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Introduction to the Review Symposium

Decolonizations: Cleaving Gestures that Refuse the Alien Call for Identity Politics

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ABSTRACT: Here follows a general introduction to this special issue of RoSA, which takes the form of a Review Forum discussing Arvind-Pal S. Mandair's *Religion and the Specter of the West: Sikhism, India, Postcoloniality, and the Politics of Translation* (hereafter *RSW*), published in 2009 by Columbia University Press.

Is it always good to talk, as phone companies (like British Telecom) pronounce through bridled smiles? Is dialogue the answer to a cross-cultural pluralistic world? *Who* would want to refuse dialogue *as a beginning* to dialogue? At the heart of Dr Mandair's *Religion and the Specter of the West: Sikhism, India, Postcoloniality, and the Politics of Translation* (hereafter *RSW*), is an *affirmative* and *productive* refusal of a peculiarly Western model of language which sanctions a particular notion of dialogue that implants an identity politics. Such a model of language assumes a metaphysical centre through which all comparisons are routed such that the other's difference is assimilated. Indeed,

1. Balbinder S. Bhogal's research interests include postcolonial and diasporic hermeneutics; theory and method in the study of religions (especially the conceptualization of the religion-secular binary); Indian Philosophy's relation to Continental Philosophy, as well as the discourse of mysticism and its critique of modern subjectivity. Recent publications include: 'The Animal Sublime: Rethinking the Sikh Mystical Body', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* (forthcoming); 'Subject to Interpretation: Philosophical Messengers and Poetic Reticence in Sikh Textuality', *SOPHIA: International Journal for Philosophy of Religion, Metaphysical Theology and Ethics* (forthcoming); 'Monopolizing Violence before and after 1984: Governmental Law and the People's Passion', *Sikh Formations: Religion, Culture, Theory* 7.1 (April 2011): 57–82.

during the Raj, Protestant Christianity and European modernity became the ciphers through which indigenous reform movements 'earned' recognition from their colonial masters.

At an international conference on *Dialogue and Difference* organized by Drs Arvind-pal Singh Mandair and Cosimo Zene, held at London University's School of Oriental and African Studies, between 12–14 September, 2001, such questions were raised, and the ominous atmosphere of the unfolding events of 11 September focused the intent of the conference ever more sharply—as the explosions, being the antithesis of dialogue, signalled the failure of all speech. In a publication that followed the conference, co-editors Mandair and Zene represented their refusal of such a European model of dialogue as an affirmation of another way to dialogue, one which incessantly deconstructs the power dynamic inherent within every dialogue:

> Indeed for those who exist on the wrong side of the power equation, dialogue, viewed as the *need to respond and to respond automatically* in a conversation, and in thus responding one's self-representation as other, may in fact be a mechanism of domination and subjection, a mechanism for levelling the difference of conversant subjects to an identity that can be reproduced at will. As a way of resisting this levelling of difference, cultures and individuals have often adopted the paradoxical strategy of entering into discourse by first refusing dialogue. Such refusals are not necessarily to be understood as the eradication of dialogue, but rather signal ways of entering into dialogue under more conducive conditions. From this perspective the strategy of refusal can also be seen as a way of opening a dialogue between cultures and civilizations without repeating past imperialisms...of saying no as a way of affirming and keeping the possibility of dialogue open. (2006: 1)

It is to this end that Mandair's *RSW* is dedicated: first, refusing dialogue in state, media and academic forums and venues (that according to his argument are already imbued with past *imperial and global designs*) by re-claiming the positivity of saying no. Saying no is a particularly indispensable gesture for people who exist on the wrong side of power, whose existence is appropriated by the mechanism of power inherent within every dialogue, and whose identities are formed by this very process of dialogue. And *then* secondly, once the framing and asymmetrical power relations of the (colonial/imperial) dialogue/structure have become visible, *negotiating* ways of *how to enter* the dialogue on more just (non-colonized) terms. That is to say, *RSW* is focused on how to speak and how not to speak in the context of a hegemonic language and power. *RSW* is then, first and foremost, a persistent examination of the legacies of the Sikh reformist movement during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Its perusal works through those legacies' wide ranging implications methodically, ultimately leading to the inevitable task of rethinking colonialism as a legacy that silenced and continues to silence certain kinds of speech for Sikhs and others similarly 'captured' by replacing them with European modes of enunciation, language-use and knowledge production.

Mandair's title foregrounds his major thesis: 'religion' itself constitutes the essential *identity* or Spectre of the West:

> In this book I explore the mechanisms by which this apparition—what I call the 'specter of the West'—has been, and continues to be, produced every time Indians retrieve for themselves a mode of identification through which they see themselves, and are seen by others, as members of a particular 'world religion' (Hinduism or Sikhism) or as members of a nation (Indian or Sikh), for in doing so they must rely on a comparative imaginary and inadvertently help to solidify the specter that calls itself the West. (*RSW*: 7)

The force and logic of this spectre of the West—as a comparative imaginary deriving from colonial conquest and control, aids the West to reconstitute itself *through* the assimilation of the Other onto its own epistemic ground. Furthermore, *RSW* delineates the continued predominance of Euro-Anglophone concepts even as the actual (colonial) evidence for their absolute hegemony becomes disguised; that is, these terms and classifications possess and thereby *haunt* Asian minds, bodies and speech *without* Asians themselves cognizing that this is happening. *RSW* aims to analyse this 'spectrality' and the colonial force of assimilation from which it arises, by offering modes of resistance—*that do not assume the simple translatability of cultures* (that operate through an economy of 'generalized translation' and which assume 'religion', for example, to be a universal).

Thus the key problematic that *RSW* takes on is the stubborn continuity of Western colonial prejudice from the past to the present. This bias assumes that there has been a shift within Europe from a religious to secular orientation—where the arrival of modernity's secular humanism constitutes a *radical break* with pre-modern traditions based within a theological worldview. Mandair argues this is a myth and one that performs a grave dereliction for it ignores the 'essential—i.e., ontotheological or metaphysical—*continuity* between different moments in the Western tradition: specifically, the Greek (*onto*-), the medieval-scholastic (*theo*-), and the modern humanist (*logos* or *logic*)' (*RSW* xiii). Mandair argues that this *ontotheological matrix* is the unconscious hermeneutic of modernity (*RSW*: 238)—one that pervades the colonial context and emerges in subsequent discourses across the academy, media and state.

Desiring that 'Sikh, and more broadly South Asian, thought [could] join the democratic spirit of dialogue with Western thought on more equal terms' than those formed through the colonial encounter (*RSW*: 380), Mandair begins by *offering a gesture that refuses the call for identity politics*:

> it may be possible to break the cycles of repetition that produce identity politics centered around structures of transcendence. These structures have continued to govern the modern and postmodern (globalized) forms of Sikhism and Hinduism by limiting their engagements in the world to revivals or retrievals of an essence or an original identity... The immediate outcome of this break with the nationalist

> schema is that it allows us to rethink *gurmat* as a teaching that engenders different ways of engaging in the world, a teaching centered on human action rather than a transcendental philosophy. This break is not a simple eradication of neocolonial representations of *gurmat* as 'Sikh theology'. It can be more usefully considered as a gesture that refuses the call for identity politics by reviving a prior relationship with temporality or finitude... (*RSW*: 379–80)

However, this refusal (to be replicated by a particular regime of translation) leads to an engagement in which terms and concepts, rather than being rejected outright, or merely substituted, are kept in play but resignified according to a non-Western 'sovereignty'—a practice prevalent within the Guru Granth Sahib (note the re-signifying of 'Hindu', 'Buddhist', and 'Islamic-Sufi' and 'Tantric' terms such as *yoga/jog, grihasth/girahī, bādhshāh/sachā-pātishāh, dharma/dharam, karma/karam, śūnya/sunn, samādhi/samādh, nirvāṇa/nirbān, allah, hari, śiva-śakti* and so on). Perhaps we should pause here, and ask whether it is indeed possible to enact such a resignification with respect to Western philosophical terms or not. And if so, who would be capable of doing this, given that believers perceive scripture as a unique 'revelation' requiring prophets, gurus, and so on, who transcend thinking or logic—the forte of the scholar/scientist—to 'capture' or 'receive' revelation. Yet, as the Guru is identified with the Word in the Sikh case (*gura-shabad*), a certain 'democratization' and 'vernacularization' prevents a strict polarization between Sikh and Guru, since each person can cultivate a direct relation with the True-Guru (*satiguru*) through the Word (*shabad*) and Name (*nām*). The Guru lineage itself demonstrates the fact that Sikhs become Gurus culminating in the Guru Granth Sahib and the Khalsa. Though there is no space here to develop this point, what this issue points to is a re-understanding of the notion of community and sovereignty (see *RSW*: 374). Nevertheless, in Walter Mignolo's terms, Mandair's refusal constitutes '*the denial of the denial of coevalness*'[2] which is *the* 'major task' of postcolonial theorizing (2006: xii).

