

Comparison, Connectivity, and Disconnection

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The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Political Theory

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Abstract and Keywords

This introduction surveys works of comparative political theory, defined here as a discursive space from which to deparochialize the Eurocentric nature of political theory, to advance substantive research in and from global bodies of thought, and to hear from cognate fields. Its methods of comparison focus not on the literal juxtaposition of two discrete objects, but rather on the transformations that occur through engagement with the unfamiliar; and its aims for inclusion are not tokenistic appropriations of marginalized thinkers, but theorizations of global asymmetries of knowledge and power. The chapter argues that the contributions of comparative political theory are connective and disruptive as much as cumulative. As such, it explains how the entries and organization of this handbook can be used to build conversations, challenge paradigms, and trace thematic preoccupations across divergent contexts of time, place, and experience.

Keywords: comparison, global political thought, political theory, postcolonial theory, area studies

Introductory Remarks

COMPARATIVE political theory (CPT) began emerging in the 1990s in response to the intensifying disconnect between a Eurocentric academic discipline and the recognition that political challenges, questions, and aspirations exceeded “the West” (Euben 1997, 32; Dallmayr 1997). Working at the intersections of political theory and area studies, international politics, and comparative politics, CPT seeks to analyze normative claims, discursive structures and institutions, and expressions and formations of power in and from all parts of the world. In principle, it includes within its scope the examination of bodies of thought and political experience arising within emerging, short-lived, and historically distant communities and traditions as much as established, long-standing, and contemporary ones. When they emphasize the global and comparative scope of political activity, comparative political theorists draw attention to the parochially Euro-American categories that have historically shaped inquiry in political theory and other disciplines, opening those categories to interrogation and expansion in light of other bodies of thought and ex-

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perience. Comparative political theory is thus both a reactive field—it identifies and seeks to rectify gaps in existing patterns of practice in political theory—and a substantive one—it enquires about, draws insights from, and reflects on the vast array of thought that lies outside more mainstream disciplinary currents.

Among the accomplishments of comparative political theory is the development of a more critical sensibility, alongside parallel efforts in many cognate fields, about the categories of “West,” “non-West,” “East,” and “South,” as well as such categories as “tradition,” “civilization,” “culture,” or “religion,” as ways of carving up the world (e.g., Euben 2006;

(p. 2) Jenco 2014; Idris 2016b; Iqtidar 2016). It has been a space from which theorists have been able to launch diagnoses and interventions into our contemporary political moment and its paradoxical global and local forces (March 2009a; Ciccarello-Maher 2014; Kim 2014). It has reintroduced the languages of commensurability and incommensurability to political theory, along with the recognition that foregrounding one or the other is a political choice (Euben 2006). In addition to its initial calls for cross-cultural engagement, CPT has sharpened understanding of the politics and dangers of “cross-cultural” dialogue, conversation, conversion, and immersion (Jenco 2007; Godrej 2011; Tully 2016). It has helped theorists to gather thinkers and contexts not normally brought together, to highlight neglected patterns across such contexts (Carlson and Fox 2013; Kapust and Kinsella 2017), and to register responses, reactions, or resistances to various forms of domination (Black 2008; Kohn and McBride 2011). It has shown that dominant concepts and categories often fail (Euben 1999; Idris 2019) and that other concepts and categories are without “purity,” but are contested and built on fusion and hybridity (Gordon 2014). It has extended the insight that ideas travel and that the politics of appropriation, reclamation, and misrecognition are central to the lives and afterlives of such ideas (Jenco 2015; London 2011; Hunt Botting and Kronewitter 2012). It has allowed for understanding bodies of knowledge as weapons, at times for the legitimization of political authority, at times for domination or resistance (Williams and Warren 2013; Hendrix and Baumgold 2017; Kapila and Devji 2010). It has emphasized the reality that who reads what, when, for what purposes, in what terms, and on whose terms goes to the core of the very practice of political theory (Deylami 2011; Thomas 2012; Hassanzadeh 2015). Comparative political theory has, in a word, contributed to the projects of decentering the canon; enriching, expanding, and transforming political theory’s archives; and intervening in debates across the globe about concrete political phenomena.

Perhaps not surprisingly, given this diverse range of projects grouped under the label of “comparative political theory,” CPT has generated intense debate about its methods and purpose.¹ Because we are more interested in cultivating work that continues the project of CPT than we are in defining or policing the boundaries of a discipline, this introduction and this handbook foreground the substantive diverse accomplishments of CPT while acknowledging the roles played by methodological disagreements and cognate fields in producing such a plural body of work. We argue that the contributions CPT is best poised to make might very well be connective and (not surprisingly) comparative, rather than internally cumulative.

