

DIVERSITY READING LIST PRESENTS:

POSTCOLONIAL THEORY, RACE AND CASTE

A DRL READING GROUP BLUEPRINT BY SUDDHA GUHARROY AND ANDREAS SORGER
FUNDED BY AHRC

LEVEL: INTERMEDIATE

INTRODUCTION

Postcolonial theory is, broadly speaking, the study of how societies have conquered, controlled, and perceived “other” societies - physically, spiritually, and intellectually - and how the resulting colonized societies have responded to and resisted being conquered, controlled, or perceived in those ways. It seeks to understand these things, but it also seeks to “de-colonize” aspects of the colonized societies in the hope of achieving physical, spiritual, and intellectual liberation and self-determination. It intersects with a number of intellectual traditions, including: various national and cultural traditions, critical race theory, feminism, existentialism, Marxism, liberation theology, and more. It also draws on a number of disciplines, including: sociology, history, literature, aesthetics, economics, geography, political science, and more. Each of the authors on this blueprint constitutes some of the best that such theorizing has to offer. Organization-wise, we have provided materials for 10 weeks worth of reading, and have provided questions for focused discussions about them. However, by all means, readers can pick and choose which weeks they want to focus on if less time is available. Or, if they have the time and energy, they can also pick and choose several readings to engage with per week, seeing as we have tried to make the readings relatively short.

CATEGORIES

- Colonialism and Postcolonialism
- Equality
- Philosophy of Gender, Race, and Sexuality
- Philosophy of Race
- Social and Political Philosophy

AVAILABLE ONLINE AT:

<https://diversityreadinglist.org/blueprint/postcolonial-theory/>

ABSTRACT:

This classic work, first published in France in 1955, profoundly influenced the generation of scholars and activists at the forefront of liberation struggles in Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean. Nearly twenty years later, when published for the first time in English, *Discourse on Colonialism* inspired a new generation engaged in the Civil Rights, Black Power, and anti-war movements and has sold more than 75,000 copies to date. Aimé Césaire eloquently describes the brutal impact of capitalism and colonialism on both the colonizer and colonized, exposing the contradictions and hypocrisy implicit in western notions of "progress" and "civilization" upon encountering the "savage," "uncultured," or "primitive." Here, Césaire reaffirms African values, identity, and culture, and their relevance, reminding us that "the relationship between consciousness and reality are extremely complex. . . . It is equally necessary to decolonize our minds, our inner life, at the same time that we decolonize society."

COMMENT:

Aimé Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism* is a foundational text in postcolonial theory, which provides an excoriating critique of not only European practices of colonialism, but also the underlying theories and logics used to justify them. Specifically, Césaire takes aim at the view of colonialism as a 'civilising mission', where benevolent Europeans would provide non-white non- Europeans with the tools necessary for modernisation. Instead, he argued that colonialism wrought destruction everywhere it went, killing people, eradicating civilisations, and obliterating any alternative cultural ideas that contrasted European values. Crucially, Césaire explores the psychological effects of colonialism on both the colonised and the coloniser – a theme that would be taken further by Frantz Fanon (a student of Césaire's) in his writings.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Throughout *Discourse on Colonialism*, Césaire uses images of decay to describe European or Western civilisation. In the sections you are reading, he talks about it as a "stricken" and "dying" civilisation (p.31) and likens every act of brutality perpetuated by Europeans to a "gangrene" that spreads throughout Western civilisation as a whole. What do you think Césaire means by this image? What effect does it have on the reader?
2. Césaire writes: "The colonialists may kill in Indochina, torture in Madagascar, and imprison in Black Africa, crack down in the West Indies. Henceforth the colonised know that they have an advantage over them. They know their temporary 'masters' are lying" (p.32). Why does Césaire suggest the colonialists are lying? Why does this give the colonised an "advantage over [the colonisers]"?
3. What connections does Césaire draw between Nazism and colonialism? Why does he suggest that every "humanistic ... Christian bourgeois of the twentieth century ... has a Hitler inside him" (p.36)?
4. What implications follow from Césaire's claim that "no one colonises innocently" (p.39)? How might this change the way we examine the legacy of colonial practices today?
5. What is the "boomerang effect of colonisation" (p.41) that Césaire diagnoses?
6. What does Césaire mean by the phrase "Colonialism = thingification"? How does this relate to his discussion of the psychological effects of colonialism on both the coloniser and the colonised?
7. What values does Césaire suggest we can find in pre-colonial non-European civilizations? What role do you think these values play in his wider argument?
8. On the one hand, Césaire explicitly details the destructive power of Western colonialism, such that entire cultures and civilisations have been eradicated as a result of its rapaciousness. On the other, Césaire defends the values of pre-colonial non-European civilisations (see p.44-46). Do you think this points to a tension within Césaire's argument? If so, how might we resolve it? If not, why not?

