

Asian and Asian-American Philosophers and Philosophies



SPRING 2014

VOLUME 13 | NUMBER 2

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Asian and Asian-American Philosophers and Philosophies

LEAH KALMANSON, GUEST EDITOR

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FROM THE GUEST EDITOR

The CAAAPP Year in Review: New Trends in Asian Philosophy and Postcolonial Theory

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The year 2013 saw a notable number of conference panels reflecting a growing interest in bringing together Asian philosophy and postcolonial or decolonial theory. This development both builds on historical precedents within Asian and comparative philosophy and also extends the field in exciting new directions. On the one hand, Asian philosophy has traditionally positioned itself at cross-purposes with the hegemonic Eurocentrism pervasive in the discipline of philosophy at large. In this sense, the field has always had an “anti-colonial” outlook on the issue of Western thought’s central place within philosophy as an academic discipline. On the other hand, there has historically been minimal contact or engagement between Asian philosophy and the specific methodologies and theoretical frameworks employed in the well-established contemporary field of postcolonial studies. That said, a range of scholars who might be broadly associated with postcolonial methodologies—including those in Africana studies, Latin American studies, subaltern studies, critical race theory, and indigenous studies—face and wrestle with the same issues of Eurocentrism that concern Asian philosophers and comparativists. Hence, a more in-depth and sustained encounter among these various fields is timely, and I am pleased to present the following overview of activities that took place toward this end in 2013.

March 21–22, “Margins of Philosophy: Decolonizing Comparative Methodologies,” Kennesaw State University

The “Margins of Philosophy” series is an interdisciplinary and intercollegiate symposium that was held at Kennesaw State University (Kennesaw, Georgia) in 2012 and 2013. The 2013 symposium was dedicated to the theme “Decolonizing Comparative Methodologies” under the directorship of Amy Donahue (Kennesaw), Leah Kalmanson (Drake University), Rohan Kalyan (Sewanee: The University of the South), and Sam Oponda (Vassar College). The focus of the symposium was on the colonial implications of scholarly engagement with non-Western traditions and the theoretical and methodological innovations proposed by scholars to address such implications. An explicit aim of the

meeting was to bring Asian and comparative philosophy into dialogue with various postcolonial studies. The two-day event consisted of a series of reading workshops as well as talks by two invited speakers: David Kim (University of San Francisco), a specialist in Asian and comparative philosophy, philosophy of race, and postcolonial philosophy; and Valentin Y. Mudimbe (the Newman Ivey White Professor of Literature at Duke University), who publishes and teaches extensively in African philosophy, comparative philosophy, existentialism, and phenomenology.

The 2013 program was distinctive for its inclusion of undergraduate student participants. Each of the directors attended the reading workshops and talks alongside groups of students from Kennesaw, Drake, Vassar, and Sewanee. The undergraduate participants prepared for the symposium workshops for months in advance of the conference itself, through reading groups dedicated to material assigned by the directors. The material included a variety of influential works across related disciplines, which nonetheless might not often be read in conjunction with each other. For example, students read decolonial theorists from Latin America such as Enrique Dussell and Walter Mignolo; they read a series of debates between Rein Raud and Carine Defoort on the status of Chinese philosophy as a field of study, which appeared as articles in the journal *Philosophy East and West* from 2001 to 2006; they read members of the Subaltern Studies Group such as Dipesh Chakrabarty and Partha Chatterjee; and they read work on African history and politics such as parts of Achille Mbembe’s *On the Postcolony* (2001). Participants also studied the writings of the two invited speakers, Kim and Mudimbe, including Kim’s “What is Asian American Philosophy?” and Mudimbe’s “African Gnosis, Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge.”¹ During the workshop sessions at the symposium itself, students presented their own research on and responses to the possible intersections of Asian philosophy and postcolonial theory.

October 24–26, “Philosophers, Comparativists, Activists: New Work in Womanist-Buddhist Dialogue,” satellite session of the Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy (SACP) at the Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (SPEP) meeting

In 2013, the SACP held its inaugural satellite session at SPEP. This inaugural panel showcased the emerging field of Womanist-Buddhist dialogue. The term “Womanism” was originally coined by Alice Walker in *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens* (1983) to demarcate a discourse independent of those feminist studies dominated by white, middle- to upper-class perspectives. Womanism has taken

on a life of its own within certain academic circles, where it describes scholarship focusing on the diverse intellectual, spiritual, and religious experiences of women of color, especially as such experiences relate to issues of social and political concern. Womanism also tends to overlap with fields participating to varying degrees in the family of postcolonial discourses, such as liberation theology, critical race theory, and Africana studies.

In recent years, a number of Womanist scholars have turned attention to Buddhism as a resource for Womanist thinking, including Walker herself. At the 2013 SACP session at SPEP, Carolyn M. Jones-Medine (University of Georgia) spoke about this recent confluence of Walker's Womanism and Buddhist practice in "The Face of the Other: Alice Walker and Postcolonial Feminist Thought." In her talk, Jones-Medine discussed the impact of Walker's personal engagement with Buddhism on the development of two of Walker's literary identities: the "revolutionary artist" of early works and the "Grand Mother spirit" of later writings. Although the Grand Mother is older and physically less powerful than the revolutionary artist, she is also the bearer of bodhisattva-like compassion, whose cosmic consciousness is finely attuned to the cry of each and every individual who suffers. Jones-Medine highlighted the unique Buddhist response to the legacy of colonialism that Walker provides through this intermingling of literary work, social activism, and personal Buddhist practice.

Another speaker at the SACP panel was Melanie Harris (Texas Christian University), who presented "Engaged Buddhism and Liberation Theologies: Fierce Compassion as a Mode of Justice." Building on the work of Womanist-Buddhist dialogue, Harris examined the concept of "fierce compassion" in Vajrāyāna or Tantric Buddhism through a Womanist lens. As she discussed, fierce compassion promotes a radical sense of inclusion that is found in a figure familiar to major streams of African American spirituality (i.e., Jesus), but that is also present in the teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh, Pema Chödrön, the Dalai Lama, and other figures in Engaged Buddhism. Harris described how Engaged Buddhism might offer Womanism a theoretical framework to support practices that combine a fierce demand for justice with the radical inclusiveness of compassion. Versions of both of Jones-Medine's and Harris's presentations appear in the forthcoming collection *Buddhist Responses to Globalization* (Lexington Press), currently on schedule for release in 2014.

December 27–30, CAAAPP sessions at the APA Eastern Division meeting

The Committee on Asian and Asian-American Philosophers and Philosophies (CAAAPP) sponsored two panels at the APA's 2013 Eastern Division meeting, which together rounded off a year of exciting work in Asian philosophy and postcolonial theory. Several presentations from these panels are provided in full or in summary below. The first of the panels, both organized by David Kim, was titled "Between/Beyond Neo-Classical and Postcolonial Approaches to Asian Philosophy" and began with a presentation by Amy Donahue, "Expressing Conventional Truths—What Jñānaśrīmitra Could Say." Donahue's study

of Jñānaśrīmitra's theory of language and its relevance to contemporary questions about the construction of identity and power relations is, in part, rooted in the work she began at the Margins of Philosophy Symposium described earlier. Donahue provides a summary of her presentation below.

The presentation by Hwa Yol Jung (Moravia College), titled "Wang Yangming and World Philosophy," aimed at the heart of the Eurocentrism still alive and well within many widespread conceptions of cultural and historical development. As he discussed, when Europe sets the agenda for global "progress," non-European cultures are marginalized as underdeveloped or even ahistorical. In particular, Jung focused on the still-influential view that philosophy "proper" has a Greek birth and a European upbringing, and the corresponding claim that Chinese intellectual traditions are non-philosophical. Looking back to the Ming-dynasty philosopher Wang Yangming, Jung sees the roots of a "transversal" philosophy that can help us resist Eurocentrism today—not by replacing it with Sinocentrism but by thinking outside of the terms of a universalizing (and marginalizing) *telos* altogether. A version of Jung's presentation appears as the article "Wang Yangming and the Way of World Philosophy" in *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy*.