Mandair's approach is thus to understand not only why 'the colonizer's paternalistic demand for "true religion," fostered...the reciprocation of this demand by neocolonial elites who produced monotheistic versions of Sikhism and Hinduism in order to inscribe themselves within the political and ideological space of Christianity', but also to detect 'the production of an economic (fluent) exchange between English as the First Idiom of the Raj and the regional vernaculars represented by the imaginary figure of the mother tongue', that actually led to 'the invention of the mother tongue (Punjabi, Hindi) as the

2. Fabian (1983) argues that anthropology constitutes its object by internalizing colonial prejudices of perceiving the other not only spatially, but temporally—such that tribes are seen to be distant in *time* not only space, and so are called 'primitive' and serve as present living examples of '*our*' past 'ancestors'. This Western deception of re-presenting socio-cultural differences as differences in time constitutes the 'denial of coevalness'. This phrase is central to both Mignolo's and Mandair's work as postcolonial thinkers of Latin America and South Asia respectively, and yet this is the first time their work is being inter-related.

monolingual other of English' (*RSW*: 14). Hence Mandair re-reads and updates the *ontotheological* discourse of the West into a *mono-theo-lingualism* as the West expands through colonization towards a global presence. The politics of religion-making go hand in glove with a politics of language-making (*RSW*: 14). Mandair writes,

> English was never learned through the mother tongue. Rather a mother tongue had to be invented as a specter or mirror image that corresponds to what Sakai calls 'homolinguality' and to what Derrida calls the 'monolingualism' of the English other. The paradox here is that the idea of the unity of 'one's own' had to be invented in order to break with what was *actually* one's own, namely, the heterolingual. (*RSW*: 99)

What gives Mandair's book its precise drive and meaning is a certain tone of mourning that runs throughout its contents, exemplifying many Sikhs' (and Hindus') own journey of witnessing the subordination, if not loss, of this heterolinguality and its heterological culture, through an imposed inheritance of monolingualism *and* monotheism. Going beyond Sakai's (1997) theorization then, Mandair astutely asks 'why in the moment of its formation, is the mono*lingualism* of the other also the mono*theism* of the other?' (*RSW*: 100)—hence his term *monotheolingualism*. Mandair desires to transform this mourning and its traumatic loss into a political project to first recognize this spectre of the West as an alien and colonial imposition, then refuse the homogeneous subject it announces as well as the exclusive nationalism it instigates, and finally offer various ways out of the entrapment of its identity politics.

Mandair's book is indeed ambitious, unavoidably so given the task at hand. In keeping with its scope, RSW has attracted two other Review Symposia (Murphy *et al.* 2011; Abeysekara *et al.* 2011) as well as individual reviews (Pennington 2011; Oberoi 2011; Flood 2011; Bhogal 2010). Given the recognition, and indeed accolade of the book's intellectual significance within a variety of fields, it seemed crucial to invite scholars whose own work is directly related to Mandair's arguments. I want to thank the editors of *Religions of South Asia* for seeing the importance of this project right from the start and for providing an excellent platform for its future discussions.

In this Review Colloquium the seven authors wrote their reviews independently and without meeting in a workshop or symposium. Because many of the above reviewers have already noted the book's considerable depth and range, the authors under this forum were invited to identify and analyse themes that related to their own work rather than each attempt a comprehensive review. Given the book's size (516 pages) and sheer range, I wanted to allow each author to focus on themes and sections *they* found most interesting to work with. The advantages to such a review strategy are obvious, but the downside is that the book's many-sidedness can be missed—hence the attempt of a partial redress here. Having planned to avoid unnecessary repetition of the book's major themes and arguments by

the seven reviewers, I have taken this task of redress and precis upon myself in this introductory essay—focusing on a major theme that structures the whole book: the *disruption* of colonial power, its *unending* legacy, and what to do about it.

SYNOPSIS OF *RELIGION AND THE SPECTRE OF THE WEST*

After a preface and long introduction that summarizes the book's key arguments, *RSW* is divided into three parts, each with two lengthy chapters.

Part I details the general context of Western colonial metaphysics and its encounter with India. Here Mandair rethinks the dichotomy of religion and the secular within key disciplines of the academy: history of religions, continental philosophy and postcolonial theory.

Part II charts the specific case history of how the Sikh reform movements instigated by the British during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries responded to this colonial, *ontotheological* imposition. The transformation of *sikhi* into a 'religion' named Sikhism is shown to be a political process imbued with colonial and orientalist prejudices and hierarchical binaries that reserve the highest value to monotheism, morality and 'secular' rationality, thereby setting the stage for communal and identity politics that gained force through the work of the dialectic (of lack) that continually cast South Asian subjectivities as numerous steps *behind* the West.

Part III uncovers the persistence of the subjugation of past imperialism in the present discourses of the state, media and academia, and offers solutions of how to disrupt and transform the discourses of these institutions that reinscribe the bondage of the past into the present.

LOCATING *RSW*: THE CONTINUITY OF COLONIALITY IN MODERNITY AND HEGEL'S METAPHYSICAL IMPOSITION OF *RELIGION AS HISTORY*

Mandair's reading of a colonially-inflected modernity from the South Asian context is clearly contiguous with many Latin-American postcolonial thinkers such as Mignolo, Mendieta and Maldonado-Torres—with whose work he does not directly engage. To emphasize the currency of the same issues across different colonialisms, these thinkers' work will be used here to support Mandair's thesis as well as signify its unique contribution to the field. A good starting-point is Mignolo's contention that the key difference between the two stages of the 'modern/colonial world system' (as he names it), where 'Occidentalism in the sixteenth century became the necessary grounding to conceive Orientalism in the eighteenth century' (Mignolo 2009: 282), is the transition from a *spatial* organization of the Renaissance world into a *spatio-temporal* one of the Enlightenment. Mignolo writes:

> During the European Renaissance, people around the world were mainly located in space, not in time. Christianity did not conceive of the 'infidels' as being less developed, or behind in time. Rather, they were in distant geographical places, like India... It was during the eighteenth century and the European Enlightenment that people outside Europe began to be located in time. The secular idea of 'primitives' replaced that of 'infidels'. (2009: 277)

Important to note here is the hugely influential role played by Hegel in this key transition—not missed by Mandair who dedicates a lengthy chapter to the re-examination of Hegel's work. By the time Hegel had completed his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* and *The Philosophy of History* (1820s–1830s), India, China and Japan had already been assigned to the past in contrast to Europe's present; for whilst Hegel assumed history began in 'the East', he argued it was no longer 'dwelling there' given his denial of the possibility of co-evalness. Thus the disjuncture of the 'historical'/'colonial' difference between East and West.

The birth of Europe's 'modern/colonial world system' operates then on a crucial denial of the sovereignty of multiple centres *from which* histories/stories/narratives can be written and/or spoken. That is to say, with the introduction of a temporal frame, and with the crucial backing of an European colonizing power, whole continents could be *ordered* in a line from the past to the present, from myth to history, from magic to religion, from blood purity to race, from coloured to white, from conquest to civilizing missions, from religious faith to secular reason, in short from tradition to modernity. Mignolo confirms: 'Hegel's denial of coevalness established the dividing line between "modernity" and "tradition"; but the distinction between both was created by the discourse of "modernity," not by the discourse of "tradition"' (Mignolo 2009: 277). Both 'tradition' and 'modernity' were thus inventions or abstractions, necessary to define and locate 'modernity' in Europe (England, France, Germany), which was then seen as *metaphysically* (*ontotheologically*) superior both developmentally and spatially, given the identification of Europe as the vanguard of *Geist* (Spirit). Mignolo notes that while the Christian interpretation of universal history may differ from Hegel's secular re-understanding, they both *share the same epistemic space* (2006: 451). Mandair is therefore not alone in detecting the force at the centre of European conceptuality to be that of Hegel's formulations of the *Geist*'s temporal development through the 'religions' of the world. This is why Hegel is central to how non-Western cultures were re-classified in relation to Western Christian-secular-modern identity. Another reason why Mandair embarks upon a substantial analysis of Hegel is that his works bring together, more than those of any other thinker, three centuries of intellectual development precisely focused on the religion/secular binary that culminates in a certain hierarchical conceptuality of religions in general. That spatio-temporal conceptualization of religion *as* history establishes the ground upon which a whole array of epistemological orientations and judgments feed directly into state, media and academic discourses, which in turn compose in part the modern social imaginary.