Fragment: "Down at the Cross: Letter from a Region in My Mind", pp. 3-22.

ABSTRACT:

A national bestseller when it first appeared in 1963, *The Fire Next Time* galvanized the nation and gave passionate voice to the emerging civil rights movement. At once a powerful evocation of James Baldwin's early life in Harlem and a disturbing examination of the consequences of racial injustice, the book is an intensely personal and provocative document. It consists of two "letters," written on the occasion of the centennial of the Emancipation Proclamation, that exhort Americans, both black and white, to attack the terrible legacy of racism. Described by The New York Times Book Review as "sermon, ultimatum, confession, deposition, testament, and chronicle...all presented in searing, brilliant prose," *The Fire Next Time* stands as a classic of our literature.

COMMENT:

Published in 1963, this essay offers a scathing attack on the racist history of America and its contemporary present in the 1960s. The text provides a trenchant critique of the way racism has shaped, and continues to shape, relations between whites and blacks in American society by suggesting that whites are trapped by a history they refuse to acknowledge – thereby making them unable to conceive of black Americans as their fellow co-citizens. Thus, for Baldwin, it is imperative that whites are made to recognise this history, as a failure to do so will inevitably result in an outbreak of violence. It is a compelling narrative of various quotidian as well as extraordinary incidents interwoven with local and international political causes and repercussions.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. With respect to the religious journey of Baldwin:
 - a. What made him enter the 'church racket' (p.6) and get indoctrinated in Christianity?
 - b. What was his subsequent understanding of the historical role that Christianity played 'in the realm of power and in the realm of morals'?
2. "The white God has not delivered them; perhaps the Black God will." (p.12) How would one describe Baldwin's conception of God?
3. "...this leads, imperceptibly but inevitably, to a state of mind in which, having long ago learned to expect the worst, one finds it very easy to believe the worst"
 - a. Why does Baldwin consider not being able to believe 'the humanity of white people is more real to them than their colour' to be worst? What do we understand about Baldwin's idea of love for people?
4. What was the initial impression Baldwin had of Elijah? Did the impression change? If yes then what was the revised impression of Elijah that Baldwin had?
5. "...the Negro has been formed by this nation...and does not belong to any other -- not to Africa, and certainly not to Islam." (p. 16) Why does the identity of the Black Americans not belong to Africa and Islam? Why does Baldwin claim that only a radical change in the constitution of American social and political structure can bring a real change in the life of a Black American? Do you believe that radical change in the social-political structure has occurred?
6. What is the definition of 'tokenism' (p.18) that we get in the text? What are its material causes and consequences?
 - a. Against the idea of tokenism, how does Baldwin envisage freedom?
7. "...a vast amount of the white anguish is rooted in the white man's equally profound need to be seen as he is, to be released from the tyranny of his mirror." (p.19)

- a. What, according to the text, was Baldwin's diagnosis of the problem in America? What does the idea of the mirror evoke?
- b. "To create one nation has proved to be a hideously difficult task; there is certainly no need now to create two, one black and one white." (p. 20)

How does Baldwin envision the creation of a new America?

SAID, EDWARD W. *ORIENTALISM*

1978, Pantheon Books. pp. 1-23.

Difficulty: Intermediate

ABSTRACT:

More than three decades after its first publication, Edward Said's groundbreaking critique of the West's historical, cultural, and political perceptions of the East has become a modern classic.