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On this basis, we have tried to organize the entries of this handbook in a way that fosters thematic connections—and illustrative contrasts—across a wide variety of shared political projects and concepts, from sovereignty and violence to rights and rightlessness, from local and transnational political economy to economies of morals, from non-Rawlsian liberalisms to decolonial liberation. These connections and disconnections might extend not only *from* comparative political theory to more mainstream work in the field, but also *among and between* the work of comparative political theorists themselves. By offering introductions to a range of existing scholarship, each entry enables and furthers conversations among comparative political theorists, with other political (p. 3) theorists, and with scholars working in related fields. These kinds of conversations are necessary if CPT is to pursue its twin goals of deparochializing the Eurocentric nature of political theory while advancing substantive, and not merely reactive, research.

This introduction thus proceeds as follows. In the first section, “What Is Comparative Political Theory and What Can It Do?” we survey the wide range of work traveling under the term “comparative political theory.” We argue that CPT is best seen as a discursive space that can sometimes take institutionalized form rather than a Platonic idea or research paradigm with clearly defined boundaries. We go on to consider some of its distinctive features while pausing to consider how debates about comparison—what it means to be doing it, what is being compared, and whether we need comparison as a specific methodology at all—have generated much of CPT’s apparent internal diversity. We submit that a broad definition of “comparison”—understood not as the literal contrast of two discrete objects, but rather as a “transformative mediation between what is familiar and unfamiliar and, by extension, between rootedness and critical distance” (Euben 2006, 10)—motivates a broad range of projects in this field. Rather than re-entrenching the dominant terms of political theory, comparative projects creatively and self-reflexively engage with sources, sites, and ideas, as well as the practice of theorizing itself. Indeed, as we explain in the subsequent section, “Fellow Travelers and Diverse Genealogies,” such creative engagement ties CPT to a range of cognate fields and approaches, from feminism to area studies and global intellectual history. Finally, we conclude by considering the future of CPT and how the organization of this handbook might nourish it, provoking readers to explore the connections or discontinuities across the entries. We introduce the organization of the sections, as well as our use of “tags” to indicate potentially fruitful overlaps between entries. We hope that such organization will enable a variety of readers—from teachers hoping to include more CPT on their course syllabi, to newcomers to the field, to established theorists hoping to explore the comparative dimensions of their own work—to use this handbook.

What Is Comparative Political Theory and What Can It Do?

Our aim in this section is to present to readers the breadth and value of a wide variety of work traveling under the term “comparative political theory.” We aim neither to intervene

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on behalf of particular approaches nor to itemize their methodological differences. We therefore ask what specific contributions to knowledge have already been—and are currently being—generated under the rubric of CPT. So far, perhaps because of its fracturing along geographic rather than thematic or methodological lines, CPT has not generated the kind of internally self-referential and cumulative knowledge characteristic of a discipline or field. At the same time, many practitioners view CPT as a needed challenge to precisely the kind of canonization or solidification that often accompanies (p. 4) such development (see Jenco 2011; Godrej 2011, 26–49; Euben 2010; Idris 2016a). We go on to consider how CPT is, or should be, considered “comparative” and how its practitioners have elaborated their connections to comparative method.

Comparative Political Theory: Significant Features

We submit that comparative political theory is best understood as the discursive space carved out by immanent/internal critiques of political theory’s privileging of “the West” and its marginalization of other archives—whether those archives are understood as constituted by traditions, practices, bodies of thought, or texts. As Farah Godrej (2009) notes, these exclusions appear in the *practice* of political theory (what is written, what is published, what is taught), even if not everyone agrees that they are intrinsic to the *idea* of political theory. This is not to say that CPT, as an institutional and discursive expansion, can offer anything like perfect inclusion—a global reach can never be truly global—or that CPT can perfectly and unproblematically inhabit or access perspectives in the process of re-presenting them. Although political theory as a field exists in many university systems and intellectual communities outside the anglophone West, “comparative political theory” as a label (if not a set of practices) remains largely a preoccupation of scholars publishing in English and often with Euro-American university degrees (though there are growing and important exceptions: see, e.g., Shaw 2014, 2016). Cognizant of such structures of asymmetry, CPT is generally alert to and often studies how imperial power can be linked to knowledge production, mistranslation, and appropriation. Comparative political theory, as a practice, cannot and should not be limited to the select number of scholars who claim it explicitly as a research agenda. Rather, CPT has served as a place within political theory in which to hear from adjacent disciplines and cognate fields, within or outside political science. It has been a place within political theory where scholars can pursue research about political thinking that is not always and already treating the questions or authors familiar to political theorists more generally.