By analysing Hegel's often overlooked *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* alongside his more popularly studied *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, Mandair brings to light an important lacuna: the co-origination of religion and historicism. 'The ontotheological schema is a means for rendering the encounter with non-Western cultures politically harmless by installing them on a standardized graph of history/religion/reason' (*RSW*: 15). This schema provides 'a principle of "generalized translation"—to use Derrida's term—a mechanism for bringing different cultures into a system of equivalence in which the relative meaning-values can be assigned to each culture, in order for them then to be exchanged/compared' (*RSW*: 16). This is precisely Hegel's task, and in carrying it out he

> effectively replaces the very real problem of translation with the work of representation proper to the political economy of the sign... More precisely than any other thinker, Hegel's work both fleshes out the contours of 'the West' and 'the Rest', and provides the conceptual tools for future disciplines within an emerging humanities to theoretically exclude non-Western cultures... Central to this double act of exclusion-through-inclusion is the gesture of denying coevalness in time, or the assertion of temporal disjunction, the classification of non-Western others as noncoincident and essentially discontinuous with the West. (*RSW*: 16)

Mandair, like Mignolo, is not interested in how the West represents the East per se, but 'how European peoples and communities constructed the idea of the self-same' (Mignolo 2006: 332) *through* their representations of the East, and in Mignolo's case South America. That is to say, the notion of *enactment* rather than *representation* allows the focus to be on the locus of enunciation whence representations are fabricated. Both Mandair and Mignolo realize that 'It is as much the *saying* (and the audience involved) as it is what is *said* (and the world referred to) that preserves or transforms the image of the real constructed by previous acts of saying' (Mignolo 2006: 22). The problem then here lies with Western Christian/secular metaphysical *thinking*. Mandair explains, quoting Derrida:

> Globalatinization in all of its manifestations is the result of presupposing a 'concept of fundamental translatability [that] is linked poetically to a natural language' that itself *resists translation*. Today globalatinization enables the fiduciary, the core mechanism of Christianity and its language, to retain its hegemony due to the conceptual apparatus of international law, global political rhetoric...and...the various modes of multiculturalism. It can be seen as the global re-Christianization of the planet through the discourse of secular conceptuality. (*RSW*: 104)

Mandair argues that Derrida's neologism of 'globalatinization' illuminates why the Sikh reformists during the nineteenth-century colonizations, focused simultaneously on transforming their heterological speech into a monolingual one, as well as on transforming their diverse traditions into a singular 'religion'. This

> resulted in the emergence of a unified subject in whom the formerly heterolingual/heteroreligious experience becomes centralized through enunciations such as 'I speak Hindi (or Urdu, Punjabi, etc.)', 'My religion is Hindu (Muslim, Sikh, etc.)'; and why these enunciations, once they become synonymous with the nation, worked to destroy the subject's own otherness, its radical heterogeneity. (*RSW*: 105)

It is due to the imposition of this mode of abstract and singular identification that 'decolonization' does not necessarily occur when colonial powers leave the colonies (to fend for themselves, in creating their new 'nation'). What European colonizers attained 'was economic and political power that made possible the universalization of regional values' (Mignolo 2006: 18–19). The core of these regional values was formed by the invention of 'religion' as a historical logic, whose master locus of enunciation was conceptualized by, for and from a Christian-secular vantage.

Christianity's Double Location: Religion in General

European Christian cultures (be they Portuguese, Spanish, French, Dutch, Danish, English or German) colonized almost the whole world, which led to Christianity's double location: as being part of an emerging constellation of 'World Religions', and as the *epistemic centre* that defined (according to its own values and prejudices) the very classificatory structure of *religion in general*. This in turn secured their own elevated position in the hierarchy of the emerging religions and also justified their colonial exploits as a superior secular-modernizing force. Thus it is crucial to understand that Christianity is inseparable from secular modernity and postmodernity in sharing a privileged and double location. Mignolo summarizes this advantage:

> Christianity and its aftermath, secular epistemology, had the privilege of being part of the totality enunciated, and at the same time the universal place of enunciation (while being able to make-believe that the place of enunciation was a non-place). Consequently, the order of the enunciator was the natural order of the world, and the world, alas, was organized in dichotomous hierarchies. (Mignolo 2009: 278)

The unspoken lever of the Euro-American West then is this privilege of assuming a double position vis-à-vis the rest of the world due to the legacy of colonialism. Here, the colonized, due to the linear development of Hegelian *Geist*, had first to reform their pagan and polytheistic traditions in the image of Western-Christian (monotheistic) conceptions of 'religion', and then aim to relegate religion into a private subjective realm alone, in order to gain critical secular consciousness. This second move is, however, always denied by the insistence that the Non-West is perpetually trapped by their newly minted religious identity. For example, this double location is evidenced in the place

of historicism vis-à-vis religion. In analyzing the (controversial) works of the *historian* Hew McLeod, Mandair argues that secular historicism is thus valorized above religious traditionalism—even though it is given through a false humility of limitations, for whilst McLeod argues that he has no access to the spiritual truths of Sikhism, *he is also claiming that no access to special private revelation is possible as legitimate public knowledge* (*RSW*: 246–49).

Thus 'modernity produced both the illusion of the end of religion and the birth of the religious proper. Before modernity there was no religion, just as there was no "society". The fact is that modernity could not have come into being without the invention of religion' (Mendieta 2001: 46, in King 2009: 35). Religion is *the* discourse of how the West has *managed* the encounter with the Other: 'through the idea of religion, the West continuously speaks of itself, even when it speaks of others. For when it does so, it is implicitly in relation to the perfected model that it thinks itself to be. This is narcissistic objectification' (Dubuisson 2003: 95, in King 2009: 35). Therefore, just detecting and challenging the central dichotomy of the secular humanist Enlightenment imaginations of the *modern* over the *traditional*, is not sufficient, as King argues, 'if it does not also include critical engagement with the politics of representation involved in the translation of (non-western) traditions, through the category of "religion", into the lingua franca of "Universal History"' (King 2009: 43). King cites Daniel Dubuisson in support of this reading:

> Created by the West, enshrined in Western epistemology, and central to its identity, the concept of religion eventually came to be the core of the Western worldview... Would not abandoning the idea of religion be the equivalent for Western thought of abdicating part of its intellectual hegemony over the world? (2003: 94)

Mandair charts 'how the category of "religion" was *transferred* from the first ethnographic reports of the Sikhs in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, to the cultural, theoretical and political projects of the Sikh elites in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries' (*RSW*: 175). During the reform period of the 1870s–1920s, the imposition of the colonial ontotheological reinterpretation of 'native' traditions and ways was internalized. The West's modern dominant symbolic order *became a conceptual reality to be lived*, but not without effecting a fundamental transformation in the psychology of the colonized and his/her agency in the ability to *enunciate* a heterogeneous identity. In this regard the assumption of a 'dialogue' between colonizing and colonized 'agents', misses the point that 'the agency of the colonized cannot exist outside of his enunciation within a particular regime of discourse *to which he had to accede without choice*'. Mandair goes on to argue that 'what this tells us is that agency cannot simply be ascribed through a mode of epistemological certainty. Rather, new forms of agency or subjectivity will have been generated through this very process of accession and enunciation' (*RSW*: 195). Thus merely including the *colonially re-formed* 'voice of the other' in an attempt to demonstrate 'cultural diversity', or 'respect' multiculturalism, misses the

point. Mignolo clarifies: 'The politics of enacting and of constructing loci of enunciation are at stake, rather than the diversity of representations resulting from differential locations in telling stories or building theories' (2006: 15). European colonialism was not only able to deny alternative loci of enunciation as equally legitimate, but implant its own enunciation as universally valid, and do so *to such an extent* that all other loci of enunciation were fundamentally displaced. If the colonized can remember this displacement, then 'what is the locus of enunciation from which the understanding subject comprehends colonial situations? In other words, in which of the cultural traditions to be understood does the understanding subject place him- or herself by constructing his or her locus of enunciation?' (Mignolo 2006: 16).

To find the beginnings of an answer to these questions, Sikhs would have to first uncover the European epistemic mask inherited from the colonial past. That past is one which involves Europe re-asserting its identity in the face of a welter of uncountable, diverse and 'disturbing' foreign beliefs and gods, which set the ground for an intercultural mimesis of the Christo-secular Master's monotheism, secular morality and scientific modernity. This enforced mimesis left the indigenous reform movements practically no choice but to create a Sikh History (via the narration of becoming a nation), a Sikh Theology (via a concept of a *thinkable* God) and a Sikh Subjectivity (via a modern monolingual identity) (*RSW*: 208). European identity was thus centred in a particular spectre that was created through the very act of translating and representing other cultures as *inferior* 'religions' (*RSW*: 183). A genealogy of that inferiority leads directly to Europe's racist legacy.