In this wide-ranging, intellectually vigorous study, Said traces the origins of "orientalism" to the centuries-long period during which Europe dominated the Middle and Near East and, from its position of power, defined "the orient" simply as "other than" the occident. This entrenched view continues to dominate western ideas and, because it does not allow the East to represent itself, prevents true understanding. Essential, and still eye-opening, *Orientalism* remains one of the most important books written about our divided world.

COMMENT:

Orientalism is a classic text in postcolonial theory which successfully brought out the politics of 'othering'. It shows how the 'Orient' was constructed by delineating it from the supposedly morally, culturally and politically advanced (and superior) 'Occident'. The book is not so much about the East as much as it is about how the Orient was 'produced' by the imperial masters of Europe and America and perceived as the 'other' to the rest of the 'civilized' world. The author traces and examines various literary and political sources which originated and perpetuated Orientalism. The abstract gives an overview of the argument and introduces the reader to the rest of the book.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What is the relationship between Orientalism and imperialism?
2. What does Said mean when he says 'producing the Orient, politically, sociologically, militarily...' (p.3)?
3. What is the Gramscian distinction between civil and political society? Express your views on whether you find the distinction helpful. How does the concept of 'hegemony' figure in the discourse? Why is it an important tool to understand the cultural life of the West?
4. "Orientalism is after all a system for citing works and authors." Discuss the relationship between the overarching ideology of Orientalism and the contribution of individual works. What position does Said take in the debate? Do you agree with his position? Give reasons for your answer.
5. What is Said's opinion on the 'liberal consensus' (p.10) about true, 'non-political' knowledge? Can there be non-political, pure knowledge in human sciences? State reasons for your agreement/disagreement.
6. What does Said mean when he says orientalism is 'premised on exteriority' (p.20)? How does the Orient rest on representation? In relation to this discuss briefly the politics of 'representation'. (Discussion in greater detail available in chapter 1)
7. What special significance does 'Islamic Orient' add to the study of Orientalism, given contemporary geopolitics?

ABSTRACT:

What can philosophy contribute to African culture? What can it draw from it? Could there be a truly African philosophy that goes beyond traditional folk thought? Kwasi Wiredu tries in these essays to define and demonstrate a role for contemporary African philosophers which is distinctive but by no means parochial. He shows how they can assimilate the advances of analytical philosophy and apply them to the general social and intellectual changes associated with 'modernisation' and the transition to new national identities. But we see too how they can exploit traditional resources and test the assumptions of Western philosophy against the intimations of their own language and culture. The volume as a whole presents some of the best non-technical work of a distinguished African philosopher, of importance equally to professional philosophers and to those with a more general interest in contemporary African thought and culture

COMMENT:

Kwasi Wiredu's *Philosophy and an African Culture* grapples with the relationship between African philosophy and African traditional folk thought in order to carve out a distinctive role for African philosophers in the present day. In the chapters for this week, Wiredu is contributing to a debate in African philosophy that seeks to answer the question: "What is African Philosophy?". Wiredu takes issue with Europeans elevating the traditional folk beliefs of Africans to the status of philosophy, which historically has been used to justify and legitimise the racist belief in the inferiority of black Africans. Instead, Wiredu suggests that the absence of a written tradition of philosophy means that African philosophy can only exist in the present. Thus, it is up to contemporary African philosophersto create a 'new' tradition with distinctive insights for the problems faced by African societies.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How does the comparison between African philosophy and African versions of other disciplines, such as engineering, illuminate the problem Wiredu is grappling with? What is the difference between the universalist and nationalist conceptions of African philosophy? What, for Wiredu, are the limitations of the nationalist conception?
2. Why does Wiredu suggest that traditional African philosophies are "pre-scientific"? Is this a distinct problem for African philosophy? Does the pre-scientific nature of traditional African philosophy mean that it should not be made the subject of further study?
3. What is Wiredu's conception of philosophy in a technical sense? Why does Wiredu think that this conception of philosophy is useful for contemporary African society? Can philosophy, in Wiredu's sense, be universal and, if so, in what ways?
4. a. Similarly, how are cultural considerations relevant for philosophical thinking? In answering this question, refer to Wiredu's comments about the relationship between language and philosophy.
5. b. What implications do you think follow from this relationship between language and philosophy?
6. What is the definition of African philosophy Wiredu offers at the end of Chapter 2? Why does he suggest that this project is "urgent"?
7. What are the criticisms Wiredu advances against Western anthropologists who focus on the "pre-scientific characteristics of African traditional thought" (p.39)? What are the problematic consequences of such thinking for the perception of Africans by the West, as well as the self-image of Africans themselves? Can you draw any connections between Wiredu's remarks here and the effects of colonialism discussed by Césaire?
8. How does Wiredu's contrast between African and Western traditions of thought serve to undermine the binary opposition between a rational modern West and an irrational superstitious Africa?

