive’ power of the state is largely revealed to be an illusion, and the cooperative aspects of power are brought to light.

Furthermore, by emphasizing an understanding of freedom as a form of situated agency within power relations, rather than as modern, state-based rights and liberties that ostensibly free subjects from the operation of power, the bottom-up approach is better able to keep in view the non-juridical and non-statist forms of power and governmentality that operate around and indeed *through* modern rights and liberties (Ayers 2009; Rose 1999; Dean 1999; Brown 2006). As Wendy Brown argues,

...by formulating freedom as choice and reducing the political to policy and law, liberalism sets loose, in a depoliticized underworld, a sea of social powers nearly as coercive as law, and certainly as effective in producing subjectivated subjects. Indeed, as a combination of Marcusean and Foucaultian perspectives remind us, choice can become a critical instrument of domination in liberal capitalist societies; insofar as the fiction of the sovereign subject blinds us to powers producing that subject, choice both cloaks and potentially eroticizes the powers it engages. (2006: 197)

By understanding that power operates well beyond the formal, institutionalized power of the state, the bottom-up approach brings into view a much wider spectrum of power relations, and foregrounds the ability to challenge, call into question, and perhaps even re-constitute these relations by transforming both the discursive and material dimensions of them. These power relations are regarded as permeating all aspects of everyday life, including potentially the very form of subjectivity that constitutes the resistant subject. Unlike the top-down approach which largely relies upon a formal, juridical picture of an autonomous, choosing subject, the bottom-up approach

problematizes the very form of the subject as a site of power. This is why a cultural politics from below goes well beyond the institutional scale of the nation-state and the problem of cultural accommodation and integration, to include the transnational problem of cultural imperialism and its relations of assimilation (Tomlinson 1991). Gandhi, for example, does not simply want Indians to recognize that they have the power/freedom to expel the British, only to end up having “English rule without the Englishman” (1997: 28); rather, Indians must primarily be attentive to the assimilation of their way of life and form of subjectivity by modern civilization, not simply their political subjection to the rule of another.

It is important to note that a normative form of freedom can be understood to follow from the ontological sense of the term described above, one that is directly relevant to the politics of recognition. Tully calls this “dialogical civic freedom,” and describes it as the freedom to “call into question and renegotiate freely the always less-than-perfect norms of mutual recognition to which [partners in practices of governance] are subject, with a minimum of exclusion and assimilation, and...to negotiate reasonably fairly without recourse to force, violence and war” (2008a: 292). This form of freedom is crucial because it emphasizes the ability and protection to call into question any norm of recognition involved in the vast multiplicity of relations of power. Again, this even includes the ability to call into question the operation of particular types of rights and freedoms, as they can themselves, in some cases, become sources of unfreedom and injustice. The approach from below emphasizes that freedom can be practiced without, and in some cases even *against*, dominant institutionalized forms of liberal-democratic freedoms, and thereby opens up horizons and practices of freedom that are not constrained by hegemonic norms, institutions, and forms of subjectivity.

3.4 Two Understandings of Cultural Claims & Cultural Diversity

As we have seen, *cultural claims* are understood by the top-down approach as particularistic claims, made on the state, for autonomous individuals to be free to live as they please. These claims do not challenge or present alternatives to liberal-democratic principles, either with respect to the latter’s content or universality, but rather are presented in terms of them—indeed, they are understood as affirmations of these principles. Indeed the challenge posed by cultural claims from this perspective is that of making compatible “multiculturalist aspirations and liberal-democratic universalism” (Benhabib 2002: 20). Cultural claims are therefore contained claims; they are self-regarding claims on the part of those who make them, not aiming toward any greater social transformation or to make any contribution to the broader principles or norms of society, but simply to be able to live their own lives as they themselves choose. Culture is subordinated here to liberal-democratic norms, principles and in-

stitutions which are themselves regarded or treated as acultural and universal (see Brown 2006). As Nancy Fraser's theory makes clear, cultural claims seek to address harms of misrecognition which are located in the symbolic realm of society, comprised of its relations of language, communication, interpretation and meaning, and rendered distinct from the economic and political spheres. So while the remedies for cultural harms might require political or economic forms of redress, cultural claims themselves do not and cannot present any deep challenge to the economic or political spheres, or what might be regarded as the material structures of society, nor can they challenge the differentiation and disaggregation of social spheres itself. At best, they can only use liberal-democratic norms against themselves to argue for a more expansive and more inclusive liberal-democracy.

Iris Young's work is also interesting to examine in this regard, because although she is more receptive than many to strong cultural claims, she still operates with a distinction between cultural claims and structural claims. Young (2007) draws a distinction between a politics of 'cultural difference', which is concerned with the freedom of cultural expression and the political self-determination of ethnic, religious, and national groups, from a politics of 'positional difference', which is concerned with the equality of structural social groups, or groups that occupy a similar structural position within unequal societal structures due to race, gender, disability, etc. While this distinction may be helpful in some ways, it nevertheless functions to construe cultural claims as distinct from structural claims, and thereby to suggest that cultural claims do not and cannot themselves present (or in fact consist primarily of) deep structural claims, or challenge the very terms in which structural claims are made.

As for *cultural diversity*, theories of recognition from above tend to treat it as a social *fact* that needs to be managed by a liberal-democratic state. Cultural diversity tends not to be valued in itself by these approaches, but only instrumentally toward some other, ostensibly more universal, liberal-democratic good(s). In Kymlicka's own words, "It is the instrumental, not the intrinsic, value of culture that grounds claims for political powers and resources in my liberal theory" (Kymlicka 2001: 62). Indeed culture is valued here only insofar as it contributes to and furthers the autonomy of individuals. If culture needs to be protected in order to ensure the autonomy of individuals, then it ought to be; however, by the same token, if individuals need to be protected *from* culture in order to ensure their autonomy, then they also ought to be: "I have defended the right of national minorities to maintain themselves as culturally distinct societies, but only if, and in so far as, they are themselves governed by liberal principles" (Kymlicka 1995a: 153).

Indeed, an entire second wave of theories of recognition developed in response to Kymlicka's and Taylor's early work in this field, fuelled by a concern that recognition could actually endanger the autonomy of members of cultural groups, rather than protect it. These second-wave theorists of multiculturalism argued that because of the dangers of cultural essentialism and the need to attend to power relations within cultural groups, internal minorities must be protected through various liberal and

democratic mechanisms (Benhabib 2002; Appiah 2005; Phillips 2007; Deveau 2000, 2006; Eisenberg and Spinner-Halev 2005;

Jung 2008; Weinstock 2007; Cohen, Howard and Nussbaum 1999; Shachar 2001). Either explicitly or implicitly, the tone of this second-wave literature tends to take up cultural difference not simply as a *fact* but as a *problem*, that is, as a potential source of illiberality and democratic illegitimacy that needs to be more carefully managed through the separation and prioritization of the political (understood in liberal-democratic terms) over the cultural²⁴.

In other words, to ensure that culture does not become illiberal or undemocratic, culture must be compartmentalized from, and subordinated to, a particular political form, in much the same way that the cultural sphere is compartmentalized from the economic sphere, with the effect that culture is rendered silent on both political and economic questions.

That top-down approaches to cultural recognition tend to take up cultural difference as a social fact and a problem to be managed by the liberal-democratic state is not surprising given that, from the start, the effort to argue for a politics of recognition has been based not in an attempt to take deep cultural difference seriously on its own terms, but to provide an argument for taking it seriously within modern, liberal-democratic terms. To some extent this is a result of the broader Rawlsian and Habermasian problematics of state stability and liberal-democratic legitimation within which much of the debate over cultural recognition from above has taken place. But this attitude is also expressed in the way that cultural

Even when cultural diversity is not conceptualized solely or explicitly in these terms, the general problematic in which it is taken up and addressed by the top-down approach nonetheless tends to treat diversity in this way; that is, it takes up the problem of diversity only insofar as it poses a challenge to the legitimacy, stability, or liberal-democratic principles of the state. Hence the disproportionate attention paid among top-down theorists to a narrow set of ‘difficult’ cultural practices, including female circumcision and the wearing of the turban and hijab, as well as to the particular set of questions surrounding ‘minorities within minorities’. diversity is treated as a problem that can be managed by appealing to a single set of ‘metanormative’ liberal-democratic goods or principles, which are supposedly in every person’s interest, regardless of who they are, what they believe, and how they live, and to which any reasonable person could ostensibly agree. As such, this approach does not take diversity seriously as itself a source of normative pluralism, that is, as a source of diverse ethicalpolitical goods and principles, of which none is able to definitively attain a transcendent or metastatus above all others. Instead, this approach tends to assert that the appropriate solutions and accommodations to cultural diversity can be derived from a normative monism that provides the proper political consensus on substantive and/or procedural principles.

A politics from below, on the other hand, understands cultural claims and cultural diversity quite differently than a politics from above. First, *cultural claims* are not

limited to claims made on a state for the freedom to live out particularistic differences. Rather, cultural claims from below are understood as any practice of calling into question a power relation from the perspective of an alternative set of cultural meanings or practices. These claims are not necessarily claims for state recognition, although they do inevitably involve the recognition dimension of any political claims, including those that address non-statist power relations. By the same token, these cultural claims are not necessarily aimed toward the symbolic realm; because this approach understands culture as encompassing the full scope of everyday life, including both its symbolic and material realms, cultural claims can be equally concerned with material and symbolic issues, structural and subjective, and therefore not necessarily constrained by and subordinated to a higher-order form of politics (or economy). Cultural difference, in other words, can be a source of resistance or alternatives to any kind of power relation, as well as to any specific dimension of a particular power relation.

Furthermore, cultural claims are not understood here as necessarily self-regarding, particularistic claims for one's own autonomy or free expression, but may well be aimed toward a greater contribution to or transformation of shared terms, norms, and institutionalizations of power.

As for *cultural diversity*, the bottom-up approach attempts to take up the deep diversity of ways of life as a *value* or good in itself, rather than as a simple fact or problem. It does not prioritize the search for meta-normative or universal principles upon which a state could appropriately manage cultural diversity from above. Indeed, because it regards the political and the cultural as inseparable, it does not look for a politics to transcend cultural difference. Instead, it seeks to build cultures of politics from the ground up that embrace deep, irreducible pluralism; are committed to cultivating and nurturing the skills, habits, virtues, capabilities, and forms of material relations conducive to living and working together with diverse others; and are grounded in the difficult task of establishing peaceful and flourishing modes of cooperation and negotiation over time from within deep diversity, rather than by recourse to meta-norms that are enforced by an overarching power (Osterweil 2004).

Let me emphasize four aspects of this bottom-up approach to cultural diversity. The first is that this approach avoids construing one tradition as universal and meta-normative, while casting all others as particular. Instead, all normative traditions are approached as *partial*, in two senses of the word: (a) they are each regarded as being committed or oriented in particular ways, situated within particular languages, histories, and contexts, and casting light on and offering key resources and insights into a spectrum of spiritual, ethical, political, economic and social questions and issues; and (b) each is limited or incomplete in its perspective—that is, it is aspectival in its point of view and insights, and can always learn from, and be supplemented by, the practices, articulations and insights of others²⁵. Rather than conceptualizing the field of diversity as consisting of a single universal and many particulars, then, this perspective regards diversity as consisting of many universals and many particulars, with universality re-conceptualized here as a particular and aspectival perspective on

the universal, rather than as a doctrine with universal validity or a universal foundation. The universal is maintained here as a scale of the object of representation (the universe), rather than as a scale of the legitimacy of the foundation of that representation. Without eliminating universals, bottom-up approaches simply recast universals as multiple and situated—that is, as *diverse*. As Judith Butler argues, to say that the universal is culturally variable

...is not to say that there ought to be no reference to the universal or that it has become, for us, an impossibility. On the contrary. All it means is that there are cultural conditions for its articulation that are not always the same, and that the term gains its meaning for us precisely through these decidedly less than universal conditions. (2002: 45-6)

Similarly, as Esteva and Prakash argue: “There is a legitimate claim to ‘universality’ intrinsic in every affirmation of truth. However, people who dwell in their places do not identify the limits of their own vision with that of the human horizon itself” (1998: 28). Such an aspectival view on the situatedness, partiality, and diversity of universals is nicely captured by Walter Mignolo’s term “diversality” (2000), or Esteva and Prakash’s concept of a “pluriverse” (1998).

To suggest that all traditions are regarded as partial in these two senses is not to suggest that we can assume a detached, bird’s eye view of these diverse traditions and transcend our partiality in the first sense. Any secondorder, aspectival awareness we develop with respect to our own traditions and those of others remains deeply situated and enmeshed in the traditions to which we belong.

Second, from this bottom-up perspective, the normative monism of the top-down approach is viewed as a key barrier to developing an aspectival awareness of universals, because it encourages the parochialism and chauvinism that comes with evaluating all situations, traditions, practices, and cultures by a single, pre-determined ‘universal’ standard, comprised of a delimited set of goods. Such monisms foreclose an appreciation of the diverse ethico-political goods—and their many expressions, practices, and manifestations—that motivate beings in every culture and society, and therefore serve as a barrier to dialogue and mutual understanding.

For the bottom-up approach, then, the liberal-democratic horizon is not regarded as a privileged horizon in relation to all others that provides the universal, rationally necessary, or optimal rules for peaceful co-existence in the midst of diversity. In the words of Stuart Hall, “liberalism is not the ‘culture that is beyond cultures’ but the culture that won: that particularism which successfully universalized and hegemonized itself across the globe” (2000: 228). As such, the bottom-up approach regards liberalism and liberal-democracy as one family of ethico-political languages among many, but also one that wields a great deal of hegemonic and assimilative power over others. This approach recognizes, then, both the imperial and emancipatory scripts of liberal-democracy, and the way that these scripts together serve to subalternize other ethico-political languages. It also rejects the notion that liberal-democracy has a monopoly on values such as autonomy, respect for difference, individuality, and an appreciation for

diversity, and contends that that these or functionally similar goods (along with many others) are manifest, both in theory and practice, within various normative traditions.

Third, to say that the bottom-up approach treats diversity as a general value rather than as a problem is not to say that this approach is relativistic or does not recognize the inevitability or even importance of limits on diversity. Diversity is understood, by this family of approaches, as one good among others, and will, like all goods, be balanced against others. Surely, then, even when diversity is valued, each situated perspective will approach and recognize particular differences and forms of diversity in a spectrum of ways, ranging from celebration, appreciation, inclusion, empathy and understanding, curiosity and inquiry, to toleration and co-existence, indifference, agonism and disagreement, and antagonism. Each will draw its line in a different place with respect to the limits of diversity (which will itself then be a perpetual source of disagreement among and within various perspectives and traditions). Esteva and Prakash argue that what is important here, then, is an ethos of intercultural hospitality:

This hospitality to another culture, daring audaciously to re-cognize it in its radical difference and therefore to respect it, demands profound humility; to re-cognize one's own limits, the scope of every form of intelligibility of the world. It requires learning to see the other culture, without necessarily admiring it. (1998: 129)

In a similar vein, William Connolly suggest that an “ethos of engagement” (1999, 2005), is crucial to approaching pluralism or diversity as a good. This ethos involves the cultivation of “relational self-modesty and presumptive generosity” within oneself and one's communities when engaging with other creeds, practices, and ways of life. It also involves developing an understanding of, and a willingness to publicly acknowledge, the “comparative contestability” of elements of one's own doctrines, values, practices and beliefs, and to address the past and/or present relations with other groups (including structural and symbolic relations) that have served to colonize, marginalize, disparage, negate, silence, ignore, or harm them. And it involves the cultivation of skills, virtues and capacities to trust, dialogue, negotiate and cooperate with diverse others, instead of requiring that all others agree, in advance, to a necessary set of ground-rules, principles, and/or doctrines.

Finally, rather than treating the state as the primary agent in relation to cultural diversity the politics of cultural diversity from below is taken up as a challenge to individuals, groups and communities to build, from the ground up, the sort of lived, practical orientation toward diversity described above. The challenge here is to cultivate an ethical relation to diversity and difference; what such a relation will look like in particular cases, including the kinds of practices in which this relation will be manifest, will differ according to different cultures, traditions and perspectives. When particular differences do give rise to tension and conflict, as they surely will, the bottom-up approach does not prioritize an appeal to the law, state institutions, or other forms of coercion as the primary means to handle disputes, nor does it look to transcend difference in those moments. Instead, this approach prioritizes mutual translation and dialogue across difference, but perhaps even more importantly, it encourages each ac-

tor to live up to the best in his/her own ethical tradition in order to find ways to go on and to move the relationship forward. This approach is committed, then, to a form of vigilant, but nonetheless deeply diverse, ethical practice that seeks to disarm others, engender trust, transform relationships, and overcome impasses. In short, cultivating diverse cultures of living ethically in relation to diverse others is therefore prioritized to using the law to compel adherence to the proper limits of diversity.

Gandhi's arguments are again relevant here. Throughout *Hind Swaraj*, and in particular in his discussion of the relations between Hindus and Muslims, Gandhi expresses great disdain for the idea of going outside of the actual relationship between Hindus and

Muslims and appealing to an impartial third party who is to administer justice amongst them. Such an appeal is a shameful sign of enslavement to modern civilization: "The fact is that we have become enslaved, and, therefore, quarrel and like to have our quarrels decided by a third party" (1997: 54). Rather than appeal to a third party, Hindus and Muslims should look to the best of their own traditions and attempt to live up to it: "If everyone will try to understand the core of his own religion and adhere to it, and will not allow false teachers to dictate to him, there will be no room left for quarreling" (56). When quarrels do arise, the parties in the dispute should remain committed to staying within the relationship, and working to diffuse the conflict through ethical practices toward one another: "When men become obstinate, it is a difficult thing. If I pull one way, my Moslem brother will pull another. If I put on a superior air, he will return the compliment. If I bow to him gently, he will do it much more so, and, if he does not, I shall not be considered to have done wrong in having bowed" (55). In short, rather than seeking to overcome conflict by transcending the differences between normative traditions through an appeal to a third party or independent standard, Gandhi's approach emphasizes modes of cooperation across difference and forms of ethicality that nonetheless remain rooted within the distinct normative traditions of those participating in the relationship (Skaria 2002).

3.5 Two Understandings of Self-Determination

Lastly, the top-down approach understands self-determination as the strongest form of recognition claim (Kymlicka 1995a). By this view, certain kinds of collectivities—especially distinct nations, peoples or societal cultures—deserve not simply to be accommodated or recognized within existing institutions, but have certain rights to govern themselves and their land through their own institutions of governance, as well as through shared institutions to which they have consented. Self-determination or self-government is constitutively understood here as a claim against a colonial or imperial form of rule; in other words, for a distinct nation or people to be ruled over without their consent is understood to constitute an imperial relation, and conversely, for such a nation or people to gain institutional powers of self-determination and rights

to self-government is understood as the overcoming of this imperial relation. As such, the central issues of this kind of politics of self-determination pertain to the questions of who rules, and who ought to rule. Whereas in weaker claims for recognition from above the goal is often to gain particular rights or freedoms within existing institutions, in claims for self-determination from above the key goal is for a nation or people to gain the formal institutionalized powers to rule over itself, and to gain recognition as a self-determining people both by the former imperial power and under international law²⁶.