Forgetting the Colonial (dark) Underside of (white) Modernity

Enrique Dussel's work demonstrates how the modern European subject has been formed by conquest, colonization and imperial governance. He argues that it was hard for Europeans to escape the logic of 'I conquer therefore I am' (1996: 133; 1985; 2007). It is difficult to avoid, then, that Descartes' *modern* logic of 'I think, therefore I am' is ineluctably tied to Dussel's *colonial* logic of 'I kill, therefore I am'. That is to say, to be just in one's celebration of European progress, liberalism and freedom, one has to also recall European fascism, nihilism and colonial carnage. Hence Mandair's focus on a suppressed and subjugated subjectivity that is forced to make unconscious that which was normative pre-colonial 'tradition'. Colonialism is to Modernity what subjugated unconscious is to conscious awareness. To talk about modernity is to only talk about Descartes, who *can* say 'I think therefore I am' *regardless of others*. But to recall *colonial* modernity is to talk about Fanon (1963; 1967) who realizes that I am *only insofar* as I am heard or seen (*by the master*). The unconscious which underlies modern formations of subjectivity then brings to fore the necessity to re-think subjectivity as an *affective* intersubjectivity,

as layered, deep and complex—*beyond* reason's conscious mastery. Uncovering modernity's colonial side reveals the repressed unconscious as a political force (whose return may often be violent, and violently dealt with).

In contrast to the definition of sub-alter formulated by the subaltern studies group (that pertains more to class and status), Mandair's view implies an *ontological* and *intersubjective* definition. As Maldonaldo-Torres explains:

> [It is the] condition of someone whose alterity is made to play a significant role in contexts of subjugation. The colonial Other is not so much an Other, as a sub-alterized or sub-alterical Other, a subject whose being and meaning have been altered to such an extent that her or his alterity works mainly in function of a system of subordination. (2009: 207)

Mandair argues that this subalterization within the South Asian case consists in 'two orders of forgetting'. Firstly, forgetting the identification with the (heterolingual) 'mother-tongue' and one's 'pre-colonial' culture, and secondly forgetting that one has forgotten pre-modernity, believing as though Panjabi/Sikhism or Hindi/Hinduism had always existed (*RSW* 19). But this forgetting goes beyond mere language and culture, and points more to how language and culture constitute a way of being, with all its alternative tones, inflections and attitudes that affect not only what the mind thinks but how the body moves. Mandair thus urges Sikhs to *allow* a 'disorder of identity' to arise and thus guide one's retrieval of these two orders of forgetting hidden behind one's modern mask.

Amongst the colonized the colonial paradigm produces a double consciousness—upon which new socio-linguistic grammars of value are inscribed. The internalization of these inscriptions demote if not displace indigenous meaning structures—socially, economically and politically. These psycho-physiological inscriptions from the colonial past enforce the repetition of the colonial difference into the future so long as the new order of (Christian/secular) value is taken as normative and universal—given that the structure of hierarchical binaries is the *modus operandi* of the way secular modernity is re-produced. Yet the split psycho-somatic subject can also provide an opportunity to recall, revive, and re-echo their indigenous past into the present, and in doing so, that same double-consciousness may engage what Mignolo variously calls a 'border thinking/gnosis', or a 'critical cosmopolitanism' (Mignolo 2009: 279) that occurs *inbetween* the borders of national territorialized imaginaries. Border gnosis arises from 'the fractured locus of enunciation from a subaltern perspective...a response to the colonial difference' and an 'enunciation in dialogic situations with the territorial and hegemonic cosmology' (Mignolo 2000: x).

As a consequence of the colonizer's privilege of bi-locating, the colonized were left with a schizoid alienation of a double-consciousness. The submission to the regulatory apparatus of imperial governmentality did not re-invent the Sikh identity but introduced an alien logic of identification—one based not

only on monolingual homogeneity but also on error, lack and the antithesis of European value. Mignolo argues that in South America the geographical paradigm for the establishment of a series of intertwined 'lacks' and 'errors' was established according to Christian religious and secular epistemic frames. Without alphabetical writing, the natives *lacked* history, and through the *error* of 'magical' forms of thinking they demonstrated their *lack* of logical reasoning. Through the *wrong* or *error* of worshipping plants and nature, the natives revealed that they *lacked a true* religion (Mignolo 2009: 282–83). How then to decolonize and escape the on-going process of reinscribing and reproducing the habituated returns of the master-slave dialectic? How to undo or exit the spectre of West's racial and *colonial* modernity?

Mandair's First Solution: Refusing General Translation in Favour of Co-Contamination

It could be argued that colonial modernity repeats itself subconsciously or unconsciously as a *habitual praxis*, which occurs through the perpetuation of key epistemic 'blind-spots', or as the *habituated* unsaid that exists within the fabric of all binaristic saying. For example, in arguing that Europeans arise out of a *slave* morality, Nietzsche forgets that Europeans were also *masters* over others during real spaces of Europe's imperial conquests. Thus we need to recall modernity's institutionalized *forgetting* of its colonial violence and the perpetuation of the master/slave dialectic. Maldonado-Torres therefore argues that

> the traditional triad of History (Time/History/Tradition) would no longer be simply opposed to that of Individuality (Experience/Subjectivity/Freedom). Rather they would have to be problematized and reconceived in the light of the triad of Spatiality (Space/Nation/Empire). History, Subjectivity and Spatiality become the basic coordinates of Post-Imperial theorizing. (2009: 204)

Herein lies the impact of Mandair's thesis, for while his analysis is structured in terms of all three of these triads, Mandair offers a way forward by adding the crucial dimension of language or translation. Western colonial projects occurred—and persist today—through the invention and enforcement of a *comparative* schema (Hegel's 'epistemograph') and socio-political technologies of control (colonial 'biopolitics'), that assume the perfect translatability of the non-Western others under the 'supposed' universal of (the West's conceptualizations of) 'religion'. This strongly implies that, 'South Asian subjects and phenomena, for example, can only be read as a set of particulars, and therefore remain unable to actively share in the universal' (*RSW*: 428). In other words, Mandair re-reads the master/slave dialectic as an intersubjective dialectic of (universal) enunciator and (particular) enunciated *through the problematic of translation*:

> What forces us to separate the South Asian and the Western in terms of particular and universal is the act of disavowing the memory of this encounter, in effect a disavowal of the double-sided nature of translation. How, then, does one halt the compulsion to repeat this disavowal? (*RSW*: 428)

One clear way would be to acknowledge that at the heart of colonial modernity are regimes of comparative translations that assume that the West can easily and perfectly name, capture, and hence control (discipline and order) the non-Western other—as pre-modern, as being captured by religion *and* simultaneously lacking religion's fullest expression (i.e., monotheistic Christianity). This is why Mandair is at pains to return to the politics of historical space, language and the translation process during the colonial encounter, because this is where the visibility of this disavowal of the translation process as a conflictual enterprise, and the construction of an *erroneous* subject that is fundamentally *lacking* and *amoral* becomes apparent. Building on Derrida's insight about the *un*translatability of religion, which is not 'to halt the history of colonial translation of religion as if it had never happened, or to ignore the very tangible South Asian responses', Mandair writes. 'Rather, it is to circumvent the ideological relay, the programmed manner, in which translation happens automatically' (*RSW*: 429). In this regard, and to return to the refusal at the heart of his thesis, Mandair argues that

> 'Untranslatable' does not imply a refusal to translate, but rather the need to take a step back in order to allow the work of translation to be seen as being positively dependent on an *in*ability to translate... To allow the 'untranslatable' would be to refuse the ruse of transparency that allows religion (for example) to be translated perfectly; that is, to refuse the false belief that it is possible to pass from one language/culture to another and back again without being contaminated, a ruse/belief that constitutes the enunciation of religion as a universal. (*RSW*: 429)

Another major thematic, directly related to this refusal at the heart of *RSW*, is the work of aporia with regard to naming and self-constitution (whether that be as an 'individual' or 'nation' or an 'institution'). The aporetic nature of translation reveals the permanent play of undecidability in the relation between universal and particular. In agreement with Judith Butler, Mandair sees the ethical dimension of this recognition such that 'contenders compete for universal hegemony' (2000: 167; *RSW*: 430). Mandair elaborates: 'The aim of this competition must not be to simply include what had formerly been excluded (e.g., particulars such as nationalisms), but to change the nature of universals, to pose alternative universals' (*RSW*: 430).

Being interested in a crosscultural philosophy that 'does not study other philosophies but changes the very perception of what philosophy is' (Pannikar 1992: 236, in King 2009: 47), Mandair does not shy away from proposing alternative universals and elaborates them at length. Such alternative universals may include the Indic/Sikh

> practical notions of freedom and action based on the nondual One (as opposed to the One of monotheism), the paradoxical One that fosters a balancing and coexistence of ego and non-ego and creatively cultivated contingency through an emptying of the ego (*nirgun*) as the ground of worldly relations (*sargun*), so that one could say in response to modernity's demand, that being is first being-with, or that ego is first ego-cum. (*RSW*: 430)

That is to say, the master/slave dialectic (of ego among other egos) is shown to be predicated on the false belief that dominance and subjugation are the *only* way being can be expressed among beings, rather than re-configure this individuated Being as an interdependent being-with-others (ego-cum). The master/slave dialectic, however, grants being only to the master, leaving the slave bereft, in a state of non-being, or un-being. The intersubjective ground of being implies co-contamination is actually normative, and that in itself re-conceives being beyond the master/slave dialectic towards a mutual cooperation. Cooperation demands much more than simple acknowledgment by systems of modern colonial power. In this regard the challenge for Sikhs and others, according to Mandair,

> will be not to demand inclusion within the semantico-political field of the global fiduciary, which would retain the conventional universal/particular relationship, but to [and here he cites and ends with Butler] 'establish practices of translation among competing universals... [that represent] an opening towards alternative versions of universality that are wrought from the work of translation itself'. (*RSW*: 430–31)

The competition among universals might result in proposing alternative versions of universality, such as that proposed by Mignolo who argues that 'the crucial point of the Darker Side of the Renaissance' is 'that modernity occluded the pluriversal under the persuasive discourse of the universal' (2006: 435). This insight, that the universal may not be universal, understands 'diversity as global diversality rather than as "difference" within the "universal" ' (Mignolo 2000: 248).