9. How do you interpret Wiredu's conception of development as a "continuing world- historical process" (p.43) in which all peoples are engaged? What are the advantages of conceptualising development in this way?
10. Towards the end of Chapter 3, Wiredu seems to suggest that a written tradition is necessary for possessing a philosophical heritage. Do you think this is fair or it does it unfairly marginalise oral traditions of philosophy as being 'folk wisdom'?

Fragment: "Imperialism, History, Writing, and Theory", pp. 19-41.

ABSTRACT:

To the colonized, the term 'research' is conflated with European colonialism; the ways in which academic research has been implicated in the throes of imperialism remains a painful memory. This essential volume explores intersections of imperialism and research - specifically, the ways in which imperialism is embedded in disciplines of knowledge and tradition as 'regimes of truth.' Concepts such as 'discovery' and 'claiming' are discussed and an argument presented that the decolonization of research methods will help to reclaim control over indigenous ways of knowing and being.

Now in its eagerly awaited second edition, this bestselling book has been substantially revised, with new case-studies and examples and important additions on new indigenous literature, the role of research in indigenous struggles for social justice, which brings this essential volume urgently up-to-date.

COMMENT:

Linda Tuhiwai Smith's *Decolonising Methodologies* argued that, for the colonised, the idea and practice of academic research was imbued with imperialism. Thus, to escape this problem and reclaim indigenous forms of knowing, an effort to decolonise the methodologies of research is imperative. The reading for this week is the first chapter of the book, in which Smith advances her critique of Western knowledge to show that "every aspect of producing knowledge has influenced the ways in which indigenous ways of knowing have been represented" (p.35).

Smith's critique is far-reaching, and her point is to suggest that Western notions of history, writing, and theorising are bound up in the way research is pursued such that they exclude and marginalise indigenous groups.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What are the four different uses of the term 'imperialism' that Smith distinguishes between? What is the main difference between the fourth use of imperialism and the first three? Why is this significant?
2. What are the two main strands of critique offered by indigenous scholarship on imperialism and colonialism? Why do discussions of globalisation and post-colonialism pose new challenges for the ways indigenous communities "think and talk about imperialism" (p.24)?
3. How does Smith conceptualise the struggle to assert and claim humanity? What do you think Smith means by her suggestion that, for indigenous peoples, fragmentation is not "a phenomenon of postmodernism" but rather "the consequence of imperialism (p.28)"? What connections can you draw between the ideas articulated in this section and the writings of Césaire?
4. What are the 9 interconnected ideas that Smith suggests are central to Western conceptions of history? What is the critique of this kind of history raised by post-colonial and indigenous theorists alike? Do you find her critique convincing? If so, why? If not, why not?
5. If history in its modern/Western construction is predicated on a sense of Otherness that marginalises indigenous peoples, how and why is history important for decolonisation? In answering this question, think about how Smith conceptualises the relationship between history and power, as well as what Smith means by "coming to know the past" (p.34) and what this entails for decolonisation efforts.

6. On page 36, Smith writes "Writing can also be dangerous because we reinforce and maintain a style of discourse which is never innocent". What are some of the dangers she talks about, and how have indigenous and post-colonial theorists attempted to resist and push back?
7. In drawing on the work of Cheryl Smith and Edward Said, Linda Tuhiwai Smith highlights the importance of "'writing back' and simultaneously writing to ourselves" (p.37). How do you interpret this idea and what implications do you think it has for both writing and interpreting academic texts? Does it make you rethink the assumptions in your writing? Or does it reinforce concerns you may already have?
8. How and why is theory important for indigenous communities? What kind of theory development is necessary for indigenous communities, and what does this process entail?