My own talk on this panel, "Reflections on Womanist-Buddhist Dialogue and the Future of Comparative Philosophy," began with a consideration of Walter Mignolo's claim that "the very concept of 'culture' is a colonial construction," and hence "cultural difference" is always a matter of "colonial difference."² What does this claim imply for the study and practice of cross-cultural comparative philosophy? Mignolo's claim challenges comparativists to reconsider the nature and extent of Eurocentrism, through a critique of constructed categories as basic as "culture" and "history"—categories that, as Jung discussed in his own presentation, still bear the mark of Hegelianism. One task for comparative philosophy, in the wake of Mignolo's critique, is to preserve the possibility of philosophical inquiry even when such basic terms of discourse are suspended. I focused on the innovative work of Womanist-Buddhist dialogue as an example of a comparative project that draws on the critical insights of both postcolonial theory and Asian philosophy, while continuing a conversation on issues of contemporary ethical and political concern.

The second CAAAPP panel, titled "Philosophy and Social Movements: Asian and Latin American Perspectives," highlighted the various philosophical and political projects that unite cross-cultural philosophy and postcolonial or decolonial studies. The presentations, all three of which appear in full or in summary in the newsletter below, included Veena Howard (California State University, Fresno) on "Gandhi's *Satyagraha*: Reinterpreting *Satyakriyā* (Act of Truth) as a Political Strategy," which draws on material from her recent book *Gandhi's Ascetic Activism: Renunciation and Social Action* (SUNY, 2014); Boram Jeong (Duquesne University), "The Concept of *Minjung*: Inventing 'a People to Come'"; and Grant Silva (Marquette University), "Populism, *Pueblos*, and Plutocracy: A Comparative Analysis of Ernest Laclau and Enrique Dussell, or Notes on a Radical Democracy from Latin America." Reflecting on the past two APA Eastern

Division presidential addresses by Linda Martín Alcoff and Sally Haslanger, both of which speak to the problematic demographics of philosophy as an academic profession, I am heartened by this account of events that went on within the field of Asian philosophy in 2013. The work described above and made available in the newsletter below marks the beginning of many exciting conversations, rooted in Asian philosophy, but significant for the field of philosophy at large.

NOTES

1. See the bibliography for information on all the publications mentioned here.
2. Mignolo, "Philosophy and the Colonial Difference," 85.

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ARTICLES

Expressing Conventional Truths—What Jñānaśrīmitra Could Say

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In 2010, a collective of comparative philosophers and scholars of non-modern South Asian Buddhist texts, The Cowherds, published various interpretations of Madhyāmika Buddhist appeals to "conventional truth" (*lokasamvṛtisatya*) in *Moonshadows: Conventional Truth in Buddhist Philosophy*. This presentation critiques some of these readings by extending Dipesh Chakrabarty's concepts of "historicism" and "subalternity" from subaltern studies to elements of the Cowherds' comparative philosophical project. Further,

it draws on the work of Gayatri Spivak, a Marxist feminist deconstructionist theorist, and Jñānaśrīmitra, an eleventh-century South Asian Buddhist philosopher of language, to elaborate a reading of *lokasamvṛtisatya* that might dislodge colonial tendencies in comparative philosophical scholarship without occluding fruitful engagement with classical non-Western intellectual traditions.¹

Chakrabarty, a historian and member of the Subaltern Studies collective, argues that the academic discipline of history takes a hyperreal, imaginary "Europe" as "the sovereign, theoretical subject of all histories, including the ones we call 'Indian,' 'Chinese,' 'Kenyan,' and so on."² Through this historicist move, he contends, "other histories tend to become variations on a master narrative that could be called 'the history of Europe.'"³ They are consequently placed "in a position of subalternity."⁴ Because of this positioning, theoretical activity—i.e., generating new theories, categories, methods, and ideas—is confined to the hyperreal West, and the study of non-Western histories becomes largely empirical—i.e., an exercise in divvying them up according to maps of historical possibility that are determined by the West's sovereign, theoretical subject.

We see a similar phenomenon in our discipline of comparative philosophy when we consider the readings of Madhyāmika Buddhist philosophies of language in *Moonshadows* by scholars such as Tom Tillemans, Mark Siderits, and Georges Dreyfus. While these comparative philosophical readings of *lokasamvṛtisatya* differ, they are also all situated on maps of philosophical possibility that are determined by Western philosophy. Consequently, the questions these Cowherds ask are more empirical than theoretical. For example, were classical Madhyāmika Buddhists fictionalists like Yablo? Were they Quinean? Were they Pyrrhonian skeptics? Were they conservative populists?

One objection to this avenue of postcolonial criticism would be to ask whether anyone can engage another philosophical tradition without assuming, and therefore privileging, some concept, or hyperreal standard, of "philosophy." We might respond constructively to this objection by examining Jñānaśrīmitra's use of "conventional truth" and "conditionally adopted positions" (*vyavastha*) to elaborate a dialectical and contextual method of intercultural philosophical engagement that does not universalize conceptions of philosophy. My aim in ongoing research is to apply Jñānaśrīmitra's method of philosophy to the model of subaltern language dialectics that Gayatri Spivak elaborates in *Nationalism and the Imagination*, to show how this non-Western style of philosophizing may be used (and not merely studied) within contemporary theoretical projects.

NOTES

1. This summary reflects a combination of material that Donahue presented at the February 2013 APA Central Division meeting as well as at the CAAAPP panel at the 2013 Eastern Division meeting.
2. Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Coloniality and the Artifice of History," *Representations* 37 (1992): 1.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.

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Gandhi’s Satyagraha: Reinterpreting Satyakriyā (Act of Truth) as a Political Strategy

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Mahatma Gandhi used the method of *satyagraha*, commonly known as passive resistance, to mobilize masses in the fight against racial oppression and slavery. Many world leaders, including Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the Dalai Lama, Aung Su Kyi, and Nelson Mandela, were inspired by Gandhi’s method. According to Nelson Mandela: “He is the archetypal anticolonial revolutionary. His strategy of noncooperation, his assertion that we can be dominated only if we cooperate with our dominators, and his nonviolent resistance inspired anticolonial and antiracist movements internationally in our century.”¹ Gandhi’s method of *satyagraha* is a combination of two words, *satya* (Truth, Reality, Brahman) and *āgraha* (firmness, adherence), together meaning “steadfast adherence to truth.” Often Gandhi’s *satyagraha* methods are described and replicated under the secular rubric of “passive resistance” for mobilizing mass movements and defying social and political injustices. However, the philosophical foundations on which Gandhi constructed his strategy—his creative rendering of Indian philosophical notion of *Sat* (the ontological principle of Truth, i.e., Brahman) and the belief in the miraculous power of truth-force, traditionally known as “truth act” (*saccakriyā*)—has not been sufficiently explored. Without understanding the philosophical roots of Gandhi’s *satyagraha* movement, we cannot adequately evaluate the moral force that he deemed necessary for a nonviolent movement.

In this paper, I argue that for Gandhi a mass mobilization requires the force of truth, not merely the political method of nonviolent resistance.² First, I briefly provide the historical background of the method of *satyagraha*; second, explain the concept of *Sat* and its inherent miraculous powers as described in Indian philosophical texts and myths of the tradition; third, explore parallels between Gandhi’s *satyagraha* and the Indian philosophical concept of *saccakriyā*; and finally, provide a snapshot of one of the most documented examples of Gandhi’s visible public display of the power of truth during the Salt March that mobilized masses of different genders, races, religions, and ages.