Together these elements of self-determination from above comprise one of the main branches of the modern ‘liberation’ orientation to anti-imperialism. This orientation focuses on the attainment of some kind of end-state or telos, usually in the form of a

26 It is important to note here that the institutionalized form of self-determination from above, however, is itself not particularly open to the self-determination of the groups fighting for it. Rather, in order to be recognized under international law, self-determination must take a largely modular institutional form, consisting of representative democracy, a market economy, and a standard constitutional bundle of liberal, democratic and market rights and freedoms. This form of self-determination is underpinned and supported by a combination of normative institutional languages of modernization, development, liberalization and democratization that cast the Western-style state, civil society and economic system as the necessary institutional framework for selfdetermination and the proper political telos for all societies. For the history of this narrowing of selfdetermination under international law, see Anghie 2004, Koskeniemi 2002, Tully 2008b. political/institutional status or entitlement that is regarded as essential to being a fully free and equal subject. This orientation tends to focus on imperialism as a form of institutional, structural, and/or material constraint or domination, and often seeks to seize modern forms of institutionalized power in order to overcome this constraint. This orientation also tends to abstract away from questions of ethics or subjectivity, because the political or institutional ends sought are usually construed as second-order goods—that is, as universals that are needed regardless of your form of subjectivity or ethics, or in fact, for every form of subjectivity or ethics. Furthermore, this orientation tends to place less significance on the means used to achieve the desired telos than on the telos itself, treating the means as secondary and as largely instrumental to the final goal.

Self-determination from below, on the other hand, while still understanding self-determination to be constituted against an imperial relation, approaches it not as a particular institutional telos, but as a kind of ethico-political practice. This ethico-political orientation to anti-imperialism takes up imperialism primarily as an assimilating and destructive ‘way of life’, rather than as a form of structural or institutional constraint. This approach—which can be found in many culturalist movements against imperialism, as well as in many strands of feminist and environmental struggles, anarchist, cooperative and peace movements, and indigenous struggles—begins from the traditional ethical question of ‘how ought I/we to live?’, but does not see this as a

‘private’ question that is detached from the broader political or economic organization of a society. It is attentive to the fact that imperialism often operates by shaping the self-understandings, forms of subjectivity, and daily practices—that is, the way of life—of the imperialized, and as such, this orientation does not seek to simply mimic, imitate, or be included into the nominal universals of the imperialists; rather, this approach aims to affirm and practice an alternative, non-imperial form of subjectivity as a mode of resistance. The ethico-political orientation tends to be characterized, then, by an emphasis on transforming one’s practices and goods/values in a way that protects or brings into being an alternative way of life. This approach collapses the means-ends distinction by focussing on directly practicing or ‘being’ the change one wants to see through prefigurative or transformative practices. Because of its emphasis on actualizing, in the here-and-now, an alternative, non-hegemonic way of life, form of subjectivity, or ethico-political good(s), I will call this type of self-determination from below a form of ethico-political *actualism*.

Let me compare four key aspects of this practice of self-determination from below to self-determination from above. First, just as self-determination from above often takes the form of a strong case of recognition from above, self-determination from below often takes the form of a strong case of recognition from below. As we saw earlier, the politics of recognition from below is understood ontologically as including all struggles over the norms of mutual recognition, which constitutes only one aspect or dimension of all struggles over social norms. Practices of self-determination from below often arise in strong cases of such struggles over the norms of mutual recognition in which: (a) the norms of mutual recognition become deeply sedimented and entrenched; (b) they are experienced as deeply alien and/or demeaning by those subject to them; (c) they are deeply and inextricably tied to, and complicit with, unjust material or structural relations; (d) they are deeply corrupted and coopted, such that the immanent critique of these norms in accordance with the public goods inherent in them produces no results, and in fact serves to perpetuate and strengthen the pernicious norms; and/or (e) the imperative to appeal to the particular public goods inherent in the prevailing norms is itself regarded as part of the problem, as these goods are part of a limited, imposed, hegemonic, and assimilative framework that does not and cannot adequately and accurately recognize the subjects involved.

In these cases, subjects often resort to practices of self-determination in which they:

(a) attempt to disengage from or not cooperate with the power relationship that is regulated by the norms in question; (b) work on themselves individually or collectively to undo or repair the damage inflicted by the pernicious norms and to build up the strength, courage and capacity for (a); (c) focus on building alternative relationships governed by better norms, often on a smaller, more local, or more informal scale; and/or (d) engage in a deep, long-term struggle to transform the pernicious norms in question, either through revolutionary struggle or continual modification and reform. These are just some of the kinds of ethico-political practices of self-determination that often arise in deep or radical struggles over the norms of mutual recognition. But the

key point here is that those who are without institutional power and/or without hope of attaining it, or those who deeply resist the hegemonic power structures, often must begin with smaller-scale, localized practices of self-determination. As Vandana Shiva argues, when large-scale structures and processes are controlled by the dominant power, small-scale responses become necessary and powerful “in rebuilding living cultures and living democracies because small victories can be claimed by millions. The large is small in terms of the range of people’s alternatives. The small is large where unleashing people’s energies are concerned” (2005: 183).

Second, I want to suggest that this actualist approach to self-determination introduces a new *scale* of normativity and political action, beyond the universal-particular binary that characterizes top-down forms of recognition and self-determination. According to the latter, as we have seen, liberal-democratic norms (including the autonomy and self-determination of individuals and peoples) are universal, whereas the specific contents of cultures are particular. In contrast to this top-down approach, I argued earlier that approaches from below situate all universals within particular forms of life, thereby re-casting the field of cultural difference as a field of diverse universals and particulars. Here I want to go even one step further by suggesting that while forms of self-determination from below (or actualism) may indeed be motivated or oriented by truth claims with universal content, the mode of political action at work here does not demand an answer to the key question which, from the topdown perspective, lies at the heart of the issue of scale, and of the universal/particular binary more specifically. This is the question of *jurisdiction*: To whom do these norms this apply? Who is to be subjected to these norms? Over whom can these norms be legitimately enforced?

Because self-determination from below is not built around these questions of jurisdiction, legislation and enforcement, it is in many ways able to move beyond the binary of universal and particular that these questions impose. After all, actualists are not seeking to impose their truth claims universally on others, but rather primarily aim to experiment with them in their own practices and lives; at the same time, however, they do not necessarily intend for this type of practice and the goods to which it is oriented to remain solely their own, or *particular* to them. Rather, the very reason for experimenting with these practices and goods is that they may well prove to express a good that reaches beyond themselves, in which case the hope would be that such practices would spread or continue to develop into increasingly complex forms of social organization. I want to suggest, then, that the scale of political action here is better understood as neither universal, nor particular, but as *common*.

The notion of a *common* scale of political action and normativity relies upon two different senses of this term: first, the sense of being *shared*, and second, the sense of being *frequent, familiar, or widespread, without necessarily being universal*. An actualist mode of political action relies on the common scale, then, because it seeks to actualize a way of being that is neither understood to be radically particular, nor presumed in advance to be universal. Furthermore, the shift to the common downscales the scope of normative judgement, suggesting that even if our conceptions of truth have a universal

character, our normative judgements are better focussed on those relations of power with which we are most closely related and familiar, and over which we can exercise the most direct control. Human knowledge, intelligence, and judgement, by this view, have limits, and tend to become more and more distorted and inappropriate the further they get from the ethico-political worlds and cultures in which they are rooted and immersed. As Esteva and Prakash argue, there is a certain arrogance and hubris involved in modern forms of ‘global thinking’ that exceeds “the proportion and scale that humans can really understand, know and assume responsibility for the consequences of their actions and decisions upon others” (1998: 23). As such, for practices of self-determination from below, the key scale of political action and normative judgement is the realm of the familiar, the realm that one immediately inhabits and shares with those around her/him, the realm of everyday life in which one participates directly, in which one’s practices are embedded, and in which one can both take responsibility and be held accountable for one’s practices.

Third, self-determination from below does not regard the institutional bundle that constitutes self-determination from above as the overcoming of imperialism. Rather, the bestowal of this institutional form of self-determination is viewed as the very basis of a contemporary form of (informal) imperialism. As Tully explains,

The protection of self-determination and democratic government under international law and the exercise of powers of self-determination and democratic self-rule are internal to informal post-colonial imperialism, at least in their present form. They are literally the two main ways by which the conduct of subaltern states is governed by informal imperial rule: that is, through supporting, channelling and constraining their self-determining and democratic freedoms. (2008b: 153)

By this view, older forms of colonial imperialism have, in many cases, transitioned to a postcolonial, informal imperialism by recognizing the right of self-determination of colonized peoples, and by then structuring the field of possibilities of self-determining subjects through an extensive system of economic, military, and cultural inducements and constraints. Not only does self-determination from above co-exist with imperialism, then, but the formal ‘free and equal’ status that it grants functions to legitimize these informal imperial relations by making them appear non-imperial. As such, from the perspective of self-determination from below, “the dominant forms of representative democracy, self-determination and democratisation promoted through international law are not alternatives to imperialism, but, rather, the means through which informal imperialism operates against the wishes of the majority of the population of the post-colonial world” (Tully 2008b, 158).

Fourth, rather than emphasizing the seizure of formal powers of self-determination, the bottom-up approach emphasizes the transformation of power relationships. As we saw earlier, power is understood here not as a *substance* to be possessed and wielded, but as a *relation* among actors in which some act on the actions of others. As such, self-determination from below focuses less on appropriating institutional power in the

traditional sense than on transforming power relations by disrupting the hegemonic norms that conduct one's conduct

(by conducting oneself differently) and/or by working to modify or transform these norms in accordance with alternative ethical-political goods. While this approach is not predominantly oriented to an institutional or structural telos in the same way as the liberation orientation, this is not to say that it is not concerned with social structures or institutions. Rather, it is to say that this approach regards social structures not as independent forces that structure human action, but as themselves constituted by an infinite array of localized practices, continuously performed and reiterated by subjects who are capable of re-orienting their actions, and in the process re-structuring society. As such, the priority here is on social change, that is, on transforming the very ground of practices in which institutions are rooted, rather than on using institutional power to impose or graft social change onto populations from the top-down. Indeed, by this view, institutional change that is acquired in the absence of deeper ethical and social change tends to just re-inscribe the central features of the imperial or other power relations that were called into question. However, institutional change that is a product of deeper ethical and social transformations tends to be more meaningful, substantive, and robust. As such, self-determination from below treats social change as both politically and temporally prior to institutional change.

To summarize: while both self-determination from above and from below understand self-determination in contrast to an imperial relation, the former approaches imperialism as a specific ruling relation or structure of rule, whereas the latter approaches it as a more general power relation penetrating the whole way of life. As such, the bottom-up approach places greater emphasis on ethico-political practices of self-determination and self-rule as the most basic component of an anti-imperial praxis, rather than on institutional forms of self-determination from above. This approach recognizes that, in a world that is deeply interconnected and shaped by a long history of imperial relations, imperialism does not end with the attainment of a formal, institutional space of self-rule; after all, relations of exploitation, dependency, and assimilation work around and through such spaces. As such, the web of relationships, forms of knowledge and subjectivity, and habits and practices that penetrate these spaces must be rebuilt, from the ground up, in a non-imperial fashion, and through ethico-political practices that are neither immediately particular nor universal. Through these practices of self-determination, actors can work to actualize (either by prefiguring, transforming or creating) new power relations by conducting themselves differently within and against prevailing norms, constraints and inducements. Such practices can include a broad range of activities, including self-transformation, transformation of direct relationships with others, and transformation of societal norms and structures. Glen Coulthard writes of this form of self-determination from below among some indigenous peoples and activists in Canada:

...the strategies and tactics adopted by a growing number of today's Indigenous activists — in reserve settings like Grassy Narrows and Six Nations, or in the urban centers of Vancouver, Winnipeg, and Toronto — have begun to explore the emancipa-

tory potential that this type of politics offers; a politics that is less oriented around attaining an affirmative form of recognition from the settler-state and society, and more about critically revaluating, reconstructing, and redeploying culture and tradition in ways that seek to prefigure, alongside those with similar ethical commitments, a radical alternative to the structural and psycho-affective facets of colonial domination... (2007: 456)

Self-determination from below, then, serves an important part of contemporary anti-imperial praxis, whether in relation to more traditional settler-colonial imperialism, or informal imperialism, because it emphasizes practices *of* self-determination, rather than struggles *for* a form of self-determination that has been incorporated into contemporary imperialism.

Once again, it may be helpful to relate contemporary forms of this anti-imperial praxis to the historical example of Gandhi, who developed one of the most recognizable forms of anti-imperialism in which the primary threat of imperialism is understood to be a holistic way of life, and that privileges practices *of* self-determination over struggles *for* institutional self-determination. For Gandhi, the achievement of the most common sense of swaraj—institutionalized Indian self-determination or home-rule—was desirable only if paired with (and in many ways subordinated to) a second sense of swaraj—practices of selfrule or ethical mastery over the mind and passions that actualized an alternative Indian civilization against the trappings and shortcomings of what he called modern civilization²⁷.

As described earlier, Gandhi felt that most of his Indian contemporaries—or at least those of the elite variety—wanted the first form of self-rule without the second; that is, they simply wanted “English rule without the Englishman” (1997: 28). Gandhi, on the other hand, saw the second form of self-rule as most important: “*Real* home-rule is self-rule or self-control” (1997: 118, italics added). Self-rule does not even require the expulsion of the British, for if Indians would simply “revert to their own glorious civilisation, either the English would adopt the latter and become Indianised or find their occupation in India gone” (1997: 7). The “sword of ethics”, for Gandhi, is stronger than any form of political rule (1997: 69). David Jefferess summarizes Gandhi’s notion of swaraj as follows:

Gandhi’s reformulation of swaraj does not produce liberation as the end product of a teleology of struggle or revolution but as a way of being...Swaraj is not just a political ideal but a practice of consciousness; the transformation of social and political structures requires the transformation of Indian (and ultimately human) values, ideals, and ways of understanding the world.

Gandhi’s views were very complex and changed over time, but here I focus on the early form of antiimperialism he articulates in *Hind Swaraj*.

Swaraj, therefore, is an individual and a social aim that is not so much a utopian ideal state but an ever-present practice. (2008: 107)

Because the emphasis for Gandhi is on a form of self-rule that is an immediate form of practice, rather than a future goal or political end-state, his approach closes

the gap between means and ends that is so characteristic of modern forms of politics. The immediate ‘means’ used (which are no longer simply means at all) constitute and produce the end that is generated over time:

Your belief that there is no connection between the means and the end is a great mistake. Through that mistake even men who have been considered very religious have committed grievous crimes. Your reasoning is the same as saying that we can get a rose through planting a noxious weed. ...there is just the same inviolable connection between the means and the end as there is between the seed and the tree. (1997: 81)

But there are a number of other aspects of Gandhi’s praxis that resonate with our description of self-determination from below, beyond simply his prioritization of self-rule as an ethico-political practice. First, although Gandhi was oriented by and toward a conception of Truth and an ethical-religious code/system (*dharma*) that he clearly regarded as having universal content, his praxis embodied a humility and fallibility toward his ability to know these universals and a corresponding experimental mode of being toward them. The ideas or doctrines that he espoused were not primarily characterized by their universal truth content per se but by their orienting role in Gandhi’s being: “[These views] are mine because I hope to act according to them. They are almost a part of my being” (1997: 10). When a truth appears or dawns on us, the primary goal should be to experiment with it or test it in our own practice: “I, at least, must act up to the light that has dawned on me” (Jack 1994: 334). In trying to ‘act up’ (a phrase that Gandhi uses frequently in his writings) to those forms of truth that appear right or truthful to us at present, we do not immediately seek to legislate or impose these views on others, because we may well turn out to be wrong. As such, in experimenting with forms of truth in our own lives and practices first and foremost, we prioritize self-sacrifice and self-suffering over the suffering of others. This is one of the key advantages of using soul-force rather than body-force:

...if [soul-force] is used in a cause that is unjust, only the person using it suffers. He does not make others suffer for his mistakes. Men have before now done many things which were subsequently found to have been wrong. No man can claim to be absolutely in the right, or that a particular thing is wrong, because he thinks so, but it is wrong for him so long as that is his deliberate judgement. (1997: 91)

Gandhi’s experimental and fallibilistic approach to Truth-seeking in many ways, then, embodies both what I earlier called a form of actualism, and a ‘common’ scale of normativity and political action.

Finally, Gandhi’s mode of self-rule as a form of ethical and experimental practice is applied in several of the ways discussed earlier, including: (a) turning away from the imperial power relationship to focus on fortifying and transformative individual practices of the self, which for him included various dietary practices and practices of celibacy²⁸; (b) turning away from the imperial power relationship to experiment with new forms of communal living and socio-political organization, in the form of the various ashrams or settlements that he helped to establish, as well as the Constructive

Programme which Gandhi developed and viewed as central to the Indian independence struggle²⁹; (c) engaging in practices of training, discipline

For a full account of these practices, see Gandhi's autobiography (1993).

For an excellent analysis of Gandhi's politics of the ashram, see Skaria 2002. For Gandhi's constructive programme, see Gandhi 1997, and for an analysis of the importance of this programme to Gandhi's politics of satyagraha, see Horsburgh 1969. and organization necessary in order to prepare for (d) turning back toward the imperial power relationship and attempting to confront, resist and transform it through satyagraha and the use of soul-force, which may include persuasion, negotiation, strikes, boycotts, non-cooperation, civil disobedience, usurping the functions of government, and/or establishing parallel forms of government.³⁰

3.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have provided one possible account of the key differences between a politics of recognition and self-determination from above and from below. While the former generally takes the perspective of, and is oriented toward the preoccupations of, the state and its agents, the latter generally takes the perspective of, and is oriented toward the preoccupations of, those without institutional power and without much hope of attaining it, and/or those posing deep or radical challenges to dominant institutions, structures, norms and/or subjectivities. I have suggested that the bottom-up approach begins with alternative understandings of recognition, freedom and power that bring into view a much wider array of cultural and political struggles than are noticed by the top-down approach, especially those involving subalterns and non-liberal or radical critiques of society, and emphasizes an alternative normative conception of freedom involving the right to call into question

For an excellent theoretical account of this outward, transformative aspect of Gandhi's praxis, see Jefferess

2008. For detailed accounts of both the theory and practice of satyagraha, see Gandhi 2001 and Bondurant 1988. dominant social norms. Furthermore, the bottom-up approach takes up cultural diversity not as a problem to be managed by the state according to meta-norms, but as a challenge to individuals and communities to build radically pluralistic cultures of politics that involve an aspectual awareness and appreciation of differences, an understanding of the material relations that engender and/or exacerbate tensions across differences, and practices of trustbuilding and co-operation across difference. Finally, the bottom-up approach emphasizes the agency of those subject to power relations, and prioritizes individual and collective practices of self-determination as a form of struggle and social transformation, relative to (and possibly even against) struggles for self-determination from above, understood as a particular institutional telos recognized by international law. I have argued that self-determination from below is a form of ethico-political actualism, in that it seeks to

actualize (prefigure, transform, or create) alternative social norms and relations by practicing and building them from the ground up.

To be clear, drawing a distinction between a politics from above and from below, and exploring the differences between these approaches, does not necessarily entail any argument about their mutual irreconcilability or incommensurability; in many cases it may not only be possible but crucial to reconcile and/or combine a politics from above and from below, and indeed one of the great challenges of our present is to find ways of bridging the best of both traditions³¹. While it is certainly true that these approaches are oriented differently, and have different priorities arising from their different standpoints and horizons of possibility, it is

Of course, this is not to deny that there are some deep differences between these approaches (or more specifically between particular adherents of each approach) on a number of issues that may not be reconcilable, especially regarding the necessity, desirability, and/or role of the state and other large-scale coercive institutions and social structures. Nonetheless also the case that each is, with its respective emphases, better able at present to address certain kinds of questions and issues than is the other. For example, while a politics from below is more attentive to the micro-political operation of power, the agency available to subalternized and marginalized groups, liberal-democratic forms of governmentality, radical challenges to the status quo, and the broader ethical-cultural transformations needed for deep social change, it tends to downplay or bracket a number of other important questions more fully attended to by approaches from above, including how to deal with existing institutions, how to address deep-seated disparities of structural power and the constraining effects these have on micro-political change, how best to design, configure, and maintain the stability of social institutions and large-scale forms of action-coordination, and how to respond to acute, complex, and protracted conflicts and atrocities when they arise.