Such *pluri*versality/*di*versality rather than *uni*versality would be in fundamental harmony with an ontology based upon an interdependent 'being-with', and would thus allow less a 'competition' and more a 'co-operation', 'resonance' and a 'harmonics' to arise among multiple and different voices—no longer understood as 'rival claimants', but 'essential partners' in the legitimate aporetic being-with-the-other as part of a shared and greater, even cosmic, being-becoming. Would this then mean, against ontotheological thinking, the transformation of the master-slave dialectic into a friend-friend (*sājan-mīt*)[3] one, a particular-particular 'universal'—where universality

3. This phrase occurs a number of times in the Guru Granth Sahib. Both words mean friend, yet there is a difference between them. *Sājan* is the one towards whom all intention is focused and *mīt* is the one in whom we confide our secret yearning for *sājan*. *Mīt* aids our

arises in the shared enactments (rather than representations) among particulars? Would the demand of the particular-particular pluriversal require speech then to lose its hubris of speaking universals (in one language by one culture or one religion)? Mandair's 'competition' is not between beings of the master/save dialectic, but one immersed within a being-with the other that is mutually contaminating/co-operating.[4]

Mandair's Second Solution: Going beyond Border Gnosis to Collateral Being

Border gnosis arises at the periphery where Western knowledge at the centre overlaps and dominates non-Western knowledges. As already intimated, Mandair's focus is not so much on this overlap, but on producing alternative universals from within the (de-centred) centre of indigenous tradition. Thus unlike Mignolo who would want to re-name tradition as a coloniality,[5] Mandair realizes there are still non-Western knowledges that live on, such that one need not only rely on border knowledge or critical cosmopolitanism, but one can draw from the resources of one's own culture/tradition/secularity/religiosity as such alternative universals. In this regard he seems to move beyond Mignolo's double-consciousness and border gnosis. Mignolo strikes a resigned note about border gnoseology of the periphery and its ability to transform 'territorial gnoseology' of the centre, whereas Mandair believes the centre can be de-stabilized, contaminated, and thus transformed.

Along with Derrida, and the Sikh Gurus for that matter, Mandair holds that there may be things, subjects, events that simply remain beyond our understanding, and no matter how sensitive and sophisticated one's hermeneutic, it will not be able to translate such phenomena into meaning. Life is an ongoing mystery that remains untranslatable even in the light of increasingly powerful interpretations, its very untranslatability being the actual motor of all interpretation. The mystery (*vismād*) of life (God, truth, being-with etc.)

journey to *sājan*. Yet within the Guru Granth Sahib God is both (thanks to Prabhsharanbir Singh for this observation). Generally the meaning is that God is one's best friend, but that God is simultaneously everything and no-thing. This immanent and ambivalent presence of the divine in the world as the world reveals every being's body as part of God's body, as part of the Guru, Name and Word. That is why one can strike up a 'sacred' relation with any and every body, it is natural (*sahaj*) to do so.

4. 'Co-operation' needs to be clarified, as the image of the master/slave is also used many times in the Guru Granth Sahib, but there it is clearly not Hegel's master/slave dialectic. There is no space here to explore how it is different, except to note that it leads to including the other through a merger in consciousness (*samāi*), rather than excluding him/her/it through dualistic thinking (*dubidhā*), for that divine otherness is at the root of all beings—'there is no other or second' (*avar-na-dūjā*), and it is liberating to consciously contact it.
5. 'It is then necessary to replace "tradition" with *coloniality*, the latter being a place of enunciation from where the invention of modernity can be disclosed, and its "natural" underpinning revealed' (Mignolo 2009: 278).

may then call forth mystical forms of *un*knowing or *un*hermeneutics (i.e. kinds of deconstruction) where the subject-object duality is perceived from a non-dual, non-ego perspective. South Asian thought certainly abounds with such forms of deconstructive non-knowledges or 'self-knowledges' (*prajñā, sahaj, buddhi, vijñāna, rāj-jog* etc.). These forms of *un*knowing are termed 'higher knowledges' or supra-rationalities, not irrational, anti-rational or non-rational—in the sense that love (*bhagati, prem*) is *supra*-rational. Mandair's approach moves towards a radicalization of egoic subjectivity as self-other intersubjectivity, with the pantheistic and nondualistic implication, contra Hegel, that we do all share the (unnameable) centre and that knowledge may arise from that shared (non-egoic) centre:

> ...the nonduality of the Absolute is conceptually inseparable from the notion of freedom exemplified by the polar themes of fusion and separation. In conformity to broadly Indic patterns, knowledge of such an Absolute is grounded in a state of existence that has realized this nonduality by relinquishing the individuality of the ego and merging itself into the Other. In this state of being one instinctively resists representation and conceptualization in terms of subject-object duality. An individual who is able to realize this state of existence (*gurmukh*) no longer represents the Absolute to himself since the distinction between self and other, I and not-I, disappears into a knowing that knows without immediately splitting into subject and object. (*RSW*: 215)

Mandair goes on to point out how this paradoxical state of *sahaj* (effortless creative being with difference) is caricatured by the Western epistemic symbolic imaginary as 'annihilation, dissolution, or depersonalization' or 'an impractical ideal', whilst the figure of one awakened to the reality of the Guru (*gurmukh*), 'is better seen as an intensely creative form of existence through which the world is perceived not as something outside of ourselves...[but] rather as an infinite succession of creative acts' that assumes a middle-ground or in-between space/time that refuses the universalization of any conceptualization (by reason) (*RSW*: 215). That non-representational, nonconceptual, enactive middle-ground or Way of spontaneous creativity, is also beyond cognition and ethics (*RSW*: 216). Whereas knowledge moves from ignorance to 'truth' via some inductive or deductive method, *sahaj* does not move but is established in truth through identity, and its impulses are gleaned through direct intuition and spontaneous feeling or vision. *Sahaj* is not a *thinking* of the ego-mind, nor is it limited by personality or individuality; it is prior to these structures. Insofar as *sahaj* reveals a primordial identity with the infinite One, then 'in the plane of gnosis the infinite is at once our normal consciousness of being, its first fact, our sensible substance' (Paranjape 2009: 64). Paranjape further notes that 'it vindicates itself even to the mental intelligence by its greater calm, freedom, light, power, effectivity of will, verifiable truth of ideation and feeling' (2009: 471–72). This Indic/Sikh subalternized knowledge is therefore also *ontological*, not merely epistemological, that is, deconstructive and not merely hermeneutic.

In this way, Mandair's notion of what one might term 'collateral being' moves beyond Mignolo's 'border gnosis' and pluritopic hermeneutics. One can *refuse* the operation of a 'generalized translation' which homogenizes identity (by working from a secular monolingualism and/or a religious monotheism), in order to enunciate an in-between complexity which 'would *hold together* the two alternative languages and concepts against each other in a tension'—akin to the hybridization present before colonialism 'where terms and concepts came together in moments of fusion-separation' (Mandair 2011: 181). Such nondual, or in my terms, *cleaving* gestures (that split apart and fuse together) make possible multiple, unpredictable and creative responses. This collateral being would then simultaneously recall the colonial event of 'subordination' with its stigmatization of 'secondariness', indicating a belonging to the same human species but being of a 'different' (read non-European) line. Finally, being 'situated side by side', *collateral* Being is and always has been a 'together-with' the other.