Despite the plurality within, and the indistinct boundaries of, CPT, we see three central and persistent themes of CPT work as a whole that help to bring it into focus as an important strand of political theory. These themes are critiquing relations of domination, particularly with respect to scholarly inquiry and the production of knowledge; foregrounding historically marginalized bodies of thought; and attending to the cross-regional and transnational itineraries of politically relevant ideas as they are translated across contexts. We discuss each of these in turn.

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First, theorists working in this discursive space of CPT, having interests and literacy beyond European and American thought and contexts, have been especially well situated to draw attention to the global and regional contexts of political power, exclusion, and relations of domination. Comparative political theorists have made interventions into ongoing political problems, including questions of Islamic and non-Islamic fundamentalism (Euben 1999), democratic participation (Walton 2018), “terrorism” and spectacles of humiliation (Euben 2017), realism and violence (Mantena 2012; Palshikar 2016), (p. 5) the justification of liberal citizenship (March 2009a), the nature of public reason in nonliberal East Asian polities (Chan 2014), political foundings, their exclusions, and the constitution of “the people” (Ochoa Espejo 2012; Bernal 2014; Jenco 2010a), the need for environmental stewardship (Gray 2017), invocations of war for the sake of peace (Idris 2019), and decolonization (Ciccarello-Maher 2017). Such interventions, ranging from the global to the local, are grounded in their moment, drawing attention to commensurability across perceived difference. Comparative political theory has also helped political theorists demonstrate important distinctions within and across *incommensurability*, whether in the necessary and partial failures of translation or in the differences across conceptual grammars (Euben 2006; Jenco 2010b; Gordon 2014).

The significance of emphasizing resonance or disagreement, or, more deeply, commensurability or incommensurability, depends not only on questions of political context, but also on particular sensitivity to *who* says what, to whom, how, and why, or the acknowledgement that problems—and what may register as problems to some theorists and thinkers but not others, in some contexts but not others—are always situated (Gordy 2015). For example, explorations of liberalism’s expandability to include either Islamic (March 2009a) or Confucian (Chan 2014; Kim 2016) justifications have shown how familiar terms and ideas might be rendered on the basis of less familiar texts and authorities. The extensive literature on human rights in vernacular and non-Western contexts demonstrated how such terms can be mobilized to both enliven and critique mainstream views (Bauer and Bell 1999, Madhok 2018). Euben (2006, chs. 4 and 5) examined how differently situated speakers might call for rejection or accommodation in relation to their status in layered hierarchies of gender and race, across national, regional, and global contexts.

As it presses these questions about how political theory is defined and who is recognized as theorizing (Euben 2006, 11–13), CPT is often pushing against hegemonic conceptions of politics, including the values of Western liberal democracy (Iqtidar 2014; Klausen 2014; Tully 2016; Bell 2015). Yet there remains a great deal of disagreement about how to proceed and what is important. Some suggest that a new, cosmopolitan hybrid perspective may emerge from an egalitarian “cross-cultural conversation,” irreducible to any of the cultural categories that originally informed it (Dallmayr 2004; Tully 2016). On this view, prevalent also in earlier calls for comparative philosophy (Taylor 1985; Panikkar 1988; Parel and Keith 1992), CPT facilitates the transgression of boundaries to the shared benefit of both sides, rather than shoring up knowledge as inhabiting one community or another. Other scholars herald the development of indigenous, non-Western categories and scholarship as new centers of global critique (Goh, this volume; Jenco 2011), arguing that ongoing conversations centered within particular communities can offer important per-

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spectives on shared knowledge, without at the same time assuming these perspectives emanate from essentialist commitments or features. Still other scholars, in communication with fields such as international political theory and multiculturalism, urge a global ethics within a reconceived international society that takes seriously the abundance of perspectives brought to bear on global problems and connections (Sullivan and Kymlicka 2008; Shapcott 2016), including but not limited to those of (p. 6) the “global south” (Santos 2013). Crosscutting many of these positions is a commitment, first theorized within postcolonial studies, to “provincialize” Eurocentric categories (Chakrabarty 2000)—that is, to see such categories as numbering among many categories available to global thinkers and activists as they make sense of their world, rather than exclusive or necessary features of legitimate academic study—and in so doing view them in new ways from historically marginalized sites of thought (Bajpai 2011; Tully 1999).