Nonetheless, paying attention to a distinction between a politics from above and from below is important today because it exposes a growing gap between elite and subordinated groups, and the forms of politics that are arising and consolidating in response to this gap. Paying attention to a politics of recognition and self-determination from below, in particular, is crucial because it sheds light on the praxis of those most marginalized by, and often most resistant to, the prevailing norms and institutions, those whose hardships, practices, capabilities, insights, and movements for change are most often and easily ignored, overlooked, misunderstood or underestimated. Far too often, top-down forms of politics have been guilty of proceeding from monological and monistic theories and forms of knowledge that have not been informed by the realities and perspectives of those at the bottom, yet come to be imposed on all, with the worst off often bearing the greatest burden and having the least say over the reshaping of their lives and communities. This is dangerous not only because it ignores the needs, hardships, insights, and knowledges of many, but also because it polarizes by excluding and by rendering incomprehensible the political claims and actions of many subalterns and counter-hegemonic social movements. This narrowing and obfuscation

of the political field both serves to reinforce the hegemony of prevailing norms, and also hides from view a major site and source of important insights into, as well as innovative and creative attempts to address, pressing social problems. Paying attention to the distinction between a politics from above and from below may help to counteract this ideological function of theory in a continuing age of imperialism.

4. Foucault, Freedom and the Ethics of Autonomy

I cannot conceive of a radical critique which would not be ultimately motivated by some sort of affirmation, acknowledged or not.

–Jacques Derrida (cited in Bernstein 1991: 7)

Recent liberation movements suffer from the fact that they cannot find any principle on which to base the elaboration of a new ethics.

–Michel Foucault (1984c: 343)

4.1 Introduction

As I have suggested in previous chapters, Michel Foucault's work has been central both to attempts to think an anti-imperial or postcolonial politics from below, as well as to the turn to ethics in a great deal of contemporary critical thought. Indeed his imprint on postcolonial studies in particular can hardly be overstated. Foucault was perhaps the single most significant theoretical influence on Edward Said's *Orientalism* (Kennedy 2000: 25), which is itself widely regarded as postcolonial theory's inaugural text. In fact, *Orientalism* and its Foucaultian-inspired problematic of colonial discourse has in many ways served as the touchstone of subsequent postcolonial work, such that many argue "that postcolonial studies has actually defined itself as an academic discipline through the range of objections, reworkings and counter-arguments that have been marshaled in such great variety against Said's work" (Young 2001: 384). Furthermore, Foucault's influence on this field has not only been via Said, but in its own right. Many of the seminal texts in the field have directly engaged with Foucault's work, and many of its central concepts have come from him. As Robert Young writes,

It is not only with respect to discourse that Foucault has been a central theoretical reference point for postcolonial analysis. Whether early or late, so much of Foucault seems to be applicable to the colonial arena—his emphasis on forms of authority and exclusion, for example; his analysis of the operations of the technologies of power, of the apparatuses of surveillance, or of governmentality. (2001: 395)

Clearly, then, the lens of postcolonial studies tends to have a distinctively Foucaultian tint in both its central concepts and preoccupations, as well as in the genealogical method that is so prevalent within this literature.³²

However, just as postcolonial studies has been challenged in recent years with respect to its political orientation (see Chapter 1), Foucault's form of radical critique tends to be rather opaque with respect to its affirmative commitments, and as a result has often been criticized for its normative ambiguity. While Foucault went some ways toward clarifying his normative commitments to some extent in his later work, postcolonial critics are today grappling with the question of what ethical-political commitments to affirm in the midst of a persistent, and in fact resurgent, neo-imperial world order that seems to have co-opted earlier forms of liberation politics (Scott 1999; Loomba et al. 2005; Parekh and Pieterse 1995). What is interesting about examining these two forms of critique together is that while Foucault has been one of the most significant theoretical influences on the field of postcolonial studies, his influence, I will argue, is now at the heart of a tension within that

For a detailed study of Foucault's influence, reception, and circulation in the field of postcolonial studies, see

Nichols 2010. field, surrounding the place of autonomy and liberal-democracy within a postcolonial politics.

This chapter consists of several parts. The first is an examination of the normative horizon of Foucault's form of critique, as articulated in his later works. I want to suggest that in order to understand Foucault's affirmative commitments, it is crucial to understand three analytically distinct, but crucially interrelated, senses of freedom in these works. As such, I will begin by providing a taxonomy of these three senses as a way of explicating the normative framework of Foucault's work. After sketching out these three main senses of freedom in his work, I will then suggest that Foucault's emphasis on individual autonomy as a key value underpinning his form of critique potentially brings his work into a closer relationship with liberal-democratic theory than was previously thought. Finally, relying upon my discussions in earlier chapters about postcolonialism's tense relationship with the hegemony of liberal-democratic thought and the politics of autonomy, I argue that there is now a related tension within postcolonial studies around the role of Foucault's work in helping to think about a postcolonial politics. While some argue that Foucault's turn to ethics in his later work provides some tools for thinking beyond liberal-democracy and the autonomous subject, I argue that the link between his turn to ethics and his commitment to autonomy complicates the degree to which postcolonial thought should turn to Foucault in its own turn to ethico-politics.

4.2 Foucault's Three Freedoms

In response to a number of his critics, Foucault, in his later writings and interviews, reflected on his oeuvre and made more clear and explicit some of the normative problems and commitments that were orienting and motivating his work. In these discussions, Foucault elaborated on concepts such as freedom, autonomy, enlightenment, ethics, the subject, and the will, many of which had not appeared (or appeared rather differently) in his earlier works. Foucault's discussions of the concept of freedom are particularly illuminating with respect to the normative framework he outlines in these later works. I want to argue that Foucault uses the term 'freedom' in (at least) three different senses, and that an understanding of these three interrelated meanings provides a helpful way of understanding what commitments are being affirmed in Foucault's distinctive form of critique.

4.2.1 The First Freedom

Let me begin with a discussion of Foucault's notion of power, which will eventually lead us into a discussion of his first sense of 'freedom'. In his later work, Foucault defines power as "a relationship in which one person tries to control the conduct of the other" (1994b: 292); it is a mode of action that structures "the possible field of action of others" (1994c: 341). As such, for Foucault, power does not act directly upon others; rather, it operates at a distance, upon the actions of others. Implicit in this understanding of power is that the subject whose actions are acted upon is him/herself capable of action. According to him,

A power relationship...can only be articulated on the basis of two elements that are indispensable if it is really to be a power relationship: that "the other" (the one over whom power is exercised) is recognized and maintained to the very end as a subject who acts; and that, faced with a relationship of power, a whole field of responses, reactions, results, and possible inventions may open up. (1994c: 340)

This description of the two elements of the power relationship leads to Foucault's novel definition of freedom (in its first sense), and points toward the non-oppositional relationship that Foucault conceives between power and freedom. In his words:

When one defines the exercise of power as a mode of action upon the actions of others, when one characterizes these actions as the government of men by other men—in the broadest sense of the word—one includes an important element: freedom. Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are "free." By this we mean individual or collective subjects who are faced with a field of possibilities in which several kinds of conduct, several ways of reacting and modes of behavior are available. Where the determining factors are exhaustive, there is no relationship of power: slavery is not a power relationship when a man is in chains, only when he has

some possible mobility, even a chance of escape. (In this case it is a question of a physical relationship of constraint.) (1994c: 341-2)

For Foucault, power and freedom always exist together. Despite the oppositional relationship that is often attributed to them, “there is not a face-to-face confrontation of power and freedom as mutually exclusive facts (freedom disappearing everywhere power is exercised)”; rather, freedom is permanently coupled with power, serving as “the condition for the exercise of power (at the same time its precondition, since freedom must exist for power to be exerted, and also its permanent support, since without the possibility of recalcitrance power would be equivalent to physical determination)” (1994c: 342). As long as the subject has some field of possibilities in front of her/him, if only consisting in the option to kill her/himself, then the subject is still ‘free’ in this first sense of the word (1994b: 292).

Freedom is therefore planted at the heart of power; it is the ontological condition of any attempt by some to conduct the conduct of others. An interesting consequence of this is that power relations are always to some extent “mobile, reversible, and unstable” (1994b: 292). Because it is precisely the *freedom* of another upon which power acts, an element of fluidity is necessarily involved in the power relation; freedom, after all, is a capacity to act that can either be exercised by the subject in a way that supports the power relationship (in which case the possibility of resistance is nonetheless maintained), or it can be exercised in a way that actively confronts or resists the relation of power. “At the very heart of the power relationship, and constantly provoking it, are the recalcitrance of the will and the intransigence of freedom” (1994c: 342).

It is important to notice here that freedom, in this first sense, is not a normative concept for Foucault. ‘Freedom’ is used here, at least on the surface, in a descriptive sense, describing when a subject has the capacity to act, which, for Foucault, is at all times except for when the subject is physically constrained. Stated plainly, freedom is not discussed as a *goal* here, but simply as a *description* of a condition that one either has or does not. Nonetheless, this discussion of freedom certainly raises an important normative question; that is, if freedom is the condition of having the capacity to act, or, in other words, of having a “field of possibilities,” is it better to have this capacity than to not have it at all? Furthermore, and more substantively, is it better to have a wider field of possibilities than a narrower one, to have more options than fewer? In other words, does the *degree* of freedom matter here to Foucault? While Foucault does, in fact, provide a response to these questions, his response cannot be understood using this first sense of freedom alone.

4.2.2 The Second Freedom

Foucault’s characterization of freedom as ‘recalcitrant’ and ‘intransigent’ signals the second sense of the term that can be found in his work. While freedom in the first sense is concerned only with the subject’s capacity to act, rather than *how* the subject acts—

after all, the subject is nonetheless free whether s/he acts in unquestioning support of, *or* in resistance to, a particular power relation—in the second sense, Foucault equates freedom specifically with the questioning or transgression of a power relation. He suggests that “Liberty is a *practice*,” and he identifies ‘practices of liberty/freedom’ with “projects whose aim is to modify some constraints, to loosen, or even to break them” (1984a: 245). Practices of *freedom*, in this second sense, are now contrasted with practices of *subjection*, in that the former are “more autonomous” than the latter (1988: 50). This second understanding of freedom construes freedom as a localized practice that detaches from, and calls into question, particular relations or rules of power: “calling the rule into question in dialogue and contesting it in practice will not be the prolegomenon to freedom but the practice of freedom...itself” (Tully 1999: 137). For this reason, James Tully calls this Foucaultian freedom a “concrete” or “situated” notion of freedom (1999: 98). So while in the first sense of freedom *any* action that is not physically determined could be considered a ‘practice of freedom,’ now only a particular *kind* of practice—that is, a *transgressive* practice—qualifies as such.

Perhaps the clearest example of this second sense of freedom in Foucault’s work arises in his explanation of the term ‘domination’. For Foucault, relations of domination are an intermediate between power relations and relations of physical constraint. While subjects within states of domination remain free in Foucault’s first sense, their ability to transgress the power relation is extremely limited; as such, practices of freedom, now in this second sense, are hindered: the power relations, instead of being mobile, allowing the various participants to adopt strategies modifying them, remain blocked, frozen. When an individual or social group succeeds in blocking a field of power relations, immobilizing them and preventing any reversibility of movement by economic, political, or military means, one is faced with what may be called a state of domination. *In such a state, it is certain that practices of freedom do not exist or exist only unilaterally or are extremely constrained and limited.* (1994b: 283, my italics)

Clearly, in order to understand Foucault’s point in this passage—that domination blocks not the capacity to act itself, but the practices of calling into question the relations of power that could lead to their modification or reversal—we need to understand ‘freedom’ here in Foucault’s second sense of the word. Freedom is now equated with detaching from, challenging, questioning, and/or transgressing a power relation (an attempt to conduct one’s conduct), and domination is actually defined against such practices of freedom; domination exists where practices of *transgression* are impossible or extremely limited.

Notice that this second sense of freedom is not necessarily normative. Clearly, one could define freedom as the localized transgression of particular power relations without endorsing or advocating the occurrence of such transgressions. In his later work, however, Foucault explains that transgression is indeed, for him, a normative commitment. He suggests that “Maybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are but to refuse what we are” (1994c: 336). To this end, he advocates a historico-critical ethos that aims to “separate out, from the contingency that has made us what we are,

the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think” (1994d: 316). He characterizes this ethos as a “limit-attitude” in which “the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them” (1994d: 319). The critical task today is to open up new possibilities for being by finding what is singular, contingent and arbitrary within what is presented to us as universal, necessary and obligatory. In doing so, according to Foucault, we seek “to give new impetus, as far and wide as possible, to the undefined work of freedom” (1994d: 316), which is, perhaps, “the political task that is inherent in all social existence” (1994c: 343).

Recall as well that practices of freedom, in this second sense, are prevented or obstructed by relations of domination. As such, the other side of Foucault’s normative commitment to transgression is a commitment to non-domination. The ethico-political problem facing us, according to Foucault, is not to dissolve all power relations, but to minimize relations of domination:

...power relations are not something that is bad in itself, that we have to break free of. I do not think that a society can exist without power relations, if by that one means the strategies by which individuals try to direct and control the conduct of others. The problem, then, is...to acquire the rules of law, the management techniques, and also the morality, the ethos, the practice of the self, that will allow us to play these games of power with as little domination as possible. (1994b: 298)

By minimizing domination, we help to maximize the reversibility and instability of the power relations that are inevitably at play in our society by maintaining the greatest opportunity to think and act differently than we currently do.

But a lingering normative question remains here: why transgress? In other words, why should we seek to be different than we are? One answer for Foucault here is simply that practices of freedom, or the permanent contestation of relations of power, actually serve to

“control” power relations; that is, they prevent power relations from becoming relations of domination in the first place (1994b: 283-4). Domination can therefore be minimized through the perpetual transgression of power relations. But this answer simply postpones the pressing question, since domination is itself only a problem for Foucault because it prevents transgression. In other words, practices of freedom might be beneficial because they help to ensure that other practices of freedom will be possible in the future, but why is it important to allow for practices of freedom in the first place? Why not simply allow relations of domination to expand and solidify, such that transgression is no longer possible? Why is transgression valuable? Foucault’s response to these questions—and he does offer one—is crucial to understanding his normative vision, and introduces a third sense of freedom into his work.

4.2.3 The Third Freedom

In his later work, Foucault surprised many by making clear his commitment to an ideal of individual autonomy, from which the value of transgression derives. Although he is careful to distinguish his preferred notion of autonomy from the legal or juridical notion, he nonetheless situates his work in a strand of Enlightenment thought committed to “a critique and permanent creation of ourselves in our autonomy” (1994d: 314). For Foucault, the ideal of autonomy is the ideal of inventing oneself, of creating one’s life as a work of art. In his words:

What strikes me is the fact that in our society, art has become something which is related only to objects and not to individuals, or to life. That art is something which is specialized or which is done by experts who are artists. But couldn’t everyone’s life become a work of art? Why should the lamp or the house be an art object, but not our life? (1984c: 350)

Foucault’s autonomous subject is one who “transfigures” his world, not in a denial of reality, but in a “difficult interplay between the truth of what is real and the exercise of freedom” (1994d, 311). Autonomy, then, is not an ideal that is achieved through an escape from relations of power and knowledge, but rather is practiced through creative self-transformation from within these relations.

It is this distinct notion of autonomy, which Foucault calls an “aesthetics of existence” and identifies as a form of “self-mastery,” that I am arguing is the third sense of freedom in Foucault’s work. Foucault’s later work clearly suggests that a subject who is not creating him/herself as a work of art—that is, a subject who is not practicing autonomy—is unfree in a distinctly normative sense, and I want to suggest that this normative commitment to an autonomous subject is the affirmation that infuses his work with its critico-normative force.

To illustrate this point, it is helpful to revisit the earlier two senses of freedom, and to notice how Foucault’s commitment to autonomy actually underpins and provides the criticonormative force to these other (not straightforwardly normative) senses of freedom in his work. Recall that earlier I raised two sets of normative questions, one arising from each of these two earlier senses of freedom. I want to argue that Foucault does provide responses to these questions, but that his responses flow from, and therefore can only be understood in light of, his third, and most clearly normative, sense of freedom. Let me now revisit these questions in reverse order.

With respect to the second sense of freedom—freedom as transgression—I posed the normative question ‘Why is it valuable to transgress?’ I think we can now understand Foucault’s response to this question as flowing from his commitment to the self-creating autonomous subject. In other words, for Foucault the value of transgression is rooted in the value of autonomy. In order to understand why transgression is necessary to living autonomously, it is helpful to understand the difference between Foucault’s autonomous subject and the autonomous subject of legal or juridical discourse. While the legal subject is defined as autonomous when there is an absence of power being

exercised upon him/her (or at least the absence of particular kinds of power relations, such as those involving state institutions), Foucault's autonomous subject is always already within a wide variety of power relations. Autonomy is practiced not by escaping power relations, but through ethical practices of inventing oneself through creative play with the "rules, styles, inventions to be found in the cultural environment" (1988: 51). In a characterization of his own later work, Foucault says:

...if I am now interested in how the subject constitutes itself in an active fashion through practices of the self, these practices are nevertheless not something invented by the individual himself. They are models that he finds in his culture and are proposed, suggested, imposed upon him by his culture, his society, and his social group. (1994b: 291)

Foucault's autonomous subject practices autonomy through a creative mixture of transgression and compliance within the rules of the games in which s/he is constituted but never fully determined. It is in this way, then, that transgression plays a key role in living autonomously for Foucault.

Now turning to the first sense of freedom, I suggested that while his understanding of freedom as the capacity to act—that is, as having a field of possibilities for action—is descriptive rather than normative, it raises a normative question: Is it better to have a wider field of possibility for action than a narrower one? Or more starkly, is it better to have a capacity to act at all, rather than to be in chains? Foucault's response to these questions is clearly yes, and again can be traced back to his commitment to autonomy. If autonomy for Foucault is a matter of creative self-invention within the games of truth, power and subjectivity within which one finds oneself, and if practicing this autonomy to some degree involves transgression or localized practices of freedom, then the *opportunity* to transgress is a key pre-condition of autonomy. As we saw earlier, the political upshot of this for Foucault is the minimization of domination, since domination, by definition, forecloses the opportunity to transgress. As such, particular "liberations" from relations of domination are necessary in order to ensure that the opportunity to transgress remains open. Foucault is clear on this point in the following exchange with an interviewer:

Q. But doesn't the exercise of practices of freedom require a certain degree of liberation?

M.F. Yes, absolutely. ...I agree with you that liberation is sometimes the political or historical condition for a practice of freedom. ...Liberation paves the way for new power relationships, which must be controlled by practices of freedom. (1994b: 283-4)

A key point to notice here is that Foucault's commitment to liberation from relations of domination reveals in his thought not only (what is known in political theory as) an 'exercise' concept of freedom, but also an 'opportunity' concept of freedom³³. Foucault is not simply concerned with the exercise of practices of freedom and autonomy, but also with the opportunity for such practices. For him, a society is freer the less domination it has, and,

For an interesting discussion of the ‘exercise’ and ‘opportunity’ concepts of freedom in Foucault’s work, see the debate between Paul Patton (1989) and Charles Taylor (1989). correspondingly, the more opportunity it allows for individuals to transgress and modify the relations of power within it. In response to a question about the normative implications of his work, Foucault says:

Well, the important question here, it seems to me, is not whether a culture without restraints is possible or even desirable but whether the system of constraints in which a society functions leaves individuals the liberty to transform the system. Obviously, constraints of any kind are going to be intolerable to certain segments of society. The necrophiliac finds it intolerable that graves are not accessible to him. But a system of constraint becomes truly intolerable when the individuals who are affected by it don’t have the means of modifying it. ...these restrictions have to be within the reach of those affected by them so that they at least have the possibility of altering them. (1994e: 147-8)

In another place, but also concerned with the opportunities afforded to individuals, Foucault suggests that one of the key stakes of his work is to enhance the *capabilities* of individuals to live autonomously: “What is at stake, then, is this: how can the growth of capabilities be disconnected from the intensification of power relations?” (1994d: 317).