The aporetic logic of this collateral being is taken directly from the Sikh 'scripture'. Therein the transition and transformation in subjectivity where the ego is no longer its centre and master is a key leitmotif. That one should mature beyond the ego as the primary frame of reference is taught by many traditions, though especially prominent in Eastern ones primarily because de-centring the ego is synonymous to de-centring thought and thinking, especially rational thinking, in favour of a meditative calm (*sahaj, dhyān, samādh* etc.) that allows a different non-egoic relation to thought. The de-centred ego and rational thinking still remain, but language, action, no longer derive according to their predictable dictates but respond to a 'higher' (that is, more real and intuitive) unpredictable intelligence (*gyān, prajnā, pratibhā* etc.) and care (*bhagati, sevā, karuṇā, prem* etc.). Such an idea is common in Indic thought but is explicit in Guru-Sikh thought given the equation of Guru as Word/Language (*gur-shabad*). It is from this non-I space held within the temporal I, to keep it open and listening to language as Guru and therefore keep it always new (*nita-nāva*), that the aporetic logic and its cleaving gestures can be offered. This mode of collateral being/becoming cannot be brought into thought without aporia, ambiguity, multiplicity, heterogeneity; without the other and its difference and contamination; that is, without a 'solicitous mutilation' in the 'body of tradition' (Navdeep Mandair 2003; *RSW*: 27), for it is a poetic dwelling in-between I and not-I. That is to say its praxis resists conceptual formulation, for it is not possible to re-present its inherently unpredictable, creative and spontaneous mode under any fixed set of signs; it is inherently anti-ideological. Its repetition, not being circular or mechanical, operates through difference—like applied law, it must adapt to be relevant.

Mandair provides a concrete example of this cleaving or collateral being in Chapter 4 (*RSW*: 307–308), where he details two different responses to the same issue: the religious and/or secular status of the Sikh turban. In the New York case (Jaggi vs NYPD) Mandair, as the called-upon expert, defines the

turban as a *religious* item. Yet in another court case occuring in France he defined the turban as *not* being a religious but a secular item. Mandair reveals how the American and French constitute their public spaces differently. His cleaving here is not mere equivocation or expedient relativism, hedging one's interpretation according to certain contexts and thus disguising the real 'truth' of the matter. Nor is he denying speaking in the universal, for he is actually introducing a new mode of participating in the universal (as co-equal *sājan-mīt,* friend-friend, *particular-particular*) in that he provides evidence of a different hybrid or 'aporetic' logic, that clearly signals that there is an *outside* to the Western Christian-secular, historico-philosophical episteme (as the unequal master-slave, *universal-particular* relation). If 'truth' is inseparable from daily living (for it to have any meaning), then a transcendentalizing logic that dictates either the turban is religious or it is secular can only make sense as a truth if it exists along colonial modernity's religion-secular fiction. For the 'truth' of the turban *as spectre* does not exist on the rough and constantly changing ground of everyday life, but in an ideal abstracted space of theory, of myth, of imagination, of stereotype, in a law independent of being applied in a *particular* land meaningful to a *particular* people—that is in a speaking that can pretend to come from nowhere, the nowhere God's-eye view that the Euro-American West has enjoyed for the past five centuries.

APPLYING *RSW:* DECOLONIZING THE SPECTRE OF THE WEST IN THE ACADEMY

Mandair's Third Solution: Philosophy outside Europe

Mandair's work exposes the complicity between academia and colonialism. As such he furthers the work of Immanuel Wallerstein who writes that

> 'at least 95 percent of all scholars and all scholarship from the period 1850 to 1914, and probably even to 1945, originates in five countries: France, Great Britain, the Germanies, the Italies, and the United States...not only does the scholarship come out of these five countries, but most of the scholarship by most scholars is about their own country' (1996: 3, in Mignolo 2000: 190).

Colonial expansion of these countries prompted scholarship to respond:

> 'what they did in our view was simply to invite two other disciplines to study the rest of the world. The first and most obvious is anthropology, which was invented to study the primitive world. The primitive world was defined in a very simple way: in practice, as the colonies of the five countries... These groups were presumed to be unchanging and timeless' (1996: 3, in Mignolo 2000: 190).

The second academic 'science' was Oriental Studies to cover everything *other* than Europe.

Mendieta, following Wallerstein *et al.* (1996, 2001), also notes how the 'modern research university institutionalized an epistemic division of labor'—where the objective world was studied by the *natural sciences*, the social world became the remit of the *social sciences* (sociology, economics, politics), and finally the past world became 'ordered' and 'classified' by the *humanistic sciences* (history, oriental studies, anthropology, ethnography). Thus, the world became compartmentalized into 'three distinct ontological regions: the objective, present and the past worlds' (Mendieta 2009: 237). In this regard, Mignolo's decolonization envisions a new kind of university based on '*a critique of knowledge and cultural practices*' as opposed to the Kantian university based on *reason*, the Humboldtian university based on *culture* and the neoliberal university based on '*excellence* and *expertise*' (2000: xii). Mandair's work resonates well with these scholars of Latin America, for he seeks not only a critique that charts 'the coexistence of differential loci of enunciation in colonial situations' (Mignolo 2006: 316), *but the creation of structures that allow the formation of a new more ethical comparativity, that treat subjugated knowledges more equitably, as well as the inclusion of different self-other reflective aporetic logics,* that allow a 'competition between universals', or, as I read him, allow a creative cooperation between particulars as the basis of a new pluriversal.

Mandair analyzes five academic disciplines of the Humanties: Indology, History of Religions, Philosophy of Religion, Area Studies and Political Theory. Mandair notes how the 'ontotheological presuppositions of the Hegelian schema passed seamlessly into the discipline of Indology', given that those studying Indology were usually 'graduates undergoing training for missionary and administrative work in British India' (*RSW*: 161–62). Thus those new sciences formulated to study the other (anthropology and orientalism) unsurprisingly also saw the 'natives' as being 'obsessed with religion'. This is because these 'sciences' were constructed out of the same presuppositions that enabled a new platform to emerge—recalling the privilege of the double location, which 'allowed Indologists to remain committed to a Euro-Christian standpoint, given that many of them were active missionaries, and yet claim secular status for their work' (*RSW*: 162). Mandair's point is not simply to offer a Sikh social theory (in the vein of Loy's 2003 *Buddhist Social Theory*), but to alter the paradigm within which such proposals get heard. Mandair charts a genealogy of the major disciplines within the academy along such Christo-secular hierarchical binaries. As the 'new distinction between pantheism and monotheism overtakes earlier traditions of distinguishing heathens and Christians' (*RSW*: 163), so is there a continuity as the Christian religion *versus* religions dichotomy morphs into the (Christian-secular) culture *versus* cultures binary (*RSW*: 163). Mandair thus asks, 'isn't the mono- versus pantheism distinction, as it comes to be understood after Hegel, effectively also the basic measure of what counts most as culture in the multicultural frame despite its supposedly secular-humanist framing?' (*RSW*: 163).

Here Mandair is in agreement with Mignolo's contention that the discourse of '*cultural* difference' serves the dominant ideological structure to maintain popular ignorance of the '*colonial* difference':

> The idea of 'cultural difference' is indeed an invention of modern imperial discourses that function by hiding the power differential; the 'difference' is indeed 'colonial' rather than 'cultural'. That is, it is a difference that justifies exploitation, control, and domination of one sector of the population over another. 'Racism' and 'racialization' are consequences of the 'colonial difference'. 'Cultural difference' calls for relativism, while 'colonial difference' calls for liberation from epistemic imperial powers. (Mignolo 2006: 440)

Mandair charts how in the West's epistemic architecture religion morphs into culture whilst maintaining the 'colonial difference', through the strategy of 'cultural differences' which mask real contradiction: 'Insofar as Western thinking completely effaces the possibility of contradiction and manages to distance itself sufficiently from the *nihil*, chaos, thinking about religion [or culture] is absolutely metaphysical, which means, properly speaking, theoretical' (*RSW*: 164). This *ontotheological* distancing of the other's worldview amounted to a *disavowal*, and this disavowal *through the coercive force of colonialism and the logic of coloniality* instigated structures of *dependency* into the global order of European modernity (Mignolo 2006: 442). To enter the 'enlightened' living of the West, to enjoy its 'freedom' and 'democracy', one has to disavow one's own (non-metaphysical) thinking, and be prepared to become a co-dependent of the West's economic and political order.

Given that much of Indic *thinking* embraces contradiction and the *nihil*—for its absolute or God is indistinguishable from an *impersonal* absolute (be it a 'Buddhist' *nirvāna*, 'Hindu' *brahman* or 'Sikh' *nirgun*)[6]—one way the West argued its 'higher' development was to disassociate from this 'nothingness' which it quickly perceived to be a form of *atheism* and *nihilism* as the essential identity of the East. Indeed a number of monographs now exist that show how a Christian Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries produced Buddhism and other Indic 'religio-philosophies' as a nihilistic spectre (that subsequently evolved to haunt the imaginations of the West—depicting more its own emerging identity than that of the East (Droit 2003; Heisig 2001; King 1999)). The spectre of *nihil* or chaos became a fulcrum upon which the West see-sawed 'higher' than the East, as their conscious awareness sublated the *nihil* into what Mandair calls a 'political unconscious'. This *ascending public and secular* identity of the West was strident and superior, in that Hegel's rejection of Schelling's view of a common physical and spiritual origin of humankind (a view later asserted by Blavatsky) (*RSW*: 170) was incorporated into the dominant narrative of the history of European philosophy; and this dominant

6. These and many other terms are shared across these 'traditions' in a heterolinguality especially before the emergence of the colonial idiom, hence the scare quotes.

narrative can be seen in terms of a Hegelian logic of development (*RSW*: 125). The *private sublated* identity of the West was offloaded onto the East as their 'religious' essence. Such projection that saw the other as so threatening has existed for a long time in the West's imagination, but perhaps hit a peak in the medieval discourse of the 'monster races' (Mitter 1992; Friedman 1981).