Numerous scholars, such as Judith Brown, J. T. F. Jordens, and Dennis Dalton, trace the origins of Gandhi’s idea

of passive resistance to the fight against injustice and maintain that he was influenced by various writings. These sources, accredited by Gandhi himself, include the writings of Tolstoy and Thoreau on nonviolence and civil disobedience, the philosophy adhering to one’s *dharma* (duty) of the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, and the teaching of “turning the other cheek” of the Sermon on the Mount. In South Africa, Gandhi initially used the term “passive resistance” for his public defiance of unjust laws. Later, upon deep reflection about his strategy, Gandhi replaced the term “passive resistance” with *satyagraha*. In his creative combination of the two words, *satya* and *āgraha*, he combined aspects of the Indian metaphysical notion of unchangeable, absolute reality (Brahman), as well as the virtue of *satya* (meaning, integrity, commitment, speaking the truth), with social and political goals. Gandhi himself described the “etymological meaning” of the word *satya* in this way: “It is derived from the root ‘sat’, which means to exist eternally.”³ He sought to make that eternal principle active for mobilizing the masses against the unjust colonial regime, which represented “untruth.”

In South Africa, during his public discussions with the fellow activists, which were later published, Gandhi said that neither “passive resistance” nor its Hindi rendering, “*nishkriya pratirodha*,” very accurately described “the force denoted by the term.”⁴ Gandhi wanted to disassociate his method from passive resistance because that term suggested passivity or inertness. In contrast, to Gandhi, *satyagraha* required immense inner strength. He later said that “*Satyagraha* is not physical force. . . . *Satyagraha* is a pure soul-force. Truth is the very substance of the soul.”⁵

In his rendering of the method of truth-force, he moves away from the secular idea of passive resistance to a philosophical notion of *Sat* for his strategy that demanded absolute commitment to nonviolence and dedication to the cause. Not surprisingly, scholars such as Joan Bondurant, Heinrich Zimmer, Raghavan Iyer, and Bhikhu Parkeh explore the roots of Gandhi’s *satyagraha* within the Indian traditions. Their analyses present the ethical, epistemological, and metaphysical connotations of the “*sat*” of *satyagraha*. Iyer systematically analyzes Eastern and Western philosophical notions of *Sat* and suggests that “the Rigvedic and Platonic notion of the ever-existent Absolute Truth was essential to Gandhi for the purpose of endowing truth . . . [with] the highest moral value and the highest human end.”⁶ Gandhi preferred *Sat* as the name of God because “God is formless and so is Truth. . . . Truth is the only perfect description of God.”⁷ In 1944, Gandhi began a practice of writing his deepest reflections each day in a series “Thought of the Day,” and he wrote in his first one, “Hence verily Truth is God.”⁸ I suggest that through this characterization Gandhi embraced a more universal notion of God (*qua* reality), which eventually helped him to relate to people of different religious traditions and even atheists.

In the texts of Indian philosophy, *sat* is also considered “at times as entirely equivalent to *dharma*,”⁹ meaning the principle of law and order. Having no adequate equivalent in English, *dharma* is variously translated as virtue, ethic, law, duty, or religion. Gandhi perceived the inherent unity between metaphysical truth and the cosmological principle

of *dharma* (which he usually equated with morality and moral duty) when he said, “morality is the basis of things, and that truth is the substance of all morality.”¹⁰ Bondurant posits, “the *satya* of *satyagraha* is understood in the ethical sense.”¹¹ However, *Sat* (Truth) in Gandhi’s *satyagraha* does not merely connote simply abstaining from speaking a lie, but rather commitment and integrity.¹² In his rendering of *satyagraha*, he embraced the metaphysical and moral meanings of *Sat*: as ultimate reality (Brahman), as virtue, and as one’s own moral duty.

Even though Gandhi used *satyagraha* as a political strategy of passive resistance, he also understood it as mobilizing the “miraculous power” of truth celebrated in Indian religious and mythical traditions. Gandhi was referring to the miraculous power of truth, which enables whoever possesses it to perform miracles. In a 1921 article “What is Truth?” Gandhi writes:

And when the sun of truth blazes in all its glory in a person’s heart, he will not remain hidden. He will not, then, need to use speech and to explain. Or, rather, every word uttered by him will be charged with such power, such life, that it will produce an immediate effect on the people.¹³

It is important to note that on the one hand, Gandhi used *satyagraha* as a political tactic, and on the other hand, he sought to materialize the inherent metaphysical power of *Sat* articulated in philosophical texts and depicted in religious literature of India. In the following sections, I will explore the notion of the miraculous power of truth and moral virtue known as *saccakriyā* or *satyakriyā* (act of truth) in the parables, fables, and anecdotes of ancient Sanskrit and Pāli literature and demonstrate the influence of this notion on Gandhi’s *satyagraha*.¹⁴

Indologists Heinrich Zimmer and Norman Brown demonstrate that common to these narratives is the view that the power of truth manifests itself when someone performs his or her duty (*dharma*) with an adherence to moral virtue. In his seminal article, “Duty as Truth in Ancient India,” Brown notes: “There existed in ancient India a belief that Truth has a power which a person with the right qualifications can invoke to accomplish wonders or miracles.”¹⁵ In the Buddhist and Hindu texts, acts of truth are “based upon some quality or attainment of the user of the Act.”¹⁶ This quality is usually an observance of a specific moral virtue and varies according to the nature of the agent who performs the *satyakriyā*. A commitment to virtues such as *satya*, *ahimsā* (nonviolence), *brahmacarya* (control of the senses), or *dāna* (charity) necessitates the willingness to forsake all for commitment to the virtue. Gandhi narrated select narratives from the *Mahabharata* and other literature in support of his conviction in mobilizing the truth-force for his goals. For example, King Śivi was committed to the protection of any being (humans or animals) who sought his refuge, and the princess Damayantī was devoted to observe pure chastity. Both were able to win favors from gods due to their solemn commitment to virtue. According to Buddhist tales, the prostitute Bindumati served all men alike, whether of high or low position. In Bindumati’s case, the force of her act of truth was able to make the Ganges

River flow backwards, thus averting a flood that was threatening King Ashoka’s capital city.

These and other legendary figures gain extraordinary power due to their performance of duty (commitment) regardless of their social strata. In their respective articles, Burlingame and Brown both show how the performance of an act of truth yields supernormal powers when individuals religiously adhere to their *dharma*. Brown expounds: “One who can rightly be called ‘true,’ meaning ‘fulfilling his duty perfectly,’ has the power to perform ‘miracles.’ When a person fulfills his duty perfectly, he gains this power.”¹⁷ A performance of duty “perfectly” demands taking a vow to keep the commitment. Although the performance of Acts of Truth appears to exist only in the pages of mythological literature, Zimmer maintains that this ancient belief “that Truth—of the right sort—has such power still persists in an attenuated form in India.”¹⁸ He presents Gandhi as one of the examples, proclaiming, “Gandhi had something partly similar in mind.”¹⁹ Although Gandhi does not mention the term “*satyakriyā*,” he invokes the power of truth similar to that embedded in the act of truth by relying on the truth of the underlying goodness of all people. Zimmer sees a recurrence of the mythical motif of *satyakriyā* in Gandhi’s commitment to the duty of serving India through the method of absolute nonviolence. In his writing and speeches Gandhi often said, “in everything that he did, he was prompted by his love for truth and *dharma*.”²⁰ Gandhi’s *dharma* and love for truth manifested themselves in his declaration to confront social injustice in the form of inequity and political slavery.

Gandhi’s commitment to serve the cause of Indians was inspired by an incident in South Africa, when on a dark night in 1893 he was ejected out of a train by a white man because he was colored and had no right to travel in the first-class compartment. During that night Gandhi made a solemn pledge to confront social injustice related to color prejudice: “I began to think about my duty. . . . I should try, if possible, to root out the disease and suffer hardships in the process.”²¹ This incident led him to dedicate himself (*dharma*) to fight for Indians interests in South Africa and, subsequently, to mobilize a *satyagraha* movement to confront the British empire in India for securing Indian’s political freedom. To keep his commitment, he sacrificed all—his lucrative profession, family life, and personal gratification. Both Brown and Zimmer mention Gandhi as a modern example of someone who relied on the truth-force to fulfill his duty to confront social injustice and who observed the moral quality of absolute *ahimsā* in order to activate the power of truth. Gandhi’s decision to address racial inequality was not just political; he linked it to his commitment to truth (implying both God and moral obligation).