To return, then, to the normative question I posed earlier with respect to the first sense of freedom, for Foucault it is better for individuals to have a wide field of possibilities, and therefore a high *degree* of freedom in the first sense, as this freedom serves as a condition for transgression and, ultimately, autonomous living. Foucault’s practices *of* freedom are simultaneously practices *for* autonomy.

4.3 Foucault and the Politics of Autonomy

I have sketched out the three main senses of freedom in Foucault’s work because, in my view, an understanding of these three senses and how they are interrelated helps us to understand the normative framework outlined by Foucault in his later work. Clearly, however, this framework remains somewhat vague with respect to Foucault’s more specific ethico-political commitments, an elusiveness for which his work has received much criticism. In response to some of these criticisms, Foucault suggested at various times that further elaboration of his personal commitments was: unnecessary and not of great interest to him; actively hostile to his intentions and in violation of the spirit of his work; or a regrettably underdeveloped aspect of his work requiring further attention. Whatever his reasons for this vagueness—for I believe that at least some of these are good reasons, and that, in any case, this vagueness probably served as an enabling factor for the many strengths and successes of Foucault’s work—my intention is not to try to pigeonhole Foucault into a specific, pre-established political camp. I do want to suggest, however, that very important and interesting questions

remain open with respect to the politics that might flow from the normative commitments that Foucault does discuss; namely, is there a politics that can be associated with Foucault's self-creating, autonomous subject? Is there a politics that would best allow for a minimization of domination and a maximization of his particular form of autonomy?

The political ramifications of Foucault's commitment to autonomy are especially pressing, I want to suggest, for those who are both deeply concerned with political questions, and have been deeply influenced by Foucault's theoretical, historical and methodological work. For in his later work, Foucault made clear that his commitment to autonomy not only influenced his more theoretical writings (as I have just surveyed), but it also played a significant role in the particular genealogies that he decided to conduct, as well as in his particular formulation of the genealogical method itself. First, with respect to the particular genealogies that he conducted, Foucault clarified in his later work that his goal for the last twenty years had not been "to analyze the phenomena of power, nor to elaborate the foundations of such an analysis," but rather "to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects" (1994c: 326). Within this genealogical project, Foucault explains that three domains of study are possible:

First, a historical ontology of ourselves in relation to truth through which we constitute ourselves as subjects of knowledge; second, a historical ontology of ourselves in relation to a field of power through which we constitute ourselves as subjects acting on others; third, a historical ontology in relation to ethics through which we constitute ourselves as moral agents. (1984c: 351)

In situating his own genealogical studies along these three axes, he suggests that the truth axis was the focus of *The Birth of the Clinic* and *The Order of Things*, the power axis was the focus of *Discipline and Punish*, the ethical axis was examined in *The History of Sexuality*, and all three axes were present in *Madness and Civilization* (1984c: 352). In general, however, the purpose of all of these historical ontologies for Foucault, as we have already seen, is to "separate out, from the contingency that has made us what we are, the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think" (1994d: 316)—an end which is itself justified by Foucault, or so I have argued, through a normative appeal to autonomy.

Furthermore, with respect to the genealogical method itself, Foucault's commitment to autonomy plays an important role in influencing him to utilize this historical mode of critique, as opposed to a more straightforwardly normative mode. For Foucault, the genealogical method of critique is "much more respectful for everyone's freedom" (1994f: 404). "The role of the intellectual," according to Foucault, "does not consist in telling others what they must do. What right would they have to do that?" (Trombadori 1991: 11) Rather, in the historico-critical analyses advocated by Foucault,

...people are not told what they ought to be, what they ought to do, what they ought to believe and think. What they do rather is to bring out how up till now social mechanisms had been able to operate, how the forms of repression and constraint had

acted, and then, it seems to me, people were left to make up their own minds, to choose, in the light of all this, their own existence. (1988: 50)

It is because genealogy does not tell others what they ought to be, do, or believe, but rather leaves this up to them—in short, because it respects their autonomy—that Foucault prefers this mode of intellectual work.

Clearly, then, Foucault's genealogical method, as well as his particular genealogical studies, can be viewed as crucially underpinned by his commitment to autonomy. This commitment motivates and influences both what is studied, and how it is studied. As such, with Foucault's commitment to autonomy so deeply infused throughout his work, this commitment will inevitably be imported, at least to some extent, to the work of others insofar as they are influenced by him. The question of the politics of autonomy is therefore of great concern to those who have been influenced by Foucault's theoretical, historical, and/or methodological work.

In terms of what Foucault himself says about the politics of autonomy, earlier we saw that he does suggest several political ideals or principles that might flow from a commitment to the particular form of individual autonomy he endorses: non-domination; the need for individuals to be able to modify the relations of power to which they are subject; and the enhancement of the capabilities of individuals. What is most striking about this list, in my view, is that all of these normative commitments have also been championed in recent years within liberal-democratic political theory. First, the older, juridical concept of autonomy that dominated earlier liberal-democratic theory has been roundly criticized and widely abandoned in favour of a more complicated understanding of the autonomous subject who is always already constituted within social and political relations (the Rawlsians and Habermasians—easily the two most dominant schools of liberal-democratic theory—both recognize this point, as well as liberal feminists, radical democrats and agonistic democrats). Second, non-domination is today the central normative ideal of an entire strand of liberaldemocratic theory, most notably the republican tradition (Skinner, Pettit), within which some theorists, influenced by Foucault directly, define domination as the inability to modify the relations of power to which one is subject (Ivison, Patton, Bellamy).³⁴ And third, a welldeveloped body of literature has been created around the 'capabilities approach' to liberaldemocratic theory, which argues that a focus on the capabilities of individuals is a more effective way to ensure their autonomy than a focus on rights and resources (Sen, Nussbaum). All of these recent developments in liberal-democratic thought then raise the question of the relation between Foucault's normative commitments and liberal-democracy. Should Foucault's normative commitments be viewed as liberal-democratic commitments? Is some form of liberal-democracy the best political expression of these commitments?

4.4 Foucault and Liberal-Democracy

In the next chapter I will also examine how Foucault's notion of minimizing domination serves as the orienting ideal for a school of anarchist/post-anarchist thought, which does not fall into the family of liberal-democratic schools I am surveying here.

Because of the seeming affinity between Foucault's commitments to autonomy, freedom, and non-domination in his later work and those of liberal-democratic theorists, a number of commentators have speculated on or inquired into the relation between Foucault and liberal-democracy. As Nancy Fraser (1981) asked many years ago, even before the publication of many of Foucault's later works, does Foucault's critique not presuppose or appeal to liberal norms? Foucault's focus on the autonomous subject in his later work makes this question all the more appropriate, since the form of normative thought that has been most devoted to the autonomous subject has undeniably been liberal-democratic theory. As such, Foucault's emphasis on autonomy appears, at the very least, to reduce the distance between his work and liberal-democratic theory, and perhaps even makes his insights much more easily assimilated by the latter.

To illustrate this convergence, let me examine one commentator's discussion of the relation between Foucault and liberal thought. Lois McNay argues that there are two central differences between Foucault's work and liberal thought (1994: 129-132). The first is that while liberals place power and freedom in opposition, freedom beginning only where power ends, for Foucault power and freedom permanently co-exist and are inextricably mixed. And the second difference is that while liberals rely on an essentialized view of the individual subject as possessing a universal form or nature upon which power can only be applied, for Foucault the form of the subject is always historically constituted within and by relations of power.

Upon closer examination, however, and in light of later developments within both Foucault's thought and liberal thought, neither of these differences turns out to be quite as robust as it may have initially appeared. First, while it is certainly true that Foucault's first sense of freedom is permanently coupled with power, the relation between power and the other two senses of freedom in Foucault's work is much less straightforward. As I have shown above, freedom in Foucault's second and third senses actually does stand in an oppositional relation to a particular kind of power relation—that is, a particularly rigid and irreversible kind of power relation, which he calls a relation of domination. Foucault even concedes that such relations of domination are what “people ordinarily call ‘power’” (1994b: 299). So perhaps Foucault's work does include a much more similar opposition between freedom and power to liberal-democratic thought than was initially apparent. And second, as I suggested earlier, most sophisticated forms of liberal-democratic theory today acknowledge, to varying degrees, the historical constitution of the subject, and have abandoned the idea of a rigidly essentialized, naturalized, and universal form of subjectivity.

Again, my concern here is not to suggest that Foucault himself was *really* a liberal-democrat of some stripe or another. In my view, not much of importance turns on

this question at this point. What is important to consider, however, is that many of the concerns that Foucault himself expressed about liberalism have today been taken up and incorporated by liberal-democratic theory, such that there are no longer as many resources within Foucault's work itself with which to directly challenge this incorporation. In fact, one of the more recent edited collections on Foucault's work focuses directly upon the normative philosophical and political implications of his later work, and contains several papers trying to bring out this common ground between Foucault's later work and liberal-democratic thought (Moss 1998).

Without resolving this question of the relation between Foucault's work and liberal-democratic theory, I now want to shift my focus away from this relation, and toward a particular problem that is generated by this ambiguous relation. I want to suggest that Foucault's emphasis on individual autonomy, and the convergence this produces between his work and liberal-democratic theory, in turn gives rise to a particular tension for those who have been deeply influenced by, and continue to rely upon, his work, but who are also deeply committed to moving beyond the politics of autonomy and the horizon of liberal-democratic theory. This tension is particularly acute within postcolonial thought.

4.5 Beyond Liberal-Democracy and the Autonomous Subject

As I have argued in earlier chapters, anti-imperial and postcolonial thought is today grappling with question of the limits of liberal-democracy as the hegemonic language of the modern project. For those who privilege subaltern or colonial difference, the challenge for postcolonial thought today is to question "the view that the ideals of liberal democracy—those of liberty and equality—are an unsurpassable political horizon" (Scott 1999: 150). To this end, some postcolonial thinkers see promise in Foucault's work for thinking through the challenge of postcolonial politics. Leela Gandhi suggests some convergences between postcolonial politics and anarchism, and argues that Foucault's ethics of autonomy suggests a type of practice that resonates strongly with an anti-colonial politics:

While governmentality...works on the subject through the prescriptive, interdictory, and strictly juridical order of *nomoi* (code or custom-oriented morality), ethics brings the recalcitrant self to bear on itself internally in an effort of self-mastery or *ascesis*. These distinctions resonate immediately with the antagonisms specific to colonial encounter wherein the tamed or forcibly civilized subject of colonial *nomoi* protests precisely by embarking on an oppositional *ascesis* seeking sole, if ultimately illusory, command of his or her affective and psychic interiority, hoping against hope to become *sui juris* and autonomous at least in this imagined domain if none other. In these terms, we could say that the centrality of ethics to anticolonial endeavor (indeed,

anticolonialism's willful naivete in relation to dominant political culture, whether imperial or nationalist) is enabled by the paradigmatic clash of governmental *nomoi* and self-rule-seeking ascesis within colonial encounter. In this context ethics emerges and is available for theoretical recuperation, simply and powerfully as a critique of the very principle and prerogatives of "rule." The constitutive unruliness of (anticolonial) ethics is thence a subject for further consideration and elaboration. (2011: 37)

Unlike Gandhi, however, other postcolonial thinkers argue that the postcolonial challenge involves looking beyond the limits of the autonomous subject. David Scott asks: "do we all have to endorse [the liberal democratic subject] as the norm? ...are we obliged to affirm autonomy as the *most* desirable form of human being? Why should we not treat it as *merely* one among many plausible human goods?" (1999: 154-5) It is not simply autonomy in general that is being interrogated here, but Foucault's own version of the autonomous subject, as Scott asks whether we all need to accept the conception of a subject who "is *always* available for unmaking and remaking" and indeed "*thrives* on such unmaking and remaking" (1999: 154)? Couze Venn also asks why "the problematic concept of autonomy [is] reinscribed in both radical and 'liberal' reformulations of the question of changing the subject" (1997: 7) Venn is specifically concerned about the absence in Foucault's work "of the concept of justice among the stakes—power, autonomy, freedom, and the growth of capabilities—of the work of critical ontology" (1997: 5). He argues that "without a notion of a project and without clear new ethical principles the talk of an aesthetics of the self is open to any kind of politics," and that in the circumstances of late capitalism, this practice of self-fashioning would probably be "confined to a privatized domain, limiting ethical life and aesthetic pleasures to narcissistic forms of self-actualization, consistent with the concept of autonomy inscribed in individualism or fantasized by the political economy of liberalism" (1997: 23-4).

Finally, Saba Mahmood agrees that we must question the autonomous subject, but sees in Foucault's turn to ethics precisely the tools needed to do so. For Mahmood, because Foucault's notion of ethics begins from the "paradox of subjectivation," or the idea that "the capacity for action is enabled and created by specific relations of subordination" (2005: 29), his ethical subject is therefore not an autonomous subject: "Despite his attention to the individual's effort at constituting herself, the subject of Foucault's analysis is not a voluntaristic, autonomous subject who fashions herself in a protean manner. Rather, the subject is formed within the limits of a historically specific set of formative practices and moral injunctions that are delimited in advance" (2005: 28).

What Mahmood neglects here, I think, is the particular notion of autonomy that Foucault developed and affirmed late in his life, and which motivated his turn to ethics. In this notion of autonomy, as I described above, the autonomous subject is not, to be sure, one who fashions herself out of nothing, in a space free from power, but rather one who fashions herself from within the diverse relations of power and modes of subjectivation in which she finds herself. This subject does not make her life out of nothing, or out of herself alone, but she nonetheless makes her life her own, and

this is what her autonomy consists in. “For what is ethics,” Foucault asks, “if not the practice of freedom, the conscious practice of freedom?” (1994b: 284). For those, like Mahmood, then, who remain committed to thinking beyond the autonomous subject, it appears that Couze Venn’s fascinating question still applies: “After the subject of Foucault, who comes?” (1997)

4.6 Conclusion

In his article ‘What is Enlightenment?’ Foucault advocates a critical ethos that preserves the attitude of the Enlightenment, without adopting its particular doctrinal elements. I have suggested in this paper, however, that underpinning and motivating this critical ethos is actually one of the central *normative* doctrines of the Enlightenment: that is, the autonomous subject. There is a tension within Foucault’s work, then, between his ‘limitattitude’ and the commitment to autonomy from which he derives this limit-attitude. For in a sense, postcolonial critics have begun to suggest that liberal-democracy and the politics of autonomy are themselves dominating limits of our present, limits that must now be transgressed. This tension becomes significant for anyone who is heavily influenced by Foucault’s work and methodology, but at the same time seeks to resist the structures of domination that are themselves interwoven with the theory and practice of liberal-democracy and the politics of autonomy. As such, this tension has become particularly acute within postcolonial thought, as normative questions have begun to receive increasing attention within this field, and as it struggles to reconcile its Foucaultian inheritance with its commitment to alternative normative horizons.

Perhaps we can go some of the way with Foucault here, especially in his call (quoted at the beginning of this chapter) for contemporary movements to find the basis of a new ethics, and to “promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality that has been imposed on us for several centuries” (1994c: 336). This kind of ethico-politics is, I think, precisely what Ajay Skaria finds in Gandhi’s politics of satyagraha, which he describes using Foucaultian vocabulary in the following way:

...[Gandhi’s] politics involved a disciplinary logic that made modern discipline—the practice of modern power—its object, that displaced and undid modern discipline with its own discipline, that disciplined modern discipline. Given the capillary nature of modern discipline, given the multiple registers and institutions through which the economizing logic of modern governmentality constitutes itself, a Gandhian disciplining of this power too had to work at those levels, rather than confine itself to representation in the state through elections. (2002: 982)

Indeed, this task of disciplining modern discipline could itself be directed against the strand of modern ethics of autonomy to which Foucault himself subscribed. Indeed, this might be a practice *of* freedom from this modern form of subjectivity, but would not

be a practice *for* autonomy. And such a practice could be viewed, quite appropriately, as a transgression of the limits of Foucault's thought in a Foucaultian spirit.

5. Agency beyond Autonomy: Social Movements, Deep Diversity, and the Relationship between Ethics and Politics

The resistance to modern oppression has to involve, in our part of the world, some resistance to modernity and to important aspects of modern theories of oppression.

—Ashis Nandy (1987: 117)

5.1 Introduction

Contemporary reflection about global social movements from below must contend with the incredible diversity of these movements. Sites like the World Social Forum and the Occupy protests (as well as the myriad links made between the latter and the Arab Spring uprisings) make readily visible the myriad forms of difference across which many groups are attempting to build cooperation and solidarity. Increasing recognition of this deep diversity is apparent in the widespread shift from the term ‘the anti-globalization movement’ to ‘the movement of movements’, and from the slogan ‘another world is possible’ to ‘other worlds are possible and actual’. This shift in emphasis toward greater diversity appears in many ways to be a response to contemporary sites like the WSF in which the modern, secular left comes into contact with religious, indigenous, feminist, ecological, queer, dalit and many other subaltern peoples and groups (Sen et al. 2004; Santos 2005b, 2006, Conway 2012).

While the dizzying character of this diversity is often acknowledged—“chaotic, dispersive, unknowable” (Mertes 2004: 237)—attempts to think through it in a sustained way have tended to focus on differences of organizational forms, structural targets, and tactics/strategy. For example, there has been a great deal of discussion about the appropriate processes, procedures and organization of these activist spaces with respect to this diversity—about ‘open space’ in the WSF, and about ‘consensus decision-making’ in the Occupy movements. Other discussions have centred around the tensions between groups that are centralized and structured hierarchically, and those that are decentralized and organized horizontally, as well as tensions between groups that are oriented

toward institutional reform, and those oriented toward anti-systemic, revolutionary change. Still other conversations have focussed on how to conceptualize the common structural target of these movements— globalization? neoliberalism? empire?—and on the appropriate tactics with which, and scale(s) on which, to confront this target. Finally, a good deal of attention has been paid to the diverse and intersecting structures of oppression that operate among diverse groups, and to the question of how to confront and resist all of these structures simultaneously.

Relative to these issues of organizational-structural-tactical diversity, however, little direct attention has been paid to the issues raised by the deep ethical or normative diversity of these movements, and especially the challenges it poses for coalition and solidarity-building. Of course, many of the former issues are closely related to questions of ethical diversity; nonetheless, it has been rare for substantive ethical differences (e.g. those between indigenous and modern ways of life) to be confronted in any concrete and sustained way. Indeed often when questions of ethical diversity arise, the response does not involve a concrete engagement with substantive differences but rather a (re)affirmation of a commitment to autonomy. For example, one of the most common ways of describing the benefits to diversity of the ‘horizontalist’ procedural and organizational innovations of the WSF and Occupy protests is to say that they allow for greater *autonomy* of participating individuals and groups. Similarly, one of the most common responses to the various structures of oppression that affect diverse groups has been to affirm a common commitment to ‘anti-oppression’ or to the minimization of oppression and domination, which itself is often internally related to a commitment to autonomy (as we saw to be the case with Foucault in the last chapter). The encounter with deep diversity within the global justice movements, then, has in many ways served to re-inscribe the classic, modern meta-norm of autonomy (however ascribed with a subintern meaning) as a kind of higher-order good that is to orient and coordinate the praxis of deeply diverse social movements.

Indeed because of the hegemony of modern, top-down ways of thinking about diversity that seek to transcend diversity rather than engage with it, the appeal to meta-norms of freedom, equality and autonomy continues to be quite common within both activist circles and academic theories that regard themselves as aligned with bottom-up social movements and as taking seriously their vast diversity. In this chapter I will engage with several prominent theoretical approaches to the politics of diversity among social movements. Interestingly, while each of these approaches is rooted in a different critical tradition, they each explicitly reflect on diversity through an examination of the relationship between ethics and politics, and therefore focus on the specific question of ethical diversity. Through a detailed exposition and comparison of each approach, I will argue that these theories form a kind of trajectory or learning curve with respect to the depth and complexity of diversity (especially normative diversity) that they take seriously.