In light of this colonial genealogy, where academic 'theory' insists on deriving its 'materials and impetus primarily from Western tradition and phenomena' (*RSW*: 381–82), an inherited colonial violence is repeated. For example, Mandair notes that whilst critical theory has 'helped to dismantle well-worn dualisms such as religion/secularism, theism/atheism, and sacred/secular,' and 'challenged essentialist and theological tendencies (dreams of absolute principles, supernatural origins... etc.) *and* scholars' claims to methodological objectivity and impartiality' (*RSW*: 382), it has re-inscribed certain asymmetries.

> In what might be seen as a reversal of critical theory's atheistic roots in the 'masters of suspicion' (Marx, Nietzsche, Freud), contemporary cultural theory has been adopted by scholars to successfully dispute the atheistic presuppositions of modern secular thinking in the social sciences, thereby revitalizing religious and theological reflection in the Christian and Judaic traditions. As a result theory has been used to legitimze the use of phenomena from Judeo-Christian traditions as resources not only for thinking critically about religion, but for thinking more critically about theory itself... (*RSW*: 382)

This observation allows Mandair to foreground the repetition of the colonial asymmetry at the heart of the book, noting that, 'By contrast, the effects of theory on the study of South Asian "religions" has had precisely the opposite effect. Here the effects of critical theory seem to have reinforced the priority of the secular' (*RSW*: 382). In support of his case Mandair cites (among others) Dipesh Chakrabarty, who notes: 'past Western thinkers and their categories are never quite dead for us in the same way' as past South Asian thinkers (2000: 6; *RSW*: 383), and confirms the impossibility of giving the same *efficacious* voice to non-Western modernities within the 'protocols of academic history' because 'the globality of academia is not independent of the globality that the European modern has created' (2000: 46; *RSW*: 383).

What animates much of Mandair's energy about this 'rigged' situation are the following questions: 'What prevents non-Western traditions of thought and practice (*gurmat*, *bhakti*, etc.) from being used as resources for conceptual thinking/theory rather than being regarded as living relics?' And further, 'Why is it that despite the proliferation of postcolonial critiques, the humanities and social sciences continue to reconstitute the hegemony of theory as specifically Western?' (*RSW*: 384).

In answering these crucial (and previously occluded) questions, Mandair charts how 'recent articulations of postsecular theory inherit a critical narrative that simply repeats a past imperialism', where the possibility that such

secularization could already exist in South Asian traditions is foreclosed. According to Mandair this *imperial* move 'denies coevalness' to these non-Western 'traditions' by keeping them 'safely within the domain of Western conceptuality', which in turn pivots on the 'continuing assumption of historical difference between the West and non-West'. This perpetual retrieval produces such effects because 'theory continues to access the other through the problematic idiom of the history of religions' (*RSW*: 385). After tracing back this present situation to an imperial past and its 'colonial difference' via European philosophy's complicity in the construction of categories of 'history', 'religion' and the 'modern', Mandair concludes: 'The problem, therefore, is no longer that of trying to locate and define the incommensurability or difference of the non-Western traditions, but rather the more difficult one of revealing the denial of access to theory itself' (*RSW*: 385). That is to say, regarding 'post'-modernity, 'post'-secularism and so on, 'there is an ethnocentrism that keeps these newer stages of Western thought effectively tied to oppressive structures that were part of modernity and colonialism' (*RSW*: 385). Mandair argues that we should refuse the call for *equivalent* indigenous terms, for this ignores the role translation (or at least the generalized notion thereof) plays to manage and negate difference. Instead, this secular theory itself should be questioned, for it is out of its language that we come to know the very category and meaning of religion in the first place. In this regard Abeysekara notes in his review of *RSW*: 'we cannot think the untranslatability of religion by merely questioning or abandoning the hegemony of Western model or by looking for some native theory "adequate" to that model. Those scholars who continue to ask if "theory" violates "native agency" will find these reflections especially relevant' (2011: 126). *RSW* is, then, tied to the task of making this implicit ethnocentrism visible and 'ultimately go through a process of decolonization' (*RSW* 385) to approach a new inclusive academic theory and praxis.

Mandair's Fourth Solution: The Necessity of Aporetic Logic

A new academic praxis requires a more nuanced *non-metaphysical* 'logic' that can take into account value, affect, and responsibility as well as genealogical thinking and critical questioning. The resurrection of subjugated knowledges would eventually revolutionize the centre of global public discourse away from its long Christo-secular ontotheological *monologue* towards a dialogue and eventually a 'multilogue' that Mandair would not refuse.

Mandair's desire for an equitable competition between universals arises out of a keen insight into the actual difference at stake, which is, as Paranjape argues, not 'between modern and pre-modern, but modernity and non-modernity', for the real 'difference is between two kinds of rationality' (Paranjape 2009: 61). We could say here, two kinds of logic, the Western-

Aristotelian logic that abides by the *law of non-contradiction* and the *law of the excluded middle* expressed in the colonial divide-and-conquer, and the Indic *aporetic* logics that include contradiction and the middle in their (aesthetic, affective, and transformative) *intersubjective* thinking.

Mandair elucidates this logic via the concrete example of responding to the 'call of religion'. Recalling the alienness of the term religion to non-Western contexts, and its essential Western self-referentiality, Mandair is wary of responding to its apparitional nature either affirmatively *or* negatively. His approach therefore 'is to conceptualize the identification that Indians make with "religion" or "world religion" as an *aporia*, an experience that is simultaneously possible and impossible' (*RSW*: 7). Mandair goes on to note, 'this aporetic response would be one that on the one hand accepts *without resistance* the translatability of the term "religion," and at the same time *must resist* what is encompassed by the term "religion"' (*RSW*: 7).

> Accordingly, every time an Indian responds, quite responsibly, as 'I am Hindu/Hinduism is my religion', or even if one rejects this response in favor of a purely secular enunciation, what is never questioned, because it is always assumed, is the concept of religion operating in this case, indeed, the relation between religion and conceptuality. In responding at all one will always have conformed to a certain law—which is first and foremost a law of thinking, or an assumption about *what thinking is* that itself constitutes a law—according to which the meaning and concept of religion is accepted universally and without resistance. (*RSW*: 9)

RSW provides a profound contemplation on why Hindus, Sikhs and others continue to respond not only to the call of religion, but also to a certain (identitarian/nationalistic) ordering and *non-aporetic thinking* due to their accession to a theology of generalized translation and its subjugating power. Yet the Guru Granth Sahib is replete with a completely different *aporetic* logic of love (*bhagati*), which provides an existential mode of non-dualistic becoming (*sahaj*), as well as the highest gnosis (*gyān*), lived and embodied through the spontaneous and unending remembrance of the Real (as oneself, not merely the ego) (*simaran*), and a mode of acting that is in service to the Real (the All) (*sevā*). Within this 'rationality' or 'logic', fixed notions of identity and dualistic subject-object epistemes are only evidence of a deluded subjectivity, captured by an identitarian logic of reason, that in the moment of its fixing a thing creates a 'false-consciousness' (*dubidhā*). Paranjape and Mandair therefore go beyond Mignolo's gnosis (that seems restricted to some form of logic, *ratio*, hermeneutic), for both appeal to indigenous terms that still retain within the centre of each tradition (before and after colonialism) the integrity of an authoritative voice meaningful to their respective communities.

RSW, born out of the force of colonial subjugation, provides the risk of a different future, one that refuses the invitation to enter the dialogue of the West, without first re-negotiating the *terms of entry*. *RSW* charts those very terms of entry that demand a shift from representation/generalized trans-

lation of an ontotheological *Euro-American* Being to the co-contaminating translations and cleaving gestures of a collateral being, where subjected non-Western knowledges are allowed to shape the dominant symbolic order, and thus participate in the shared but competing expressions of the *non-possessible* universal or 'pluriversal' of public and political space. The pluriversal cannot be colonized without the violence of oppressing other collateral sovereignties. It is not without reason, then, that Mandair's future projects take up the concept of sovereignty and comparativity.[7]

CONCLUSION: COUNTERING HEGEMONY

The uniqueness of *RSW* lies in its potential impact on a number of disciplines and their fields of study (including postcolonial and translation studies, continental philosophy, history of ideas, race and ethnic studies, theology and religious studies). Although there have been a number of fine scholarly publications specifically in the field of Sikh studies, few if any have seriously challenged the boundaries of the field nor systematically pondered its relation to other fields. *RSW* disrupts and broadens not only Sikh studies but the whole academic enterprise itself, by revealing its complicity to an imperialism that arises from the colonial encounter. *RSW* thus aims to instigate academic reform that would in turn infect media and state discourses. Moreover it is palpably evident that Mandair's work arises from a cry for justice. As I have written elsewhere, it 'is obvious that these ideas have long been mulled over and at great pains. The reader gains the distinct impression that Mandair's personal struggle for a political voice, having been poured into an intellectual endeavor born out of social activism that spans well over a decade, has produced an immensely rich work of mature reflection and insight—one that will no doubt bear much fruit and deservedly so—for this is arguably the most theoretically incisive work in Sikh studies since the field's inception' (Bhogal 2010: 556). Through a refusal of the West's call for identity politics, that has led to a concerted, intimate and illuminating dialogue with the West, *RSW* offers numerous cleaving gestures that demarcate alternative futures beyond the hegemony of the modern/colonial world system.

