

REWRITING THE PEOPLE:
NARRATIVE, EXILIC THINKING, AND DEMOCRATIC AGENCY BEYOND THE WEST

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Abstract

The vital originary moments of democracy rely on the work of dissidents using creative means to contest exclusion and domination. Much of contemporary political theory continues to mine the Western tradition of political thought for such democratic resources. Augmenting those well-known iterations, I look outside the confines of Western political theory to locate other histories and conceptual resources that inform ongoing resistance against exclusionary structures across time and place.

Focusing on narratives of democratic agency in both Western and non-Western cases, this dissertation uncovers texts and actions that show how those outside or at the margins of different political orders empower themselves and work to radically reconstitute those societies. Against circumscribed definitions of “the people” instituted by executive and juridical authorities, those left out of the political realm evince what I term exilic thinking to challenge such exclusionary scripts and extend the scope of the demos.

I argue that narratives of democratic empowerment are not merely the products of Western political theory, but transcultural and ubiquitous. Using a narratological method that combines insights from Hannah Arendt and Edward Said, I survey a select set of historical moments in Western and non-Western experience to identify worldly manifestations of agency in texts and practices underappreciated for their democratic significance. The democratic moments I analyse include dissident Sufism in the wake of the Islamic Golden Age; the poetics of exile in early Renaissance Florence; decolonial thought moving from the Americas to Africa and the Middle East; and contemporary struggles against exclusion and domination in Iran and North America. Taken together, these explorations shed new light on practices of resistance and collective self-governance, contributing to theoretical advances in the study of democracy and

comparative political theory. Finally, I provide a praxis-oriented approach at the end of my dissertation to consider the efficacy of sharing aesthetic, literary, and exilic narratives in enabling common world-building practices in conditions of deep diversity.

Lay Summary

Exclusion has been a major problem for as long as politics has existed and continues to present a challenge around the world today. For many years, theorists of democracy have been insisting on the idea of inclusion, drawn almost exclusively from the political experiences of the West, as a solution to this problem. My dissertation looks outside those boundaries, shifting to the words and actions of people left out of politics in both Western and non-Western societies. Across different cultures, I uncover various kinds of narratives—especially literary and poetic expressions—that the exiled and the marginalised use to challenge exclusion on their own terms and rewrite what it means to be part of “the people.” To learn from these experiences and deepen democracy, I suggest ways to tune into the narratives of different societies’ outsiders and use their ideas to tackle exclusion and domination wherever they appear.

Preface

This dissertation is original, unpublished, independent work by the author Nojang Khatami.

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For my parents

Chapter One: Introduction

Beginnings inaugurate a deliberately *other* production of meaning—a gentile (as opposed to a sacred) one. It is ‘other’ because, in writing, this gentile production claims a status *alongside* other works: it is *another* work, rather than one in a line of descent from X or Y. Beginnings... intend this difference, they are its first instance: they make a way along the road.

—Edward Said, *Beginnings*¹

What usually remains intact in the epochs of petrification and foreordained doom is the faculty of freedom itself, the sheer capacity to begin, which animates and inspires all human activities and is the hidden source of the production of all great and beautiful things. But so long as this source remains hidden, freedom is not a worldly, tangible reality.... [Freedom] develops fully only when action has created its own worldly space where it can come out of hiding, as it were, and make its appearance.

—Hannah Arendt, “What is Freedom?”²

I. Revisiting a Perennial Problem

There is perhaps no political problem older, more persistent, and at the same time more pressing, than exclusion. At its core the concept itself seems to inhere as a necessary facet of human experience and interaction. There are those that ostensibly belong among “the people” as deserving participants in political life, and those who are deemed unfit for, or even a threat to, that way of life. Yet at the same time, even many of those “brought into” and contained within the dominant political order of diverse societies continue to remain marginalised, disempowered, and disallowed from taking part as equally respected participants. This puzzle, which only begins to lay bare the complex entanglements of the discourses of exclusion and inclusion, constitutes the initial theoretical concern of this dissertation.

¹ Edward Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), 13.

² Hannah Arendt, “What is Freedom?”, in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993 [1968]), 169.

Exclusion, in both historical and contemporary manifestations, has operated by demarcating a border that leaves some out of the political realm based on undesirability or supposed incapability of self-government. Across centuries and in different human societies, political subjects have been excluded from the polity on the basis of race, ethnicity, cultural identity, indigeneity, gender, and sexuality. This problem is relatively direct, as it constitutes outright and explicit domination. The discourse of inclusion, on the other hand, introduces complexity and a new set of ambiguities even as it seeks to respond to the original problem of exclusion.

The word inclusion conjures myriad meanings, depending on its employment across different contexts. At the level of practical application—particularly in social and political policymaking—it is part of a common phraseology revolving around accommodation and respect for diversity. In mainstream liberal and democratic political theory, inclusion has gained ground as a normatively desirable ideal that responds to the problem of exclusion and its deleterious effects on the lives of those deprived of meaningful political participation. The idea of *democratic* inclusion has held prominence in recent decades, in large part on the strength of efforts by thinkers working within, or in response to, theories of multiculturalism and deliberative democracy. Notably, Iris Marion Young’s exemplary work at the turn of this century identified inclusion as a praxis-oriented form of empowerment enabling the participation of all agents affected by democratic decision-making processes.³

³ Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 6, 251. An earlier, and widely influential iteration of the concept is found in her *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 156-183. For parallel definitions among theorists associated with deliberative democracy, see Jürgen Habermas, *The Inclusion of the Other: Studies in Political Theory* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998), xxxvi, 79, 145; and Seyla Benhabib, *The Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), ix-x, 134.

Despite being championed and widely drawn upon in democratic theory, however, the notion of inclusion more generally has been troubled in recent years by a variety of critical scholars who have rightly pointed out its shortcomings. On one side, theorists within the field itself have advanced critical work outlining the practical limits of deliberative democratic inclusion in political life, particularly in light of gender inequality and biases about alternative modes of communication.⁴ On the other, thinkers attuned to the racist and colonial structures of various modern liberal democracies have critiqued the discourse of inclusion as a set of practices that work to forcibly incorporate or subsume difference under a colonial project. Such critical approaches to the ongoing legacies of colonialism and empire have attended to their effects at both the international and domestic levels. At the intersection of international relations and political theory, recent critiques of inclusion highlight the disparity between nation-states, in this case through a veil of integration that works to further entrench domination over non-European societies. These processes have been characterised as “inclusion on unequal terms,” which stratifies disproportionate power through the imposition of debt and geopolitical dominance over weaker states⁵; and “unequal integration,” a mode of hierarchical ordering that perpetually denies full rights of membership to non-European states in the international community.⁶ By extension, racial and ethnonational hierarchies are analogously maintained *within* nation-states, as both formal and informal institutions work to suppress and marginalise large segments of the population.⁷ In settler colonial contexts like Canada in particular, inclusion has been interrogated

⁴ See, for example, Deveaux (2016), Song (2018), and Bächtiger et al. (2010). Young was also deeply aware of such limitations and sought to attend to them through her threefold response to “internal exclusion,” which I take up later below. See *Inclusion and Democracy*, 53.

⁵ Jennifer Pitts, *Boundaries of the International: Law and Empire* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 2018), 9.

⁶ Adom Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 18.

⁷ Michael Hanchard, *The Spectre of Race: How Discrimination Haunts Western Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 118. See also Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the*

as a pretence for dialogue that in actuality works to further assimilate and subordinate Indigenous peoples and others subject to marginalisation.⁸ What is at stake in all of the above critiques of inclusion is the problem of *domination*, or the insidious ways in which asymmetrical power is maintained over disadvantaged groups with false assurances of equality.⁹

The difficulty with tackling the problem of exclusion by adopting a general principle of inclusion is that the latter concept is multifaceted and ambiguous. There are, in fact, a range of inclusions to which those brought into the category of “the people” may be subject—some of these are democratic, and others not. In contemporary liberal-democratic societies, it is quite common for those formerly left out of the political realm to be brought in and formally granted status as part of the demos; yet this crossing of the boundary becomes problematic when those brought in are subjected to *conditional* forms of inclusion which enact new forms of domination. Those historically excluded due to gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, indigeneity, and cultural identity may be invited to cross to the other side of the line only to find themselves in the margins, remaining disempowered at the edge of the polity.

Legacy of Late Colonialism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) and, for an extended account of the many other ways internal domination has been advanced, Barbara Arneil, *Domestic Colonies: The Turn Inward to Colony* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

⁸ See Glen Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 25, 40-42, 99-103; Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 20-24; and James Tully, “Deparochializing Political Theory and Beyond: A Dialogic Approach to Comparative Political Thought,” *Journal of World Philosophies*, no. 1 (Winter 2016), 58.

⁹ As Coulthard explains in concrete terms with regard to Indigenous dispossession in Canada: “A settler-colonial relationship is one characterized by a particular form of domination; that is, it is a relationship where power—in this case, interrelated discursive and nondiscursive facets of economic, gendered, racial, and state power—has been structured into a relatively secure or sedimented set of hierarchical social relations that continue to facilitate the dispossession of Indigenous peoples of their lands and self-determining authority. In this respect, Canada is no different from most other settler-colonial powers: in the Canadian context, colonial domination continues to be structurally committed to maintain—through force, fraud, and more recently, so-called ‘negotiations’—ongoing state access to the land and resources that contradictorily provide the material and spiritual sustenance of Indigenous societies on the one hand, and the foundation of colonial state-formation, settlement, and capitalist development on the other,” *Red Skin, White Masks*, 6-7.

As a response to the persistence of exclusion and the ambivalence of the discourse of inclusion, the ideal of democratic empowerment offers a promising alternative. But what exactly does this form of empowerment look like? How can we see both those who are excluded and those who are kept in the margins of different societies pushing back against domination on their own terms to rewrite the meaning of “the people”? And in locating these resources of resistance, what can be gained by looking outside the parochial confines of the West?

I argue in this dissertation that narratives of democratic empowerment are not merely the products of Western political theory, but transcultural and ubiquitous. Specifically, I focus on narratives of *democratic agency* by highlighting texts and actions of dissidents in both Western and non-Western cases, and recasting the vital originary moments of democracy as resistance to oppression, domination, and exclusion. The term democratic agency is made up of two core components: self-representation and voice on the one hand, and empowerment through action in common on the other. Together, these capacities constitute the essence of collective self-governance. Broadly, I characterise agency as the demonstrated capacity to act decisively and meaningfully in the world, over and against deterministic worldviews.¹⁰ What makes agency

¹⁰ Conceptual foundations in the philosophical domain include Wittgenstein’s ideas of agency as mastery over language, and justifications for action based on critical reflection and choice (see *Philosophical Investigations*, trans G.E.M. Anscombe, P.M.S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte [Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009], §199, §217 and §§629-30); and by extension Anscombe and Davidson’s postulations of the centrality of intentional action as the core of agency (G.E.M. Anscombe, *Intention* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1957], 1-12; and Donald Davidson, *Essays on Actions and Events* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980], 46-59). While I acknowledge these accounts as important in establishing individual concepts of autonomy, I believe conceptions of *social*, *collective*, and *relational* agency are even more significant with regard to the political—and more specifically the democratic—practices of resistance I will explore throughout my dissertation. In particular, I draw on practical and politically oriented precursors in Peter Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2010 [1958]), 23-48, 108-118; John Searle, *Freedom and Neurobiology: Reflections of Free Will, Language, and Political Power* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 41-7, 79-109; and especially the two key thinkers who provide the animus for the approach I take throughout this dissertation: Hannah Arendt and Edward Said. The key insights these two thinkers provide on democratic agency as worldliness, action in common, and exilic thinking, will be discussed in much more detail in the pages to follow, and can be traced respectively in *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998 [1958]), 175-212; and *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 119-144.

democratic, in my view, is the ability to act collectively against absolute claims to authority, including political strictures as mandates from a world beyond and hierarchies that deem some to be worthy members of society at the expense of others. Democratic agency is worldly in the sense that it empowers those who would otherwise be left out of the political realm to actively intervene in its reconstruction by partaking in concrete forms of resistance and challenging exclusionary structures. In my analysis of Western and non-Western¹¹ cases alike, democratic agency is vital insofar as it is used by the excluded to contest the boundaries of various polities and reimagine the notion of “the people”¹² through an increasingly complete story of what they want to become. Moving away from the forms of inclusion that imply a set of provisions to be *brought into* the dominant political order, I shift the frame toward resistance, contestation and empowerment of different societies’ marginalised Others. The agency cultivated by those at the margins is vital to demands for democratic self-government, and can be seen manifested in many cultures and forms of expression around the world.