Raghavan Iyer articulates Gandhi’s conviction in the power of Truth: “[Gandhi] held to the Indian belief that a man who has lived in accord with the law of his true nature . . . can cause anything to happen by the simple act of calling to witness the power of Truth or God.” This belief also entails the idea that such a person endowed with the power of truth “becomes a living channel of cosmic power, the power of Eternal Truth.”²² The concept of mobilizing the

power of the truth or the moral force (i.e., *satyagraha*) in order to perform his duty to fight against social injustice might appear to be Gandhi's unique invention—particularly in the context of modern-day politics—but this belief in the power of truth is ancient. Gandhi admitted that his belief in the superiority of “the power of truth” or “soul force” was not his innovation. He pointed out that “it is a doctrine enunciated in our Vedas and Shastras. When soul-force awakens, it becomes irresistible and conquers the world.”²³ Thematically, Gandhi's declaration of *satyagraha*, for which he observed the vow of *ahimsā* (which for him necessitated observance of ascetic disciplines such as *brahmacharya* and *aparigraha*), certainly had undertones of the moral power evocative of an act of truth (*satyakriyā*). According to Gandhi, Hindu religious and philosophical literature is replete with models of those who followed the path of truth and worked wonders.

Even though Gandhi's conviction in the power of truth mirrors the examples from the ancient narratives, his methods of performing the act of truth—if we can call it as such—appears to differ in several notable ways. Gandhi cited the ancient lore to substantiate his use of the truth-force but used unconventional methods in its performance. What specific ways did Gandhi reinterpret the ancient philosophical notion of the power of truth to achieve modern secular goals such as social justice and India's political independence?

First, Gandhi did not doubt the *śāstra*'s (scripture's) testimony that even one self-controlled person is able to accomplish difficult tasks; however, he knew that *satyagraha* against an empire mandated adherence to truth (commitment against the unjust Empire) by a great number of people, not merely a single individual. Therefore, Gandhi extended the *satyakriyā* from individual performance to a community affair—mass participation—by testing its power in the political arena. His objective was not personal; rather, it was for a larger concern, that of acquiring social justice and political freedom. In 1924, Gandhi justified his new applications of the Truth: “Satyagraha is an immutable law. We are now applying it to a new field. We have enlarged the scope of its application and have also moved from the individual to the mass.”²⁴ In this way, Gandhi made his followers aware of his unique rendering of the power of truth.

Second, Gandhi called on men and women of all classes and religions to participate in his *satyāgraha*. An act of truth, as described in the ancient narratives, is powerful, yet a “rarity,” applied by a few individuals who wholeheartedly commit themselves to a single virtue, as Brown suggests.²⁵ In his exemplification of *satyagraha*, Gandhi sought collective performance of truth—not by some specialist sages or virtuous individuals but by the marginalized masses. Gandhi acknowledged that the thousands who took part in the famous Salt March were “average” men and women: “They were erring, sinning mortals” who were participating with him in the movement of truth-force against an unjust law.²⁶ Although Gandhi never mentions the narrative of Bindumati, his viewpoint is consistent with this narrative of a woman who, despite her inferior social status as a prostitute, was able to perform a miracle.

Third, Gandhi presented the act of truth as a universal phenomenon, citing examples of individuals from Judaism, Christian, Muslim, and other traditions—Daniel, Jesus Christ, Socrates, Latimer, and Imams Hasan and Hoosein. According to Gandhi, these individuals relied on moral force and demonstrated their dedication to truth (i.e., their commitment against various forms of injustices). These legendary figures displayed the power of firmness in truth and the readiness to sacrifice all for duty; they left a legacy of commitment to the just course of actions.

Lastly, the goal of Gandhi's mobilization of truth-force was not for any supernatural achievement, but rather for the miracle of making the millions of ordinary Indians firm in their search for *swaraj* (self-rule) and thereby awakening the conscience of the British authorities to realize their unjust actions in India. He believed that a collective effort in following Truth could provide *swaraj* to India. In his 1921 article he explained: “Truth shines with its own light and is its own proof. If a large number from among us strive to follow it even in some measure, we can win *swaraj*. We can also win it if a few of us pursue it with utmost conscientiousness.”²⁷ Thus, Gandhi's version of *satyakriyā* for the unconventional objective of securing political freedom utilized a non-traditional approach—collective involvement in the adherence of truth. For this, he developed constructive strategies and a consistent narrative (including examples from different religious traditions) that could unite different factions within India.

Historically, one of the most well-documented examples of Gandhi's visible public display of the power of truth was the Dandi Salt March, from March 12 to April 6, 1930, led by Gandhi and selected followers to defy the salt tax. Gandhi believed the success of the march depended on the dedication and integrity of the participants, and he carefully chose a group of people who had taken vows of nonviolence, celibacy, and life-long poverty. The launch of the march was infused with ritual symbolism. On the morning of March 12, 1930, thousands of people gathered at the Sabarmati Ashram, Gandhi's headquarters and the place of the launch of the protest against the salt law. Gandhi presented the march as a performance of act of truth that mandated utmost integrity and absolute dedication unto death. During the prayer meeting, Gandhi addressed his followers:

God willing, we shall set out exactly at 6.30. Those joining the march should all be on the spot at 6.20. . . . This fight is no public show; it is the final struggle—a life-and-death struggle. If there are disturbances, we may even have to die at the hands of our own people. If we do not have the strength for this, we should not join the struggle. For my part I have taken no pledge not to return here, but I do ask you to return here only as dead men or as winners of *swaraj*. . . . The marchers have vowed to follow life-long poverty and to observe *brahmacharya* for life.²⁸

By uniting his followers for a just cause, the protest might have been seen simply as a political act to defy an unjust law. Even though Gandhi presented his actions as a pragmatic

political necessity, it would be naïve to assume that he was not careful in choosing symbols and expressions evocative of specific myths and religious figures dedicated to the path of truth. Gandhi was aware of the emotional impact of the legends, rituals, and symbols that he himself had encountered in his childhood. Therefore, it would appear that by including only those followers in the march who were committed to a life of virtue, Gandhi was testing and seeking to manifest the power of truth promised by virtue, commitment, *tapas*, and other ascetic practices.

Dennis Dalton provides a snapshot of the event: "This was a saint at war, with penance as his weapon, and however somber and sincere their meaning, these words [Gandhi's speech before the march] were also theatrical in the extreme."²⁹ What can be perceived as "theatrical" was, on Gandhi's part, a passionate call to a performance of truth act by thousands of common people as he was preparing them to pledge their all—family and life. I suggest that, in response to the war of untruth being waged by the colonial regime, Gandhi was calling on the performance of collective moral force, which formed the nexus of his personal ascetic life and political nonviolent strategies. Furthermore, the emotional impact of Gandhi's actions and words derives largely from the analogies that he drew—either explicitly or often implicitly—between his political actions and various religious narratives. Both factors attest to his belief in the power of truth for mobilizing a mass movement.

Dalton records numerous conversations with the participants of the march that show the impact of the moral force that Gandhi's actions, symbols, and words delivered. His account of the thoughts of Mahadev Desai, one of Gandhi's closest associates, at the launch of the march is revealing: "I am reminded of Lord Buddha's great March to attain divine wisdom. Buddha embarked on his march bidding farewell to the world, cutting through the darkness, inspired by the mission of relieving the grief-stricken and downtrodden."³⁰ Gandhi's social movement to defy salt tax was perceived by participants as a moral act performed by a sage, a *mahatma*.