ABSTRACT:

First published in 2000, Dipesh Chakrabarty's influential *Provincializing Europe* addresses the mythical figure of Europe that is often taken to be the original site of modernity in many histories of capitalist transition in non-Western countries. This imaginary Europe, Dipesh Chakrabarty argues, is built into the social sciences. The very idea of historicizing carries with it some peculiarly European assumptions about disenchanted space, secular time, and sovereignty. Measured against such mythical standards, capitalist transition in the third world has often seemed either incomplete or lacking. *Provincializing Europe* proposes that every case of transition to capitalism is a case of translation as well - a translation of existing worlds and their thought-categories into the categories and self-understandings of capitalist modernity. Now featuring a new preface in which Chakrabarty responds to his critics, this book globalizes European thought by exploring how it may be renewed both for and from the margins.

COMMENT:

This book is a watershed in Indian history, labour theory and postcolonial theory. Chakrabarty begins by accepting the idea that history has already provincialized Europe. However, time and again we find the author acknowledging that the categories and ideals that European thought and the Enlightenment produced are both indispensable and at the same time inadequate to understand the modern political relations of non-European, ex-colonial lands. On the one hand, the familiar theories we use to understand the lives of the proletariat or bourgeois political relations were inadequate to explain their postcolonial existence in Bengal and India. Yet, on the other, these frameworks are simultaneously indispensable for theories about the proletariat in postcolonial Bengal to be accepted as knowledge. A quest, therefore, ensued to interpret the lives of the working class and bourgeoisie political relations in parts of the world that did not replicate the historical transition of Europe. This book challenges the monolithic understanding of historical progression and attempts to follow a different historiography (using Marxist insights) to understand political modernity in places with different histories.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What is understood by 'Europe'? Is it a geographical identity or a historical and ideological category?
2. Why does the author think that European thought is both 'indispensable and inadequate' for understanding political modernity in a non-European country like India?
3. What is the meaning of historicism implied in the text? How did it turn into a political prescription to non-European peoples?
 - a. What was the response of the anticolonial movements to such an idea?
 - b. With respect to India, what could be considered as a national gesture of rejecting Mill's historicist prescription? What tension did the Indian political modernity run into for making that gesture? (pp. 6-11)
4. How does subaltern historiography extend the meaning of 'political' by critiquing the standard binaries of 'political' and 'pre-political'? Discuss with reference to the debate between Eric Hobsbawm and Ranajit Guha. (pp.12-15)
 - a. How does the binary division of political and pre-political lead us to a 'stagist' reading of history, and to the assumption that capitalism brings with it bourgeois power relations?
5. What are two strands of modern European social science?
 - a. How does a Marxist reading of history 'occlude' questions pertaining to belonging and diversity, thus producing an insufficient tool to read history? (p.18)
 - b. Was Marx himself clear about questions pertaining to History 2? (Discussions in greater detail available in chapter 2)

ABSTRACT:

Sylvia Wynter is a radical Jamaican theorist influenced, among others, by Frantz Fanon. This well known interview is often considered to be the best introduction to her thinking about the question of human in the aftermath of 1492 and the consequent racialisation of humanity.

Wynter rethinks dominant concepts of being human, arguing that they are based on a colonial and racialized model that divides the world into asymmetric categories such as "the selected and the dysselected", center and periphery, or colonizers and colonized. Against this Wynter proposes a new humanism. According to Katherine McKittrick Wynter develops a "counterhumanism", that breaks from the classification of humans in static, asymmetric categories.