More than articulating selfhood to empower individuals, agency is also a means of expressing resistance against the status quo, refusing to be bound by the strictures and norms of authorities ruling through overt and insidious forms of domination. The exilic thinking at the core of such resistance, I argue, can be located across time and place, in various societies that develop agency and narratives of empowerment among those formally or subtly excluded from the demos. I characterise resistance as exilic because it persists outside the bounds of the

¹¹ These remain troubling aggregates but still useful insofar as they allow those resisting the idea of the “West” as the centre to assert their alternate self-understanding on their own terms.

¹² This concept has been explored by numerous political theorists seeking to identify and problematise its scope (Honig 2001; Smith 2003; Muller 2016; and Urbinati, 2014 and 2019). Among the most recent examinations, Urbinati’s highlights the “indeterminate character” of the notion of “the people” and the way its inherent ambiguity lends itself to manipulation and claims to a full or complete constitution of the demos by founding figures and populist leaders across time (2019, 77-8). Democratic agency serves as a vital countervailing force against these delimiting ascriptions.

established demos, in spaces where those left out empower themselves on their own terms and demand to rewrite the political realm from the outside or the margins. Taken together, exilic thinking, agency, and the narratives that carry the demands of the excluded constitute crucial means to challenge political domination wherever it exists. As I will go on to show, the pursuit of this path of empowerment can be seen as an imperative not only in the West, but also in other traditions throughout history in both explicitly political and aesthetic expressions.

To delineate a broader understanding of agency and exilic thinking throughout my dissertation, I aim to trace some of their earlier iterations in particularly illuminating narratives, shifting from literary to political, in two nominal traditions broadly termed “Western” and “Iranian” culture. In the chapters to follow, I will employ what I call a narratological approach, drawing on the work of Hannah Arendt and Edward Said to examine how agency is developed and sustained through multiple forms of expression including literature and poetry that challenge dominant norms and authorities across contexts. Before drawing out this methodology further below, I begin with a fuller account of the diverse manifestations of exclusion to which discourses of inclusion have sought to respond in various ways.

II. The Roots of Exclusion

The logic of exclusion has long been evident, in one of its more extreme forms, at the borders—the outermost limits—of society. The surveillance and the control of the bodies of foreigners at airports in the United States alone provide clues to a much wider discourse at work. Here, those whose bodies are subjected to expulsion and routinised confinement are given no choice but to accept it as a necessary and inevitable process legitimated by official policies. Those singled out as particularly threatening know all too well why they are placed where they are on the spectrum of danger created and sustained by discourses of terror and criminality. They

are subject to exclusion on the one hand, and surveillance and confinement on the other, by virtue of an imagined connection to that broad, sweeping language of terror. In the wake of the Iranian regime's retaliatory attack against U.S. forces after his authorised killing of General Qasem Soleimani, Donald Trump provided a telling statement that implicated all Iranians in the conflict: "Your campaign of terror, murder, mayhem will not be tolerated any longer."¹³ Looking back, such messages cannot be taken as isolated statements of hostility between nation states, or the ramblings of a particularly callous politician. As part of a broader discourse of othering, the use of this language and its concomitant deployment in exclusionary actions and policies point to a larger web of prejudicial thinking in which particularly dangerous others are categorised under a collective threat of terror, to be eliminated, controlled, or kept at bay.¹⁴ The use of this language of exclusion is nothing new. It is as old as politics itself. Yet it would be an error to assume that exclusion has remained altogether the same. The persistent marginalisation and subjugation of those not considered citizens or even fully human, the atrocities committed to erase countless numbers of them, the innumerable barriers erected to keep others out and silence them—these are all very different forms of exclusion, even if the core logic remains the same.

The concept of exclusion, from its earliest uses in written language, has always been about keeping out—its Latin root *cludere* meaning to shut out, as with a barrier—what is threatening or unnecessary to the political order. Yet, through time, its scope and its applications have taken on new forms of conveyance and operation. A brief consideration of the ancient

¹³ Donald Trump, "Remarks by President Trump on Iran," Washington, D.C., January 8, 2020, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-iran/>

¹⁴ In that same speech, Trump used the words "terror," "terrorist," and "terrorism" nine times in a six-minute span, each time linking it specifically to Iran, its leaders, and its people. The persistence of this language is indicative of the staying power of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978) and its continual manifestations as discussed in *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (New York: Vintage, 1997), esp. Chapter 2: "The Iran Story", 81-133.

Greeks' concern with order provides a taste of the subtle differences in the way the idea has been understood in its earlier iterations. There were at least three ways the Greeks understood and employed exclusion as far back as the 5th century BCE: as essential differentiations and borders between themselves and cultural others (*politēs* as opposed to *barbaroi*, often used to refer to the Persians)¹⁵; as expressions of rejection against those deserving ostracism and loss of political rights (*ostrakismos* and *atimia* meaning one's protection under the community is relinquished, leaving one to be killed with impunity)¹⁶; and as a kind of supervision or internal control to restrict participation in public life (legitimated by *sophrosyne*, or the moderation of inferior parts by those considered superior).¹⁷ Anticipating later European colonisation, the ideas and practices of the Greeks—and by extension the Romans—signalled forms of domestic and imperial control, turning *inward* as well as *outward* to identify those considered inferior or unfit to take part in society.¹⁸ Such practices have of course prevailed for centuries and continue to make their mark felt on the present. But the ways in which they have expanded and been put to use in modern politics—not only by authoritarian regimes but, troublingly, also in nominally democratic societies—warrant careful scrutiny.

Perhaps the most marked difference between past and present forms of exclusion can be noted in the more diffuse and insidious ways it now proliferates. Whereas in earlier centuries, the exclusion of cultural others was primarily sustained by control from a distance, recent decades have witnessed migration and intermingling on such a scale that those in fear of losing their

¹⁵ As illustrated in the salient discourse of Greek vs. non-Greek in Herodotus' *Histories*, Aeschylus' *The Persians*, and numerous other works

¹⁶ A thorough account is provided by Sara Forsdyke in *Exile, Ostracism, and Democracy: The Politics of Expulsion in Ancient Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

¹⁷ As, for example, in Plato, *Republic* II and by extension Aristotle's injunctions against women, slaves and others in *Politics* I. For a recent account of how more subtle forms of exclusion and ambivalence operated with regard to "metics" or immigrants in ancient Athens, see Demetra Kasimis, *The Perpetual Immigrant and the Limits of Athenian Democracy* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

¹⁸ Arneil, *Domestic Colonies*, 22-4.

status as the dominant majority have lashed out in various ways against those they viscerally feel as invaders. Only their responses have changed. The aforementioned policies of the Trump administration in the United States and the growth of the far right in Europe are in part the manifestation of long-held prejudices bubbling under the surface of supposedly rational, enlightened polities. Recalling Adorno and Horkheimer's observations in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, projections of barbarism onto "savage" and "alien" others merely stem from primordial feelings of fear, hatred and resentment on the part of those who consider themselves civilised (2002, 150-54). As with the conditions that gave rise to totalitarian ideologies in the past, the causes of cross-cultural hostility are in part material and economic: "they" are the ones taking our jobs away; "they" are holding our society back from greatness; "they" do not belong here. Yet how is this negative representation of otherness sustained if not through deep-seated prejudices and misrepresentations of who "they" are to begin with? The underside of those oft-heard statements is constituted by misguided narratives about the cultural identities of others: "they" are fundamentally different from us; "they" do not want to integrate; "they" are dangerous and should be expelled or suppressed.¹⁹

The ramifications of exclusion remain ever-present and in need of critical elucidation, whatever guise they take. In its most extreme form, exclusion is about eradication: genocide, murder, and the rendering of statelessness onto "alien" or unwanted peoples as an excuse for eliminating them with impunity.²⁰ Exclusion as exile likewise looks to get rid of those who are unwanted, in this case by banishing them from the political and social realm. In this sense, even

¹⁹ For a comprehensive account backed by thorough empirical findings, see Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Cultural Backlash: Trump, Brexit, and Authoritarian Populism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2019), esp. 175-206. The classic earlier work on this topic, which focuses on individual personality traits to explain the threat of status insecurity, is Theodor W. Adorno et al, *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York: Norton, 1950), esp. 147-150.

²⁰ See Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1973), 275-290.

if their lives are not lost, the excluded are deprived of a sense of place and belonging afforded to others with a homeland (Gündogdu 2015, Benhabib 2018). Finally, there are the more subtle and complex forms of exclusion alluded to in the above paragraphs, often blending into inclusion. This type of exclusion can take on the shape of physical barriers, travel bans, and limitations placed on the entry of unwanted peoples, simultaneously inscribing the inclusion of others who are considered members of a polity. On the other side, however, many of those admitted to and recognised as constituting the demos continue to face exclusion in the form of disenfranchisement, unequal access to public goods, and limitations placed on expression, movement, and the preservation of their cultural values. In this way, some forms of inclusion turn out to be exclusionary because they deny individuals and groups their democratic agency. Liberal democratic societies are often at pains to question and attempt to correct such impediments, invoking a tradition of rights and duties to fully include others in keeping with a self-professed commitment to wider empowerment and equality. Yet, recognising the reality that such efforts continually come up short, it is necessary to say more about the concept of inclusion to parse out its normatively desirable forms from those that reify exclusion and domination.

III. Modern Discourses of Inclusion in the West

Inclusion, among careful and critical readers, is a fraught term. As mentioned at the outset, its use by states and juridical authorities is loaded with the baggage of assimilation—a bundle of ways to dominate and suppress others, all the while assuring them that their interests are being considered. The difficulty of employing the concept of inclusion meaningfully to genuinely empower others lies in its inescapable entanglement with exclusion. If *excludere* was about shutting out what is undesirable or unwanted, the literal meaning of *includere* is troubling for its very meaning of shutting *in*: enclosure, confinement. The etymology of the Latin term, its

dissemination across European languages and contexts, and its shifts and transformations as it moves across time and place all demand critical scrutiny. Hence a later portion of my project involves questioning and problematising the meanings, uses, and occlusions bound up with the concept of inclusion in the West. More than this, however, as I propose looking beyond the Western iterations of this concept, I hope to uncover what is most normatively desirable in the very core of the ideal. Before digging deeper, I carry out in this section a wider survey of the predominant ways in which inclusion has been understood by contemporary political theory in the West.

If theories of liberal multiculturalism and deliberative democracy have held sway in popularising and sustaining discourses of inclusion in recent decades, their persuasiveness has in large part leaned on their efforts to identify outright exclusion as socially and politically objectionable. By and large, thinkers in both these fields have taken up this task by emphasising rights, duties, recognition, and rational communication to mitigate inequalities and misunderstanding among members of diverse societies. Yet, despite the progress they have made in advancing inclusion as an ideal, their theories have yet to lead to a robust framework that genuinely empowers all members within, and at the margins of, the political sphere.

Definitions of multiculturalism typically refer to it as a set of theories and policies that aim to recognise and accommodate ethnic minorities and the marginalised in culturally diverse societies (Iverson 2016, 2; Taylor 2012, 415; Modood 2013, 5). This emphasis on both theory and practice makes it a seemingly appropriate starting point for building on forms of cross-cultural communication. Yet some of its major proponents tend to focus heavily, at times exclusively, on notions of rights, representation, and recognition (Kymlicka 1995; 2007; Taylor 1994; 2012) without sufficient attentiveness to exchanges and interactions as they unfold in the public sphere.