INTRODUCING THE SEVEN REVIEWERS

Giorgio Shani's previous work (2008) focuses on the formation of Sikh identity. Noting that whereas his and others' work takes up the vector of the nation, Shani argues that Mandair's originality consists not only in taking up

7. The books are provisionally titled: *Mourning Sovereignty: Sikhs, Civil Society and the State* and *Thinking between Cultures: Sikhism and Postsecular Thought*.

the concept of religion (as Oberoi's 1994 work does in noting the *construction of religious boundaries*) but in doing so as a *political project* of *religion-making that hails from Europe and impacts both Europeans and Indians*. Whilst praising Mandair for his employment of *sabda-guru* (Guru as Word) to resist deployment within an economy of Christo-secular humanism [either as revealed Logos or rational logic], Shani argues for other such terms that could be similarly employed like *panth, khālsā, and mīri-pīri*—that together reveal an embodied sovereignty of deterritorialized peoples living under conditions of globality, rather than seeking freedom under the hegemonic sovereignty of territorialized states.

Jakob De Roover argues that there can be little doubt now that the coercive imposition of European Christian/Secular conceptuality produced a rupture that instigated major social reform movements. He goes on to note that, should equivalent terms exist, there is no certainty that they would be used in the same ways. More critically, De Roover points to what he understands as a methodological paradox in Mandair's thesis, and ponders why one would invest in the project to decolonize the study of religion and then turn to the very Western philosophical canon that legitimated the colonization in the first place to seek redress? He asks: 'How does a Derrida fare any better in this regard than a Durkheim? Why is a Heidegger superior to a Hegel here?' De Roover also finds confusing the notion that *concepts are allowed to compete*—arguing that theories can compete, but not concepts. In a way he is asking Mandair to provide a Sikh *theory*—not a *term,* whether *sabda guru* or some other—that can compete to be taken as a universal. With this critique, De Roover finds Mandair not Western enough, in that Mandair wants a form of competition that refuses to reciprocate within the given framework of rationality.

Virinder Kalra opens his review with a case history of a recent controversy in Panjab that clearly exemplifies the very polarization of religious versus secular viewpoints that Mandair's book predicts and outlines, that traps *both* sides into the same logic and discourse of identity politics bequeathed by the British. Kalra agrees with Mandair that to break out of this discourse that informs the neo-colonial Sikh imaginary, a different repetition has to be recalled—one that disrupts orders of the religious *and* secular present. In Kalra's view, *RSW* contains a 'strongly utopian desire', especially if a response by that colonial modern discourse is constantly commanded. Yet the response, as Mandair argues, is aporetic (non-positional, *supra*-logical, loving and transformative). This aporetic response is post-theistic but also post-secular, following a non-logic of affect. But Kalra wonders who is authorized to make the aporetic response? He praises Mandair's answer in this regard—for authority is pluralized through the very concept of *sabda-guru*, where language itself is not separate from the Guru. For Guru Nanak's Guru was not a person, but

the Word itself, and not the secret revealed Vedic Word, but the Word spoken in the vernacular, by any caste, open to be heard and spoken by all—such that 'religion' becomes a question (and a *unpredictable quest*) rather than a category, or given doctrine or belief system (as a *safe home*).

Timothy Fitzgerald finds consonance with Mandair's overall project. Indeed his own work (2007; 2000) has also sought to demythologize the ideological formations and effects of the term 'religion'. Though both hold a critique against the *sui generis* interpretation of 'religion' that assumes it to be a cross-cultural universal, Fitzgerald asks if it is at all possible for a project of emancipation—one that specifically seeks to transcend the ubiquitous Western conceptual matrix—to simultaneously employ terms that make up that very Anglophone lexicon? Should one not simply excise or at least quarantine such terms and concepts as 'religion', 'secular', 'political', to evade confusing ambiguities, and hold all such terms at a critical distance? Or even, at least substitute them for non-Western indigenous terms to avoid this potential re-inscription of the West's conceptual grammar? Finally, do such re-inscriptions signify a critical oversight, a sleep of reason, a lack of vigilance that constitute an ethical failing on Mandair's part? Or, responding to Fitzgerald, perhaps it is not simply a matter of *which* terms but *how* such terms are used? In this way, Fitzgerald's essay pushes Mandair on his strategy of mutual contamination, where the aim is to instigate a 'solicitous mutilation' in the body of Western (and Indic) conceptual grammars by employing those very terms in new ways that work against the system, retrieving them from the ontotheological schema of the past.

Purushottama Bilimoria studies the broader context in which the ontotheological matrix with its tripartite schematics inaugurated by Hegel's historicism plays out. He sees a forerunner in Joachim of Fiore's three phases of Christian time: the ages of the Father, the Son and the Spirit, and charts the effects of the introduction of this new temporal and conceptual framing. Bilimoria charts this inheritance prior to Hegel, and notes how 'scholars have resisted the clear signal given by Hegel here that he intends to approach history of other philosophies equipped with this wondrously crafted a priori hermeneutics', and argues that 'What Hegel is really doing is making the shift from God to Reason or thinking as that which grasps truth about the world, as Heidegger pointed out: that is the ontotheological move in the post-Enlightenment secularity'. Bilimoria, while commending *RSW's* impressive comprehensiveness, locates a possible lacuna, claiming that Mandair 'does not dwell sufficiently on Hegel's treatment of Buddhism'. Nevertheless, noting a trajectory of 'philosophical racism', Bilimoria agrees with Mandair that the real threat from the colonized for Hegel was not physical but intellectual, to do with the proper function and meaning of Cartesian and later Hegelian *thinking*; for Indic notions of identity

with Brahman were seen to offer a direct threat to the very design of the *concept*, and were thus (mis)interpreted to be a form of *not* thinking, or a thinking of *nothing*. He therefore agrees that the ontotheological schema can be considered a diagram of power enabling the means for controlling both the 'constituent and subversive forces within Europe' (Schelling, Spinoza), as well as provide a 'negation of non-European desire' (Upanishads etc.), which continues till today in a 'galaxy of neo-Hegelians over the last two centuries' in many academic disciplines.

Srilata Raman, whilst admiring Mandair's scholarship, questions his use of Hegel insofar as Hegel is not really seen as an authority on Indic traditions for his works are 'considered speculative at best and met with little acceptance or interest on the part of Indologists'. Raman concludes that 'the influence which Hegel's views on Indian religions exerted might well have to be more relativized and contextualized within the development of the study of religion as a discipline and also in areas other than Germany'. Regarding Sikh reformists like Bhai Vir Singh, Raman argues that he was not just influenced by British but also Indic, especially Advaita, sources, and so wonders about the imprint of pre-1930s commentarial traditions on his work. Raman writes, that though he is 'undoubtedly responding within the parameters of the power relation', he 'can only do so at all because he has access to a conceptual world which precedes this colonial moment and which shapes the theory he encounters'. Raman, therefore asks: 'How useful, then, can post-colonial theorization be in helping one to make a distinction between the conceptual dominance of Sanskrit in pre-modernity and the conceptual dominance of English in modernity and post-modernity?' After discussing Hegel's influence and the complexity of the reformists' response to colonial conceptuality, Raman discusses the nature of orality and writing in Indic culture, taking issue with the idea that Indian 'sonic economy' devalues writing, and how writing and orality shared an interdependency through a manuscript and exegetical culture.

Brian Rennie, though highly complimentary to RSW, focuses his review on what he perceives to be an erroneous homogeneity of the History of Religions in Mandair's account. Rennie (2006; 2007) uses his expertise on Mircea Eliade as a prime *counter* example, listing and working through six factors that he argues reveal a contrary picture to Mandair's representation. In this way, Rennie's essay raises the question of the broad canvas that Mandair attempts to sketch—and in particular, asks what it means that any one figure can always be read in a more subtle and internally diverse fashion. Rennie's microstudy on Eliade consciously sidesteps Mandair's major arguments to make the case that an alternative voice in the history of religions exists: that though Eliade, in Rennie's interpretation, insists that religion is universal, he also refuses to define it.

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