Gandhi ignited the flame of desire to confront the unjust empire in the hearts of millions of people. Even the official government newspaper *The Statesman*, which usually played down the size of crowds at Gandhi's functions, reported that 100,000 people crowded the road that separated Sabarmati from Ahmadabad. Gandhi was joined by thousands of followers from all parts of India, and from different religions, ages, gender, and ethnicities. The walk to the sea was 241 miles and it took twenty-three days. Even though Gandhi did not include women in the first group of seventy-eight protestors who led the march, women later became an important part. The civil disobedience in 1930 marked the first time women became mass participants in India's struggle for freedom. Thousands of women, from large cities to small villages, became active participants in *satyagraha*. The following morning, after a prayer, Gandhi raised a lump of salty mud and declared, "With this, I am shaking the foundations of the British Empire."³¹ This event has been recorded in photos and pamphlets. He implored his thousands of followers to likewise begin making salt along the seashore, "wherever it is convenient" and to

instruct villagers in making illegal, but necessary, salt. By the end of the year over 60,000 men and women were arrested. More than thirty years later, Gandhi's Salt March inspired Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and he followed the example in his marches to secure civil rights for his people. It continues to inspire nonviolent movements all over the globe.

In conclusion, even though Gandhi's *satyagraha* has been studied under the rubric of massive protest or civil disobedience, the foregoing analysis suggests that it was founded in the Indian philosophical notion of truth. Gandhi utilized the metaphysical, moral, and miraculous connotations of this concept to construct a strategy to mobilize masses to fight against the forces of *asat* (untruth, which for him was the unjust British dominion in India). He uniquely reinterpreted the various meanings of truth to create a "weapon" of soul-force that has the potential to confront political and social challenges. This perspective is important for considering the difference between the method of civil disobedience, which due to a lack of strong spiritual foundations historically turns violent in many situations, and *satyagraha*. Gandhi inextricably connected *satyagraha* to the complete adherence to the practice of *ahimsā*, which, according to Gandhi, was based upon an absolute faith in goodness at the deepest core of human nature. Thus, for Gandhi, its spiritual dimension held the potential to unite people of different walks of life and the promise of their commitment due to a higher purpose.

NOTES

1. Nelson Mandela, "The Sacred Warrior," accessed February 15, 2014, http://www.tolstoyfarm.com/mandela_on_gandhi.htm.
2. Howard's APA presentation drew on material from her recent book, *Gandhi's Ascetic Activism: Renunciation and Social Action*.
3. Gandhi, "Letter to Purushottam Gandhi," in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 55 (New Delhi: Publications Division Government of India, 1999), 256.
4. Gandhi, "Satyagraha—Not Passive Resistance," in *Collected Works*, vol. 16, 9.
5. *Ibid.*, 10.
6. Raghavan N. Iyer, *The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi* (Oxford University Press, 2000), 151.
7. Gandhi, "Letter to Purushottam Gandhi," 256.
8. Gandhi began his writing his "Thought for the Day" on November 20, 1944, at the request of Anand T. Hingorani. He continued this practice for two years." See *Collected Works*, vol. 85, 255ff.
9. Iyer, *Moral and Political Thought*, 150.
10. Gandhi, *Collected Works*, vol. 44, 117.
11. Joan Valerie Bondurant, *Conquest of Violence: The Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict* (Princeton: Princeton Paperbacks, 1998), 109.
12. Gandhi, *Collected Works*, vol. 15: 167. Gandhi explains his notion of Truth: "Not truth simply as we ordinarily understand it. . . . But here Truth, as it is conceived, means that we have to rule our life by this law of Truth at any cost."
13. In Raghavan N. Iyer, ed. *The Essential Writings of Mahatma Gandhi* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991), 225.
14. This motif was initially described by a prominent American philologist Eugene Watson Burlingame as "a piece of magic." See Burlingame, "The Act of Truth (Saccakiriya): A Hindu Spell and Its Employment as a Psychic Motif in Hindu Fiction," *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (July 1917): 436.

15. W. Norman Brown, "Duty as Truth in Ancient India," *Proceedings of American Philosophy Society* 116, no. 3 (1972): 252.
16. *Ibid.*, 255.
17. *Ibid.*, 261–62.
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*, 259.
20. Gandhi, "Speech at Bombay," in *Collected Works*, vol. 33, 127.
21. "I began to think of my duty. Should I fight for my rights or go back to India . . . ? It would be cowardice to run back to India without fulfilling my obligation. The hardship to which I was subjected was superficial—only a symptom of the deep disease of colour prejudice. I should try, if possible, to root out the disease and suffer hardships in the process." Gandhi, *An Autobiography: The Story of my Experiments with Truth*, trans. Mahadev Desai (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), 112.
22. Iyer, *Moral and Political Thought*, 175.
23. Gandhi, "Talk with Congress Workers," in *Collected Works*, vol. 94, 322.
24. Gandhi, "My Followers," in *Collected Works*, vol. 27, 276.
25. George Thompson comments that in the Vedic literature it appears to be monopolized by "the authoritative ritual specialist, in particular the Brahmin." He also sees the connection between *satyāgraha* and *satyakriyā* as "immediately apparent and unobjectionable." See Thompson, "On Truth-Acts in Vedic," *Indo-Iranian Journal* 41 (1998): 125, 129.
26. Gandhi clarifies his views on *ahimsā* in a 1940 interview with B.G. Kher (a former prime minister of Bombay) who visited Gandhi with a party from Poona. *Collected Works*, vol. 79, 121–29.
27. Gandhi, "What Is Truth?," in *Collected Works*, vol. 25, 138.
28. Gandhi, "Speech at Prayer Meeting, Sabarmati Ashram," in *Collected Works*, vol. 48, 416–17.
29. Denis Dalton, *Gandhi's Power: Nonviolence in Action* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004), 108.
30. *Ibid.*, 109.
31. Stephen Hugh-Jones, ed., "Gandhi, Salt and Freedom," *The Economist*, December 23, 1999, <http://www.economist.com/node/347107>.

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The Concept of Minjung: Inventing "a People to Come"

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What was once called minjung art, which emerged in the 1980s and which criticized authoritarian government, capitalism, and Americanization, has now become part of private galleries' collections in the fancy part of town. A former minjung poet, who fought against the military dictatorship in the 1970s and 1980s, announced last year that he would vote for the daughter of the former dictator. We also see that some of the leaders of the democratization movement of the 1970s and 1980s have become key politicians. On a popular right-wing politics website ("Ilbe"¹), young people are mocking the victims of the Kwangju Uprising on May 18, 1980, comparing their dead bodies to a stinky fermented fish dish from the region. If the people who engaged in the minjung movement cannot call themselves by that name anymore, what then does the concept mean? Are there still minjung?

"Minjung" is a term used to designate generally a group of people who recognized themselves (individually and collectively) as political subjects in late twentieth-century Korea. The term is often translated into "people" or "multitude," although neither term fully expresses the meaning of the Korean. In this paper, I first explore the possibilities as well as difficulties of defining the concept of minjung. I then hope to show how the concept of minjung can be understood differently with reference to Gilles Deleuze's idea of "a people to come (*un peuple à venir*)."

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO DEFINE THE CONCEPT OF MINJUNG

The term minjung consists of two Chinese characters, *min* (民) as in "people" or "the ruled," and *jung* (衆) as in "the mass" or "crowd." The first character has been widely used to designate the ruled as a social class in general since ancient China. Combined with the second character, the term appears in late nineteenth-century Korea in Donghak-related documents, where the term was used to name the resistance force against the Japanese occupation.² From the late 1960s, people began to use the concept commonly to refer to the social class of the oppressed under the military dictatorship, and the subjects/agents of political change in the context of the democratization movement. It seems that people deployed the concept to organize themselves. However, there was hardly a consensus regarding the definition of the term. Within the context of this paper, I will consider two different ways of understanding the concept of minjung, as presented by several major scholars.³

Some regard the distinction between the ruler and the ruled as essential to defining minjung. Han Wan-sang, who takes a sociological approach, claims that the existence of minjung is necessitated by the mechanisms of power.⁴ The possession of power, according to Han, determines

not only the characteristics of social classes but also the inequalities among them. Thus, he defines minjung as those who are deprived of power in society. In other words, he defines minjung in terms of the “politically, economically and culturally ruled people.”⁵ For Han, the significance of minjung lies in its political implications, since the definition concerns the inequalities between the ruler and the ruled. Han’s characterization of minjung differs from others in that he divides minjung into two types: “sleeping minjung (minjung in itself)” and “awakened minjung (minjung for itself).”⁶ The latter are those who can see themselves as subjects, who can be critical about the ruling class, and, finally, who can act on their political beliefs, whereas the former lack self-awareness of themselves as oppressed. What is also important to note is that Han categorizes intellectuals as the awakened minjung.