Theories of recognition and cultural rights tend to elide asymmetrical power in the cultural and political spheres, with more advantaged groups able to gain recognition at the expense of others (Tully 2008, 300). Moreover, the lacuna between theory and practice is indicative of a wider tendency to claim inclusivity without deep or genuine engagements with the narratives of those who are meant to be understood and included.²¹ Given these oversights, inclusion is bound to remain an abstract goal if pursued within the narrower confines of mainstream liberal multiculturalism. A radical critique of multiculturalism would require identifying its blindspots and calling for deeper dialogue with perspectives that would otherwise become subsumed within its limited purview. Vital to this critical project is an elaboration of a deeper understanding of the ideal of inclusion beyond the usual discourses of tolerance, rights, and recognition.

Theorists of deliberative democracy have been prolific in contributing insights on inclusion, sometimes as companions or correctives to multiculturalism. Deliberative democratic theory, insofar as it relies on the foundational Habermasian concept of the lifeworld (1984, 335-7; 1987, 113-152), emphasises the ways that communicative acts of agents can challenge and potentially change historically conditioned normative structures, worldviews and prejudices, particularly where they are shown to be oppressive and unjust (1990, 65-66, 200). As such, it can be seen as providing an invaluable backdrop against which to judge how democratic practices carried out in civil society and the public sphere facilitate both mutual understanding among cultures and inclusion within diverse societies. Habermas's imperative to challenge exclusion and domination through deliberation and reason-giving among agents within systems (1996, 275)

²¹ As James Tully further observes, "Misunderstanding, stereotyping and deep cleavages will prevail in multicultural and multinational societies as long as [reasons for preserving identities] are not exchanged in public as a basis for mutual understanding among identity-diverse citizens. Citizens not only need to know that there are culturally different others in the association, or wanting to get in, as a matter of fact. They also need to gain some understanding of those different cultural identities, the narratives in terms of which they have meaning and worth for their bearers and so on." *Public Philosophy in a New Key, Vol. 1*, 179.

has garnered close attention and further insights into the ways agents can challenge political systems within the public sphere (Benhabib 2002, 133-146); and the ways that those agents can use empowered inclusion to speak, vote, represent and dissent within institutions; (Warren 2017, 38-40, 42-45). Moreover, innovations in the systems approach to deliberative democracy broadly encompass the multiple ways in which persuasion can replace “suppression, oppression, and thoughtless neglect” (Parkinson & Mansbridge, 2012, 5). This approach assesses institutions according to their epistemic, ethical, and democratic functions; that is, respectively, how they promote a wide array of facts and reasons, mutual respect, and inclusivity (10-12). All these functions advocated by proponents of deliberative democratic theory are normatively desirable and help to overcome some of the deficiencies of multiculturalism.

At the same time, bridges between multiculturalism and deliberative democratic theory over the years point to common normative aims and the need to carry the work in both these fields further. The enduring work of Iris Marion Young is particularly representative in its precision for identifying exclusions and promise in overcoming them by taking up the work of inclusion. In *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, Young not only laid out the various forms of oppression—notably xenophobia and aversion—but also began to explore the possibilities of empowerment and inclusion as ways to counter the often unconscious forces that sustain the “scaling of bodies” and hierarchisation based on identity (122-155). She defined this empowerment as “participation of an agent in decisionmaking through an effective voice and vote,” and noted that it “requires expanding the range of decisions that are made through democratic processes,” (251). Extending voice and expanding range requires active engagement with the narratives of those who have been historically marginalised and continue to struggle to “get in” and to have their lived experiences acknowledged and respected. As Young’s later work

demonstrated, representation and formal political fora constitute only some of the ways through which we come to learn about and acknowledge cultural others. Beyond these, she pointed us to the significance of other aspects of civil society and, most powerfully, less acknowledged modes of expression through her categories of greeting, rhetoric, and narrative (2000, 52-80). This final insight underlines the centrality of communication in its various forms, particularly the use of language in redefining and reemploying normative ideals to meet ongoing challenges and injustices in social and political life.²²

Despite Young's inspiring inroads toward a more genuine form of democratic inclusion, however, two crucial questions remain: what exactly are "accepted" members of a society being included in when we talk about inclusion? And what are the structural underpinnings of deliberation and democratic decisionmaking? These related questions are regularly treated by scholars of citizenship and migration as matters of membership within the boundaries of the demos. For democratic theorists, they are seen as matters of empowerment to extend rights such as voting, freedoms of speech and association, and discursive capacities to amplify voice and preference. Those in the first group are more principally concerned with *who gets in* and *what rights and duties apply to those who are brought in*; while those in the second want to ask *how members of a polity can be further empowered to engage more effectively in collective self-government*. Here I summarise representative work in these two fields to round out the theoretical constructs of exclusion and inclusion before restating and developing my own approach to the problem.

²² Though notable for their systematic approaches, the above theories are from exhaustive. Parallel to the ideas across traditions and contexts to be explored in this dissertation, studies widely exploring the significance of affect, solidarity, and the use of diverse narratives from racialised perspectives have been brilliantly employed in recent years to reimagine existing polities. See, for example, Juliet Hooker, *Race and the Politics of Solidarity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); and Paul Gilroy, *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture?* (London: Routledge, 2004).

The subject of membership in the demos has been explored at least as far back as Robert Dahl's (1989, 129) principle of "full inclusion" which holds that "The demos must include all adult members of the association except transients and persons proved to be mentally defective"—a problematic conceptualisation that has since been supplemented to extend rights and forms of recognition to enhance social membership (Owen 2013, 328-9). More recent work in theories of citizenship like that of Rainer Bauböck insists that there are several principles underlying democratic inclusion—namely "all affected interests," "all subject to coercion," and "all citizenship stakeholders" principles (2018, 6)—applying them in relation to different democratic boundaries. In this view, to be included in a polity is to be an agent whose interests are taken into account, who has equal protection under the law, and who has a democratic claim to be recognised as a citizen by virtue of membership in the state (20). One problem with approaches like these is the lack of attention to spaces outside the formal mechanisms of states like voting and "discursive membership" of the demos through participation in democratic institutions (Bauböck 2018, 183-202). Much less has been said in the literature about the ways exclusions persist when basic inclusion has been met. Here the lacuna has been noted and addressed in different ways by James Tully (2008, 179) and by Monique Deveaux who has insisted that "informal spaces of democratic activity and expression" are crucial to attend to in keeping with "the need to empower vulnerable members of cultural communities by... expanding opportunities for critique, resistance, and reform" (2006, 5-6). The related drawback with citizenship-centred approaches like Bauböck's concerns the problematic of integration—that is, what happens to cultural communities like those of recent migrants in liberal democratic societies even after they are afforded the bare minimum of basic rights? The problem is stated bluntly by Joseph Carens:

It is certainly possible for people to be citizens, to have equal legal rights, and to be marginalized nevertheless. If immigrants or their descendants possess citizenship status but are excluded from the economic and educational opportunities that others enjoy, if they are expected to conceal things related to their immigrant origins in order to fit in, if they are viewed with suspicion and hostility by others, if their concerns are ignored and their voices not heard in political life, then they are not really included in the political community, even though they are citizens in a formal, legal sense. They are not likely to see themselves or to be seen by others as genuine members of the community. In many important ways, they will not belong (2013, 63).

Problems like these affect an entire range of groups and identities other than migrants, intersecting with violence and discrimination against women (Deveaux 2006, 54-88), Indigenous peoples (Simpson 2017, 11-25) and African Americans (Alexander 2010, 1-19) to mention only a few.²³ Numerous groups have been excluded due to gender, race, ethnicity, and cultural identity, or conditionally included only to remain relatively marginalised and disempowered (Goodin 1996, 345-50; Young 2000, 11-12, 53-5; Dhamoon 2013, 7-28). In sum, the problem of inclusion bedevils theories of multiculturalism, immigration and citizenship, and deliberative democracy alike. In my view, this last group has advanced furthest in addressing and seeking to remedy the problem by emphasising the empowerment of marginalised groups; but I also believe this work can be extended substantially by attending to narratives of exile across traditions and cultures, in liminal spaces where democratic agency manifests itself in the powerful pleas of the excluded to radically transform the political realm.

My approach to the problem of inclusion is in part sympathetic to the deliberative democratic approach of Young and others outlined above, but I believe shifting the language away from common uses of inclusion and emphasising the role of the excluded is a necessary task in approaching the problem anew. This is because inclusion presupposes an established

²³ The historical conditions and forms of domination affecting each of these groups are of course different in important ways, as to be discussed particularly in chapters 4 and 5.

boundary, and the bounds within which it is used—particularly in liberal democratic and settler-colonial societies—have scripted exclusionary stories of peoplehood and citizenship that have been particularly insidious and enduring over centuries. The term inclusion continues to imply that there is a pre-established enclosure, a “we” that constitutes a sense of community—a community into which others are invited. But to rewrite that notion of peoplehood, another shift is necessary. Narratives and forms of contestation taking place outside political and juridical contexts have much to reveal in the way that they challenge, resist, and seek to rewrite those exclusionary scripts.

Given the criticisms against anti-democratic forms of inclusion and the challenges associated with implementing the aspirational democratic concept meaningfully in practice, political theorists would do well to reconsider the idea more explicitly as (1) resistance against exclusion; and (2) agency that empowers the excluded to rewrite the scope and status of “the people” in more deeply democratic ways. Through this shift, theorists may reimagine the concept of inclusion while noting its normatively desirable features and manifestations in various forms of expression across societies. A detailed survey of historical and contemporary forms of democratic agency in different societies—which I map out and formulate in the coming chapters—reveals that those exiled from political communities often carry out these democratic forms of resistance *artfully*, in two senses of the word: using cleverness and aesthetic sensibility to critique the existing status quo and those who seek to maintain its rigid norms. At a deeper level beyond mere resistance, these exilic voices seek to bring about a radical change in the consciousness of the members of the given society they write against and aim to transform its very structure by rewriting its norms. Narratives of the excluded are, therefore, vital resources of democratic agency as they demand more than participation and recognition—at their most

powerful, they unapologetically assert the existence and dignity of those pushed to the margins of the polity, compelling those who have excluded them to transform the polity and themselves in the process. Crucially, these practices of resistance and democratic agency are not, and should not continue to be seen as, purely Western constructs. Even if they have long been assessed under the academic auspices of the West, there are resources outside of those confines yet to be uncovered, particularly in texts and practices that have remained under- or unappreciated for their democratic potential. Political theorists in the West have been mining philosophical tomes and treatises from Plato to Marx unremittingly as long as the discipline has existed; yet as I aim to illustrate at length below, they should have good reasons for attending to other experiences and modes of expression, not least poetic and literary narratives through which manifestations of democratic agency can be traced across time and place. My contention is that looking to such narratives outside the West will allow democratic theorists to better appreciate the different ways in which inclusion can be reimagined. Yet, lastly, I think it is important to reiterate that no matter how it is pursued and by whom, inclusion is always exactly that—a *pursuit*. By virtue of its status as an ideal, it has yet to be reached. Hence, in closing this section, I ask what it would mean to think of inclusion as an ideal of plurality yet to be realised, speaking of it as an “inclusion to come.”

The expression “inclusion to come” echoes the late work of Jacques Derrida, intimating a need to think beyond the concepts that we come to hold as rigid or in any way final. Derrida famously characterised the notion of democracy in the same fashion through the last decade or so of his work, as he began to think more deeply about hospitality and the possibility of a more just democratic future. “For democracy,” he wrote, “remains to come; this is its essence in so far as it remains: not only will it remain indefinitely perfectible, hence always insufficient and future,

but, belonging to the time of the promise, it will always remain, in each of its future times, to come.”²⁴ Likewise, in his writings on cosmopolitanism, he considered the possibility of “cities of refuge” as places of genuine inclusion and belonging, yet to be created or even clearly conceived.²⁵ As Derrida endeavoured to explain throughout his oeuvre, all such concepts are elusive, subject to variability and difference as they move from being written to being read, forever reinterpreted through new iterations.²⁶ Language, conceived in this sense, is always haunted by absence and the impossibility of “recovering” an originary meaning for any concept.