First I will examine Nancy Fraser’s neo-Kantian approach, which draws a strict separation between ethics and politics, and suggests that diverse movements ought to

build cooperation around a politics that remains impartial to ethical commitments. I will argue that

Fraser's approach limits diversity by (a) asserting a universal liberal-democratic principle that ostensibly transcends all cultural complexity and difference; (b) employing a metanarrative of modernization that does much of the work to limit the scope of diversity that Fraser takes seriously; and (c) restricting what counts as 'political' to those claims or demands that can be placed on, and enforced by, dominant institutions. Second, I will then turn to the post-Marxist, radical democracy tradition of Chantal Mouffe. Through an examination of both her sole-authored writings and her earlier work with Ernesto Laclau, I will argue that this approach takes the complexity of diversity more seriously than the neoKantian approach because it begins with the premise that no form of morality can transcend all ethical diversity, and that the field of the political is marked by undecidability and irreducible pluralism. Despite this starting point, however, this approach proceeds to argue for a contingent but nonetheless hegemonic liberal-democratic project that is both ethical and political and provides a 'contaminated' form of universality through which to articulate diverse movements into a chain of equivalence. The liberal-democratic limits of diversity in this approach, then, turn out to be quite similar to the neo-Kantian approach, but are simply construed as ethico-political decisions, not moral requirements. Furthermore, like the neoKantian approach, Mouffe deploys a modernization story that does a great deal of work in limiting the range of diversity that Mouffe has to take seriously. Third, I will examine the work of Richard Day, who is writing in an anarchist/post-anarchist tradition. Day's approach shares with Mouffe's the notion that ethical difference cannot be bracketed out of politics by recourse to a deontological morality, but unlike the latter he is highly attentive to forms of ethico-politics that fall outside of hegemonic projects, especially that of liberal-democracy. Furthermore, Day is very critical of imperial meta-narratives that circumscribe diversity within the limits of modernity. I will argue, however, that because Day's approach takes up diversity within an oppression/autonomy problematic, it ends up affirming a meta-norm of autonomy which is to reconcile and coordinate the actions of deeply diverse movements.

Lastly, I will attempt to bring into conversation with these three 'progressive', secular-humanist traditions the work of anthropologist Saba Mahmood. Mahmood's work aims to show how an Islamic women's piety movement in Egypt challenges the limits of 'progressive', liberal-democratic understandings of politics by illustrating that ethical movements can exercise tremendous agency and commitment to radical social change without necessarily being oriented toward the end of autonomy or liberation from oppression. I will use Mahmood's work to argue that a post-imperial approach to diversity must learn to see the deep diversity of ethico-political movements that lie beyond the oppression/autonomy problematic. This, I suggest, will help us take another step in understanding and furthering the possibilities for coalition and solidarity-building within the global networks of social movements from below.

5.2 Nancy Fraser and the Critical Theory Tradition

One author who has attempted to articulate a normative project to orient the praxis of diverse social movements is Nancy Fraser. Her work explicitly aims to “clarify the aspirations of those social movements that seem to me to carry our best hopes for an emancipatory future,” as well as to disclose and foster “possible links between existing social struggles” (Nash and Bell 2008: 74-5). Writing within a Habermasian Critical Theory tradition, Fraser argues for a deontological approach to social justice, in which norms of social justice are regarded as universally binding because they are derived independently of contextually-embedded evaluative horizons, and therefore remain impartial with respect to particular forms of life and “hold independently of actors’ commitments to specific values” (2000: 97). Struggles for social justice, then, should for Fraser strongly prioritize the right over the good, privilege questions of justice over questions of the good life, and remain on the ground of morality as long as possible without recourse to ethics or ethical evaluation.

Originally developed as a two-dimensional theory, Fraser’s theory of social justice now includes three goals towards which diverse social movement praxis should be oriented—redistribution, recognition, *and* representation—each corresponding to an analytically distinct aspect of social order, as well as to an analytically distinct form of injustice. First, redistribution seeks to address injustice in the *economic* structure of society, including exploitation, economic marginalization and deprivation, through the remedy of economic restructuring. Second, recognition seeks to address injustice in the *cultural* order of society—that is, in the social patterns of interpretation, evaluation and communication—including cultural domination, nonrecognition and disrespect, by pursuing cultural or symbolic change (2003: 13). Finally, Fraser has recently expanded her theory to include representation, which seeks to address injustice in the *political* dimension of society. This dimension involves the boundaries of the political community, and the question of who is able to make justice claims on one another, as well as the procedures of public contestation and decision-making. This political dimension of justice, which is increasingly crucial and complicated in a globalizing world in which the Keynesian-Westphalian frame of politics can no longer always be assumed to be the appropriate frame of social justice, “furnishes the stage on which struggles over distribution and recognition are played out. ...it tells us not only who can make claims for redistribution and recognition, but also how such claims are to be mooted and adjudicated” (2005a: 75)

For Fraser, while there are three social spheres or dimensions to which social justice concerns apply, there is only one normative standard of justice that transcends and applies to all three, namely the principle of ‘participatory parity’. This principle, then, is not itself cultural, economic, or political, but transcends each and is rooted in a universal morality. Her theory of social justice is, then, “*social-theoretically multidimensional and normatively monist*” (2007a: 328). She writes:

In my view, the most general meaning of justice is parity of participation. According to this radical-democratic interpretation of the principle of equal moral worth, justice requires social arrangements that permit all to participate as peers in social life. Overcoming injustice means dismantling institutionalized obstacles that prevent some people from participating on a par with others, as full partners in social interaction. (2005a: 73)

What is important to recognize about Fraser's principle of participatory parity is that in her view it takes seriously and begins from a foundational recognition of deep ethical pluralism. She argues that:

Under [modern conditions of value pluralism], there is no single conception of self-realization or the good life that is universally shared, nor any that can be established as authoritative. Thus, any attempt to justify claims for recognition that appeals to an account of self-realization or the good life must necessarily be sectarian. No approach of this sort can establish such claims as normatively binding on those who do not share the theorist's conception of ethical value. (2003: 30)

As such, for Fraser, today "we must evaluate claims across divergent value horizons, no single one of which can reasonably claim to trump all the others. The result is that Critical Theory needs a *nonsectarian* theory of justice" (2003: 223; her emphasis).

While recognizing, then, that the challenge of deep diversity is that no single ethical conception can be deemed universally authoritative, Fraser nonetheless proceeds to argue that *her* principle of social justice—namely, the principle of participatory parity—actually transcends this predicament, and *can* in fact be established as universally authoritative. Because her theory is based upon a commitment to the equal *autonomy* of individuals, which depends on their ability "to exercise their free and equal personhood by participating with one another as peers," (2007a: 334) it therefore "does not appeal to a conception of selfrealization or the good"; rather, it appeals "to a conception of justice that can—and should— be accepted by those with divergent conceptions of the good," and can therefore be established as "normatively binding on all who agree to abide by fair terms of interaction under conditions of value pluralism" (2003: 31). This theory, in her view, is based only on a "limited, 'political' conception of the person, which picks out only those features of personhood that a non-sectarian theory of justice *must presuppose*" (2007a: 334, my italics). In short, she regards the norm of participatory parity as wholly "deontological and nonsectarian" (2003: 30-1); as such, it is not simply one value horizon among others, but is a meta-norm, rooted in the practice of discourse itself, that is able to fairly mediate conflicts across different value horizons (2003: 225). As she herself puts it: "I also contend that *beneath all the cultural complexity* lies a single moral imperative: the principle of participatory parity" (2003: 219, my emphasis).

Despite refusing to situate participatory parity as simply one value horizon among others, however, Fraser does not hesitate to situate this principle within the *historical tradition* of liberalism. She fully admits to having "returned to the core concepts of

the liberal tradition, namely, the equal autonomy and moral worth of human beings” (2003: 224).

Participatory parity, which Fraser claims “*simply is* the meaning of equal respect for the equal autonomy of human beings *qua* social actors” (2003: 231, her emphasis), and is a species of “thick deontological liberalism” (2003: 230), is further described as

...the outcome of a broad, multifaceted historical process that has enriched the meaning of liberal equality over time. In this process, which is by no means confined to the West, the concept of equal moral worth has expanded in both scope and substance. ...Participatory parity, then, is the emergent historical “truth” of the liberal norm of the equal autonomy and moral worth of human beings. (2003: 231-2)

So despite clearly locating her principle of justice within the historical unfolding of the liberal tradition, her theory of social justice nonetheless remains “nonsectarian,” and avoids becoming simply “one concrete ethical ideal among others,” for in that case it would be “fatally compromised” (2003: 225).

It is important to recognize here that Fraser is able to claim that her theory of social justice is universal and impartial, while simultaneously being historically situated, by recourse to a global meta-narrative of modernization. Indeed, in Fraser’s framework, the transition to modernity does the work to create the historical conditions in which her principle of participatory parity can function as an impartial norm. For Fraser, recognition of value pluralism is a distinctively modern development, and participatory parity is able to remain neutral among conceptions of the good precisely because of the epistemic adjustments brought about by modernization. In other words, participatory parity is neutral not among all evaluative horizons, but among those who have been suitably adjusted by processes of modernization. She writes:

Embracing the modern view that it is up to individuals and groups to define for themselves what counts as a good life and to devise for themselves an approach to pursuing it, within limits that ensure a like liberty for others,

[participatory parity] appeals to a conception of justice that can be accepted by people with divergent conceptions of the good. (2000: 104)

Fraser fleshes out her conception of modernity by contrasting it, rather conventionally, with “traditional” societies, which are understood as “fully kin-governed” (2003: 54)35. While traditional societies are “sharply bounded, institutionally undifferentiated, ethically monistic, uncontested, and socially legitimate” (2003: 55), cultural modernity—which she refers to interchangeably as “contemporary society”, thereby identifying the present homogeneously with modernity—has, on the other hand, been transformed through historical processes of marketization and the rise of a complex civil society into a society that is “hybridized, differentiated, pluralistic, and contested, ...[and] suffused with anti-hierarchical norms” (2003: 56). Modernization, then, for Fraser not only gives rise to the values upon which participatory parity is based, but also does the historical work needed to allow for it to function as an impartial norm.

Ultimately, then, Fraser’s approach to deep diversity is simply to transcend it by recourse to an ostensibly impartial standard of justice. It is this standard that, in Fraser’s

framework, allows for the articulation of diverse social movements. Rather than facing deep diversity, however, this approach simply wishes it away, declaring participatory parity to be a meta-norm that stands above all particular value horizons, and ignoring the work of feminists, communitarians, value and legal pluralists, and postcolonial critics of liberalism who have for decades been critiquing liberal pretensions to impartiality. These critics have

Fraser is careful to place ‘traditional’ in quotation marks, and clarifies that the model of the ‘fully kingoverned society’ that she is utilizing is hypothetical, and based upon the assumptions of anthropologists. Nonetheless, she deploys this ostensibly hypothetical model precisely in order to flesh out her markedly nonhypothetical conception of cultural modernity. carefully traced how all political principles and procedures are underpinned by substantive (and controversial) ethical and cultural commitments, and how these principles and procedures are always historically and culturally situated and are intertwined with particular forms of life. In doing so, they have exposed the particular, substantive, non-neutral character of liberalism’s autonomous individual subject. Indeed, Nikolas Kompridis is correct to remind us that “compelling arguments have been circulating for some time as to why such strong notions of impartiality may be part of the problem, not part of the solution to the challenges of value pluralism and deep diversity” (2007: 279). Dismissing these critiques, Fraser paradoxically identifies her approach “with the central moral ideal of modern liberalism” (2003: 228) while at the very same time explicitly denying that it is “one concrete ethical ideal among others”. She accomplishes this, furthermore, by deploying a modernization story that confers all non-liberal forms of life to the dustbin of history and renders them unnecessary to confront or even acknowledge in contemporary reflections on social justice. Clearly, then, Fraser’s framework does not take seriously the deep diversity of a contemporary ‘movement of movements’ that includes many indigenous and other subaltern movements who not only provincialize liberalism as one ethico-political tradition among many others, but also continue to resist the modernization project that Fraser treats as a *fait accompli*.

Another aspect of Fraser’s framework that relates to the praxis of contemporary social movements is that this praxis is, in her view, ultimately channelled toward making demands of formal political institutions. Not only does the prefix ‘re-’ in each of her three branches of social justice point toward the presence of an ultimate agent from whom justice is demanded and by whom justice is subsequently distributed, but this is confirmed by Fraser’s claim that representation provides the very ground on which struggles for social justice take place, as well as by her argument that the key challenge of the post-Westphalian world is the “need to construct new addressees for public opinion, in the sense of new, transnational public powers that possess the administrative capacity to solve transnational problems” (2007b: 23). For Fraser, social movements must always be paired with formal state institutions because it is ultimately to these institutions and their binding decisions that social movement praxis is aimed: “the civil-society track of transnational democratic politics needs to be complemented by a

formal-institutional track” such that “formal institutions...can translate transnational public opinion into binding, enforceable decisions” (2005a: 85 n.16).

5.3 Chantal Mouffe and the Radical Democracy Tradition

Another project that has sought to provide normative orientation to the praxis of diverse social movements can be found in the work of Chantal Mouffe, beginning with her early co-authored work with Ernesto Laclau, through to her most recent work in which she shifts her attention from a national to a global scale. A central goal of Mouffe and Laclau’s highly influential book, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, was to take seriously the rise of the ‘new social movements’ and to encourage the Left to move past an orthodox economism in order to accommodate these movements. This ‘post-Marxist’ intervention sought to reformulate the socialist project in terms of “radical and plural democracy”, and to encourage the building of a ‘chain of equivalence’ among old and new democratic struggles “in order to form a ‘collective will’, a ‘we’ of the radical democratic forces” (Mouffe 2005: 53).

In many ways, the objects of Mouffe and Laclau’s critique of classical Marxisms are the same objects of Mouffe’s later critique of liberalisms. Both critiques remain largely on the terrain of epistemological debates, and consist mainly of poststructuralist critiques of foundationalism, rationalism, essentialism, universalism, a priori knowledge and unitary subjects, and teleological and monistic readings of history. Mouffe and Laclau, then, reject the kind of deontological, universalistic, and rationalistic approach to social justice offered by Fraser’s Critical Theory approach. For them there are no impartial, context-independent standards of social justice that can provide a common foundation for diverse social struggles, no principles to be found ‘beneath all the cultural complexity’. Instead, the whole realm of the political—including every social struggle and movement—must be dealt with in its undecidability, indeterminacy, contingency, and irreducible pluralism. The highly diverse ‘new social movements’ with which Mouffe and Laclau are concerned, including “urban, ecological, anti-authoritarian, anti-institutional, feminist, anti-racist, ethnic, regional or that of sexual minorities” (1985: 159), should each be understood as distinct particularities, each with their own differential specificity, arising in distinct and (at least quasi-) autonomous social spheres and with differential positions in the social, and without an ultimate reconciliation to be found among them. They write: “Pluralism is radical only to the extent that each term of this plurality of identities finds within itself the principle of its own validity, without this having to be sought in a transcendent or underlying positive ground for the hierarchy of meaning of them all and the source and guarantee of their legitimacy” (1985: 167).

But while the realm of the social is characterized by undecidability, the work of the political, for Mouffe and Laclau, is to impose decisions. In this framework, ‘the political’ is understood as a moment of closure, a moment in which a ‘decision’ is made and enforced over the entire political community, and in which the margin of undecidability is therefore reduced (Mouffe 1993: 141). For Mouffe and Laclau, then, politics turns out to be essentially about hegemony-building, or the work of building a contingent and necessarily exclusive social unity, a common symbolic framework or system of meaning, and a collective identity, in a way that collectively reduces the margin of undecidability of the social. Hegemony, then, is “a theory of the decision taken in an undecidable terrain” (2001: xi). It requires “the construction of a new ‘common sense’ which changes the identity of the different groups, in such a way that the demands of each group are articulated equivalentially with those of the others.” Hegemony “does not simply establish an ‘alliance’ between given interests, but modifies the very identity of the forces engaging in that alliance” (1985: 183-4). Mouffe and Laclau are clear, however, that hegemony requires more than simply building a chain of equivalences among a set of distinct particularities, for even after such a chain has been generated, it eventually “becomes necessary...to represent the totality of the chain, beyond the mere differential particularisms of the equivalential links.” As such, a proper hegemonic relation is established only when “a certain particularity assumes the representation of a universality entirely incommensurable with it” (2001: xiii).

And what exactly is the specific particularity that is to assume the hegemonic position and provide the “contaminated universality” in Mouffe and Laclau’s radical democratic vision? From the start, Mouffe and Laclau have been clear that liberal-democracy itself will play this role. Radical democracy is in fact “radical liberal democracy,” and should be conceived of “as the extension of the democratic ideals of liberty and equality to more and more areas of social life” (Mouffe 1996: 20). At the heart of radical democracy is a commitment to specifically liberal form of pluralism: “Pluralism, understood as the principle that individuals should have the possibility to organize their lives as they wish, to choose their own ends, and to realize them as they think best, is the greatest contribution of liberalism to modern society” (Mouffe 1996: 20). As such, “It is not liberalism as such which should be called into question, for as an ethical principle which defends the liberty of the individual to fulfil his or her human capacities, it is more valid today than ever” (1985: 184). Far from rejecting the hegemony of liberal-democratic values and norms, then, radical democracy is a project meant to further the spread and fulfillment of liberal democratic ideals:

...liberal democracy is not the enemy to be destroyed. If we take ‘liberty and equality for all’ as the ‘ethico-political’ principles of liberal democracy...it is clear that the problem with our societies is not their proclaimed ideals but the fact that those ideals are not put into practice. So the task for the left is not to reject them, with the argument that they are a sham, a cover for capitalist domination, but to fight for their effective implementation. (2005: 32)

In her sole-authored writings (1993, 2000, 2005) Mouffe has further developed the notion of radical democracy as a type of political regime in which political adversaries share an allegiance to the hegemonic principles of political legitimacy of liberal democracy—the values of freedom and equality—but struggle over competing interpretations of these values. Radical democracy is described as an unapologetically hegemonic project that should (a) utilize its power to exclude anti-liberal-democratic values, since, according to Mouffe, conflicting principles of legitimacy cannot co-exist within the same regime without jeopardizing its very existence; (b) utilize its power to establish a hegemony of liberal-democratic values among its citizens, by promoting liberal-democratic forms of subjectivity, identity, and self-understanding; and (c) allow for contestation among endlessly competing interpretations of the liberal-democratic values of freedom and equality (i.e. a ‘conflictual consensus’ on liberal-democratic values). Mouffe does not object, then, to the exclusion of all forms of non-liberality from the political—indeed she explicitly endorses such an exclusion—but only rejects any attempts to construe this “eminently *political* decision” as a “moral requirement” (Mouffe 2000: 25).