Others have defined minjung in terms of economic variables. For instance, Park Hyun-chaee, who adopted the Marxist distinction between bourgeoisie and proletariat, viewed minjung as a product of proletarianization in Korea. He notes that in early capitalist society, the lower strata of the middle class all sink gradually into the proletariat class due to the introduction of new methods of production. Unlike Han, Park limits the minjung to the economically oppressed, that is, the social classes of laborers, laboring farmers, and the urban poor. He also notes that the class strata of Confucian societies have facilitated the formation of the proletariat in the case of industrialization in Korea.⁷

If what defines minjung is political and economic oppression as argued above, the notion may seem to be less appealing today. Apparently, the Korean people are liberated from both forms of oppression: politically, the dictatorship is no longer present, although whether democracy has been successfully achieved or not is a different question; economic inequality is also no longer conceived as a form of oppression, even though it is questionable if people actually have more freedom in a free market economy. In addition to the social structure, the people are also in flux. As noted earlier, the status of those who called themselves minjung has changed over the last thirty years. Thus, we may be able to agree with Kim Hyung-A’s claim that the notion of minjung characterized as such is “putative”; that is, it applies effectively only to a particular period in Korean history. Kim argues that “it attempted to define what was essentially a non-definable entity and struggled to encapsulate notions of a suppressed people, striving to rise above their condition characterized by economic hardship and a lack of personal freedom.”⁸ According to him, the concept of minjung relied heavily on “emotional responses under such banners as nationalism, anti-imperialism and anti-capitalism” and was mostly drawn from Western thought (mainly Marx and Weber).⁹

I agree with Kim that the concept of minjung cannot be grasped as a static entity. Since the way in which power is exercised over the people has become much more subtle in a neo-capitalist society, there is no one single “enemy” or “oppressor” against which minjung, as the alienated and oppressed, can define themselves. However, this doesn’t mean that the concept itself is to be “rejected by today’s subjects of history,” as Kim concludes.¹⁰ The concept

needs to be redefined in accordance with changes in the mechanisms of power.

MINJUNG IN THE POST-MINJUNG ERA: DELEUZE’S NOTION OF FABULATION

In an attempt to redefine the concept of minjung, I would like to show how it can be linked to Deleuze’s idea of “a people to come” (*un peuple à venir*).¹¹ In his second book on cinema, Deleuze introduces the term in the chapter on “minor cinema,” where he talks about the difference between classical political cinema and modern political cinema.¹² He notes that in classical films, the people are already present, although they are oppressed, tricked, subject to suppression, and perhaps unconscious of their situation as oppressed. The cinema makes the people an explicit subject simply by representing them in a collective image. In the modern cinema, however, mechanisms of power as well as the distinction between oppressor and oppressed become much less conspicuous. Deleuze writes, “if there were a modern political cinema, it would be on this basis: the people no longer exist, or not yet . . . *the people are missing*.”¹³ This is clearly shown in the third world and postcolonial cinema, where the oppressed are perpetually “in a collective identity crisis.”¹⁴ Thus, there emerge the filmmakers who attempt to show this *absence* of the people. On the one hand, where the colonizer proclaims “there have never been people here,” the people may need to (re)invent themselves.¹⁵ On the other hand, they acknowledge that it is not sufficient to assert an identity formed as a counterpart to that of the colonizer; that is, the people question the idea of unified people and their supposed identity. This acknowledgment of the missing people does not entail that “a people” as political subjects can no longer be constituted. As Deleuze continues, “this recognition is no reason for a renunciation of political cinema, but on the contrary the new basis on which it is founded.”¹⁶ The new forms of political art base themselves on “contributing to *the invention of a people*” rather than “addressing a people which is presupposed already there.”¹⁷

I would argue that the concept of minjung is also going through such a crisis. When there were obvious “enemies,” the minjung could easily be represented by setting up an identity distinct from the enemy. Since the unity of the will of people had been put forward, the differences within the minjung group were supposed to be disregarded for a “greater good.” Also the oppression of minorities within minjung—on the basis of gender, age, sexual orientation, and so forth—was often justified since it could be considered a small sacrifice for achieving the liberation of the minjung as a whole. Under the banner of a “unified people” anything that could cause internal conflict was regarded as a threat to the overall power of the people; thus, no one could even report sexual harassment cases in the minjung group until the late 1990s. The concept of minjung, laden with these problems, might well be rejected by subjects who are sensitive to micropolitical power today. Indeed, the notion of minjung associated with these former practices may not represent the people in the present. Nonetheless, the absence of “the people” altogether speaks to the continued significance of minjung.

Similar to Deleuze's belief in the possibility of modern political cinema, I think that the concept of minjung can also go beyond the representation of the people who existed at one time. Whereas "the people" repeats the logic of colonizer/ruling class, "a people" forms a new collectivity:

A people isn't something already there. A people, in a way, is what's missing, as Paul Klee used to say. Was there ever a Palestinian people? Israel says no. Of course there was, but that's not the point. The thing is, that once the Palestinians have been thrown out of their territory, then to the extent that they resist they enter the process of constituting a people.¹⁸

When the filmmakers create characters that are not categorized by the preexisting people, this movement of constituting a people can be called "fabulation," according to Deleuze. He adopted the term from Henri Bergson and added a political meaning to it. It is through fabulation that "a people," which does not yet exist, invents itself. However, this is not limited to the characters in cinema. In a sense, all the attempts to define the concept of minjung can be regarded as practices of fabulation in that the definitions of minjung discussed earlier suggest different conceptions of the minjung subject: for some, minjung was a people who would be liberated from political oppression; for others, it was a people who would be free from capitalism. Throughout its history, the concept of minjung has addressed the need to invent "a people to come," a people who emerge as the new, thus, who lack a name. The concept is the act by which "a people" is invented, rather than a concept that names those people in advance. This is, I argue, why providing a definition of minjung was one of the most controversial issues in the 1970s and 1980s. It is, in fact, the very impossibility of defining the concept that opens up the possibilities for reinventing it; the concept of minjung, as a tool for the creation of "a people," should not be understood merely as a reaction to an "enemy" in a particular period of history. Rather, it can be defined in its affirmative dimension. This is why we reject the easy path, where we simply reject the idea of minjung altogether and come up with some new term to avoid carrying the weight of the concept's past.

MINORITY DISCOURSE

In the examples given at the beginning of this paper, what we once believed to be a creation turned out to be the repetition of the old form of power. I also briefly mentioned the internal problems brought about in the minjung group in the 1980s. Thus, the question arises: How do we evaluate fabulation, the creation of a people? Is any "people to come" worth inventing?

I would suggest that a redefined minjung be based on "minority ethics" rather than the "majority ethics" by which the notion has been understood in the past. When seen in terms of the ruled or the oppressed, minjung was often defined as a majority of people opposed to the minority group of rulers, the rich, and sometimes the intellectuals.¹⁹ But as Deleuze claims in an interview with Antonio Negri, the difference between minorities and majorities is not their size. A minority can be bigger than a majority. The

difference, according to him, lies in the fact that "what defines the majority is a model you have to conform to: the average European adult male city-dweller, for example. . . . A minority, on the other hand, has no model, it's a becoming, a process."²⁰ He further notes that when minorities create models for themselves, it is because they want to become a majority. Hence, based on this idea of a minority *without* models, the definition of minjung avoids the trap of creating a "new old" model to replace the majority, or of setting up a static model for an "ideal" people to come (i.e., a utopia).