Given the heavy implications of these claims, Derrida was critiqued throughout his life for perhaps taking his insights too far, into the outer limits of meaning. Certainly, if one were to take language as an endless Dionysian play of different meanings, the very possibility of mutual understanding would risk collapsing. By extension, as critics would maintain, we would be limited in our capacity to identify ongoing injustices and seek to remedy them. Agreeing with some of these criticisms and maintaining that understanding is not only possible but of vital importance for social and political life, I would nevertheless argue for retaining Derrida’s central insight. That is, the concepts we use in human language do not have known beginnings and ends, but are always already in process of being understood, through their innumerable iterations, through the play of repetition, contestation, and redefinition. But the reason many normative ideals must be understood anew is precisely because they have yet to be realised. This does not

²⁴ Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship* [1997] (New York: Verso, 2005), 306.

²⁵ As Derrida wrote, “I also imagine the experience of cities of refuge as giving rise to a place (*lieu*) for reflection— for reflection on the questions of asylum and hospitality—and for a new order of law and a democracy to come to be put to the test (*expérimentation*). Being on the threshold of these cities, of these new cities that would be something other than ‘new cities’, a certain idea of cosmopolitanism, an other, has not yet arrived, perhaps.” See *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 23.

²⁶ See, for example, Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1981), 290 ff; and *Limited Inc.* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 9, 53. Seyla Benhabib has also drawn on the Derridean concept of iterations fruitfully in *Another Cosmopolitanism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 45-74.

mean that we cannot have a basic understanding of a concept like inclusion. I only state this early on to reaffirm that a narratological tracing of the core concept across traditions and contexts will allow us to redefine it and reorient our understanding and use of the concept. And as I maintain throughout this dissertation, the task of elucidating an “inclusion to come” is best served by directing our gaze not only toward the Western experience, but also the multifarious narratives that have bourgeoned beyond that terrain.

IV. Other Narratives, New Beginnings

In looking beyond the West for the possibilities of new beginnings and elaborating my method, I want to situate my work as a response to, and an expansion of, the ideas of two key thinkers: Hannah Arendt and Edward Said. At first glance, the parallels between the project I have outlined so far, and the vital work these scholars have done may seem obvious; but there are two crucial distinctions I hope to illustrate about how my work departs from and builds on their ideas: an extension of Arendt’s horizons in appreciating the value of different traditions of political thought, and a deeper engagement with a set of experiences and practices outside the nominal West to follow through with Said’s sketch of what he called *contrapuntal* thinking.

Arendt’s oeuvre—with all its insight, depth, and promise—is a fitting, even indispensable point of departure in discussing the possibility of beginning anew and “bringing in” those who have perpetually been left out of the political realm. Along with her notions of plurality and publicity, her conception of natality is a promising articulation of how a society can overcome even the most destructive and harmful forms of exclusion to tell a new story about its identity. Natality, she writes in *The Human Condition*, is “the miracle that saves the world, the realm of human affairs, from its normal, ‘natural’ ruin,” as it represents “the birth of new men and the new beginning, the action they are capable of by virtue of being born” (247). This “miraculous

character” is rooted in the “twofold gift of freedom and action” she would go on to identify in her essay, “What is Freedom?” quoted as an epigraph to this introduction. But in that same exercise, as with other observations in *Between Past and Future*, she ultimately locates these gifts in the circumscribed boundaries of a distinct culture.

Though she bemoans the lack of political engagement in pre-modern and Christian traditions for their emphasis on the notion of free will and the inner self (157), Arendt nonetheless identifies a particular tradition that she believes to be a wellspring worth drawing on in the present. As she memorably writes in an earlier preface, there is a certain kind of treasure to be found in a great tradition—one with many names, the most prominent of which could be “public freedom” (5). But the recovery of that lost treasure depends on our collective memory of the tradition from which it springs. As with the example of the French resistance at its lowest moments of defeat, the loss of such a tradition “was consummated by oblivion, by a failure of memory, which befell not only the heirs but, as it were, the actors, the witnesses, those who for a fleeting moment had held the treasure in the palms of their hands” (6). The preservation and use of tradition are dependent on a collective remembrance, “which is helpless outside a pre-established framework of reference, and the human mind is only on the rarest occasion capable of retaining something which is altogether unconnected” (Ibid.). What is needed then, is a story, a narrative tying us to the past and thereby cultivating the possibility of a future. Arendt argues that this kind of story is a basic need, for without it, “there seems to be no willed continuity in time and hence, humanly speaking, neither past nor future” (5). Drawing on the Augustinian conception of time and narrative, she extends the logic into the political realm. Hence Augustine’s realisation—“if nothing passes away, there is no past time, and if nothing arrives, there is no future time, and if nothing existed there would be no present time” (2008, 231)—is

given a political edge to imply that our sense of meaning and humanity in society among others is dependent on a collective memory of our political tradition. But the tradition that Arendt implicitly identifies as the one most—or in fact, by virtue of the omission of any other tradition mentioned, the *only* one—worth returning to is the so-called Western tradition of political thought. There are two central concerns regarding the conclusions Arendt reaches that I would like to problematise and move beyond in the course of my project.

The first problem that arises from Arendt's conceptualisation of the Western tradition is the meaning and scope of the term itself. What exactly constitutes this expansive term in her thinking? How might usages like hers inform the ways in which many political theorists today understand and employ the term? And should the term be used liberally or unproblematically to refer to a set of geographical and imaginary boundaries to be taken for granted? The extensive work carried out by those pushing the boundaries of political theory would press us to answer the last question with a clear “no.” As Murad Idris writes in his critical appraisal of the politics of comparing political traditions, “the expansion of political theory should be accompanied by a questioning of its terms; to simply accept its categories, divisions, and visions of the globe is to pretend that they are not inflected by power” (2016, 2). The power dynamics at play in the dissemination and widespread usage of the term “Western political thought” point to an ideological and linguistic systematisation in which the West is taken as the centre and primary point of reference for political thought, while “other” traditions remain in the periphery as loosely defined “particularities” with little to offer by comparison. There is, therefore, good reason to problematise the very terms themselves, such that “the lexicon of West/non-West must be troubled” (Ibid., 4) even when used as forms of self-identification. Moreover, going beyond the uses and the idealisation of terms like “Western political thought” requires a conscious de-

centering of that tradition through what Tully identifies as “genuine dialogue.” This kind of dialogue would be constituted by a conscious practice of openness and receptivity to “enable participants to understand one another in their own traditions” (2016, 52). In short, a coherent narrative of “us” and “our” tradition is possible, but it should not be received uncritically or without deep attentiveness to its various forms of self-understanding. Turning back to Arendt’s identification of the tradition with these caveats in mind, it is clear that she offers important insights about the inherited tradition she values so highly, but also that it is necessary today to think beyond its provincial boundaries to have a wider appreciation of other narratives.

For all her attentiveness to storytelling from the perspectives of pariahs and those persecuted under the worst calamities of the Western tradition,²⁷ Arendt evinced a consistent and staunch defence of the tradition’s timeless worth. The “lost treasure” to which she alluded in her preface to *Between Past and Future* had, in her view, a clear point of origin: a tradition of political thought which “had its definite beginning in the teachings of Plato and Aristotle” (17). Her intimate familiarity with and extensive knowledge of this tradition meant that it was a wellspring from which she drew often. *The Human Condition*, most notably, returned without fail to the ancient Greeks for insight and inspiration, in particular for the purpose of disclosing identity and meaning (192-3), and creating a political realm out of “acting together, the ‘sharing of words and deeds,’” (198). Arendt claims, however, that the value of this tradition must be gleaned through negative terms—that is, it can only be appreciated when we recognise the inadequacy of its beginning and the disaster that ensues when it is broken off. Placing Plato on one side, and Marx on the other, she identifies them as respective harbingers of a tradition’s

²⁷ Most notably in *Rahel Varnhagen: The Life of a Jewess*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1997). For discussions, see also Jennifer Ring, “The Pariah as Hero: Hannah Arendt’s Political Actor,” *Political Theory* Vol. 19, No. 3 (1991): 433-452 and Lisa Jane Disch, *Hannah Arendt and the Limits of Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).

beginning and an end: one that “began with the philosopher’s turning away from politics” and culminated when “a philosopher turned away from philosophy so as to ‘realize’ it in politics,” (1968, 18). This attempt by Marx to “realize” a vision of material conditions so radical that it abolishes the need for politics altogether (19) was, for Arendt, catastrophic on more than one level. That is, it was antipolitical not only because of its shift toward violence at the expense of persuasion by means of speech (22-3), but also because it instantiated a kind of rebellion so extreme that it caused a decisive break from history and our very way of thinking. It led, “through terror and ideology,” toward what she saw as formerly unthinkable: “Totalitarian domination as an established fact, which in its unprecedentedness cannot be comprehended through the usual categories of political thought, and whose ‘crimes’ cannot be judge by traditional moral standards or punished within the legal framework of our civilization, has broken the continuity of Occidental history,” (26). Detailing her thoughts in a longer manuscript version of the same essay, Arendt went further to say that the thread of this tradition was broken precisely when we could no longer refer “to the existing legal framework of a civilization whose juridical cornerstone had been the command *Thou shalt not kill*,” (2018, 10). Finally, she tempered her indictment of Marx in this posthumously published version of the paper by placing the blame more on those who (mis)appropriated his ideas, as “Marx’s roots go far deeper in the tradition than even himself knew,” and “it can be shown that the line from Aristotle to Marx shows both fewer and far less decisive breaks than the line from Marx to Stalin” (6).

Arendt’s defence of the Western tradition amounts to an attempt to cleanse and, in so doing, salvage it. Granted, it does not mean she advocated a wholesale and uncritical acceptance of the entire tradition. Regarding the evils already inherent in the West’s understandings of and approaches to its many Others before the rise of Nazism, she acknowledged that “Racism was

neither a new or a secret weapon, though never before had it been used with this thoroughgoing consistency” (1973 [1952], 158). It emerged, she wrote, “simultaneously in all Western countries during the nineteenth century,” and revealed itself particularly in “the powerful ideology of imperialistic policies” around that time (Ibid.). But, in rounding out my critical reading of Arendt and offering an alternate groundwork, I would ask two questions: what about the many other evils stemming from the dehumanisation of Others perpetuated by Western political thought and concomitant practices, not least colonialism, dispossession, slavery and genocide; and how far are the deep roots of exclusion truly recognised in a vision that downplays or ignores their significance?²⁸ Though I agree with Arendt that there is great value in the Western tradition’s ideals of agency, empowerment and inclusion, I find the framework offered by the “thread of tradition” narrative misleading and limited. Associating the Western tradition exclusively or primarily with tolerance and inclusion risks presenting a circumscribed understanding of the complex, multifarious growths that constitute its development. In short, it seems to me that Arendt was ignoring the possibility that there may be more than one kind of narrative in the Western tradition: a branch that is primarily exclusive, and another that tends toward inclusivity. These two branches, as I aim to further show, are deeply connected and in many places intertwined. As part of an initial attempt to expose these complexities, I turn to another pathbreaking thinker in Edward Said to complement Arendt’s ideas and elaborate another vision of traditions and what they offer for political thinking at present.

²⁸ Though Arendt does give some attention to imperialism in the aforementioned section of *Origins*, the focus on this particular campaign and its role in prefiguring totalitarianism still belies a deeper history of othering long present in the Western tradition. As I argue, the practices of domination that manifested so forcefully in imperial and totalitarian policies were themselves rooted in earlier forms of exclusion always already at the core of Western identity. For a discussion of Arendt’s particular focus on imperialism, see Karuna Mantena, “Genealogies of Catastrophe: Arendt on the Logic and Legacy of Imperialism,” in *Politics in Dark Times: Encounters with Hannah Arendt*, ed. Seyla Benhabib (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 83-112.

