



## Afterword: Steps to a Global Thought

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In remarkably varied ways, the essays in this special issue address the weighty question posed in the introduction by Bhrigupati Singh, Veena Das, and Sudipta Kaviraj. What, they ask, might a non-Eurocentric or global thought look like? And the contributors respond by refusing to occupy the place vacated by Europe in gestures of conquest or compliance. Nor to abandon it and in doing so repeating its claim to singularity. Instead of telling stories about historical or dialectical transformations in which the old dies and the new is born, the authors responding to this question evade such heroic as much as tragic narratives. Instead, they focus on the everyday as a site not of Eurocentric exceptionalism and originality but a far more pervasive set of transformations which nevertheless cannot be recounted in the prose of history.

The essays collected here, in other words, can all be said to begin by asking how everyday transformation is at all possible. It is a genuine question because the apparently repetitive or habitual structure of the everyday seems to disallow for the transformation and novelty characteristic of Eurocentric thinking except in a minor key and outside the prose of history. And yet, as each one of the contributors argues, the everyday can be transformative in all kinds of ways while yet remaining within the realm of the ordinary. Must everydayness or the novelty it enables, then, play a negative role and even become invisible to make such a cohabitation possible? How can the everyday be what it is, after all, when brought to light or indeed to mind as a site of change?

A good example of the seeming paradox involved in the idea of everyday transformation as a relationship between what remains and what changes can be found in M.K. Gandhi's first manifesto on nonviolence, published as *Hind Swaraj* or Indian Home Rule in 1909 to be promptly banned by the British government in India. Since nonviolence was marked by its everyday character, claimed Gandhi, it could have no history. This was because history in Gandhi's understanding could only be an account of some exceptional departure from the ordinary which was very likely to be violent. But to be absolved from history in the everyday also meant that nonviolence could have no name of its own, which is why it can only be voiced in negative form like many terms in Gandhi's lexicon including non-cooperation and non-possession.

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Named as they were for and even by their opposites, Gandhi's terms did not result from a struggle to separate, say, nonviolence and violence into strictly demarcated domains of norm and exception. On the contrary, nonviolence defined the everyday precisely because it continued to exist within the very violence from which it took its name. It was this intimacy that allowed for violence to be converted into its opposite. Unlike the kind of moral and political thinking that relies upon exclusive definitions in which war begins where peace ends, for instance, Gandhi thought nonviolence was possible anywhere and sometimes especially on the battlefield. To be quotidian, in other words, it had to be universal even if only potentially.

The conversion of violence into nonviolence, therefore, occurred once the latter's everyday practices were withdrawn from the former allowing it to collapse. For it was not the exceptionality of evil that defined violence so much as the ordinary habits and inadvertent complicities that lent it support. Violence depended upon quotidian virtues like friendship, loyalty, compassion, and courage more than it did on fear and hatred, with the withdrawal of such virtues from evil representing the failure of a logic or politics of exception. Yet this internal transformation could not be conceived in violent terms as the victory of one party and the defeat of another and was therefore not an historical event either.

I would like to think that this example from Gandhi allows me to engage the very diverse and highly original contributions to this special issue in a way that does them some justice. More appropriately than justice, my afterword can only offer a translation, in part, of some of the many ideas from this collection. What I take to be common to them is the gesture of setting up an analytical distinction, usually a binary, between parties representing everydayness and transformation. These are then put into question not by the familiar process of philosophical or taxonomic exclusion but rather by an epistemological as much as ethical openness that undoes the distinction altogether. What comes through in each essay is the author's refusal to name or distinguish some new concept as a gesture of fidelity to the everyday and a repudiation of history as the inevitable site and meaning of the transformations it allows.

Veena Das, Michael Puett, and Andrew Brandel, for example, show how conventional ideas about translation between one language and another do not allow us to see the very different ways in which grammatical interpretation in Sanskrit and literary commentary in classical Chinese are premised upon intellectual transformations that are nevertheless regulated by or originate from everyday actions, usage, or understanding. In doing so, they open up the category of translation by allowing us to see its complex operation within as much as between languages as a proliferating yet highly differentiated principle of movement that goes well beyond the language boundaries and so instrumentalities defining it traditionally. By making this proliferation visible, however, they also render translation an invisible because undifferentiated practice.

Ahona Palchoudhuri takes as her subject the relationship of a musical mood to the rainy season it is meant to evoke. The *raag*, she argues, is not simply a learnt tradition allowing for the aestheticization of a season but is informed by and defining of the longing and labour that marks everyday life in a drought-prone district. Here, the everyday cut through the ostensibly representative relationship between music and season but only invisibly. Sudipta Kaviraj, for his part, demonstrates how the

decolonial effort to construct a new kind of relationship between a hyperreal Europe and the undifferentiated category of the non-West or global South can only end up having the latter take the former's place in a mimicry of its violence. For it is impossible to make a clean break from Europe without having inhabited it, which makes any such separation schizophrenic as well as phantasmatic.

Ruth Vanita writes about the link between Thoreau's and Tagore's views of rebirth. Their affirmation of the cosmological or possibly genealogical but certainly not historical relations between species leads to them question humanity's autonomy without anthropomorphizing the non-human. The missing third here are the gods, who traditionally take human or animal form and themselves become possibilities for the other two. It is Bhrigupati Singh and Naveeda Khan who introduce the theological to this collection. Singh shows how the hierarchical relationship between European theory and non-European practice (or the secular and the religious) can be subverted by considering the everyday relationship between men and gods in the epistemological, genealogical, and map-making rituals of Hindu pilgrimage.