These critical facets of the CPT project have proceeded in numerous and diverse ways; often, such revelatory inquiry is integrated into more substantive contributions that showcase the degree to which many existing debates of political theory and philosophy rest on uninterrogated assumptions about their universality (Hall and Ames 1987; Flikschuh 2014). Some theorists critique the “Western” ascription of such universalist ideas, showing their historical imbrication with imperial, commercial, migratory, or other diverse patterns of human interaction (Clarke 1997). Others point out the degree to which foundational principles of that seemingly global worldview were formulated explicitly to exclude—or even deny the humanity of—peoples seen as irredeemably other (Mehta 1999; Mignolo 2011). In his “counter-history” of liberalism, for example, Domenico Losurdo (2011) shows how deeply the value of liberty was implicated in arguments for the enslavement and genocide of peoples seen as incapable of its exercise.

Second, in addition to attending to political forces of domination, exclusion, and asymmetry, CPT has foregrounded historically marginalized bodies of thinking. Always acknowledging that marginalization is relative, the significance of this move has been to enrich the archives with other intellectual histories (Jenco 2016). As a result, CPT has drawn attention to the politics of knowledge production in political theory, as well as how these bodies of thought can be useful to readers, whether to disturb, disrupt, transform, or resist those politics of knowledge production (Hendrix and Baumgold 2017). It has also meant recognizing that some important sources or genres for thinking about political life—such as oral transmission of narratives or stories (Flikschuh 2014; Nichols, this volume), poetry and belles lettres (Bol 1992; Huters 2005), occasional writing and cataloging (Weiss 2008), travel narratives (Euben 2006), ritual embodiment (Seligman et al. 2008), teacher-student transmission (Jenco 2007), and even practices of silence (Rollo 2017)—are marginalized or absent within the field of political theory and sometimes even within discussion of politics more generally.

We are mindful that CPT can (and does) produce its own exclusions (as the entries by Seth and Klausen, in this volume, remind us) and may at times re-entrench older disciplinary exclusions (Ferguson 2016). But we might adapt Judith Butler’s (2015, 4–5) advice, offered to democratic theorists uneasy with persistent exclusions. First, we should recog-

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nize that exclusions are not always visible and might appear natural. We understand CPT as a domain of inquiry that seeks to transform the relation between the recognizable and the unrecognizable, or, as Euben puts it, the familiar and unfamiliar, for political theory and for readers more broadly. In other words, one of CPT's challenges has been to rethink the basis of exclusions in politics and in knowledge production. Second, mere inclusion toward equal recognition for bodies of thought and thinkers is (p. 7) not a primary or ultimate *aim* of CPT (Euben 1997; Goto-Jones 2011; Jenco 2014). Instead, since the focus of CPT—like political theory broadly—is on studying and thinking with ideas, texts, and practices, it aims to open to further elaboration, critique, and transformation both the ideas and practices in disciplinarily marginalized sources and contexts and the idea and practices of political theory. In Roxanne L. Euben's words, such analysis would "raise questions about the relationship between how political theory is defined—as an institutionalized field, a canon of books, a set of interrogatives, a philosophical genre, or a practice of inquiry—and who may be recognized as theorizing, in what locales, and in which genres" (2006, 13). The aim of CPT is less to include and equalize bodies of thought than to offer a discursive space for theorizing with and through their asymmetries.

Third, CPT has contributed to the wider field of political theory by opening broader geographies in which a single concept or idea, a set of texts, or a body of thought can itself travel, paying attention to the cross-regional and transnational itineraries of such ideas (see the essays in Hendrix and Baumgold 2017). Theorists have shown what happens when orientalism, for example, is taken up by colonized thinkers (Thomas 2012) or when the ideas of liberal democracy (Bajpai 2011; Walton 2018) or socialist revolution (Lin 2006; Gordy 2015) travel beyond the contexts in which they may have first emerged. Some ideas are appropriated and reclaimed; for some, this is the unfolding of an emergent promise and for others a creative misreading, a willful refusal, a separate communal archive. Here, comparative political theorists highlight the politics of knowledge production and the effects of different knowledges as they travel from one context to other geographic, linguistic, institutional, or political contexts. When, in contrast, it treats the contemporary convergence of so many societies on shared normative principles, CPT aims to interrogate and contextualize those principles. This contextualization typically proceeds in light of the specific historical experiences, cultural dynamics, and forms of power that historically operated to make certain concepts—such as human rights or the universal franchise—more globally pervasive or natural seeming than others (Mitchell 2000). Part of this investigation entails treating such convergence on values with greater historical and conceptual suspicion and sometimes recognizing the extent to which many of those concepts and values were never exclusively European productions anyway, as when ancient Greek and Roman thought is understood as moments of Arabic transmission or part of a Mediterranean, not European, world (Gutas 1998; Daiber 2012; also see Hasse 2016).