Said's contributions to political thought are remarkably undervalued among political theorists today. Despite the tremendous influence his legacy continues to exert across the humanities and social sciences, political theory is still catching up on what to do with his massive, multifarious body of work.²⁹ The spirit of Said's critical work is perhaps most conspicuously present among thinkers contributing to the wide-ranging fields of decoloniality and comparative political thought (Mignolo 2000, 2011; Quijano 2000; Santos 2014; Dallmayr 1996; Tully 2008, 2016). Yet while he is frequently invoked for the significance of his critique—most notably in his ground-breaking *Orientalism* where he identified the manifold forms of exclusion imposed on much of the world by the West—less has been said about the more *constructive* elements of his thinking, which I argue have much more to contribute for a broader understanding of inclusion. Specifically, in situating my own work in relation to the field of comparative political thought, I would argue that there are several underexplored strains of Said's thought to build upon and carry further. These include: an indispensable definition of culture that in turn helps define what is meant by "tradition"; a nuanced theory of identity that is attentive to accompanying exclusions; and a mapping of ways to expand our horizons to other cultural understandings, all of which add up to a novel methodology for thinking beyond parochial approaches to ideas of exclusion and inclusion.

Said's unique contribution, which I believe has been a largely overlooked aspect of his legacy, is the incitation to try to adopt the point of the view of the *exile* as a way of thinking beyond the limited views that have so long constrained Western political thought. This view is related to his notions of "contrapuntal thinking" and "traveling theory," but it cannot be reduced to either of them, least of all as a way to exhaust his conceptual and methodological

²⁹ With a few notable exceptions, many theorists, including scholars of multiculturalism and deliberative democracy mentioned earlier, have left Said completely out of their considerations of culture and inclusion.

contributions.³⁰ The strain that I will identify as the most promising in Said's contributions is his thinking on, and his invitation to enter, what could be called a *liminal* space from which to see narratives at work in different traditions. Such a space, initially the haunt of exiles and other figures at the margins of society, is an ever-expanding territory, continually opened up through shared exercises of thinking across traditions. And entering such a space, I will show, allows us to appreciate narratives in all their complexity—their particularities and their commonalities—to better understand what causes ideas such as exclusion and inclusion to take shape and alter the political landscapes of diverse societies.

Said's unfinished project, which was left off at the time of his passing in 2003, is in all respects a political call to action to accompany his critical and methodological innovations. In *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, the last book he completed, he compellingly wrote against the many manifestations of exclusion and called on others involved in the struggle “to challenge and defeat both an imposed silence and the normalized quiet of unseen power whenever and wherever possible,” (135). The very possibility of this struggle lay in a vision he was at pains to define over his entire career: the ability to *narrate*, to write back against those who would

³⁰ Said's idea of “traveling theory” is elaborated in the eponymous essay where he assesses the patterns and processes of change that ideas undergo as they move across time and place. The process he identifies includes: the idea's “point of origin;” the distance traversed, passing through “the pressure of various contexts;” the conditions of acceptance and/or resistance; and the transformation of the idea in its new position (1983, 227). His conception of “contrapuntal thinking,” a method he alluded to throughout several essays cited in this introduction, was a way that he suggested using in order to reposition ourselves in relation to all ideas across time and culture and view their commonalities and differences outside of our usual parochial confines. Though both views have been acknowledged for their value, the full range of Said's contributions has yet to be fully appreciated. Notable exceptions include Roxanne Euben's expansion of his traveling theory toward the way ideas actually move across time and space through the bodies of travelers (2006, 10-12); and ongoing explorations by Jeanne Morefield to urge political theorists to pay greater attention to his critical contributions. Morefield in particular has used Said to critique liberal internationalists in global justice scholarship who elide imperialist prejudices with declarations of neutrality and ahistorical theorising (2019, 184-210); and she has argued compellingly that Said's critical disposition demands of theorists that we “resist specific identity narratives that mute polyphony while challenging universal narratives that obscure historical and contemporary forms of domination” (In Abu-Manneh, 2018, 112-128). Building on this valuable work, I take Said to be offering a constructive, multilayered methodology that can be used fruitfully in the field of comparative political thought.

impose silence and exclude. Insofar as it related to his own vocation, Said believed that such a task was particularly incumbent upon writers and intellectuals; but in the same breath he invoked a wider group of exiles writ large, challenging political norms in all their solidity and persistence. Hence, he concluded “that the intellectual’s provisional home is the domain of an exigent, resistant, intransigent art into which, alas, one can neither retreat nor search for solutions. But only in that precarious exilic realm can one first truly grasp the difficulty of what cannot be grasped and then go forth to try anyway,” (144). In a sense, the whole of Said’s body of work, a lifetime of resilient, rigorous thinking came down to this question: how to come to grips with, to appreciate, and to explore, as fruitfully as one can, the experience of exile.

The exile is a figure of the liminal, the excluded *par excellence*. But it is precisely by virtue of being excluded that such a figure can discern the insidious forces working on himself or herself, on different sides of political and cultural divides. Through such discernment, those same divides begin to crumble, as traveling between one experience and another reveals their commonalities. One’s thinking about identity and culture becomes unsettled as common truths come to light. Displacement from one’s former home allows for a way of seeing and thinking otherwise.³¹ All of this is possible, for Said, without necessarily having to literally be an exile: for aside from the “*actual* condition,” he identified it also as “a *metaphorical*” one.³² Hence the

³¹ As an example, in the poetic musings of Kendrick Lamar—who travelled from his native Compton to Robben Island outside Cape Town and witnessed the legacies of violence and segregation plaguing both South Africa and his own community—the transformation in thinking is captured in the metaphor of the caterpillar and the butterfly. Whereas in the setting of home, “he can no longer see past his own thoughts” because “he’s trapped,” the unsettling displacement of travel enables insight, growth, and transformation: “certain ideas take root, such as going home, and bringing back new concepts to [his own] mad city. The result? Wings begin to emerge, breaking the cycle of feeling stagnant. Finally free, the butterfly sheds light on situations the caterpillar never considered, ending the internal struggle. Although the butterfly and caterpillar are completely different, they are one and the same.” From *Mortal Man*, TDE/Aftermath/Interscope Records, 2015. For another fascinating exploration of thinking “otherwise” through aesthetic imagination, see Lisa Wedeen, *Authoritarian Apprehensions: Ideology, Judgment, and Mourning in Syria* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019), esp. 107-139.

³² See Said, *Representations of the Intellectual* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 52. Emphasis in original.

possibility of displacing and decentering one's understanding is available to all those who are "nay-sayers, the individuals at odds with their society and therefore outsiders and exiles so far as privileges, power, and honors are concerned."³³ Among the most important insights that emerge from such an experience of displacement is the ability to see notions of identity and culture themselves in a more nuanced and refined sense.

The complexities inherent in the concepts of identity and culture have of course been explored and appreciated by numerous scholars, accentuating fluidity and contestation as their fundamental constitutive aspects (Benhabib 2006; Deveaux 2006; Song 2007).³⁴ In defining my own working definitions of identity, culture, and tradition, I would introduce another of Said's constructive insights, namely the *double* meaning of culture, one side of which is often left unmentioned in definitions and debates. That is, in addition to understanding cultures as "contrapuntal ensembles" (Said 1993, 52) which are always defined in relation to or in conversation with other identities, Said left a reminder that "[s]econd, and almost imperceptibly, culture is a concept that includes a refining and elevating element, each society's reservoir of the best that has been known and thought" (xiii). I think there is great value in this notion of culture, which points to a novel conceptualisation I want to elaborate on in the chapters to follow. Specifically, drawing on the Farsi equivalent of culture as *farhang*—which can be alternately translated as knowledge, civilisation or lexicon—I would consider it as an important vehicle toward other ways of thinking, speaking, and seeing in the world. Put another way, beyond Charles Taylor's "presumption" that "all human cultures that have animated whole societies over some considerable stretch of time have something important to say to all human beings" (1994,

³³ Ibid, 52-3.

³⁴ See also Arneil and Macdonald in Ivison 2016 for a summary of conceptual developments within multiculturalism in particular.

66), I contend that the value of a culture or tradition lies primarily in its discursive potentiality to refine and enlarge human understanding.

Culture and tradition are extensions of the individual, constitutive of selfhood. They retain a core, a marker of distinctness, but are at the same time always subject to flux. Hence, for my purposes throughout this dissertation, I will look to employ and expand upon culture in two ways: as an amalgam of ideas, practices and forms of expression that reflect a people's refined self-understandings; and as a fluid, dynamic and negotiated set of principles and practices that are continually contested and reshaped through interaction. To return to and round out the engagement with Said's work, I conclude this section by detailing the connection between this notion of culture and the significance of narratives and exilic experience.

Understanding and removing obstacles to exclusion requires genuine attention to narratives: not only the narratives that have been imposed by the West on its Others as a means of domination and control,³⁵ but also the narratives that those subjected to or affected by dominating discourses use to *write back*, to resist, and to break down barriers between cultures.³⁶ As Said wrote succinctly in identifying his purposes in *Culture and Imperialism*, "narrative is crucial to my argument here, my basic point being that stories are at the heart of what explorers and novelists say about strange regions of the world; they also become the method colonized people use to assert their own identity and the existence of their own history," (xii). A question that inevitably arises out of this concern would be "what kinds of narratives?" Given Said's extensive engagement with literature and the arts, much of his writing was devoted to exploring aesthetic forms in various historical periods. This perhaps explains why many political scientists

³⁵ Among the better-known aspects of Said's work, particularly the critical ideas elaborated in *Orientalism*, pp. 31-110.

³⁶ Notably outlined in *Culture and Imperialism*, pp. 215-16.

have either ignored his work or pigeonholed it as literary criticism. The neglect is unfortunate, though it is gradually experiencing a revival among those who recognise its political significance.³⁷ To these readers of Said, the analysis of texts often marked as literary always retained a political tinge in his oeuvre, insofar as he saw these texts as products of “creative or interpretative imagination” which at the same time illuminated the political realm in which they were produced (xxii). Even as he read and commented on literary critics like Erich Auerbach—a fellow exile with whom he noted numerous affinities—Said remained attentive to the role of great narratives in illuminating the self-understanding of writers in their socio-political contexts. This is best seen in his introduction to Auerbach’s *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, where he noted how literary narratives reveal the creation of a continuous self that becomes capable of acting meaningfully in the public realm: “a kind of self-making within the context of the specific dynamics of society at a very precise moment in its development” (Said in Auerbach 2003, xiii). By extension, if the hermeneutic and empathic act of engaging with such narratives is approached contrapuntally, or from the point of view of the exile, a new political possibility is opened up: “the relationship between the reader-critic and the text is transformed from a one-way interrogation of the historical text... into a sympathetic dialogue of two spirits across ages and cultures who are able to communicate with each other as friendly, respectful spirits trying to understand one another” (Ibid. xiii-xiv). Thus it is clear that in his own work, and critical engagement with others, Said retained a lifelong attachment to politics—and more specifically, the narratives continually being woven by exiles as ways to think politics anew.

³⁷ See Morefield 2018, op. cit. n30.

The connections between culture, politics, narrativity and exile pointed to thus far are neatly summarised in a single passage that binds together much of Said's thinking:

If we no longer think of the relationship between cultures and their adherents as perfectly contiguous, totally synchronous, wholly correspondent, and if we think of cultures as permeable and, on the whole, defensive boundaries between polities, a more promising situation appears. Thus to see Others not as ontologically given but as historically constituted would be to erode the exclusivist biases we so often ascribe to cultures, our own not least. Cultures may then be represented as zones of control or of abandonment, of recollection and of forgetting, of force or of dependence, of exclusiveness or of sharing, all taking place in the global history that is our element. Exile, immigration, and the crossing of boundaries are experiences that can therefore provide us with new narrative forms (2000, 315).