COMMENT:

Sylvia Wynter is a Jamaican novelist, playwright, and academic who draws on a huge breadth of academic literature, including amongst others anthropology, critical race theory, postcolonialism, and feminism, in her prolific academic writings that cover an equally diverse set of themes. One important strand of her work involves "unsettling" what she sees as the dominant (Western/European) understanding of "Man", which she argues is responsible for enabling the brutal and harrowing treatment of non-whites by the European colonisers. Indeed, one of the goals of Wynter's project is to theorise a new kind of humanism that does not collapse into violence and exclusion, as the current dominant Western paradigm has, but rather one that is truly "comprehensive and planetary" (p.121) in scope. The reading for this week is a long-form interview Wynter did with David Scott, the editor of *Small Axe*, and covers a huge breadth of her work. The preface of the interview offers a helpful contextualisation of Wynter's work, while the section we will be reading offers an overview into Wynter's thinking about the ways in which humanist discourse has functioned to exclude non-whites.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. At the bottom of page 174, Wynter says "I am suggesting that from the very origin of the modern world, of the Western world system, there were never simply 'men' and 'women'. Rather there was, on the one hand Man, as invented in the sixteenth century by Europe, as Foucault notes, and then, on the other hand, Man's human Others". What do you think she means by this? What is the significance of this construction for Wynter's argument?
2. In a similar vein, Wynter suggests that "at the beginning of the modern world, the only women were White and Western" (p.174). Why do you think Wynter specifically talks about the construction of women? What does this add to her analysis of the inherently exclusive conception of Man constructed by Western Europe in the modern period?
3. What is the dilemma that Wynter talks about confronting on page 175? How does 'appreciating the West's intellectual breakthroughs' help to "transform their world"?
4. What is the relationship between "ethnoastronomies" and the ways in which old civilisations were ordered?
5. Wynter states that "Copernicus's breakthrough could only have been made in the wake of the earlier humanists' invention of a revalorized natural Man in the place of Christianity's fallen creature" (p.176). What do you think Wynter means by this? How does a "revalorized natural Man" enable the scientific revolution driven by Copernicus? Why is this significant for the construction of human Others as the opposite of the West's 'rational Man'? Finally, how and why does this characterisation become "purely secular" (p.177) and biological?

6. Thinking back to Chakrabarty's and Smith's critiques of Western historicism, why does Wynter prefer to use the term "desupernaturalizing" or "de-godding" rather than "secular" to characterise the rising biological conception of Man?
7. Wynter argues that, in a medieval scholastic order of knowledge, "a lay intellectual ... had to think in paradigms which served to confirm the hegemony of the church over the lay world" (p.178). What does this mean?
8. a. From this idea, Wynter draws on the writings of Aimé Césaire and Jean-François Lyotard to suggest that the Human Other is conceptualised as "the name of what is evil". How does this occur and why is this significant for Wynter's argument?
9. b. How is the above related to Wynter's suggestion that the current dominant paradigm of Man enabled the white Western world to see non-whites as racially inferior?
10. Does the change in the dominant conception of Man go directly from a theocentric religious conception to a biocentric one? Or is there a stage in between? If so, what is the in-between stage and how does it conceptualise the Human Other?
11. How does Wynter conceive the relationship between race and gender? How and why does Wynter see gender as an "emancipatory opening"? How do you think Wynter understands gender and how does it relate to her wider argument?

ABSTRACT:

Centering his analysis in the dynamic forces of modern East Asian history, Kuan-Hsing Chen recasts cultural studies as a politically urgent global endeavor. He argues that the intellectual and subjective work of decolonization begun across East Asia after the Second World War was stalled by the cold war. At the same time, the work of deimperialization became impossible to imagine in imperial centers such as Japan and the United States. Chen contends that it is now necessary to resume those tasks, and that decolonization, deimperialization, and an intellectual undoing of the cold war must proceed simultaneously. Combining postcolonial studies, globalization studies, and the emerging field of "Asian studies in Asia," he insists that those on both sides of the imperial divide must assess the conduct, motives, and consequences of imperial histories.

Chen is one of the most important intellectuals working in East Asia today; his writing has been influential in Taiwan, South Korea, Hong Kong, Japan, Singapore, and mainland China for the past fifteen years. As a founding member of the Inter-Asia Cultural Studies Society and its journal, he has helped to initiate change in the dynamics and intellectual orientation of the region, building a network that has facilitated inter-Asian connections. *Asia as Method* encapsulates Chen's vision and activities within the increasingly "inter-referencing" East Asian intellectual community and charts necessary new directions for cultural studies.