A couple of further points are important to note here about this attempt to give normative orientation to diverse social movements. First, Mouffe departs strongly from Fraser on the importance of ethics in this project. For Mouffe, liberal-democracy (and radical democracy more specifically) is not simply a set of institutional, procedural norms or a set of quasi-transcendental rational principles that stands above diverse forms of life, but is itself constitutive of a particular form of life. Indeed, Mouffe rejects attempts by deontological, moral-universalistic approaches to place liberal-democratic norms above contestation and pluralism by presenting them as moral or rational necessities. Instead, she situates her own view within a Wittgensteinian-inspired, practice-based account of rationality, knowledge, normativity and procedures: “Indeed, procedures only exist as a complex ensemble of practices with their ethico-political dimensions. Those practices constitute specific forms of individuality and identity that make possible the allegiance to the procedures. It is because they are inscribed in shared forms of life and agreements in judgments that procedures can be accepted and followed” (Mouffe 2000b: 90). As such, the radical democratic project cannot simply be concerned with an institutionalized form of politics and the kinds of demands that ought to be made of that politics, but must also be concerned with promoting a form of life, an ethics, that permeates all social relations. Politics, for Mouffe and Laclau, is “a practice of creation, reproduction, and transformation of social relations” (1985: 153), and therefore has a deeply ethical dimension that must be addressed. However, because Mouffe and Laclau’s notion of the political remains fixated on the form of hegemony that constitutes the entire political regime, the kinds of ethico-politics that they permit are restricted to those which remain within a “conflictual consensus” on liberal-democratic values: “To be sure, pluralist democracy demands some form of consensus, but such a consensus concerns only its ethico-political principles” (Mouffe 2000b: 92). Indeed, while Mouffe aligns her approach with ‘ethical’ projects over ‘moral’

ones because the former “are more conducive to apprehending the limits of reason and to conceptualizing the plurality of values,” she nonetheless parts ways with ethical projects because “they either avoid or do not emphasize enough the need to put some limits to pluralism” (2000a: 134). In short, then, because Mouffe’s concern for ethics is limited to the question “Which ethics for democracy?” (2000b), the deep diversity of forms of ethicopolitics are largely excluded from her radical democratic project, and this project is limited to those that struggle over the meaning of freedom, equality, and rights, and seek to produce new forms of individualism (1985: 184).

Second, it is important to notice that, like Fraser, a narrative of modernization operates in Mouffe’s work to support the restrictions on pluralism to which she is committed. From its earliest to its most recent articulations, Mouffe’s explication of the radical democratic project continually asserts its ‘modern’ character. Synonymously identifying radical democracy as ‘modern democracy’ and/or ‘pluralistic democracy’, Mouffe provides an historical narrative of how ‘modernity’—understood in contrast to the ‘ancient’ or ‘premodern’, all apparently internal to the West—brings about the dissolution of markers of certainty and of shared conceptions of the good, which in turn gives rise to ‘pluralism’. Modern democratic society is understood in contrast to “*earlier societies*, organized in accordance with a theological-political logic, [in which] power was incorporated in the person of the prince, who was the representative of God—that is to say, of sovereign justice and sovereign reason” (1985: 186; my emphasis). Mouffe and Laclau repeatedly locate their work in a history of ‘the democratic revolution’ which originated with the French Revolution and has since been unfolding and progressively spreading to ever further social spheres and locations. Indeed, Mouffe and Laclau homogeneously describe the ‘new social movements’ as a product of this ongoing revolution. This meta-narrative then provides the ground for much of Mouffe’s argument for radical democracy. Radical democracy, she contends, best appreciates and incorporates the epistemological conditions of modernity (understood apparently as an uncomplicated, monolithic condition developed over the last two hundred years within the West), and in particular the pluralism that is its key feature. And moreover, radical democracy is itself an expression of the very democratic imaginary in which the new social movements are themselves already historically situated.

Furthermore, in turning her attention to global politics in her most recent work (2005; 2008), Mouffe globalizes the modern condition that she previously grounded in a particular history of the West and treated as an intra-Western phenomenon, by making it clear that the political possibilities available globally today are limited to a range of ‘alternative modernities’. To her credit, Mouffe does acknowledge that liberal democracy (including its radical version) constitutes only one form of life and one (hegemonically-constituted) type of political regime among others. Furthermore, she supports a ‘value pluralist’ orientation to diverse political regimes and argues for a multipolar world order in which hegemony is pluralized in a number of regional poles. However, Mouffe then clarifies that political regimes should only be considered good and legitimate if they remain committed to notions of human rights and democracy

that serve at least the ‘functionally equivalent’ role of protecting the dignity of the person that lies at the heart of the liberal-democratic version of human rights and democracy. Given that elsewhere Mouffe claims that human rights and democracy are the two constitutive values of liberal democracy, it is far from clear to what extent Mouffe is actually provincializing liberal democracy here. In any case, it does appear that the ‘alternative modernities’ to which Mouffe is open remain versions of ‘modernity’ in the sense that they all must be part of a conflictual consensus on the unquestionable modern values of human rights and democracy. For Mouffe, then, on both the national and global scales the historical process of modernization does a great deal of the work to circumscribe the permissible range of diversity, not only of political regimes but also of ethico-political social movements, to a spectrum that is broadly internal to modern liberal democracy. Subaltern social movements and struggles rooted in conditions of, and in resistance to, coloniality, then, are not only excluded from the radical democratic project, but do not even need to be addressed by it. Mouffe and Laclau do not appear, then, to be sufficiently attuned to the imperial power of liberal-democracy, and do not offer an account of contemporary social movements that takes seriously their deep normative pluralism.

5.4 Richard Day and the Post-Anarchist Tradition

A third attempt to provide normative orientation to diverse social movements comes from the anarchist/post-anarchist tradition. In his book *Gramsci is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements*, Richard Day, one of the leading contemporary voices in this tradition, combines a broadly anarchist framework with post-structuralist critiques of rationalism and epistemology, as well as feminist, anti-racist, queer, Marxist, and antiimperialist commitments and sensibilities. Day strongly agrees with Mouffe and Laclau on the absence of an epistemologically-privileged form of subject and politics, and on emphasizing ethics, rather than morality and deontology, in the praxis of social movements. He is highly critical, however, of the ontology of the political deployed by Mouffe and Laclau, which he regards as statist and overly preoccupied with hegemony-building. Day’s project is largely defined against what he calls “the hegemony of hegemony,” or “the assumption that effective social change can only be achieved simultaneously and en masse, across an entire national or supranational space” (2005: 8). The work of all political actors, by this framework, must be concerned with the struggle for hegemony—that is, the struggle over shared meaning, identity, and political power (Day 2005: 6)—over the entire political community. Furthermore, this ontology of the political assumes the existence of institutions of regulation and enforcement over the whole, therefore casting a state apparatus as a necessary and indispensable feature of ‘the political’. Andrew Robinson and Simon Tormey—two other post-anarchist writers working in a very similar vein to Day—argue that for Mouffe (and Laclau) “there is only one way to ‘do politics’, which is to seek to represent a

multitude of floating signifiers under the umbrella of a despotic signifier; ultimately this means a statist politics, complete with exclusions, violence, alienation and the rest" (2008: 133).

For these post-anarchist writers, the notion that politics must involve either a hegemonic or counter-hegemonic project over an entire political regime is itself a product of the hegemony of statism (in both its liberal and Marxist forms), and effaces the entire realm of non-hegemonic social and political action. Juxtaposing the hegemony of hegemony with "the affinity for affinity," Day emphasizes a form of affinity-based, experimental micropolitics that is both ethical and political, non-reformist and non-revolutionary, and seeks to prefigure, actualize, and/or construct alternatives in the here-and-now. This is a "politics of the act" that collapses the means-ends distinction, rather than a "politics of demand" that remains focused on the goal of gaining representation, recognition, redistribution or integration by national or supra-national institutions or political communities.

Importantly, Day shares Mouffe's turn to ethics, grounding his work on a Foucaultian-derived distinction between ethics and morality in which the former is prioritized and associated with situated practices of self-formation, while the latter is associated with universally binding principles of conduct (2005: 90, 167). Day's framework, however, offers many advances over Mouffe's with respect to the deep diversity of social movements. First, Day's emphasis on non-hegemonic forms of micro-scale politics takes seriously a much wider and more diverse range of social and political actors and activities. Because the effect of Mouffe and Laclau's framework is to construe as non-political all forms of struggle that do not take the political regime as their object and hegemony as their goal, it is at best dismissive of, and at worst hostile to, the myriad forms of social movement politics that reject (or at least trouble) the logic of hegemony and do not take the state or the institutional regime as the primary object of struggle. Many social and political movements do not seek to construct a new hegemony, and many are either ambivalent about, or actively hostile toward, the state institutions that serve as the centres of this hegemony. Day, as well as Tormey and Robinson, are attentive to the work of many anarchist, autonomist, feminist, and indigenous writers who have emphasized that there are many forms of politics whose primary focus is not on making demands of the state in terms of recognition, rights, representation, redistribution, inclusion, or integration. Indeed many feminist, anarchist, indigenous, environmental, queer, peace, religious, and post-capitalist movements either do not concern themselves with the state at all, or actively seek to turn away from, or at least to maintain a critical distance from, the state, and instead focus on the actualization of alternatives to the state form in the here-and-now. These activist practices and micropolitical projects focus on ethical/cultural resistance and transformation, alternative-building practices, structural renewal, and/or social (not political) revolution. As Day writes, "they are not oriented to allowing a particular group or movement to remake a nation-state or a world on its own image, and are therefore of little use to those who seek power over others, or

those who would ask others for gifts, thereby enslaving themselves” (2005: 13). These affinity-based, horizontal movements “avoid ‘the political’ in the Mouffean sense... But they are not ‘apolitical’ in the sense of being without contestation, deliberation, and power. They tend, however, to reject the negative, domatory power of statist and hierarchical relations in favour of a type of power which is constructed contingently and horizontally, and which attempts to avoid rigid arrangements and constitutive exclusions” (Robinson and Tormey 2008: 154).

What is foregrounded by the analyses offered by Day, as well as Robinson and Tormey, is the entire realm of non-hegemonic, non-state-centred politics. While they agree with Mouffe and Laclau regarding the specificity of various struggles, they do not require a moment of hegemonization. Because post-anarchists move beyond an exclusive focus on those who are making demands of hegemonic institutions or trying to build hegemonies of their own, their framework brings into view an incredibly diverse range of actors and practices that are oriented by and toward any number of normative commitments and aspirations. They argue for an expansion of the analytical field of the political such that the political field “is no longer reduced to one game” but instead “includes everything from hidden transcripts and shadow states to stateless societies and networked swarms” (Robinson and Tormey 2008: 153-4). Furthermore, they highlight the field of “everyday life” as a source of infinitely diverse forms of politics by emphasizing “the ‘density’ of everyday life as a field of meanings and immanent activities rather than as a set of floating elements just waiting to be articulated by a despotic signifier” (Robinson and Tormey 2008: 152).

Another important aspect of post-anarchism in relation to Fraser’s Critical Theory and Mouffe & Laclau’s post-Marxism is that, unlike the latter two, the former is highly attentive to both imperial and liberal forms of power (including, of course, liberal-imperial forms of power). First, because of his attentiveness to indigenous peoples’ struggles against colonialism, postcolonial critiques of Eurocentrism, and contemporary imperial power relations between the global North and South, Day is a strong critic of metanarratives of modernity/modernization of the kind deployed by both Fraser and Mouffe and Laclau. Not only does Day remain aware of the exteriorities of modernity—that is, of coloniality—he also defends attempts to resist incorporation into modernity by practicing alternatives grounded in diverse, subalternized values and ways of life (2005: 87, 192). Second, unlike Fraser and Mouffe and Laclau who only pay attention to liberal-democracy’s emancipatory script but not to its operation as a form of power, Day is highly attuned to liberal-democratic forms of governmentality. Operating by integrating diverse groups into its hegemonic social order and by channelling their desires toward liberal-democratic demands, liberal-democratic governmentality is understood by Day as a mode of capture as well as a form of discipline and control that seeks to contain difference and pluralism within a highly circumscribed range. Because of his attentiveness to both imperial and liberal forms of power, then, Day’s post-anarchist framework is able to understand and appreciate a much deeper diversity of social movements, including those of indigenous and other subalternized groups,

and therefore move beyond the truncated liberal-democratic pluralism of Fraser and Mouffe and Laclau, toward what we might call a postcolonial pluralism that includes non-liberal, nonmodern, and other subalternized forms of difference (and their ethico-political practices and struggles).

One of the great advances of post-anarchism over Critical Theory and post-Marxism with respect to the deep diversity of global social movements, then, is that it neither seeks an ultimate rational reconciliation of diverse struggles, nor does it demand that they become articulated in a common hegemonic project. Rather, the particularity, specificity or “singularity” of each struggle is maintained and respected, for there is no single enemy against which these movements are fighting, and therefore no common, coherent project that can ultimately harmonize or unify them (2005: 5-6). Instead, the emphasis is placed on building solidarity and cooperation among irreducibly diverse individuals and groups through webs of affinity-based relationships. Solidarity is understood here in contrast with both identity and representation, since solidarity occurs across identifications, rather than within them (Day 2005: 90; Tormey 2006: 149). This affinity-based action of solidarity-building across difference is also understood as distinctly ethical, rather than moral, action, as it involves micro-level practices of self-formation that are non-universalizing or –totalizing in intent (Day 2005: 90).

However, it is crucial to recognize that there remains a kind of meta-norm at work in this literature that is meant to serve as the basis for solidarity amongst diverse individuals and groups. In keeping with the anarchist tradition in which they are working, post-anarchists like Day, Tormey and Robinson envision that diverse social movements will build relations of solidarity and cooperation around shared ethico-political commitments to maximizing the autonomy of individuals and groups and to minimizing forms of domination. While autonomy is detached here from its state-based forms, and is no longer supported with a foundational meta-narrative, it nonetheless functions in this work as a kind of second-order commitment toward which the practices of individuals, groups, movements and struggles are to be oriented. Affirming the difference of diverse ‘singularities’ is understood as the expression of a commitment to autonomy in which each singularity “speaks for itself” (Tormey 2006: 141-43). Relations of power should be evaluated, then, “according to the extent to which they *encourage* or *discourage* the maintenance, emergence and development of equitable relations between autonomous individuals and groups” (Day 2005: 134, original italics). The flip side of this commitment is the Foucaultian-derived commitment to minimizing the myriad and interlocking structural forms of domination that constrain autonomy/difference, including patriarchy, imperialism, racism, capitalism, and the state: “how can we organize ourselves so as to minimize domination and exploitation, particularly in a world increasingly colonized by neoliberal globalization and the societies of control?” (143). The basis for linking disparate individuals, groups and communities in relations of solidarity is to be built through the development of (diverse, but nonetheless) autonomous subjectivities who are actively committed to preserving their own autonomy and that of others by opposing oppressive relations along all axes of subordination (188-9).

5.5 Saba Mahmood and the Politics of Piety

The fourth step in the trajectory I am laying out arises from the work of Saba Mahmood, in her analysis of a grassroots women's piety movement in Egypt. In her book *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*, Mahmood argues that the theoretical and analytical tools developed within the horizon of progressive politics are neither suited to the task of understanding non-liberal social and political movements that are not guided by the ideal of individual autonomy, nor to understanding the relationship between ethics and politics that can be enacted by these movements. The theoretical lenses associated with progressive politics often read the actions of social actors through the dichotomies of oppression/autonomy, power/resistance, and reproduction/subversion of power, such that all social and political movements come to be understood as essentially concerned (whether explicitly or implicitly, self-consciously or sub-consciously, subjectively or structurally, in intent or in effect) with one side or the other of these tropes. This theoretical imposition, Mahmood argues, "makes it hard for us to see and understand forms of being and action that are not necessarily encapsulated by the narrative of subversion and reinscription of norms" (2005: 9), and prevents the meaning of agency from being "explored within the grammar of concepts within which it resides" (34). The women's piety movements she explores pushes us to move beyond the conventional horizons of progressive politics because of the way in which this movement "regards subordination to a transcendent will...as its coveted goal" (2-3), and therefore primarily seeks not to challenge or resist particular norms but rather to uphold and inhabit them (5, 15). The particular form of agency in this movement, then, can neither be understood through the notion of resistance, or the desire for autonomy. In fact, for Mahmood, these two concepts are inextricably tied together, since the notion of agency-as-resistance is rooted in a normative picture of the autonomous subject:

Agency, in this form of analysis, is understood as the capacity to realize one's own interests against the weight of custom, tradition, transcendental will, or other obstacles (whether individual or collective). Thus the humanist desire for autonomy and self-expression constitutes the substrate, the slumbering ember that can spark to flame in the form of an act of resistance when conditions permit. (2005: 8)

Mahmood's aim, in short, is to point out that agency can be exercised without an orientation to autonomy as either a political or ethical goal.

There are several interesting features of the women's piety movement that bring Mahmood's analysis of this movement into conversation with the three political traditions analyzed earlier. First, like Mouffe and Day, and contra Fraser, Mahmood's theoretical framework for understanding the piety movement utilizes an Aristotelian and Foucaultian notion of ethics that is situated, practice-based, and decidedly non-universal instead of a universalistic Kantian morality that is to transcend difference through the derivation of rational norms. She writes:

Foucault's conception of positive ethics is Aristotelian in that it conceives of ethics not as an Idea, or as a set of regulatory norms, but as a set of practical activities that are germane to a certain way of life. Ethics in this conception is embedded in a set of specific practices (what Aristotle called "practices of virtue"). It is only from the standpoint of the dispositions formed through these practices that the Kantian question of moral deliberation can be posed.

...Foucault's use of Aristotelian ethics is not geared toward asserting its universal validity... Instead, for Foucault, this tradition allows us to think of ethics as always local and particular, pertaining to a specific set of procedures, techniques, and discourses through which highly specific ethical-moral subjects come to be formed. (27-8)

Second, Mahmood stresses the non-juridical, non-statist character of the piety movement. Her analysis reveals that the primary focus of social movements need not be on the state or political association at all, or on gaining hegemony over others. Like Day, and in contrast to Fraser and Mouffe, Mahmood disagrees with the widespread notion that "contemporary (or 'new') social movements are best analyzed in terms of a politics of identity that manifests itself in claims of rights, recognition, distributive justice, and political representation" (2005: 193). Indeed "it is not toward recognition that the activities of the mosque or the piety movement are oriented, but rather toward the retraining of ethical sensibilities so as to create a new social and moral order. In light of this, it would therefore be a mistake to assume that all contemporary social movements find their genesis in a politics of identity and should be analyzed as responses to the juridical language of rights, recognition, and distributive justice" (2005: 193). This movement does not fall into a 'politics of demand', to use Day's phrase, but rather aims toward ethical self-transformation, and therefore need not be contained within, or directly oppositional to, the dominant, official languages and norms of the political association. Such ethical movements are often neither liberal nor anti-liberal, as Mouffe's approach would frame it; rather, they travel at oblique angles to the state and its hegemonic discourses, and can be oriented toward any number of non-statist and non-hegemonic goods. Nonetheless, they are deeply political, both in the sense that they seek and often achieve significant social transformation, but also because they often upset, intentionally or incidentally, the very hegemony-building projects of the state that preoccupy Mouffe, without necessarily mobilizing an alternative hegemonic project of their own. Like Day, then, Mahmood's work serves to undermine the statist or hegemonybuilding imperatives imposed by Fraser and Mouffe on diverse social movements.

Third, also like Day, and unlike Fraser and Mouffe, Mahmood is highly attentive to modern, liberal, and imperial forms of power. Not only does she situate the piety movement as at least partially a response, on the part of its participants, to perceived processes of secularization and westernization brought about by modern liberal governance (2005: 4), but she also situates her own analytical and theoretical interventions as a response to modern, liberal-secular power operating within the realm of knowledge production and intellectual labour. For Mahmood, the agency-as-resistance model that

she critiques is itself a manifestation of liberal-secular power that insinuates itself—in terms of its goals, normativities, and teleologies—into our lenses and languages of understanding and evaluation of social phenomena like the piety movement. Hers is an intervention not only into the colonialist assumptions and ideals underpinning many forms of feminist and ‘progressive’ scholarship, but also into how this work ‘functions’ in an imperial context. She writes:

...North Atlantic geopolitical interests in the Middle East have long made it a primary site for the exercise of Western power, and thus for the deployment of the secular-liberal discourses through which that power often operates. What is at stake in Western critiques of Islam, in other words, is not simply a question of ideological bias, but rather the way these critiques function within a vast number of institutional sites and practices aimed at transforming economic, political, and moral life in the Middle East... (191)

Where Mahmood goes further than Day in her critique of the imperial power of modern secular liberalism, however, is to extend this critique to the very picture of the autonomous subject that Day’s anarchism/post-anarchism shares with liberalism³⁶.