Drawing on a phrase from John Berger, Said calls these narratives "*other ways of telling*" (Ibid., original emphasis). This was a phrase he returned to more than once, most strikingly at the end of *Culture and Imperialism*, where he wrote: "it is more rewarding—and more difficult—to think concretely and sympathetically, contrapuntally, about others than only about 'us.' But this also means not trying to rule others, not trying to classify them or put them in hierarchies, above all, not constantly reiterating how 'our' culture or country is number one," (336). Aware of the difficulties of this challenge—the burden of stepping outside our own traditions and worldview, the taxing experience of trying to think from the perspectives of others—Said urged that we try, as much as possible, to approach or enter into the position of the exile and appreciate the creativity it enables. Such a task is far from simple, beset as it is by an undeniable sense of discomfort, but it remained crucial to his vision of an enlarged understanding. Thus, in a parallel passage from his revealing "Reflections on Exile," he concluded:

While it perhaps seems peculiar to speak of the pleasures of exile, there are some positive things to be said for a few of its conditions. Seeing 'the entire world as a foreign land' makes possible originality of vision. Most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that—to borrow a phrase from music—is contrapuntal (186).

Hence it is clear that Said's notion of contrapuntal thinking, linked to being "nomadic, decentered" (Ibid.), is closely bound to the exilic experience with which he lived all his life, and the enrichment of which he extolled as worthy of pursuit. This decentered thinking, finally, provides us with a methodology for displacing our familiar, parochial forms of knowledge, unsettling perceptions of "our" traditions to see beyond them and recognise the commonalities of human experience across cultures.

In sum, if Said had anything like a cohesive methodology, it could be uncovered and outlined as follows: analysis and critique of discourses of identity, culture and tradition in all their multiplicity;³⁸ a commitment to humanism to identify all such concepts and practices as "man-made";³⁹ the recognition and use of narrativity, or narrative-making as agency;⁴⁰ and finally the invitation to enter the exilic perspective and use contrapuntal thinking to refine our understanding by appreciating narratives across traditions. This distinct methodological groundwork—despite its lack of explicit development, given Said's lifelong refusal to commit to any one approach other than humanism—still constitutes a solid foundation worth building on. It shares, finally, significant affinities with several of Arendt's ideas, allowing us to view them as complementary thinkers who help construct a distinct approach to comparative political thought. Thus, the Arendtian concepts of tradition, storytelling, and natality can be productively combined, refined, and expanded through a fusion with Saidian notions of culture, narrative, and

³⁸ Viz., the employment of Foucault in *Orientalism* (pp. 3-23) and the explicit intention to analyze political, sociological, literary and other imaginative forms of expression disseminating ideas of Self and Other.

³⁹ Particularly through the continual invocation of Vico from his earlier works down to their culmination in *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*.

⁴⁰ Clearly discernible in Said's response to the post-structural elements of Foucault's work, wherein he avers belief in "the determining imprint of individual writers upon the otherwise anonymous collective body of texts constituting a discursive formation like Orientalism" (1978, 23). He also identifies and relies upon agency in the aforementioned passages about "writing back" in *Culture and Imperialism*, as well as his reference to the "point of view of the writer" in creating and advancing ideas in *Beginnings*, p. 74. For a concise reflection on this uncovering of agency in Said, see Akeel Bilgrami, Ch. 11, "The Freedom of Beginnings," in *Secularism, Identity and Enchantment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014) 328-338.

contrapuntal thinking. In the most concise terms, I would summarise their contributions in this way: Arendt reminds us that “our” tradition is worth returning to in order to understand who we are before telling a story about who we want to be; and Said urges us to expand our horizons by considering the experiences of other traditions and making that narrative of a new beginning more attentive to the many ways challenges to exclusion may be expressed. In light of this fusion of visions, the “now” becomes a moment of potential transformation, a liminal space pregnant with possibilities for the political future—but its inclusiveness is only made possible through a more complete, cross-cultural story we tell about who we have been, and what we want to become.

V. Uses and Directions for a Narratological Approach

Narratives are sources of self-understanding and the knowledge we claim to have of others. They play a fundamental role in disclosing our individual and collective identities. They also come in many different forms, from epic stories constituting the history and identity of an entire peoples, to autobiographies detailing the richness of individual lives, to poems challenging the authority of dominant political figures. No matter what form they take, however, narratives retain a crucial common element: they tell stories that involve a past and a present with intimations of possible futures, and in so doing create a sense of order and meaning for individual and collective experience.

Studying narratives through a political lens allows theorists to identify how members of different traditions have understood themselves—their lived experiences, their interactions with other members of their political community, their capacities for interpreting and changing the world around them. Understanding any given tradition’s propensity toward exclusionary and inclusionary practices therefore depends crucially on examining the narratives its prominent

representatives, mainly artists and thinkers, construct to proscribe or invite the participation of various Others in political life. Theorists like Paul Ricoeur have gone as far as to locate the universal narrative genre of discourse at the core of all forms of intelligible communication. For Ricoeur, the idea of narrative helps explain how we interpret not only texts, but practically all human actions, and history (1991, 125-143). What all these have in common is narrative structures; they each constitute an enclosed sphere which interpreters try to access by moving within the hermeneutic circle and grasping the story it tells. In reading a text, an interpreter immerses herself in the world of the text, swims around in it in search of a coherent narrative, and emerges having grasped its meaning, which unfolds temporally. The theory of action works the same way by analogy, as does history: both constitute narratives, the understanding of which requires the basic ability to follow a linear story. “The common feature of human experience, that which is marked, organized, and clarified by the act of storytelling in all its forms,” Ricoeur says, “is its *temporal character*” (1991, 2; original emphasis). Similarly, Charles Taylor maintains that it is “a basic condition of making sense of ourselves, that we grasp our lives in a *narrative*” as “our lives exist in [a] space of questions, which only a coherent narrative can answer” (1989, 47; original emphasis). And Alasdair MacIntyre helps concretise the idea by stating: “It is because we all live out narratives in our lives and because we understand our own lives in terms of the narratives that we live out that the form of narrative is appropriate for understanding the actions of others,” which leads finally to the assertion that “Man [sic] is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal. He is not essentially, but becomes through his history, a teller of stories that aspire to truth” (1981, 212, 216). As evidenced by the abovementioned, and myriad thinkers across the social sciences and humanities, storytelling is a vital function of all our communicative activities, and key for

understanding why we shape our societies as we do. Not least among the range of answers a study of narratives can provide are the reasons why we exclude or include those we consider strangers, or part of “our” community.

Challenging the notion of what constitutes “our” community has long been a critical project for many scholars writing within, or in response to, the Western traditions of philosophy and political thought. Decolonial scholars like Walter Mignolo (2000, 2011), Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2014), and Enrique Dussel (2015) have written extensively about a shift in *epistemology* as a fundamental way to disrupt Western-centric thinking and embrace a more inclusive plurality of knowledge from myriad sources around the globe. Dussel in particular has been concerned with the multiplicity of narratives found across cultures, at pains to show how expressions long ignored or dismissed by mainstream (Western) philosophy as mere myths and stories turn out to be comprehensive and comprehensible philosophical systems with rational content. He explains: “myths, or symbolic narratives, are not irrational, nor do they refer only to singular phenomena; they contain a ‘double meaning’ which requires for its comprehension a hermeneutic process” to discover the reasons behind the meaning (2015, 13; my translation). Citing numerous examples of philosophical, literary, and political narratives from around the globe, he maintains that because these and other ways of thinking are just that—examples of thinking—it is time to declare a “new era of dialogue among philosophical traditions,” working toward a future world philosophy that is characterised by *transmodern* pluriversality (30). Transmodernity, a distinctive aspect of Dussel’s thought, indicates a way to think beyond the more confining structures of Western culture to a genuine intercultural dialogue (284).

The expansion of this decolonial literature, as it continues to be translated and find more traction, has been accompanied by parallel developments in political science. Those working in

or around the field of—what is broadly, sometimes reluctantly called⁴¹—comparative political thought and advancing the trailblazing work of Parel and Keith (1992) Dallmayr (1997, 1999, 2004) and Euben (1997, 1999, 2006) have been steadily growing more attentive to the need for applying such insights to political problems. Like the abovementioned scholars of decoloniality, they emphasise the importance of intercultural dialogue as normatively desirable not only for its epistemic value (March 2009, 540; Godrej 2011, 74-6) but also for the purpose of empowering marginalised and suppressed communities in pursuing their political interests (Tully 2016, 59). Among these, Williams and Warren have a further point about the political purpose of this field of inquiry and action, viewing “comparative political theory as building political capacities within communities of fate, by facilitating the mutual intelligibility of ideas across contexts and traditions, and increasing the pool of ideational resources available to those who share fates” (2014, 37). Following the Habermasian views of communicative action and deliberative exchange, they maintain that “the aim of comparative political theory, as with all political theory, should be to render explicit the political imaginaries that are operating in the background of a given context at a particular time, in order to render them intelligible to others” (Ibid.). I agree with the spirit and purpose of this approach, particularly for attending to the problem of exclusion set out in my project; but given the aforementioned concerns found in Arendt and Said, I would add a further point on the method for interpretation and intelligibility. Specifically, I would look to shift the frame of reference found in assertions of comparative political theory’s orientation as “nothing other than the representation and reconstruction of systems of ideas that

⁴¹ A thorough and convincing problematisation of this term is found in Idris, “Political Theory and the Politics of Comparison,” mentioned above. Other scholars have used the term reluctantly, with caveats about the dangers of reinforcing the extant hegemony of Western political theory in relation to those placed in the periphery (Godrej 2011, 7; Williams and Warren 2014, 27) and to acknowledge the emergence and widespread usage of the discipline as a continual development (Von Vacano 2015, 466).

have arisen in cultures and civilizations different from our own” (36). The notion of “our” community is precisely what is at stake when we look to expand the horizons of political theory and render it more inclusive. And it is in light of this response that I return to the methodology I aim to employ before outlining its uses and applications to the contexts to be examined.

The narratological method I use in this project is marked by two key commitments: tracing the development of ideals through a set of connected stories constituting distinct traditions, while remaining attentive to the obstacles and possibilities for outgrowths in each tradition through a contrapuntal approach that resists centering or privileging one of them with evaluative judgments of primacy or preeminence. This method, as I have presented it, is a distinct fusion of Arendt and Said’s insights on narratives across traditions.⁴² Combining their views, I maintain that such a two-sided approach is initially necessary to understand *any* concepts as deep-rooted and expansive as exclusion and inclusion. Ultimately, this analysis reveals that practices of resistance against exclusion inhere not only where it has been championed in the “West,” but also in other political traditions less often explored by political theorists. Considering historical developments, there are key divergences that make these traditions distinct, and the obstacles to inclusion differ in size and scope. But as I look to show, revealing commonalities across the traditions will allow us to better identify—and by extension cultivate—the enabling conditions of openness needed to combat exclusion as well as forms of inclusion that keep structures of domination intact.