COMMENT:

Chen Kuan-hsing's book *Asia as Method* theorises what deimperialization efforts might look like, in order to begin imagining new possibilities and new futures that have been foreclosed by the entanglement of imperialization, colonisation, and the cold war in the Asian context. In this chapter, Chen puts forward his idea of "Asia as method", which he sees as being able to "move forward on the tripartite problematic of decolonisation, deimperialization, and de-cold war" (p.212) by pushing back against the universalism of Western ideas. Thus, Chen suggests the need for "shifting [the] points of reference toward Asia", thereby enabling Asian societies to learn from each other when faced with similar problems rather than engage in a dialogue mediated through Western theories and forms of knowledge production.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What is the potential of Asia as method? From the remarks Chen makes at the start of the chapter, what do you think Asia as method entails?
2. What are some of the problems associated with both the idea of Asia as method and the Inter-Asia project that inspired it? Why does Chen suggest that "due to historical constraints and current local differences, the general mood does not justify using Asia" as an "emotional signifier to call for regional integration and solidarity" (p.213)?
3. What is the relationship between "anxiety over the meaning of Asia" and the "politics of representation" (p.215)? What are the implications of this relationship for Asia as method? Why is this significant for Chen's argument?
4. What does Chen mean by an "imaginary West" and what role has it played in Asian nationalist discourses? Thinking back to some of the earlier readings, what is the relationship between the West and forms of knowledge production? Why is this a problem for Chen?
5. What are the four strategies of "dealing with the West" Chen considers and how does he critique each of them? Thinking back to your reading of Dipesh Chakrabarty, are you convinced by Chen's critique? If so, why? If not, why not?

6. Chen diagnoses a particular “predicament of postcolonial discourse” (p.222). What do you think Chen means by this? How does he attempt to move beyond it?
7. What are the similarities between Partha Chatterjee’s writings and Chen’s experiences in Taiwan? What is Chen’s idea of “shifting [the] points of reference” (p.225) and how does this inform his engagement with Chatterjee? How does shifting the points of reference collapse the “division between researcher and native informant” (p.227)?
8. Are you convinced that Asia as method can meaningfully “deal with the West”? Do you think it entails similar ideas in other parts of the world, such as Africa as method or Latin America as method? If so, what implications follow for political philosophy and/or political science?

ABSTRACT:

Decolonizing Universalism develops a genuinely anti-imperialist feminism. Against relativism/universalism debates that ask feminists to either reject normativity or reduce feminism to a Western conceit, Khader's nonideal universalism rediscovers the normative core of feminism in opposition to sexist oppression and reimagines the role of moral ideals in transnational feminist praxis.

COMMENT:

The book is a prescription for feminist praxis in lands and cultures which have histories different from that of the vanguards of the ('Western') world. It challenges both the 'progressive' ideals of the Enlightenment, which (according to the author) are ethnocentric in many ways, and their universalizing tendencies. It recognizes, and is apprehensive of, the fact that Enlightenment values operate as background assumptions in the works of many Northern and Western feminists, all the more when they are concerned with advancing women's rights in 'other' cultures. The author rejects such tendencies and proposes a different approach to the understanding of normativity and universalism.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. The terms 'Western' and 'Northern' appear frequently in the text.
 - a. Do the words refer to the same idea? If not, then what is the difference? (pp. 16-17; pp.18-19)
 - b. Why does the author levy the charge of ethnocentrism against what they call 'Western' universalism?
 - c. What position does the author take against that brand of universalism? Is it relativism or is it any other conception of universalism?
2. "Anti- imperialist feminisms, in my view, contain substantive normative claims." (p.3)
 - a. What is the substantive normative claim of the anti-imperialist feminism?
 - b. How is this normative claim different from that of the Enlightenment liberalist/ universalist claim of normativity?
3. "...according to the Enlightenment liberal retelling of history, moral progress means the erosion of community and tradition that the West has ostensibly already achieved." (p.5)
 - a. Do Chakrabarty's ideas of 'historicism' and the 'imaginary waiting room of history' shed some light on this understanding of history?
4. What are the 'specific values' that the author wishes to examine in the book? Discuss in brief how the author engages with the values. (pp. 7-10)
5. State your views about the discussions.
6. (Discussions in greater detail are available in chapters - 2, 3, 4)
7. With respect to feminist solidarity and praxis:
 - a. How does the author qualify the notion of 'positive ideals'?
 - b. How must we understand the goods of human rights, and generally the universal
8. indicators of advantage and disadvantage? (pp. 11-12)
9. The stated feminist position challenges the conventions and methodology of Anglo- American political philosophy in three distinct and important ways. Discuss briefly each of them and register your own response to those.
10. How does the stated feminist position interact with the notion of intersectionality of oppression? Do you agree that the expressed position is compatible with the intersectionality thesis or is the latter at odds with the former?