Day does not appear to acknowledge this convergence between liberalism and anarchism, at one point suggesting that the commitment to autonomy comes from anarchism and autonomist Marxism, while liberalism’s commitment is to respect and recognition (168).

Liberalism, for Mahmood, constitutes, and is constituted by, a distinct and hegemonic conception of the subject, ethics, and politics—“something like a form of life” (2007: 149)—which naturalizes and universalizes the desire for autonomy and renders hegemonic the maxim “that the good life is necessarily a freely chosen one in which a person develops his unique capacities in accord with his ‘own will and interests’” (2007: 148). What is interesting and significant about the piety movement for Mahmood is that it challenges in many ways the knowledges, self-understandings, ethics, and sensibilities of liberalism’s autonomous subject, and therefore helps to bring to light “its hegemonic qualities, its normative assumptions, and the ways in which it remains peculiarly blind to other kinds of political and social projects and moral-ethical aspirations” (2007: 149).

Because, as we have seen, the central features and commitments of the autonomous subject are shared equally by liberals and anarchists, Day’s framework maintains many of the same blind-spots and limitations as liberalism, enabling us to see and understand very little about ethical, social, and political action beyond the oppression/autonomy dyad. Mahmood’s work shows that politics is not simply about resistance to, and liberation from, forms of oppression and domination, but can be oriented toward any number of ethico-political goods. This can be true for both state-centred and non-state-centred politics. And furthermore, not only will subjects be oriented toward diverse goods, but their ethical relation to these goods may not be one of autonomous rule over oneself (“I choose to bring myself into accord with these goods”), but may rather involve establishing a relation of subordination to a duty or a will beyond oneself (“I

am compelled to live in accordance with these goods”). For both Mouffe and Day, ethical practice is to remain oriented toward an ideal of autonomy; ethical practices are not just practices *of* freedom in relation to dominant norms, but are practices *for* freedom, and are part of an effort to produce autonomous subjects and communities. Mahmood, on the other hand, uses Foucaultian ethics precisely to illustrate that ethical practices are very often not practices *for* freedom at all, and that, as such, it would be a mistake to attribute to all social and political movements either a first or second-order commitment to freedom and/or autonomy. Mahmood’s work helps to challenge, then, the meta-norm of autonomy that continues to operate even in many non-statist and ethicopolitical orientations.

It is important to notice why Mahmood is willing and able to see beyond the metanorm of autonomy where Mouffe and Day are not, even though all of these three, in contrast to Fraser, share a turn to ethics that is premised on a rejection of foundationalist meta-norms. Of course, for Fraser’s deontological Critical Theory tradition, the abstraction away from the substantive content of ethical difference is precisely the point of appealing to a meta-norm of autonomy. But for the post-Marxist and post-anarchist traditions, this move is more surprising, especially given their common critique of Kantian moral universalism and deontology, and their shared emphasis on ethical specificity, situated practice, and irreducible difference. The reason why Mouffe and Day do not see beyond this meta-norm, I want to suggest, is that they conceptualize difference primarily within the secular-humanist binary of oppression/autonomy. Through this lens, the challenge or problem of difference and diversity is in fact reduced to the problem of oppression constraining an autonomous subject, and more specifically to the problem of the *diversity of oppressions* that are doing so, rather than concern for the actual substance of ethical difference, and the *diversity of ethics*. Through the oppression/autonomy lens, difference does not have to be dealt with in its specific, positive content, but only in the autonomy to pursue whichever content the subject chooses, and the forms of oppression that hinder this. In other words, take care of oppression/autonomy, and difference will take care of itself.

This abstraction away from the ethical content of difference plays out in a couple of different ways in the work of Mouffe and Day. First, both authors place greater attention on what we might call negative difference, or forms of difference or oppression that are to be transcended, eliminated or overcome, rather than on positive difference, or forms of difference that are to be maintained, affirmed, and practiced. Differences along axes of race, sex and class, for example, are often regarded as divisions to be overcome, and are often not regarded as forms of difference that offer their own ethical alternatives to be affirmed. As such, the critiques of these forms of oppression do not appear to have to take account of any specificities of ethical difference. And second, even when these authors do take account of positive forms of difference, such as the difference involved in religious or indigenous struggles, they appear to believe that these are simply particularistic struggles for autonomy, and therefore need only to be addressed in terms of equal autonomy, rather than in terms of the content of the

ethical difference being asserted. In fact, in abstracting away from the specific ethical difference involved, difference is not treated here as a positive form of difference at all, but rather is treated as an inequality or difference with respect to autonomy, and therefore as a negative form of difference (e.g. differences of autonomy ought to be eliminated). Even struggles for difference are taken up here as struggles for a kind of sameness.

For example, when conceptualizing the relations among diverse movements and groups, Mouffe and Laclau picture various groups each utilizing the discourse of liberal-democracy and the goods of freedom and equality to challenge relations of oppression, and

gradually recognizing how their shared liberal-democratic horizon and struggle against oppression allows them to build a chain of equivalence among themselves (1985: 152-8). While many of the ‘new social movements’ that they initially claim to be addressing clearly incorporate a positive ethics that goes well beyond a simple autonomy or ‘anti-oppression’ struggle—they mention ecological, feminist, and ethnic struggles, for example—Mouffe and Laclau really only end up addressing the building of equivalence among negatively-defined struggles against oppression and positively-defined projects for equality and liberty:

The strengthening of specific democratic struggles requires, therefore, the expansion of chains of equivalence which extend to other struggles. The equivalential articulation between anti-racism, anti-sexism and anticapitalism, for example, requires a hegemonic construction which, in certain circumstances, may be the condition for the consolidation of each one of these struggles. (1985: 182)

Similarly, while Day refers to many struggles that are centrally concerned with affirming a positive ethical difference or alternative way of life, such as indigenous, queer, feminist and environmental movements, his discussion of building solidarity among diverse subjects remains focussed on the problem of addressing the diverse forms of oppression that divide these struggles, rather than their diverse ethics:

If the multitudes are ever to come together in any way, this will be the result of a long process of building solidarity and dealing with differences and structured oppressions that plague movements for radical alternatives as much as they do the political mainstream. We simply cannot wish away or have done with racism, heterosexism, classism and other forms of prejudice. (2005: 155)

By his own account, what Day’s post-anarchism adds to classical anarchism is a more thorough and multidimensional analysis of diverse axes of oppression, and a politics of affinity/solidarity that is based on an integrative anti-oppression framework and a set of shared ethico-political commitments derived from that framework (178-202). Indeed, for

Day, the reason why diverse struggles are ultimately irreconcilable is not because such a reconciliation would be somehow *undesirable* because of their diverse, positive ethical projects; rather this reconciliation is simply regarded as *impossible*, because power can never be eliminated, and forms of autonomy along different axes of op-

pression can never be fully harmonized: “total liberation does not exist, it never has existed, and it never will exist; to seek it is to give in to the Utopian urge to free the entire world once and for all, to achieve the transparent society” (154). While total liberation is utopian, the meta-norm here remains the maximization of autonomy and the minimization of oppression and domination. As such, the bedrock upon which diverse struggles and communities are to build solidarity is a shared commitment to fight against each other’s oppressions (189).

Mahmood’s work sees beyond the oppression/autonomy frame because her focus is neither on a form of difference that is defined negatively as an axis of oppression to be overcome, nor on a movement struggling for autonomy, but from the outset is on the specific ethical content that is affirmed and actualized by a nonliberal, religious movement. As such, her starting point lies outside the secular-humanist problematic of oppression/autonomy that concerns Mouffe and Day, and enables her to show that a movement can exercise a form of agency that is both ethical and political, without being oriented either toward autonomy or against oppression. In fact, as we have seen, Mahmood goes so far as to resist the very language of ‘resistance’ itself because of its ties to autonomy. For Mahmood, the common link that defines agency as a form of resistance to particular relations of power and/or oppression is itself a product of the normative picture of an autonomous subject. For her, the notion of resistance is often misapplied to many agents who are not in fact fighting for autonomy; rather, they are more concerned with affirming, upholding and inhabiting a set of norms than with resisting or subverting them.

But while Mahmood is surely correct that some movements are better understood as affirmative movements that seek to affirm and uphold certain norms rather than as resistance movements, it is also important to recognize that these are not mutually exclusive. It is possible, after all, for a movement to resist a relation of power/oppression, and to simultaneously affirm a set of norms. Indeed, in many (most?) cases, social movements are doing just this. Even in her own account of the piety movement she studies, which she argues is an affirmative movement and not a resistance movement, we can, I think, see a form of resistance at play. As Mahmood herself explains, the piety movement has arisen at least in part as a response to particular norms and relations of power and oppression—in this case, ‘westernization’ and ‘secularization’, forces which are themselves understood in relation to a history of Western imperialism.

As such, in contrast to Mahmood’s own argument, it does not seem to follow that to understand the piety movement as engaged in a practice of resistance is to impute to it a commitment to autonomy. Rather, there appears to be an intermediate position which her own analysis reveals, but which she does not herself acknowledge because of her conflation of resistance and autonomy: that is, a form of agency that does, to some extent, resist a power relation, but is oriented toward the affirmation of norms/goods other than autonomy. The piety movement is an example of this, as are many ecological and environmental movements which clearly affirm and actualize an alternative way of living, as well as resist a number of power relations, but do not affirm

a humanist goal of autonomy. Whereas Mahmood argues that resistance and autonomy are inextricably linked, I am suggesting that we maintain some distance between these terms by distinguishing between (a) practices *of* freedom/resistance against a relation of power/oppression, and (b) practices *for* autonomy. After all, practices of freedom/resistance do not necessarily involve an affirmation of autonomy, but rather may involve affirming and inhabiting any number of other goods, in what I have called a form of ethico-political actualism. The point here, in short, is that an agent can enact a particular practice of freedom, resistance, or transgression with respect to a specific relation of power/oppression, without having to affirm freedom or autonomy per se. As such, this analysis reveals that autonomy cannot be assumed to serve as a meta-norm upon which to build solidarity among social movements, even amongst those that can be understood as resistance movements.

Furthermore, this analysis can also help us to see why, even amongst movements struggling against relations of oppression, ‘anti-oppression’ itself will not be able to serve as a meta-norm upon which to build solidarity. In order to understand why this is, we must first be careful to distinguish between two types of oppressions, each of which involves a distinct form of difference. One type of oppressive relation, which we might call a *dividing relation*, imposes a negative form of difference, or a form of difference that the oppressed seek to overcome or transcend. Resistance to this type of oppression involves the assertion or affirmation of a type of positive sameness over and against the imposed form of difference. By contrast, the other type of oppressive relation, which we might call an *assimilative relation*, does not impose a form of negative difference, but rather imposes a form of negative sameness. Resistance to this type of oppressive relation involves the assertion of a form of positive difference over and against the imposed sameness. Clearly, Mahmood’s case study, insofar as it does involve an oppressive relation of some kind, provides an example of an assimilative relation in response to which a form of positive difference is affirmed (e.g. when a threatened religious tradition is affirmed and practiced in response to a form of assimilative liberal-secular power, or secularization), whereas Mouffe and Day focus on dividing relations.

But it should also be noted that the line between dividing relations and assimilative relations is usually not clear, and many forms of oppression involve both simultaneously. First, many oppressive relations which appear, at first blush, to be assimilative relations—because, for example, they involve the oppression of a way of life or an established ethical/religious tradition—often engender not only a form of resistance that affirms and practices an ethical difference, but also a form of resistance that demands a type of positive sameness (e.g. equal right to practice their religion). Similarly, many oppressive relations which initially appear to be dividing relations—such as sexism, racism, and capitalism, for example—can also be experienced and resisted as assimilative relations. In some of these cases, the oppressive relation generates and imposes a negative form of difference, which then gets transvalued into a positive form of ethical difference and asserted by the oppressed (e.g. when the racial difference imposed by

racial oppression is mobilized as a form of ethical difference in response to relations of racism and white supremacy, as in forms of Black Power that affirm blackness as a positive ethical identity). In other cases, the oppressive relation turns an existing form of difference into a negative difference, which then gets mobilized by the oppressed as a threatened ethical tradition (e.g. when the gender difference exploited by patriarchal gender relations is affirmed as a positive ethical difference, as in forms of ethical or difference-feminism that are concerned with the assimilation of femininity by masculinity). And in still other cases, the imposition of a form of negative difference by an oppressive relation is taken up as an assimilative threat to, or violation of, some other positive ethical tradition not directly or straightforwardly targeted by the oppressive relation (e.g. when a Sikh affirms and mobilizes her/his religious tradition in response to patriarchal gender relations, as in forms of Sikh feminism). While the line between them is therefore very blurry and always contested, it is nonetheless important to be aware of the ways in which relations of oppression can be experienced as both dividing and assimilative relations, and can therefore engender forms of resistance that both assert a positive sameness, and affirm a positive difference.

If diverse movements happen to assert a similar form of positive sameness in relation to their oppression (e.g. autonomy and/or anti-oppression, freedom and/or equality), then, this convergence may be able to serve as a unifying commitment among these movements. This certainly appears to be how Mouffe and Day conceptualize solidarity-building among diverse struggles. However, insofar as various forms of resistance to oppression also involve diverse forms of actualism, and insofar as the forms of positive ethical difference being actualized are not necessarily compatible or commensurable, then an 'anti-oppression' that abstracts away from the actual content of ethical differences cannot be relied upon as a metanorm upon which to build solidarity among diverse movements. Indeed, solidarity, in this case, must be built from the ground up, from directly within the deep diversity of ethical differences, and without meta-norms that are artificially regarded as transcending this diversity.

But there is yet another reason arising from this discussion why difference cannot be thought of simply in terms of overcoming oppression. This is because we cannot even know what constitutes oppression, and therefore what it would mean to overcome it and how we should respond to it, other than against a horizon of ethical purposes. Oppression, in other words, is not some independent entity that can be analyzed and critiqued outside of a normative horizon. Within the modern secular-humanist tradition, as I have argued, oppression is given meaning in relation to the affirmation of individual and group autonomy. As such, this tradition enables gender or class oppression, for example, to be critiqued and resisted through an affirmation of autonomy. But these forms of oppression can also be critiqued and resisted through many other ethical traditions and frameworks, and in relation to other sets of ethical goods and purposes. Diverse ethical traditions, in other words, affect what will even be regarded as positive/negative sameness and positive/negative difference, and therefore what constitutes a dividing relation and an assimilative relation, and how they should

each be responded to. As such, oppression cannot be analyzed or resisted together independently of difference, because ethical difference actually modulates the nature and character of oppression, and of proper responses to it. This renders untenable the notion of a freestanding critical analysis of, and resistance to, the operation of power and oppression.

5.6 Conclusion

One might object to my inclusion of Mahmood's case study into the learning curve I have laid out here. After all, there is no indication from Mahmood's account that the piety movement she studies is trying to build political ties with other movements, and certainly not with the network of anti-globalization, global justice, anti-neoliberal, leftist, or otherwise 'progressive' movements from below which have been the focus of this chapter. Surely, it may be argued, this network of movements has some kind of oppositional or emancipatory commitments in common which the piety movement does not share, and which therefore makes the latter's inclusion here inappropriate or out of place. Indeed, as we have seen, Mahmood herself is hesitant to attribute to this movement any kind of grand, oppositional political motive that might bring it into conversation or coalition with other movements.

Nonetheless, one of Mahmood's main points is to show how the piety movement challenges the limits of 'progressive' political languages, frameworks, judgements and sensibilities. And this is precisely why I find it important to bring this work into conversation with the three other critical 'progressive' traditions I examined. Global networks of social movements today bring any number of diverse struggles and movements into contact, and potentially into relationship, with any number of others. Furthermore, cooperation among these movements can be produced by any number of negative or positive, oppositional or affirmative, convergences. Resistance to imperialism, which has been my focus in this dissertation, provides only one such nodal point among many others. As such, no, there is no single set of commitments that unites a global network of movements, especially at its edges (Conway 2012); rather, the network hangs together through a dense and complex web of diverse, criss-crossing, and intersecting interests and commitments; of cooperation and competition, convergences and divergences, affinities and aversions, friends and enemies. For those who are serious, then, about creating 'one world with many worlds in it' (to use the popular Zapatista slogan)—and not just as a future goal, but as something to actualize and bring into being in the present—one of the crucial tasks is to think through the challenges of deep diversity, and more specifically of deep ethical difference—including the kinds of differences between secular-humanist forms of progressive politics, and an Islamic women's piety movement.

One of the key challenges in this regard, to which I have tried to draw attention in this chapter, is the challenge of moving beyond top-down approaches to difference

which attempt to deal with ‘difference’ in the singular—that is, in the abstract—through an appeal to a meta-norm that simultaneously transcends, reconciles, and yet enables concrete differences. I have argued that all three of the critical progressive traditions I surveyed rely, albeit in somewhat different ways and different senses, on the modern meta-norm of autonomy in this way, treating it as a higher-order norm that allows them to abstract away from concrete ethical differences, rather than as a central ethical commitment of a modern, secularhumanist way of life. As such, these traditions can each be thought of as subintern traditions to modernity—that is, they are subordinate (critical) traditions, but are nonetheless internal to modernity because they share its central form of problematization: the struggle over the autonomy of individuals and peoples.

The encounter with deep ethical difference, however, cannot simply occur within modernity in a way that allows moderns to remain safely entrenched in their already-accepted ethico-political tradition. Indeed, the pretension to be able to do so is itself an expression of the hegemonic power of modernity. And this is one of the central dangers here: that modern, especially liberal-democratic, forms of power will be reinscribed and reproduced within the network(s) of social movements attempting to realize a new world with room for many worlds in it. Taking the imperial power of liberal-democracy seriously means that many of us have to come to terms with the fact that our languages of the good and of emancipation are themselves implicated and complicit in pervasive forms of global power, injustice, oppression, assimilation, and destruction. And if this new world is built using only these modern languages and normativities, a number of modernity’s dividing and assimilative relations will surely be reproduced. As such, in this chapter I have attempted to trace a number of steps to help move beyond this family of political languages.

A first step in the learning curve I have sketched out here is to provincialize liberal-democratic norms that were regarded as universal and transcendental, and instead to regard these as particular ethico-political commitments. A second step is to recognize ethicopolitical movements that are not oriented toward, and therefore not constrained by, modern political institutions. A third step is to move beyond the idea that differences need to be hegemonized by a common political project, even if it is by a (now-provincialized) liberal-democratic project. A fourth step is to no longer rely upon a meta-narrative of modernization to limit the forms of difference that need to be taken seriously in the first place. A fifth step is to begin to take seriously the many movements that are neither oriented toward autonomy nor against oppression, but toward any number of goods or visions, and to pay attention to the infinitely diverse ways in which various movements assert forms of sameness and/or difference in relation to one another.

To recognize and affirm this complex web of deep ethico-political diversity is not to say that all differences are incommensurable, or that common goals and cooperation are not possible. Rather, it is to say that all convergences that make up this web will be provisional, situated, and shifting, and cannot be posited in advance from

within one language, framework, ideology, or way of life. These convergences must be earned and built from the ground up, from within concrete relationships of trust, humility, care, and cooperation across difference, and within dialogues that are critical, comparative, and ethical in their forms of reasoning. From the perspective of the participants involved, what is enacted here is not a form of “groundless solidarity” (Day 2005) or a “solidarity without bounds” (Kurasawa 2004), as some have suggested. Rather, these practices and relationships of solidarity remain firmly grounded and rooted within the dense field of ethical commitments and differences, not in abstraction from it.

6. Conclusion: Sikhi as Ethico-Political Practice

Truth is high, but higher still is truthful living.