NOTES

1. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ilbe_Storehouse.
2. Jung Gu Kang, "How Was Minjung Imagined?" [민중은 어떻게 상상되었나?]. *The 15th Korean Poetics Society Conference* (2005): 51.
3. There are a few other characterizations of the term that are worth noting. As Kang (ibid.) notes, Paik Nak-chung defines minjung as the subjects of revolution. He believes that the concept is not limited to a particular era but is found in any moment of history. Thus, he links minjung not only with Donghak thought and the 3.1 Movement but also with the French revolution. Kim Ji-ha, like many others, situates minjung in terms of the dichotomy between the oppressor and the oppressed, but also equates it with a nationalist ideology (Minjok). Shin Kyung-rim points out that the self-consciousness of minjung themselves is presupposed in the minjung practices and notes its close relationship to the ideology of various intellectuals.
4. Wansang Han, *Minjung sahoehak* (Seoul: Chongno Sôjôk, 1981), 64.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Hyun Chae Park, "Examination of the Characteristics of Minjung in Terms of Social Class," [민중의 계급적 성격]. In *Study of Social Classes in Korea*, vol. I (Seoul: Hanul Press, 1985), 50.
8. Hyung-A Kim, "Minjung Socioeconomic Responses to State-Led Industrialization," in *South Korea's Minjung Movement: The Culture and Politics of Dissidence*, ed. Kenneth M. Well (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1996), 58.
9. Ibid., 59.
10. Ibid.
11. There is a temporal implication of the term "a people to come" that I will not discuss in this paper. The French term "*un peuple à venir*" has a sense of futurity ("*avenir*" = future); Deleuze writes about how the modern political cinema calls on a people who belong not to the present but to the future.
12. In this chapter, Deleuze writes about such directors as Glauber Rocha (a Brazilian), Ousmene Sembene (an African), and Pierre Perrault (a French Canadian).
13. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 216.
14. Ibid., 217.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid. My emphasis.
18. Gilles Deleuze, "Control and Becoming: Interview with Antonio Negri," *Generation Online*, <http://www.generation-online.org/p/fpdeleuze3.htm>, accessed February 14, 2014.
19. Shin Chae-Ho was one of those who hold this position. He viewed the minjung as the majority of the Koreans who needs to realize themselves as potential agents of revolution under Japanese occupation. Lee, *Religion and Social Formation in Korea*, 37.
20. Deleuze, "Control and Becoming," <http://www.generation-online.org/p/fpdeleuze3.htm>.

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Populism, Pueblos, and Plutocracy: Notes on Radical Democracy from Latin America

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Shortly after the reelection of President Obama, the Filipino undocumented immigrant, journalist, and founder of *Define American* (an immigrant-awareness campaign), Jose Antonio Vargas, wrote:

The Nov. 6 election signaled a demographic tipping point: a record number of Latino and Asian voters, the country's fastest-growing voting blocs, formed a coalition with black and white Democratic voters to re-elect the country's first African-American President. A new American majority—a multiethnic majority—has not only arrived but is in fact reordering the political landscape.¹

A multiethnic majority is something the United States has not seen before. Whereas most civil rights and social movements assumed that they stood for *minorities*, how will the call for social justice change once it is understood to be a demand from a coalition of seemingly disparate voices (and allies) now constituting the majority? How will this demographic shift affect our collective attitude and commitment toward the democratic process and the practice of politics in the United States? What divisive mechanisms will be concocted so as to dissipate the power of this fledgling group?²

In order to answer these questions, this project explores the nature of democracy in the twenty-first century in

the wake of shifting racial and ethnic demographics and popular social movements situated against oppressive political arrangements. Skeptics will suggest that a multiethnic majority will not necessarily vote unanimously, fail to achieve consensus, and perhaps even lack the ability to constitute change (especially in the wake of the repeal of parts of the 1965 Voting Rights Act).³ Probably the most poignant reason to be skeptical reminds us that women have constituted a demographic majority in several countries throughout the globe for years, yet do not dominate elections as a women's movement.⁴ These concerns are right to view the birth of this new majority with caution. Below, I mention one other reason for concern stemming from the history of nonwhite majorities in Latin America.

Amidst these worries, within the recent political works of Ernesto Laclau and Enrique Dussel, two Argentines by birth, one can find ample support for the possibility and importance of a multiethnic majority. These thinkers inspire new life in democratic theory in ways that are attuned to the reality of social movements and the workings of popular political coalitions throughout the globe. Laclau offers the theoretical mechanisms for "equivocating" or translating competing justice claims into strategic alliances seeking to overcome shared antagonisms. Rather than dissipate, these strategic popular movements provide an adequate *form* through which popular sovereignty becomes possible. While Laclau admits that it is no easy task to maintain populism, his work offers a starting point for the birth of political practices situated in the hands of those who are frequently quieted by oligarchical and plutocratic systems. Dussel provides an alternative global history of political philosophy that departs from Hellenistic and subsequently Western narratives, thus providing the opportunity for diverse political futures that make sense of recent popular movements and eliminating the sentiment that the Latin American or Arab Spring "came out of nowhere."⁵ Dussel also highlights the material orientation underpinning all political thought and brings to light the inherent victimization of political institutions, which includes the eventual victims of democracy. Both thinkers fuse democratic practice with popular social movements in ways that give some reason to continue thinking about the possibilities of a multiethnic majority.

"THE REVOLT OF THE NONWHITE MASSES"

Historically, nonwhite majorities connected to the idea of popular democracy have not fared well, especially in places like Latin America.⁶ Time and time again, various social movements consisting of demographic majorities have attempted to wrest political power out of the hands of oligarchs and plutocrats to no avail. For a variety of reasons, white minorities have balked at the idea of "majority rule," especially when they control substantial amounts of economic, cultural, and political capital.⁷ Through the pressure exerted by social movements and the embracement of politics by people typically alienated from the political scene, popular sovereignty and democratic rule has found a home in Latin America in the past decade. Nevertheless, it remains commonplace that politicians who emphasize the plight of the overwhelming poor, which happens to mostly correspond with indigenous, black,

and mixed-heritage populations, are typically labeled “populist,” *indigenista*, or some *other kind* of politician (and whatever it is, it is not the good kind—the point being that most mistake “populism” as supplying a socialist platform).

Amidst these concerns, the idea of a multiethnic majority points toward the future of democratic thought. Rather than representing the needs of oppressed or alienated groups piecemeal, the kind of majoritarian politics I have in mind calls for the formulation of coalitions, blocs, or translatable justice claims united in their marginality, victimization, or “alterity.” These alliances strive to represent the needs of various groups within the larger collective, a balance that will never be perfect and constitutes an ongoing challenge rather than the outright failure of popular movements.

From the onset of *On Populist Reason*, Laclau states that his concern is “the nature and logics of the formation of collective identities.”⁸ Rather than harboring some kind of ideological commitment, populist political practice unites heterogeneous elements in ways that constitute hegemonic change. Laclau describes a means through which different perspectives and concerns unite so as to combat a shared antagonism. In order to effectively promote change within the prevailing political order, this movement must crystalize into a single voice that is “inscribable as a claim within the ‘system’.”⁹ Attempts to differentiate, equivocate, and negotiate various claims within the movement give way to the use of “empty signifiers”—i.e., abstractions or variables that make use of “chains of equivalence” in order to arrive at a level of generality that unites the people (e.g., ideas like “freedom,” “economic justice” or even “the 99%”). This is not to say that all social justice claims are generalizable, nor does it hold that a true referent for populism is possible. While acknowledging that the process of representing particularity through universality will be difficult and at times result in ambiguous, “blurred,” or vague referents, Laclau thinks that populism is “a way of constructing the political” that is characteristic of any communitarian space.¹⁰ Populism, rather than having an ongoing monolithic concern at its core, attempts to *mediate* the particularity of differing justice claims amidst the need for sufficient universality.