Comparison and How to Do It

Given the diversity of scholarly endeavor surveyed above, it is perhaps not surprising that some scholars have queried whether "comparative" is the best term to describe it (March 2009b). The term "comparison" is problematic, for several reasons. Primarily, comparison

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is sometimes construed in its dictionary definition as requiring the prior existence of discretely bounded bodies of thought (March 2009b; Freeden 2007). This (p. 8) form of what we might call “literal comparison” encourages the systematic presentation of ideas or bodies of thought as distinctly bounded, discrete, necessarily commensurable, or hermetically sealed and their content as predetermined—one reason that many contributors to this handbook often distance themselves from this sort of comparison to the extent that it has been promoted in (or demanded from) CPT. The practice of comparison, moreover, can be a root of problems sometimes also found in area studies. These include developmentalism, modernization theory, orientalism, the tendency to describe something in terms of dehistoricized cultural “traditions,” and the privilege afforded to ahistorical claims about similarities or differences (Barlow 1997; Dutton 2005; Bates, Johnson, and Lustick 1997). At the same time, comparison seems to demand an excess of explanatory context not typically required of most discussions within more mainstream or canonical political theory.

Perhaps the most important drawback of the name “comparative political theory” is that much of the work to which it refers simply does not foreground literal comparison. This may be, perhaps, a result of the field’s increasingly protean character, which encourages a heterogeneity of approaches, or of the simple fact of its persistent and more prominent association with the study of non-Western thought rather than literal comparison. Why, then, retain the term *comparative* political theory in place of something more direct, such as non-Western, postcolonial, or marginalized political theory?

Despite the potential drawbacks of this term, few others capture precisely the mix of self-reflexivity, resistance to Eurocentrism, and creative translation across the range of space and time to which the best work in CPT aspires. To append the label “postcolonial” would be to reduce the broad interest of much of CPT, whose research extends to the historically situated imaginaries that preceded colonialism (London 2008; Gray 2017; Black 2001), as well as to the contemporary societies, such as those of East Asia, that eluded the tight grasp of European colonialism. Nor is this interest, in turn, reducible to the “non-Western,” for the simple reason that such a term shores up the very binaries CPT work seeks to problematize (Idris 2016b; Seth, this volume). Comparative political theory is typically less focused on defining societies of interest through their implied contrast to the West than on using work on those societies to interrogate the kinds of binaries that hold in place “the West” as a term of cultural superiority.

These responses to the usual array of alternatives to “comparison” help us lay out the more positive and appealing features of the term. We argue for a move beyond a simple definition of literal comparison to realize that comparison can capture the possibility of *questioning* rather than entrenching presumed boundaries between objects of comparison. It need not presume the given existence of two discrete and bounded entities, but rather it may draw attention to the fact that salient features of similarity and difference *arise through comparison rather than precede it*.

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This capacious and politically dynamic vision of comparison is enacted in the germinal work of Roxanne L. Euben, whose 1999 book *Enemy in the Mirror* offered the first book-length elaboration of what she called “comparative political theory”—a term she also coined in her 1997 article, “Comparative Political Theory: An Islamic Fundamentalist Critique of Rationalism” (Euben 1997, 1999). Euben emphasizes the emergent qualities (p. 9) that are *contingently disclosed* (rather than *assumed a priori*) by any act of engagement with the unfamiliar, in the process refusing to reduce comparison to the delineation of similarities or differences between two bounded, fixed, and transparent entities (Euben 2002). On this reading, comparison is a heuristic device that clears space for investigations across cultures and history, self and other, and the familiar and unfamiliar.

Comparison, so understood, thus *invites* rather than refuses the complexity that marks the travel of knowledge from one place and time to another; and *cultivates* the translation of ideas and the exchange of concepts across contexts, rather than constrains their circulation. It is this more imaginative form of comparison that animates the curation and content of this handbook. We also hope to show that this form of “imaginative comparison” can build on work that has now moved into the rubric of CPT, even if its authors do not identify as comparative political theorists or if they resist the label (e.g., Kohn and McBride 2011; Hooker 2017). Whereas CPT is sometimes treated as the home of political theory’s different traditions, as if “South Asian,” “Islamic,” “Confucian,” or “African” might be boxes to be ticked off on the census of political theory, we understand CPT’s questions to be otherwise. Rather than ask what is culturally or civilizationaly distinctive about its sources, how such work might reveal details of some “tradition” under scrutiny, or how it might offer the promise of a European analogue, we can use comparison to engage in discussions surrounding the shared theynamics and the important disconnections across bodies of thought and practice, across the globe and history.