Khan, on the other hand, argues that the relationship of human and divine was mediated by a romantic vision of nature in the case of the famous Muslim poet and philosopher she writes about. Here, it is an ostensibly secular and even pantheistic vision that makes for as well as reinforces a distinctively theological one in an upsetting of the usual story told about religion and secularism. For Shahzad Bashir, fiction permitted writers in colonial India to overcome the instrumental relationship between past and present in modern history-writing by undoing its distinct temporalities. While Sandra Laugier criticises the relation between abstract universality and empirical particularity by showing how the everyday enables a shift from discovering the invisible to seeing the visible.

Each of these essays starts with an intellectual as well as ethical or political relationship: that of translation (Das, Puett, and Brandel), theorization (Singh), decolonization (Kaviraj), historicization (Bashir), humanization (Vanita), interpretation (Palchoudhuri), theologization (Khan), and intellectualization (Laugier). Having pointed out the philosophical problems, hierarchies, and instrumental violence entailed in them, the authors go on to explore other ways in which transformative relations can be understood. And they do so by focussing on the everyday, whose visibility Laugier describes as an American redefinition of Europe's philosophical tradition as a second chance. But for a European thinker like Lévinas, the everyday could not be seen and so grasped as an object because it was too close and so infinite.

This invisibility cannot be understood as a kind of failure or limitation of thought, representing instead a form of knowledge in its own right. It distinguishes phenomenology as a mode of apprehension that goes beyond the visible while still comprehending it. In so many ways, the everyday can only be approached phenomenologically, which is what most of these texts as much as Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj* do. More than a philosophical approach, however, phenomenology is also, I would argue, crucial to moral and political discourse in a way no other mode of thinking apart from dialectics can be. For even when it invokes a distant future, moral and political debate always begins with everyday experience if only to criticise or misread it. It is the inevitability of the

phenomenological that compels the pieces in this special issue to engage with as well as within the everyday.

Because the everyday is a mode of experience that can be approached phenomenologically, the invisible or incommunicable is essential to it. And if this does not indicate a limitation to thought, neither does it invoke some apophatic or esoteric dimension within it. That is why I began this piece with the namelessness of nonviolence. Similarly, the kinds of proliferating relations breaking through the binary logics and zero-sum games of Eurocentric thinking that are described in the essays collected here either tend not to possess their own names or are generalised into a kind of indifference. But they are nevertheless meaningful in very detailed ways precisely because they must remain invisible. And I want to end this afterword by saying something about the way in which Gandhi understood such relations whose existence exceeded exclusive or dualistic modes of categorization.

Gandhi criticised the political as much as epistemological relations he thought were defined by liberalism as a form of mediation, one in which a neutral third party triangulates between rival particularities. Gandhi distrusted such mediation, whether it was performed by a modern state between the contending interests of its subjects, or by some expert authority between rival claims to knowledge and capability. He thought that the particularities or interests allegedly involved as principal and yet somehow subordinate partners in the process of mediation, as in a court case, were deprived of their ability to enter into direct relations with one another and forced to give up their agency to a third party that he identified with colonialism as a form of knowledge as much as rule.

Mediated relations, in other words, were never successful because they could not resolve conflicts but only perpetuate them by disallowing direct dealings and so the possibility of agreement between contending parties. This is how Gandhi described the stereotyped phrase 'divide and rule', not as a conspiracy so much as a naturalised practice of dominion that colonised all of modern life. The third party, then, kept the peace by grasping more and more power for itself, and in the process continuing the transformation of its junior partners into partial interests unable to see the whole. Such claims to universality are true of political as much as intellectual life. Only by doing away with the falsely universal claims of the mediator, therefore, might genuinely nonviolent relations be established between individuals and groups no longer seen as particularities.

But without the third party's triangulation, no external or universal viewpoint was available, and so such relations could not be named and only be identified in and as the everyday. For Gandhi the only genuine relations were thus unmediated ones resulting from juxtapositions lacking any universal undergirding and therefore capable of being transformative. Like nonviolence as a relation without a name, their ubiquity had to be negative in character. Gandhi even distrusted language as a form of mediation that he thought falsely equalized its speakers as much as objects in universalizing terms. And because language always meant more or less than it said, as Gandhi well knew from his life as a lawyer dedicated to its interpretation, he preferred silence as the basis of unmediated and so juxtaposed relations instead. What could this mean?

Gandhi thought that language laid claim to a false equality as well as similarity between its speakers. For speech or language was conventionally held to define not only politics as a specific kind of relationship, but humanity itself as its subject as well as context. The gendered if also generic figure of man was classically a speaking as much as political animal. In this way, language played the same role as sexual and commensal relations did in defining both the human species and its political life. And yet these apparently expansive and universalistic definitions possessed the same narrowly biological criteria as those that defined racial exclusivity. Food, sex, and language, moreover, divided human beings rather than uniting them because they constituted shared and so competing needs. Truly moral and nonviolent relations, then, were more likely between species unable to communicate, procreate, or eat together.

The similarity or similitude that were held to define human beings and their political lives, argued Gandhi, represented a kind of racist thinking even when extended to define a whole species. Its universality also relied upon a set of false equalizations achieved through forms of political and intellectual mediation like that of speech or language as a shared capacity and medium. Such abstracted relations were not only far removed from everydayness but violent by definition and unable to produce any transformation by reason of their dependence on some presumed equivalence or sameness. Only the silent or at least nameless and unhistorical juxtapositions of everyday life, such as the unilateral one between human and animal, held transformative potential. And it is surely these kinds of relations that the essays here have so well examined under the sign of the global as a non-Eurocentric category.

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