The delineation of this project is germane to a particular metaphor already inscribed in the spirit of the language at hand. This is the “tree metaphor” used to explain the development of

⁴² It also draws on insights from Nietzsche in the *Genealogy of Morals*, where in undertaking a critique of values, he wrote: “there is needed a knowledge of the conditions and circumstances in which [those values] grew, under which they evolved and changed.” See Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and RJ Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 20.

human ideals and traditions through analogy between patterns of growth. In this view, traditions are formed out of narratives that emerge from a common experience of human problems and in turn seek to form a common response to them. Because many fundamental aspects of human experience are universal—the experiences of pain and deprivation and the desire for order, fruitful labour and flourishing—there are core elements that constitute a response to problems that potentially afflict all of us, in any given society. The most central of these are basic notions of human rights, covenants that assert our collective values, laws, and the responsibilities and duties we have to one another. Analogously, we could say that the experiences we have are our common roots, and the basic responses that all societies develop constitute the “trunk” of a tree that then grows in different directions.⁴³

The Western tradition is a prominent bough that in turn splits into several branches. The key divergences that constitute its growth include experiments with democracy; an extensive development of statecraft; and a distinct and continual cultivation of agency from the private to the political realm. The refinement of these three elements contribute substantially to outgrowths of inclusivity and the expansion of the tradition’s branches. If we examine another bough that could be collectively seen as the Iranian tradition of political thought, it becomes clear that certain outgrowths are also enabled and that during its development, it finds its own ways to flourish. In this case, the ideas cultivated in a distinct fashion consist of *ethical comportment* (*adab*) advanced through literature and poetry; *praxis* (*amal*) to enact agency in the personal and

⁴³ This metaphor finds precedents in various thinkers from Aristotle to Kant (with the notion of the “hidden plan of nature” in his *Idea of a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose*) and especially in Gandhi and the various ways he referred to trees. Gandhi, by turns, referred to the *upas* tree as representative of the poisonous aspects of Western modernity; the *banyan* tree as satyagraha, with its dual branches of truth and nonviolence, representing a distinct tradition he championed; and truth itself as “a vast tree which yields more and more fruit, the more you nurture it.” See Raghavan N. Iyer, *The Moral and Political Thought of Mahatma Gandhi* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), 28-9, 285; and M.K. Gandhi, *An Autobiography*, trans. Mahadev Desai (New York: Penguin Books, 2001), 206. Finding inspiration in these metaphors, I expand them in hopes of allegorising the development of specific ideas like agency and exilic thinking, and tracing their outgrowths in different traditions.

political realms; and an emphasis on a form of dialogue (*sohbat*) with a particular accent on fluidity. As with the Western tradition, Iranian political thought conceives a heritage of resistance against exclusion that spurs its own multifarious outgrowths. At the same time, both traditions are subject to various failures and slips that stunt their development to differing degrees. Relapse to exclusionary thinking and practices leads to petrification, delimiting and obstructing the growth of the political realm. A fuller story told from a liminal, contrapuntal perspective—observing the blockages and growths in both traditions—reveals a dual insight. That is, just as exclusion endures as an ever-present threat to any society at any given stage of its development, so too resistance against that tendency remains a latent possibility for regrowth. The crucial factor in enabling such growth is the cultivation of covenants created and sustained through democratic agency. To summarise again what I look to illustrate in extensive detail throughout this dissertation, alternatives to inclusion can be found in any society that preserves, and continually returns to, the stories that empower more of its members. A pluralised political order that reaffirms openness generates outgrowths that demand acknowledgement of those left out of the political community. Finally, the cultivation of agency among actors on the ground is crucial to this process, as it continually enables those excluded from the political realm to assert and exercise their ability to make meaningful changes to it.

In developing the argument of my dissertation, I aim to move between two traditions in a counterpoint, tracing crucial historical developments in each of them through the work of both canonical political narratives and literary efforts that have received relatively little attention in political theory. I define such narratives as those that are particularly eminent, influential, and enduring in setting the terms of discourse on which each tradition of resistance is built. Specifically, I focus on thinkers whose works are especially illuminating on questions of

exclusion, inclusion, and agency in the political realm. In the following chapter, I begin with key debates taking place among Sufi poets across and beyond Iran, particularly Rumi and Hafez, who through the 13th and 14th centuries ushered in a golden age of dissident thinking moving between the literary and the political. In the third chapter, I focus on Dante and Machiavelli as two emblematic thinkers of the early modern Western tradition whose works represent exilic thinking and agency from the private to the political realm. These two sets of thinkers, I aim to show, exemplify philosophical and political trajectories in the West and non-West whereby democratic agency is recognised, cultivated, and transferred to the political sphere to eventually empower greater numbers of ordinary people and thus challenge exclusionary practices by traditional figures of authority.

The second half of my dissertation will move to a wider study of the vicissitudes of resistance against exclusion in modern iterations of Western and Iranian political experience. In the last two chapters, I focus on a pair of representative thinkers from each tradition before turning to struggles on the ground that serve as the lifeblood of democratic agency. On the one hand, I trace the anticolonial discourses of Frantz Fanon and Ali Shari'ati as influential iterations of exilic thinking giving way to the creative, steadfast endeavours of ordinary Iranian women who use poetry to resist against political domination and attempts to establish "rightful" religion in the contemporary Islamic Republic. And on the other, I analyse the reconfigurations of inclusion and its abiding limitations in the Western political imagination through critical readings of Locke and Kant followed by a focus on challenges from outside the political realm as represented by the life and legacy of James Baldwin. With this final contrapuntal move, I hope to lay bare the complexities of achieving anything like genuine inclusion, given the challenges presented by persistent marginalisation based on gender, race, sexuality, and cultural identity.

The intersectional work developed by the end of the dissertation concludes by revisiting the responses to those challenges: the vitality of democratic agency by the exiled and the marginalised to contest domination. Considering the examples of the Green Movement in Iran and the Black Lives Matter movement in and beyond North America, I maintain that a reimagining of inclusion requires not only attention to ideas across traditions and contexts, but also emancipatory struggles that illustrate how democratic agency can be used to resist unjust political orders in new, creative ways.

As a work of comparative political theory, the scope of my project is restricted to only a select set of historical moments across traditions. At the same time, by showing how such traditions are in many ways interdependent and co-constitutive, part of my intention is to further break down the binaries that have been constructed to mark the experiences of various human societies as somehow essentially different. Hence, returning to Arendt and Said, I look to reframe ideas of tradition, storytelling, and new beginnings in light of the comparative work suggested. Exilic thinking and resistance are placed at the centre of this theoretical intervention to designate democratic thinking as a ubiquitous feature of human societies. With the final shift toward praxis, I consider the efficacy of sharing aesthetic, literary, and exilic narratives in enabling new beginnings through resistance against exclusion across traditions. Beyond recognising and cultivating such narratives, the praxis of anti-exclusionary politics requires attentiveness to three overlapping spheres of influence which I go on to identify as *exposure*, *education*, and *interaction*. Through this work, I hope to contribute a distinct narratological method to complement existing approaches to comparative political thought, and a sketch of the ways in which the insights gained could be applied to further cultivate practices of democratic agency and enact meaningful challenges to structures of domination across different societies.

Chapter Two: Agency and Resistance in Sufi Poetry: The Political Narratives of Rumi and Hafez

It is binding on the king to study religious matters, to carry out his duties in keeping with tradition and the commands of God, and to put them into practice, respecting religious scholars who interpret and transmit knowledge of religion and law.

—Nizam al-Mulk, *The Book of Government*⁴⁴

Expertise is gained through disputation,
A craft is gained through practice.
But the way of the dervish is found through *sohbat*
Not just the work of your tongue or hand.
This knowledge passes from soul to soul,
Not through the jurist's texts or words.

—Rumi, *Masnavī-e Ma'navī*⁴⁵

Come, sheikh, to our tavern
And drink wine you won't find in heaven.
Wipe clean the pages of your schooling
And learn with us,
For the knowledge of love
Isn't found in any book.

—Hafez, *Dīvān*⁴⁶

I. Selfhood and Agency across Traditions

Politics, understood as the art of governing ourselves, is inextricably intertwined with the notion of commemoration through narratives, or preservation of words and deeds through collective authorship. Politics is born out of—and always finds expression in—narratives. Narratives that inscribe agency among the people are crucial to resistance against exclusion, as agency enables the excluded to recognise their capacity for fuller participation and assert their

⁴⁴ Nizam al-Mulk, *Siyasatnameh [The Book of Government]* (Tehran: Tehran Mosavvar, 1334 AH [1965 AD]), 68. All translations are my own, unless stated otherwise.

⁴⁵ Jalāl ud-Dīn Rumi, *Masnavī-e Ma'navī*, (Kerman: Kerman Cultural Foundation Press, 1384 AH [2005 AD]), 5:47; hereafter cited as *Masnavī* followed by book and section numbers. I have left the word *sohbat* in the original Farsi here as it constitutes a crucial concept whose meaning and translatability will have to be teased out in pages to follow.

⁴⁶ Hafez, *Dīvān*, (Tehran: Safi Ali Shah Publishing, 1379 AH [2000 AD]), ghazal 162; hereafter cited with ghazal numbers.

right to challenge authorities that seek to impose various structures of domination. I begin this chapter with these premises to reassert a fundamental claim in relation to the concept of inclusivity: the expansion of a political realm that empowers its participants to take part in collective self-governance depends on the story those participants tell themselves about their capacity for agency.

Storytelling is a vital activity through which human beings have sought to establish their place in the world, wherever they have found themselves. To tell a story is to situate ourselves temporally in relation to other human beings, always entailing a political dimension. As Arendt puts it, “With word and deed we insert ourselves into the human world, and this insertion is like a second birth, in which we confirm and take upon ourselves the naked fact of our original physical appearance” (HC 176). Within the web of human plurality, action and speech work in tandem to bind people together politically (182) just as they allow individuals to disclose and solidify their particular identities (183-4).

Building on the methodology established in my first chapter, here I note another affinity between Arendt and Said’s thinking, as both reassert the profoundly political essence of human endeavours to tell stories. In Said’s words, “texts are worldly, to some degree they are events, and, even when they appear to deny it, they are nevertheless a part of the social world, human life, and of course the historical moments in which they are located and interpreted” (1983, 4). As noted in my introduction, Said would use this approach to understand how human self-fashioning occurs under given social and political circumstances, including in his reading of Erich Auerbach’s hermeneutical philology (Said in Auerbach 2003, xiii). Within this scheme, narratives are not only shaped by the prescriptions of a given political order, but they also become the way through which human beings question and refine that order by *writing*

themselves into existence. This emphasis on action again resembles Arendt at her most agonistic moments in *The Human Condition*, where she grounded self-fashioning in the world of the ancient Greeks, for whom

The public realm itself, the *polis*, was permeated by a fiercely agonal spirit, where everybody had constantly to distinguish himself from all others, to show through unique deeds or achievements that he was the best of all (*aien aristuein*). The public realm, in other words, was reserved for individuality; it was the only place where men could show who they really and inexchangeably were (41).

As she would go on to say, this spirit, found as far back as Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, was stifled by the Socratic and Aristocratic schools, such that Plato and Aristotle prescribed a retreat from action (*praxis*) into the more reliable, end-oriented activity of legislation as a form of making (*poiesis*) (195). The very idea of the *polis*, however, would remind all future inheritors of the Greek tradition that the space of appearance is always available wherever human beings live and act together, making their existence known to one another through acts and deeds to collectively constitute a political realm (198-9).

Arendt's focus on the Greeks and the Romans is undoubtedly important insofar as it reveals particular iterations of what would come to be seen as a tradition later inherited by Europe. But again, to bring in Said's thinking as both a complementary and corrective approach, I maintain that a more globally-oriented, comparative perspective reveals the quest for self-fashioning and agency to be more than a Greco-Roman invention. My contention beginning in this chapter is that a *literary* tendency—where literary is understood to mean narratively-driven, authorial acts of self-fashioning—undergirds *political* expressions of democratic agency and empowerment across societies. Thus, while the experiences and writings of ancient Greek and Roman thinkers hold undeniable significance for future conceptions of political agency in the Western world, there are multiple routes to agency that I argue are noteworthy. The rest of this

section considers the universalistic tendency of narrativity in world literature before focusing on one distinct trajectory that agency takes in the Islamic tradition of political thought.