Similar to Laclau, Dussel describes the creation of an “analogical hegemon,” a strategic *bloc* of marginalized *people* who realize their continued misrepresentation and victimization amidst the newfound ability to constitute political change. In *Twenty Theses on Politics* he writes,

From among the diverse systems of government (monarchies and republics), *democracy* came to emerge as the only feasible form for the achievement of legitimacy. Today, the task is to assess and improve upon the various types of democracy: republican, liberal, social democratic, welfare State, post-colonial populist, etc. Existing *empirical* democratic systems are always concrete, inimitable in their entirety by other States, and always open for improvement. Democracy is a perpetually unfinished system.¹¹

As “unfinished,” democracy attempts to secure the legitimacy of political institutions in a way that is inherently unique and ongoing. Rather than identify any kind of universality in the process of legitimation—which is a point that perhaps runs counter to Laclau’s emphasis on the need for a level of generality that can unite a plurality of views under a single banner of the “people”—Dussel advocates for a kind of universality associated with the content of politics (i.e., the need for political institutions to ensure the material well-being and survival of the people it serves).

According to Dussel, as the product of finite human beings, all political institutions will cause victims; even the best or most just political institutions will be unfair or harm someone, somewhere (both within their boundaries and outside).¹² Political institutions are but a moment in the attempt to formalize or capture *potentia*, the will-to-live of the political community. In order to do this, institutions rely upon a “snapshot” of the dynamic needs of community and are bound to fail in some degree since the life of the community will always exceed attempts at totalizing its existence. *Potentia* is always too rich for *potestas* or institutionalized power. Political philosophy assumes a *universal content* when it takes material well-being as its central concern and the need to ensure the survival of people (which includes animals and the environment). This material focus directs the institution’s attention towards those denied the ability to continue living (i.e., victims). While the form of addressing the plight of the suffering will vary (on account of democracies being “inimitable”), the inability to live—which is the ultimate foundation for political institutions—will bring the people together in a way that unites their concerns along a universal material ground. Arising from the position of marginalization, alienation, and victimization, the people harbor a “reason or rationality from beyond” or “the reason of Other situated beyond the self,” what Dussel calls analectical political thought (“analectics” is derived from Greek particles *ano/a* or “beyond” and *logos* or “reason”). Given that victimization is inevitable, analectical politics is thus an ongoing process and drives the institution toward a more just situation. Dussel expresses this idea at the end of the *Twenty Theses* when he writes, “It is true that the bourgeois Revolution spoke of *liberty*, but what is necessary now is to subsume that liberty and speak instead of *liberation* (as in North American pragmatism, one does not speak of *truth* but *verification*). So now we do not refer to liberty but instead to liber-ation as a process, as the negation of a point of departure, and as a tension pressing towards a point of arrival.”¹³

Analectically situated around a material content that places the community’s well-being at the forefront of its concerns (which necessarily includes those deemed not officially part of the community), and charged with the task of mediating particular interests with generalizable claims, Laclau and Dussel provide a means through which we can view the birth of the multiethnic majority as a popular social and political movement that does not fall prey to the tendency for political institutions to disassociate themselves from the needs of the community. This tendency for there to be a *will-to-live* of the institution that divests itself from the *will-to-live* of the political community it serves represents

the ultimate fetishization of politics, a point that Dussel clearly worries about.¹⁴ Laclau and Dussel remind us that under popular rule, the institution is made up of this “new” community. While popular government will be no easy task, their work indicates the challenge of popular sovereignty in an age of the multiethnic majority and not the result of this practice.

NOTES

1. Jose Antonio Vargas, “Viewpoint: the Power of the Asian and Latino Vote,” *Time*, November 8, 2012, <http://ideas.time.com/2012/11/08/viewpoint-the-power-of-the-asian-and-latino-vote/>.
2. I would argue that the focus on legal-status and citizenship in light of “illegal” immigration debate is divisive tactic. See Carol M. Swain’s response to Joseph Carens’s *The Case for Amnesty* at <https://www.bostonreview.net/forum/case-amnesty/apply-compassion-offered-illegal-immigrants-most-vulnerable-citizens-carol-swain>. Swain’s response is also in Carens, *Immigrants and the Right to Stay* (Cambridge, MIT Press: 2010), 65.
3. http://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/12pdf/12-96_6k47.pdf.
4. For reasons why, see Naomi Zack, *Inclusive Feminism: A Third Wave Theory of Women’s Commonality* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005). While Zack’s views have been criticized along the lines of failing to supply an adequate basis for defining women, her reasons for why women tend to be alienated and excluded from the political arena have not been given sufficient examination.
5. For sake of space, I will not expand on his views regarding the history and significance of a global history of political philosophy. See Enrique Dussel, *Politics of Liberation: A Critical World History*, trans. Thia Cooper (London: SCM Press, 2011).
6. Probably the most notorious critique of democracy in Latin America can be found in José Enrique Rodó, *Ariel*, trans. Margaret Sayers Peden (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988), and Simón Bolívar, “Address to the Angostura Congress, February 15, 1819, the Day of Its Installation,” *Nineteenth Century Nation-Building and the Latin American Intellectual Tradition*, eds. Janet Burke and Ted Humphrey (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2007). While Bolívar does not mention democracy *per se*, his rejection of popular suffrage and desire to implement a hereditary senate are clear indications of his disapproval of popular sovereignty, amidst his acknowledgement of the heterogeneity of Latin American populations.
7. For more on the history of and contemporary challenges facing democracy in Latin America, see Martin Edwin Anderson, *Peoples of the Earth: Ethnonationalism, Democracy, and the Indigenous Challenge in “Latin” America* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010); Howard J. Wiarda and Harvey F. Kline, *A Concise Introduction to Latin American Politics and Development*, 2nd ed. (Boulder: Westview Press, 2007), 185–244; Laura Tedesco and Jonathan R. Barton, *The State of Democracy in Latin America: Post-transitional Conflicts in Argentina and Chile* (London: Routledge, 2004).
8. Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso, 2005), ix.
9. *Ibid.*, x.
10. *Ibid.*, x–xi.
11. Enrique Dussel, *Twenty Theses on Politics*, translated George Ciccariello-Maher (Durham: Duke, 2008), 51.
12. *Ibid.*, 69.
13. *Ibid.*, 137.
14. *Ibid.*, 30.

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

Announcement on the Society for Teaching Comparative Philosophy

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It is my pleasure to be able to contribute to this newsletter with the announcement of a new academic society. The Society for Teaching Comparative Philosophy (STCP) is devoted to sharing, discussing, and developing pedagogical strategies for teaching the philosophies of diverse cultures at the undergraduate level. While there are several academic societies devoted to non-Western and/or Asian philosophies (for example, the Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy, the Association of Chinese Philosophers in America, and the Comparative and Continental Philosophy Circle, among others), there has been no such academic society devoted strictly to issues of comparative and non-Western philosophical pedagogy. Teaching comparative and non-Western philosophical material to undergraduates presents unique challenges, which the STCP aims to help teachers meet. Courses in comparative or non-Western philosophy are often the first exposure students ever have to traditions outside of their own, and as such they are a direct enhancement of the diversity of thought available to students, as well as an illustration of academic plurality and inclusiveness.

The STCP held its inaugural event, the Society for Teaching Comparative Philosophy Symposium and Workshop, from February 28 to March 1, 2014, at the University of North Florida. The meeting itself consisted of a series of workshops and panel presentations aimed at bringing pedagogical theory and scholarship of teaching and learning to bear on the specific challenges of teaching comparative philosophy courses at the undergraduate level. Panel presenters considered such topics as how to structure Introduction to Philosophy courses so as to responsibly include non-Western material, how to respond to rampant Islamophobia in a philosophical manner, and how to help students see colonial heritages and avoid colonialist thinking in the contemporary world. The first workshop, led by Dr. Erin McCarthy (St. Lawrence University), addressed the use of contemplative pedagogies in the classroom, and the second workshop, led by Dr. Benjamin Lukey, drew connections between Philosophy for Children (p4c) and comparative philosophical pedagogies. The STCP welcomes supporters and members from across the profession. To keep apprised of upcoming events, view resources related to teaching comparative and non-Western philosophies, or contribute pedagogical materials you have developed, please visit our new website at <http://stcp.weebly.com>.

NOTE

1. Sarah Mattice, Ph.D. is assistant professor in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, and the Asia Council Leader, at the University of North Florida. She is also the current STCP president.