ABSTRACT:

The paper begins from a working definition of caste as a contentious form of social belonging and a consideration of casteism as a form of inferiorization. It takes anti-casteism as an ideological critique aimed at unmasking the unethical operations of caste, drawing upon B. R. Ambedkar's notion of caste as 'graded inequality'. The politico-legal context of the unfinished trajectory of instituting protection against caste discrimination in Britain provides the backdrop for thinking through the philosophical foundations of anti-casteism. The peculiar religio-discursive aspect of 'emergent vulnerability' is noted, which explains the recent introduction of the trope of 'institutional casteism' used as a shield by deniers of caste against accusations of casteism. The language of protest historically introduced by anti-racists is thus usurped and inverted in a simulated language of anti-colonialism. It is suggested that the stymieing of the UK legislation on caste is an effect of collective hypocrisies, the refusal to acknowledge caste privilege, and the continuity of an agonistic intellectual inheritance, exemplified in the deep differences between Ambedkar and Gandhi in the Indian nationalist discourse on caste. The paper argues that for a modern anti-casteism to develop, at stake is the possibility of an ethical social solidarity. Following Ambedkar, this expansive solidarity can only be found through our willingness to subject received opinions and traditions to critical scrutiny. Since opposed groups 'make sense' of their worlds in ways that might generate collective hypocrisies of denial of caste effects, anti-casteism must be geared to expose the lie that caste as the system of graded inequality is benign and seamlessly self-perpetuating, when it is everywhere enforced through penalties for transgression of local caste norms with the complicity of the privileged castes. The ideal for modern anti-casteism is Maitri formed through praxis, eschewing birth-ascribed caste status and loyalties.

COMMENT:

This is a brilliant introductory essay to the problem of casteism which plagues not only Indian societies in India, but also the diaspora abroad. The essay provides a nuanced perspective of how we must understand caste (both in its concept and its practice), introduces us to the 20th century debates which were ongoing alongside the freedom struggle against the Raj, and links the caste debate to the debates around it in contemporary British politics. It is a novel attempt to unearth the philosophical underpinnings of the movement against caste oppression. The timing of the essay seems apposite, given the current political situation in India and its impact in the politics of the countries where Indians constitute a sizeable population.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What is caste? Is a perfect definition possible? If not, what are ways to identify caste and the practice of casteism or caste discrimination?
2. Does the notion of caste interact with the notion of class? If so, how?
3. What is the connection between Colonialism and Casteism? Take into consideration viewpoints of deniers of caste discrimination as well as that of anti-casteists.
4. Discuss the nature of relationship between the supposedly 'amoral' capitalist market and caste norms. Has the market been able to dissolve caste or is it entrenching caste divisions?
5. What do we understand about Gandhi's idea of caste and casteism?
 - a. What contradiction does Gandhi run into while describing the caste system?
6. What is the notion of morality, inspired from Buddhism, that Ambedkar endorses?
 - b. What is 'anti-social morality' and how is it different from the morality that Ambedkar propounds?
 - c. Express your opinions on the two conceptions of morality.
7. How does caste and casteism figure in the rubric of Britain's 'multi-ethnic' politics and specifically in its legal discourse