Fellow Travelers and Diverse Genealogies

If we recognize that disciplinary boundaries are contingent and arbitrary and often fail to reflect the kinds of debates and literatures on which theorists draw or to which they contribute, it makes sense to consider work outside CPT per se that informs, or should (we think) inform, the work that comparative political theorists do. Indeed, some comparative political theorists have drawn on ongoing conversations around the politics of comparison as they have appeared in the field of comparative literature (Felski and Friedman 2013; Apter 2013; Seigel 2005; Melas 2013). Insofar as CPT denaturalizes and challenges hegemonic conceptions; calls attention to the structures of power and inequality that produce, inform, and undergird ideas; and expands political theory’s canonical focus, it borrows from fields that we consider fellow travelers, including, for example, feminist thought, decolonial and postcolonial theory, comparative philosophy, and critical race studies. And insofar as CPT appreciates work that attends to complexities and nuances of the contexts in which political ideas operate, it listens to and develops forms of knowledge from area studies, history, and anthropology. Our aim of gesturing toward such connections is not to delimit boundaries or claim turf, but rather to acknowledge that CPT has hardly been the

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first or the only place in which important (p. 10) work has been done to call attention to the politics of knowledge production, to theorize how that has shaped the field of political theory, and to pursue a research agenda in productive tension with that field.

Insofar as CPT aims to transform, and call for further transformation of, both knowledge and the politics of its production, it is of a kind with postcolonial studies. People working in CPT often borrow directly from the insights of postcolonial theorists about how power and knowledge are entwined (e.g., Said 1979; Bhabha 1994; Chakrabarty 2000; Guha 1999) and from the decolonial and postcolonial thinkers who have shifted the frame of reference and attendant articulations from (predominantly) South Asia to Latin America and the Caribbean (Mignolo 2003; Trouillot 1997). When CPT treats political thought in colonial or postcolonial spaces, it even more directly uses insights about colonial forms of knowledge, forms of anticolonial thought, and, from subaltern and decolonial studies, forms of political experience and thinking that proceed along different logics (Iqtidar 2014).

Though postcolonial studies is its sister field, CPT is also related to forms of knowledge that postcolonial studies critiques. The Western academy has long included scholars interested in the political thinking of non-Western places and scholars who work comparatively on those subjects. Some of this would be found in works of anthropology, including those that predate that field's reflexive turn (on which, see Clifford 1988). Clifford Geertz's "Deep Play: Notes on a Balinese Cockfight" has been provocative and influential in anthropology but also beyond, because it vividly and compellingly illustrates a rich set of political ideas not well captured by the tropes of Western thought (Geertz 1973). Other earlier area studies scholars also were doing work that might be called CPT long before the 1990s. In "The Idea of Power in Javanese Culture," for example, Benedict Anderson (1990) explained, to a Western audience, some Javanese political ideas in their own terms, without measuring them unfavorably against Western ideas. In the process, Anderson reflected on the peculiarity of and distinctions among ideas of "power" within the Western canon. One could also add Benjamin Schwartz's (1964) germinal work on Yan Fu, the Chinese translator of works by John Stuart Mill, Thomas Huxley, and Montesquieu. In Schwartz's words, when considering this historical encounter "between the West and any given non-Western society," we must remember that "we are not dealing with a known and an unknown variable but with two vast, ever-changing, highly problematic areas of human experience," in which "the ground of the encounter may itself provide a new vantage point from which to take a fresh look at both worlds" (Schwartz 1964, 2). In other words, not only Schwartz, but also Yan himself might have been contributing to a form of CPT *avant la lettre*—and such insights are not lost on contemporary scholars who see in Yan an important model for thinking critically across cultures, particularly (dominant) Western ones and (historically subordinate) East Asian ones (e.g., Wang 1997; Huang 1998; Shaw 2014, 2016).

These are not the only classics of area studies scholarship that might be seen as some sort of forerunners of CPT; we could easily add others (e.g., Levenson 1958; Andaya 1978). To view them as such is not to say that these people and other scholars were really

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doing CPT even though they did not yet have the vocabulary to articulate their work in (p. 11) those terms, or that they would have wanted to be engaged with CPT as a field if only it had been available to them. Neither may be the case. But some of their techniques and perspectives are shared by some practitioners of CPT and continue to serve as important sources of inspiration, even while many comparative political theorists usually align their work with self-reflexive critiques of anthropology and area studies.