—Guru Nanak

This dissertation has been an attempt to think through the hegemony and imperialism of liberal-democratic modernity, and the possibilities for forms of politics rooted in subaltern(ized) difference. One of the great challenges involved in resisting this form of hegemony is that liberal-democracy itself offers a broad family of evaluative languages that includes not only dominant languages that function to conserve and protect existing power relations, but also a wide range of robust and well-developed critical languages of resistance that can be used to challenge and subvert existing power relations. While the latter do provide the means of internal critique, these critical (or subinternal) languages share with the dominant languages a basic form of life rooted in the structures, social formations, and selfunderstandings of modernity. As such, the struggle between the dominant and critical languages of modernity does little to address the relation of this form of life to other forms of life, and in particular to the processes of subalternization of all non-modern ways of life and forms of normativity. Indeed the adoption and reliance on subinternal languages of resistance by subordinate groups helps to propagate and strengthen the hegemony of liberal-democracy, and the corresponding subalternization of alternative normative traditions and ways of life.

These processes of subalternization of alternative normative traditions are further complicated by the fact that liberal-democracy's critical languages are built upon the image of an autonomous subject whose freedom and equality ostensibly allows pluralism and difference to flourish. As such, these languages carry a promise of emancipation and of the protection of difference—indeed, of providing the very preconditions for difference. These promises serve to channel alternative normative traditions into this modern, liberaldemocratic form of life itself—to take up and utilize liberal-democracy's critical resources as its own, and as a means to its own 'interests'. The interaction of alternative normative traditions with liberal-democratic languages therefore causes an internal bifurcation with which most alternative normative traditions are grappling today: the divide between a modern, liberal-democratic form of the tradition and other forms of the tradition that are not epistemically adjusted to the priority of the modern, liberal-democratic form of life. In other words, this is a divide between those forms

of a tradition that are now subinternal to liberal democracy, and those that remain subaltern. The resulting split between ‘good Muslim’ and ‘bad Muslim’ articulated by Mahmood Mamdani is a phenomenon that arises not only within the Muslim community, then, but within practically any alternative normative tradition today (although not equally so) that comes into contact with the discourse of liberal-democracy. As Esteva and Prakash argue, paraphrasing Yvonne Dion-Buffalo and John Mohawk, subintern/subaltern peoples today have three choices: “become *good subjects*, accepting the premises of the modern West without much question; become *bad subjects*, always revolting against the parameters of the colonizing world; or become *non-subjects*, acting and thinking in ways far removed from those of the modern West” (1998: 45, original italics).

Indeed, my own motivation for analyzing this process of subinternization/subalternization arises from a concern over the sheer weight and vast assimilative power that liberal-democracy exerts over the ‘other’ normative tradition in my own life: the tradition of Sikhi. It is therefore appropriate, I hope, for me to conclude this project with a reflection on how the above bifurcation is playing out within the Sikh community today, especially in the Western diaspora. This is a community that has in recent years been labelled both a model minority and a terrorist threat; has experienced racism and racial profiling, exclusion, and state-sanctioned violence and persecution, while at the same time achieving high levels of public integration; and has been grappling simultaneously with struggles against assimilation, struggles for inclusion, and movements for internal reform and transformation. In response to these various pressures and struggles, a wide range of political forms have been generated within the community, but here I want to focus on what I see as two broad families of what we might call ‘Sikh politics’.

The first, which is the most prevalent, is a modern, liberal-democratic form of Sikh politics that is centrally concerned with the struggle for forms of multicultural accommodation/inclusion of Sikhs and Sikh practices within a broadly liberal-democratic public sphere, as well as for forms of Sikh nationhood/political sovereignty. This modernist form of Sikh politics tends to abstract away from the specific or particular content of Sikhi, instead utilizing dominant liberal-democratic tropes of rights, representation, recognition, popular sovereignty, and the oppression/autonomy binary to fight for inclusion into the modern state and supra-state institutions and orders. Central examples of this family of political struggles include the fight for the right to wear the kirpan in public schools and other public institutions, to be able to wear the *dastaar* (turban) and to keep *kesh* (uncut hair) in the

U.S. military and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and to have Sikh representation in political institutions, as well as for an independent Sikh state. The second form of Sikh politics, by contrast, is an ethico-political form that approaches Sikhi as a normative tradition to be actualized in the lives and practices of Sikhs. Far from abstracting away from the positive content of Sikhi, this latter form of politics does not use modern liberal-democratic languages as an instrument or means to achieve

Sikh ends or to protect Sikh difference; rather, it closes the gap between means and ends by starting on the ground of micro-scale practices of Sikhi rather than on macro-scale institutions (but does not end with the former), and shifts the focus from the formalistic modern question of how Sikhs can achieve full, free and equal personhood, citizenship and/or nation-statehood, to the question of what it means to be/become a Sikh and to live a Sikh way of life. Within this latter form of politics, ‘modernity’ is hardly taken for granted, but actually tends to be regarded as an assimilative force that often distorts and/or contains the meaning and practice of Sikhi.

To be sure, these two forms of politics are often not regarded as standing in tension with each other. Modern rights to freedom of religion, for example, are not usually seen as an intrusion by modernity upon Sikhi in the same straightforward way as are modern social pressures to cut one’s hair. Nonetheless, I want to suggest that there are increasing tensions between these two forms of politics within the Sikh community, as dissonances between Sikhi and modernity, Sikhi and liberal-democracy, are increasingly recognized, and as the constraints imposed by modern liberal-secular rule and culture upon Sikhi are increasingly identified and challenged. One very interesting example of such a tension between these two forms of Sikh politics arose in the recent debates over the campaign for inclusion of Sikhs into the U.S. Military. While several critical commentators suggested that, rather than fight for inclusion into any and all institutions of this kind, Sikhs ought to consider whether the institutions into which we seek inclusion are themselves congruent with the teachings of Sikhi, a number of others who were spearheading, participating in, and supporting the inclusion campaign argued that, regardless of our interpretations of Sikhi, those Sikhs who want to join the military should have the right to do so.

Of course, there is a very specific reason why the modern liberal-democratic form of Sikh politics abstracts away from the actual content of Sikhi. Indeed, part of the very point of the modern, secular, liberal-democratic project is to provide a moral and political order in which liberalism serves as a higher order set of values and norms—a set of meta-norms—that ostensibly provide the preconditions and necessary protections for the exercise of diverse ways of life, while at the same time requiring that these diverse ways of life, including perhaps especially religious ways of life, be epistemically adjusted so that their first-order beliefs, practices and norms internally conform to the second-order values, practices and norms of secular liberal-democracy. This applies equally to the more traditional liberalism of someone like John Stuart Mill, for whom the process of epistemic adjustment occurs through social reform in civilized societies and through colonial tutelage and despotism in ‘backward’ societies, as to the more contemporary, ‘post-secular’ liberalism of Jürgen Habermas, for whom religious citizens must undergo a series of ‘learning processes,’ ‘reconstructions,’ or ‘epistemic adjustments’ that allow them to ‘modernize’ and to reconcile their religious ways of life with the primacy and authority of modern, secular science and liberal-secular constitutionalism and individualism. Politics, in this tradition, is largely construed as withdrawing from first-order considerations, leaving these instead to a private sphere of individual choice, and es-

tablishing a public sphere based only upon the second-order norms and procedures that are required for social cohesion, political legitimacy, and peaceful coexistence in an otherwise diverse society. Indeed, then, the shoe-horning of Sikhi that occurs within liberal-democratic Sikh politics, as well as its abstraction away from much of the distinctive content of Sikhi, is quite intentional, for this is regarded as a central condition of the social compact that ostensibly enables diverse citizens and groups to both live together peacefully, and be able to choose for themselves the way of life that best suits them.

The problem, however, with this tradition in general and therefore with the dominance of the liberal-democratic form of Sikh politics in particular is that it is precisely in the course of all of this ‘learning’, ‘reconstruction’, and ‘adjustment’ that the distinctiveness of diverse normative traditions is often lost, and that these traditions can and often do become radically disconnected from the everyday lives of their adherents. Rather ironically, the words of that great liberal imperialist himself, John Stuart Mill, are helpful in understanding this point. In the context of drawing a contrast between ‘dead dogma’ and ‘living belief’ in his treatise *On Liberty*, Mill argues that most Christians hold the doctrines of Christianity as a dead dogma, that is, in a way that is radically disconnected from the actual regulation of their conduct. He writes:

...it is scarcely too much to say that not one Christian in a thousand guides or tests his individual conduct by reference to [the laws of the New Testament]. The standard to which he does refer it, is the custom of his nation, his class, or his religious profession. He has thus, on the one hand, a collection of ethical maxims, which he believes to have been vouchsafed to him by infallible wisdom as rules for his government; and on the other a set of every-day judgments and practices, which go a certain length with some of those maxims, not so great a length with others, stand in direct opposition to some, and are, on the whole, a compromise between the Christian creed and the interests and suggestions of worldly life. To the first of these standards he gives his homage; to the other his real allegiance.

The argument I am making here bears some resemblance to Mill’s, in that I am suggesting that many forms of politics often engaged in by Sikhs in their ‘every-day judgments and practices’, and commonly understood as ‘Sikh politics’, have much more to do with the demands and interests of what Mill calls ‘worldly life’—but what I will call the structures of modern, capitalist, liberal-secular life and its forms of governmentality—than with Sikhi itself, and in fact serve to contain any radical potential of Sikhi. In the process of fighting to be integrated and included into, and therefore largely accepting the terms and constraints imposed by, modernity and its dominant ethico-political framework, forms of rule, and way of life—that is, in the process of subinternization—Sikhi can become a ‘dead dogma’, rather than a ‘living belief’. Sikhi is hollowed out, individualized and privatized such that its distinctive ontology and normative framework are either gutted or confined so effectively to a private realm that it is both disconnected from most aspects of Sikhs’ everyday lives and practices—especially in the ‘economic’ and ‘political’ spheres—and also rendered

incapable of presenting any real critical challenge to those practices. Political integration can, in this way, serve to further cultural assimilation. This is precisely the phenomenon described by Esteva and Prakash in the following passage:

[The modern state] attempts to assure absolute fidelity of the citizens-subjects whose social and political relationships cease to have their own center, to subordinate themselves to public or private capital of the centralist state, founded on the individualization of the possessive, envious and covetous individual, the *Homo oeconomicus*, created in the West. The state attempts to homogenize all natural communities in its territory; to impose upon them the same way of thinking and behaving, the same habits, to establish what is called *el imperio de la ley* (“the Empire of the Law”). (1998: 132, original italics)

But as Wendy Brown, using Foucault, reminds us, the power of modern liberal-democracy exceeds the power of the state alone. Modern governmental power goes well beyond the state; indeed, the state is itself to some degree governmentalized, or subjected to forms of governmentality which permeate the whole realm of the social (2006: 78-83).

This, then, is the great assimilative power of modern secular liberal-democracy: that while liberal-secular values, practices and norms are promoted and accepted as simply second-order norms—a set of enabling, capacitating, empowering meta-norms that do not rival or threaten first-order identities and beliefs, but, on the contrary, provide the necessary preconditions and protections for the exercise of those identities and beliefs—they nonetheless come to serve as the primary norms that orient and structure our basic, everyday form of life. As non-modern ways of life come to be adjusted to, dependent upon, and in fact built around, liberal-democratic norms, institutions, and forms of sociality, as well as capitalist economies—often through the very process of subalterns fighting for forms of freedom and equality within liberal-democratic modernity—alternative normative traditions are privatized, displaced, restructured, and marginalized. To use Mill’s phrasing again, those religious ‘maxims’ that ‘stand in direct opposition’ to the demands of worldly life, or those that do not ‘go a certain length’ with adherents’ everyday judgments and practices, are largely discarded, and in the process, any alternative contenders for their allegiance (and the forms of radical difference contained therein) are neutralized with respect to any real ability to regulate their conduct. This is the phenomenon described by Talal Asad (1996), when he says that “insofar as certain modern forms of religiosity have been identified with sets of abstracted belief-statements which have barely anything to do with people’s actual lives, you get the curious phenomenon of Christians, non-Christians, and atheists allegedly believing in or rejecting religion, but living the same kind of life.” The irony here, of course, is that this containment of alternative normative traditions which often causes them to become ‘dead dogma’ is part of the very point of the modern, secular, liberal-democratic project that John Stuart Mill himself and others were so instrumental in justifying and disseminating globally.

Of course none of this is to say that liberal-democratic forms of Sikh politics involve only a one-way process of assimilation of Sikhi into an overarching liberal-secular structure, or that Sikhs cannot and do not practice liberal-democracy differently than others. The specificities of Sikhi can and do play a modulating role in how Sikhs practice and inhabit liberal-democratic norms and forms of subjectivity, and Sikhs have played a very important role in modifying and expanding liberal-democratic norms in ways that may not have happened otherwise. Indeed, to take only one commonplace example, the fight to wear the kirpan in public schools and institutions has provoked a great deal of thought and reworking of the liberal tradition in directions that may not have otherwise happened, as evidenced by, if nothing else, the fact that the ‘Sikh kirpan’ case study plays a central role in the literature and jurisprudence on liberal multiculturalism and debates over religious freedom. Modifications of liberal-democratic norms are certainly possible, but my basic claim is that these interventions largely remain as *modifications* within, rather than *transformations* of, the general terrain of modern liberal-secular forms of rule. What is modified, amended, and/or expanded here are the central categories, values, and practices of liberal-secular rule, which are not displaced according the distinct logic(s) and categories of Sikhi, but rather maintain their privilege and place as the central structural and organizational categories.

This is precisely where the importance of the second, subaltern form of Sikh politics becomes clear, as it provides a crucial form of resistance to the assimilative power of liberal democracy and its processes of subinternization. This form of ethico-political practice, or what I have otherwise been calling a form of ‘actualism’, is itself not new, of course— attempts to actualize or to live up to the normative tradition of Sikhi are as old as the tradition itself. Nonetheless, the specifically *political* aspect of this practice has largely been concealed, obscured, or contained by modern frameworks that have construed Sikhi as a ‘religion’, and therefore as something separate from ‘politics’. Indeed the very shift away from the English term ‘Sikhism’ and toward the Punjabi term ‘Sikhi’ is meant to reflect a rejection of the constraints imposed by colonial vocabulary and Western regimes of knowledge that constructed ‘Sikhism’ as a set of relatively abstract metaphysical doctrines, belief-statements or truth-claims, and to instead recover a sense of ‘Sikhi’ as an embodied, practical tradition. In doing so, Sikhi no longer remains simply a *religion* in the modern sense, but becomes a non-compartmentalized *way of life*, a practical tradition that can orient conduct across a variety of social spheres, rather than being contained within a single sphere.

Sikhi is returned in this process to its roots as a radical social movement, as a kind of transformative praxis that operates according to an autonomous logic that need not be subordinated to the ‘higher-order’ practical rationality of hegemonic institutions, and whose politics is not primarily based on making demands of, or gaining power within, these institutions, but on actualizing a different way of life here and now through practices that prefigure or enact an alternative set of social values and practical relations. Sikhi as an ethico-political practice therefore re-unites Sikhi’s commitment to both *miri* and *piri*, to both transformative social organization and communal life as

well as to individual detachment from both ego/self and material life. This re-thinking and re-grounding of the thought and practice of Sikhi beyond the constraints of the theory and practice of liberal-democratic modernity is today occurring not only in the academic realm of Sikh Studies (Mandair

2009)37, but also within emerging social movements like the Sikh Activist Network in the greater Toronto area.

For the beginnings of a very interesting dialogue between Sikh Studies and Indigenous Studies, see Johnson

2011

The key challenge for Sikhi as an ethico-political practice, then, involves the attempt by Sikhs to extend the teachings and practices of Sikhi throughout all the spheres of their lives, or, perhaps more accurately, without regard for the differentiation of social spheres that is so central to theories of modernity and modernization. This involves developing new habits of applying the categories and normativities of Sikhi both in relations among Sikhs and in relations with non-Sikhs, to realms both within and beyond the Sikh community for which this previously may have seemed unnecessary or inappropriate. It will involve asking what Sikhi has to say (or how it can be used as a resource to think) about economic and political relations, about relations of power and oppression, about the environment, about pluralism and the diversity of normative traditions, about gender relations, and about the central goods that should guide our spiritual and material lives and our forms of critique of the same. In short: are there modern problems for which Sikhi can provide solutions? Answering this question will also involve exploring and experimenting with how to actualize or practice Sikhi here and now.

To be clear, Sikhi as an ethico-political practice is not a hegemonic or assimilative project. This is not an attempt to gain modern political power in order to legislate or enforce universal Sikh norms over Sikhs and non-Sikhs using the coercive power of the state. Sikhi, after all, is not a juridical or legislative tradition; it emphasizes truthful living over doctrines of truth, virtuous practice over universal moral and religious law. Furthermore, Sikhi is not an evangelical tradition that seeks to convert or assimilate others, but neither is it a relativistic tradition. It is neither a universalistic, nor a particularistic, tradition, but something closer to what I have called a common tradition. A central tenet of Sikhi is that there are many paths to spiritual enlightenment, so there is no impulse to proselytize or engage in missionary work; rather, a Sikh simply challenges others, through words and through her own example, to live up to the best in their own traditions. Sikhi is a deeply pluralistic tradition, committed to the flourishing of deeply different ways of life, but its pluralism is not rooted in a modern notion of autonomy.

Furthermore, Sikhi as an ethico-political practice certainly takes seriously unjust power relations and forms of oppression within to the Sikh community; indeed one of its primary tasks is surely to confront and transform these relations. However, this approach regards Sikhi as providing its own resources for internal critique and internal

consistency. There is no such thing as a formal or abstract critique of power that can be used to analyze Sikh social relations and institutions; most that claim to offer such a critique are based in a naturalized secular-humanist ontology and conception of the subject, one that is backed up by the coercive power of liberal-democratic institutions. Any critique of power is based in an affirmation of a distinct form of subjectivity and set of normative goods, and as such, Sikhi can itself provide an internal (albeit essentially contested) standard for a critique of power relations. One rather simple place to begin to think about a Sikh critique of power, then, could be with Sikhi's distinct ethical system, comprised of five vices or 'thieves' (lust, anger, greed, attachment, and ego/pride), and five virtues (truth, contentment, compassion, humility, and love).

However, in thinking of Sikhi as a practical and normative tradition that has the ability to guide a holistic way of life, this tradition should not be thought of in a narrow sense, with regard only to its central 'doctrines', 'values', or 'beliefs'; rather, it should take into account the full breadth and depth of this diverse and contested tradition, including both its symbolic and material content, and how all aspects of this tradition can serve as sources for anchoring and/or orienting the ethico-political practices of Sikhi. As such, practices of Sikhi can be those that draw upon any number of aspects of this broad and (critically) holistic tradition, including its language(s), history, scriptures, exemplary figures, normative values and frameworks, historical and contemporary customs and practices, popular narratives and meanings, social and religious institutions, and so on. Ethico-political practices of Sikhi could involve abstaining from forms of consumerism and consumption as a way of detaching from *maya*; developing alternative dispute resolution mechanisms and other parallel institutions within the Sikh community oriented toward Sikh goods and values; struggling to establish non-hierarchical and egalitarian workplaces as an expression of *nimrata* (humility) and a rejection of *lobh* (greed) and *ahankar* (ego/pride); establishing forms of communal and cooperative living, such as those encouraged and practiced by Guru Nanak; attempting to extend and apply the ethos and discipline involved in keeping the five *kakkars* to other aspects of one's life in an effort to live up to the ideal of the *saint soldier*; developing a form of Sikh feminism that is not grounded in modernity's autonomous subject, but in a distinctly Sikh subject; or re-imagining and re-institutionalizing *langar* (free, communal kitchen and meals) beyond the confines of the *gurdwara*. By expanding Sikhi's ability to guide our conduct in every aspect of our lives, we engage in practices that not only project from subaltern difference, but also begin to actualize a post-imperial, post-modern, post-liberal, post-capitalist, post-secular way of life.

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