Insofar as they work in productive tension with mainstream political theory, comparative political theorists might usefully consider how scholars of critical race theory and feminist thought, both in political theory and outside it, have navigated such terrain. In some respects, these strands are in a very different sort of relationship with political theory more broadly. For example, much late twentieth-century and contemporary theorizing in feminist theory or critical race theory is often fundamentally deconstructive, focused on contemporary oppressions and their historical and conceptual roots (e.g., Davis 1983; Collins 1990; hooks 1984; Mills 1997). While some contemporary feminist theorists and critical race theorists do work through textual exegesis (like much CPT), feminist and critical race theory emerged from and retain vibrant connections with social movements and political imperatives that exceed academic boundaries. Comparative political theory also does so for similar reasons, but arguably not as often.

In part because CPT's relationship to political phenomena and commitments is less direct, it is in a similar but not identical relationship to political theory more broadly. When CPT is included in political theory in the form of tokenistic appropriation of essentialized places of origin or codes of beliefs—such as “Islamic” or “Indian” or “Confucian” or “Latin American”—its practitioners may find it even more difficult to resist a reductive, and often wholly fictive, contrast with Europe or the West. This has led to perceptions that engaging marginalized forms of thought fits easily within the “great thinker” approach to political theory (for example, the entry on Alfarabi in Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey's influential compendium *History of Political Philosophy* [Mahdi 1987]) or that CPT remains unable to transcend the problems of tokenism (Klausen, this volume). We observe that such conclusions belie much of the more transformative interventions of CPT scholarship surveyed in previous sections, which foreground the political interventions and imaginations of the thinkers (or, perhaps more broadly, the traditions or methods of scholarship) they engage. The more transformative strands of CPT have sometimes been reduced within mainstream disciplinary circles: That is, accommodations of CPT's practice in political theory sometimes seem to amount to merely additive, canon-expanding exercises rather than the challenges to disciplinary hegemony it potentially invites—akin to processes in which neoliberalism embraces multiculturalism (Hale 2002) or settler societies recognize indigenous difference (Simpson 2014; Coulthard 2014; Nichols, this volume). In both cases, what results from recognition is a more resilient hegemony rather than hegemony's undoing.

Yet CPT continues to learn from its fellow travelers the importance of focusing attention not on scholarly buzzwords or preoccupations with defined methodologies, but rather on the differently situated practices that define and constrain political action and thought in

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the world. It is this critical and politically transformative work that motivates the compilation of this handbook. Aware that CPT is certainly not the first or only place (p. 12) where scholars have studied nonhegemonic, marginalized, or emerging forms of thinking and theorizing, we nevertheless note its value as a significant home for such theorizing within political science and theory—particularly but not only within the dominant enclaves of Euro-American scholarship. We hope that CPT can (continue to) contribute, along with these other fields, to decentering and unsettling some dominant, seemingly familiar strands in the field of political theory and to critically engaging with political thinking, highlighting the processes and articulations of power in which that theorizing happens.

How might we get there? We might start by (re)emphasizing our metaphor of CPT as a discursive gathering place, where theorists might look up from one set of particular sources and contexts to other sites, contexts, and archives. As such, this discursive space is a collaborative one that can aspire to bring into conversation with one another, for example, scholars of Southeast Asian thought with scholars of Latin America and to note neglected patterns or disconnections across thinkers not normally brought together; colonial thinkers across the globe might be read in tandem with each other and/or alongside non-European colonizers. This space can demonstrate not only convergence, but also the limits and failures of dominant concepts or categories. To facilitate these kinds of conversations and foster such collaboration, we have organized the content of the handbook around themes that also constitute the titles of different sections of the handbook. These organizing themes are amplified and complemented by a system of “tags” that identify further sites of potential shared concern.

Organization of the Handbook and How to Use It

The first three sections of this handbook comprise entries that examine the conditions under which space and time organize, and are organized by, those identities (or traditions, movements, texts, and nations) that have long stood as fodder for comparative analysis. They consider both the historical movement of ideas across domains of translatability and the normative question of how to mobilize past or present exemplars for political purposes. The fourth and fifth sections of this handbook comprise entries that respond more directly to specific dilemmas that reverberate throughout political theory as well as other fields: These concern the question of authority and the terms of knowledge.

The first section, “Geographies of Thought,” does not treat geography as an organizing principle that sorts different examples of political thinking by locating them in terms of geographical origin, but instead treats location and geography as subjects of political theorizing. The pieces in the second section, “The Presence of the Past,” all treat how ideas about the past—which pasts and mobilized in what ways—become key sites of staking political claims. The third section, “Translatability across Time and Space,” features (p. 13)

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work that looks at how specific ideas do and do not translate from one context to another and the work that such translations can do.

Turning to more direct dilemmas of governance and rule, the fourth section of this handbook, “Political Authority and Its Legitimation,” explores one of the most fundamental and recurrent questions of political theory: On what bases might political authority be justified? Entries in this section take account of a wide range of political authority, from that embodied in the state to that claimed by an oppositional figure or movement. The fifth section, “Discipline and Dissent,” treats examples of disagreement about the rules of knowledge. Entries explore debates about what counts as a certain form of knowledge, along with the political aspects of that debate, and often broach questions concerning the aims and practices of CPT itself.

Each section begins with a very short introduction to the pieces it contains. We hope that the themes around which we have organized sections might help readers not already familiar with the subjects of these entries see opportunities for how they might articulate with their own areas of scholarly research, as well as opportunities for how one might incorporate pieces from the volume—including the primary sources those pieces engage—into course syllabi. Those of us teaching courses on political theory might be able to use these entries as secondary sources or as sources for lectures, assigning our students some of the texts that the chapters treat. With the dual aims of scholarly rigor and accessibility in mind, our authors working in languages other than English have taken care to cite both the original text and valuable translations, where they exist. We also hope that this will make each of the entries valuable to a wider range of readers—from those with no prior knowledge of the entry’s subject for whom an introduction is useful to fellow specialists seeking new interpretation and insight. Some of our entries are written more self-consciously as overviews of a broad range of work, while others are written as more specific explorations. But each aims to speak both to the reader with only general political theory knowledge and to specialists.

The sections of the handbook are not the only way to draw connections and note disconnections between different entries. The section headings are not meant to be exhaustive so much as illustrative; readers will—and should—notice other thematic connections between entries that yield equally productive paths through the volume. To aid the reader, we have developed a set of tags to identify themes that connect entries across the handbook’s sections. These tags are based on significant terms such as “modernity,” “capitalism,” “postcolonialism,” “political economy,” and “Confucianism.” They operate in addition to the specific keywords suggested by each author for her or his entry, and they are designed to enable scholars to locate relevant discussions across the handbook in unfamiliar fields, questions, or bodies of thought. It is important to note that these tags do not function as indexical or descriptive terms; rather, they indicate the direct thematization of a particular topic within an entry. The “area studies” tag, for example, indicates those entries that reflect on or discuss area studies as a postwar knowledge formation; it does not indicate entries that themselves may offer an instance of work in area studies.

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In one sense, tags are alternate tables of contents. A list of tags appears at the end of our introduction. The tags reflect our understanding that, as we have written, the (p. 14) contributions of CPT are likely to be connective as much as cumulative. Our point in providing tags, therefore, is, first, to show that there exist significant points of connection (and disconnection) even among seemingly divergent contexts of time, place, and experience; second, to enable productive comparative engagement to take place; and third, to take forward the critical, constructive potential of CPT to disrupt existing paradigms of knowledge, including the hegemonic forms that may yet linger within the silos of established area-specific fields.

Conclusion

As the previous discussion has shown, it seems most work in CPT tends to have greater ambitions than the simple documentation or comparison of culturally salient differences in political perspective. It is here that describing CPT as an “emerging field” reveals that the issue is not with its age (“new materialism,” the “affective turn,” and “decolonial thought” are all just as old, but do not receive the “emerging” modifier). The idea that the field is “emerging” has been another way of signaling that its boundaries are contested, that its purpose is opaque, and that it has not yet finished the work that it is supposed to do. It would be better to say that CPT embodies what political theory *aspires* to be and might yet become, and its capaciousness represents what political theory has in practice failed to include. This work, it seems to us, is its own abolition if political theory corrects itself. If CPT is an immanent critique of political theory, its success would also mean that it will have been no longer needed as a distinct domain: political theory would be always already comparative, deparochialized, and self-reflexively situated within globally diffuse communities of argument and critique.

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Tags: Alternative Paths through the Handbook

Ancient Greece/Rome

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- (1.) For iterations of these debates, see March 2009b, 2016; Godrej 2009; Jenco 2007, 2011; Euben 2000, 2010; Dallmayr 2004; Thomas 2010; Freedman and Vincent 2013; Shapcott 2016; Black 2008; Bashir 2013; Hassanzadeh 2015; Von Vacano 2015; El Amine 2016; Hooker 2017; Simon 2014, 2017.

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