As many foundational ancient texts demonstrate, writing—preserving action and speech—entails political intention and meaning-making. This is true of some of the earliest extant remains of world literature as it is of the kind of writing explicitly called political. The *Epic of Gilgamesh*, rooted in a tradition dating back at least four millennia, is a case in point. At the barest level, this human endeavour constituting one of the earliest forms of literature to be preserved for posterity was concerned with the essential question of political legitimacy. And even more importantly, the form and rhetoric of the poem remained characteristically grounded in storytelling to explore and seek to establish such legitimacy. It is as much a story of a personal journey and meaning-making in the face of death as it is a questioning of a king's duty to his subjects. Early in the standard version, Gilgamesh is described as a powerful king—two-thirds god and one-third human—terrorising the people of Uruk, who in turn complain of him: “The young men of Uruk he harries without warrant,/ Gilgamesh lets no son go free to his father./ By day and by night his tyranny grows harsher,/ Gilgamesh, [the guide of the teeming people!]” (I.67-70). The gods' response to send Enkidu as a warrior to challenge Gilgamesh's rule signals a political concern at the heart of the text: the ordering of the political realm is a human concern to be sorted out among those who vie for leadership. Hence Enkidu's assertion about Gilgamesh: “I will challenge him... I shall change the way things are ordered” (I.220-23). Gilgamesh's defeat of Enkidu and the latter's acceptance of the king's legitimacy in turn serve as rhetorical devices in the poem to establish an accepted basis for rulership through a story to be passed down. The rest of the poem then turns to perennially human concerns: Gilgamesh's confrontation with mortality as he journeys to unknown realms. The fiction, the myth-making at work

throughout the these parts of the text become a reflection in the widest sense of the word: mirroring the world, thinking about what it means and asking if we want it to remain the way that it is. For Gilgamesh, mortality becomes a fact to be accepted, and the only forms nearing immortality are monuments and stories to be left for posterity (XI.311-329). The king's journey and deeds, his story and actions, serve as the basis for his intended legitimacy in the incipient forms of political understanding in Sumerian civilisation, and provide an early instance of ancient storytelling grappling with notions of order and selfhood.

The centrality of the concept of order in Plato's philosophy—along with its implications for the constitution of selfhood and concomitant political concerns—makes him an indispensable point of reference not only among ancients but as an influence on subsequent political thought across centuries. So it is to be expected that Arendt kept him, albeit critically, as a focal point in her analysis of the Western tradition (HC 221-224). Creating a sense of order and harmony out of chaos is vital to Plato's project of glorifying philosophy, and serves the secondary purpose of extending a political tradition (BPF 17-18). Beyond Homeric heroism (HC 186) and Herodotus' linear conception of human action through time (HC 18-19), Plato's emphasis on the harmony of the soul mirroring the ordering of the political realm instantiates a worldview that would become vastly influential among his inheritors and interpreters. On this scheme, the "correct" order of the soul as reason's control over passions with the aid of spirit (*Republic* IV.432, 443d; and *Phaedrus* 256) is reflected in the constitution of an ideal government anchored in essential truths supposedly accessible to a supreme ruler who keeps the rest of society in check (*Republic* III.411-14; *Laws* 709-12).⁴⁷ This arrangement between selfhood and political order meant that agency was not precluded altogether in Plato's philosophy, especially considering the notion of

⁴⁷ This scheme is tempered in *Statesman* 293-300 where there is more emphasis on a code of law.

the unified agent in *Protagoras* and *The Republic*, further supported by the famed treatments of self-mastery in *Phaedo*, *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, throughout Plato's works, it is difficult not to see that agency was confined to a chosen few, considered a gift from the gods in *Meno*; a privilege for those purified by philosophy in *Phaedo*; and accessible to those able to seek beauty through self-control in *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*. Plato's conclusions on authority held it to be administered by the wise who command the rest (*Republic* III.389b-e; and *Laws* 7 & 10) thus rendering politics and political agency unnecessary (BPF 17-18).

In laying out the problematics of Plato's writings on the limitations of agency and its subsequent influence on political thought from late antiquity onward, a crucial point to bear in mind about him is that ultimately, he was a storyteller. That is, despite all of Socrates' claims about timeless truths being accessible to philosophers, Plato was himself a self-recognised mythmaker and narrator. The self-reflexivity of Plato's role as a storyteller is perceptible throughout much of the *Republic* (especially II.377c-383c; III.392a-398a; III.414b-415d; VII.514-520, all with emphasis on persuasion through rhetoric and storytelling). It is, in fact, literally present from beginning to end, with the opening line, "I went down to the Piraeus yesterday" (I.327a) signalling the narrative device to be used until the very last lines: "if we are persuaded by me, we'll believe that the soul is immortal and able to endure every evil and every good, and we'll always hold to the upward path, practicing justice with reason in every way.... Hence, both in this life and on the thousand-year journey we've described, we'll do well and be happy" (X.621c-d). Plato's rhetorical strategies, and especially his use of storytelling through fictional representation in the three abovementioned dialogues, are well-noted (Nussbaum 1986, 136-234). The point that I want to emphasise with regard to his *political* significance is that,

⁴⁸ This question of agency is also discussed in Shields in Bobonich and Destree, eds. *Akrasia in Greek Philosophy*, (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

though he was an indisputably influential thinker, he is ultimately one among many writers whose contributions to political thought depended on the strength of the story he told about what constitutes a well-ordered, harmonious life, and who is supposedly best fitted to lead others toward it. And this literary propensity is, in my estimation, the key determining factor for how conceptions of selfhood and agency would develop in and beyond the West, as the stories became refracted by later philosophical and theological interpretations.

Even a cursory look at traditions beyond the West would reveal myriad examples of classical texts concerned with questions of order and selfhood. Prominent illustrative examples may include the *Bhagavad Gita*⁴⁹ and Confucius' *Analects*⁵⁰. The former, as part of the larger framework of the Hindu epic *Mahabharata*, is an ancient story that explores ethics, spirituality, and politics through the narrative of prince Arjuna's self-questioning as he contemplates the imperatives of selfless action and duties toward others. The latter is another well-known and vastly influential exploration of duty, virtue, and political dilemmas, set in the form of instructive dialogue. My intention, of course, is not to undertake a survey of these broader tendencies across traditions. I only point to these as demonstrative instances of a wider trend in which explorations of political problems have been bound up with discursive techniques of storytelling. All such developments entailed narratives: who "we" are, who is part of our community, to what extent we believe we are able to govern ourselves, what kind of order is best and who fits in that order. Turning to reread Rumi and Hafez politically can reveal surprises in the way such wider tendencies ramify and become particularised in the distinct lifeworlds they occupied.

⁴⁹ See, in particular, discussions of order, reason, and duty in sections 2.11-72; 3.3-43; 4.19-42; 5.2-26; and 18.2-73 of *The Bhagavad Gita*, trans. Juan Mascaro (London: Penguin Classics, 2003), 48-122.

⁵⁰ Consider especially the discussions of duties in private and public life, in sections 1:1-14; 2:3; 12:1-17; and 16:1 of Confucius, *Analects*, trans. Arthur Waley (London: Routledge, 2005), 83-208

II. Foregrounding a Political Legacy

The names Rumi and Hafez may evoke, for many, an air of mysticism, mystery, and the “exotic,” properly belonging to an esoteric realm of poetry. The notion that these two thinkers may be read as political has rarely been explored—least of all in political theory.⁵¹ Through the rest of this chapter, I argue that Jalāl ud-Dīn Rumi and Shams ud-Dīn Muhammad Hafez Shīrāzī can and should be read not only as poets offering valuable inroads for understanding moral dimensions of Persian and Islamic political thought, but also as thinkers prompting a reconsideration of an essential concept in political philosophy more widely. The central motif of this story, constituting another reading of the exemplary Sufi poets, is a newly articulated conception of agency found flowing in their works, their lives, and their political legacy.

Rumi and Hafez evinced visions of human togetherness and community that would shape the literary, religious, and political landscape of an immense region spanning far beyond the modern-day Iran with which they are primarily associated. Speaking of the reach of their widely read texts—the *Masnavī* and *Dīvān* respectively—Shahab Ahmed would memorably term their range of influence as the “*Balkans-to-Bengal complex*,” which has historically been “home to the absolute demographic majority of Muslims on the planet.”⁵² In Ahmed’s *What is Islam?*, Rumi and Hafez occupy a central role for the “poetical, conceptual, and lexical presence in the discourse of educated Muslims” from the Balkans to the Bay of Bengal. These poets, he argues, have done much to rethink and rewrite what it means to be Islamic, often by challenging seemingly authoritative interpretations of Islam with their unorthodox, scandalous espousal of wine-drinking and defiance of “observant ritual piety” as the ways to a deeper sense of

⁵¹ Notable scholars who approach them from outside political theory include Abdolkarim Soroush and Shahab Ahmed, to be discussed below.

⁵² Shahab Ahmed, *What is Islam?: The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016) 32.

communion and community.⁵³ But for all the brilliance and erudition of his narrative, Ahmed never went far enough in considering the *political* implications of his analysis. As Murad Idris notes, politics is somehow largely absent in Ahmed's treatment; and "these elisions of politics are notable in *What is Islam?* because the basis for an account of power is present in small remarks and details, often in the background."⁵⁴ My specific focus on Rumi and Hafez seeks to build on pathbreaking studies like Ahmed's by elaborating a distinctly political reading of Sufi poetry and expounding the agentic, discursive power they exacted on their respective societies and beyond. The purpose of this reading, in keeping with the earlier stated aims of my dissertation, is to extend work in the field of comparative political theory (CPT) by locating a distinct iteration of agency in a setting and a set of readings heretofore underappreciated for their political implications.

CPT's burgeoning output in recent years has offered a stimulating array of ways to question political theory's longstanding parochialism and rethink the concepts at work in evaluating political problems across time and place. Given the field's broad discursive space and its critical insistence to think beyond the categories of culture and tradition (Euben 2006; Jenco 2014; Idris 2016), interrogations of the politics of translation and translatability have remained a focal point among its explorations. Concepts like "tradition," alongside "tolerance" (Iqtidar 2016) and "humiliation" (Euben in Jenco et al 2020) have come under critical appraisal, accompanied by a wider concern about the complexities and potential pitfalls of comparison across contexts (Hooker in Jenco et al 2020).

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Murad Idris, "The Politics of *What is Islam?* What Kind of Question is This, Anyway?" *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 40, no. 1 (2020): 199.

At the same time, CPT scholars leaning toward democratic theory have maintained that dialogue and efforts to translate ideas across contexts still constitute worthwhile endeavours, not least because they see political theory writ large as always already dialogical and driven by the need “to get others’ thought right *on its own terms*.”⁵⁵ Though there are serious obstacles to what could constitute “genuine dialogue,” theorists insisting on an ethic of openness and receptivity see this engagement as crucial for the democratic ends of acting together and undoing unjust practices of domination.⁵⁶ Listening and learning can extend the work of deparochialising political thought and mark the beginning of new conversations and encounters, with the crucial caveat that the attempts be kept in check by an active awareness of one’s own presumptions and biases.⁵⁷ As Melissa Williams and Mark Warren maintain, CPT provides critical reflexivity to democratic theory because it extends “critical dialogue about what we ought to do”⁵⁸ to sociohistorical contexts beyond the ones to which much of political theory has historically restricted itself. Building on Andrew March’s generative overview,⁵⁹ they look to CPT as a way to spur democratic possibilities in stages of empathy, representation, translation, discourse, and action.⁶⁰ More recently, Williams has suggested that this work, situated between democratic theory and CPT, invites us to reconsider “the defining ideals of democratic politics,”⁶¹ and “think

⁵⁵ Melissa Williams and Mark Warren, “A Democratic Case for Comparative Political Theory.” *Political Theory* 42, no. 1 (2014): 35. Original emphasis.

⁵⁶ James Tully, “Deparochializing Political Theory and Beyond: A Dialogue Approach to Comparative Political Thought.” *Journal of World Philosophies* 1 (Winter 2016): 55.

⁵⁷ Emily Beausoleil, “Gather Your People: Learning to Listen Intergenerationally in Settler-Indigenous Politics,” *Political Theory* 48, no. 6 (2020): 668.

⁵⁸ Williams and Warren, 36.

⁵⁹ See March, “What is Comparative Political Theory?” *The Review of Politics* 71 (2009): 531-65. Here, March identified the goals of CPT as *epistemic, global-democratic, critical-transformative, explanatory-interpretive, and rehabilitative*.

⁶⁰ Williams and Warren, 43-5.

⁶¹ Melissa Williams, *Deparochializing Political Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 17.

beyond the usual boundaries of our field... to explore deparochializing as an ethos, as a practice, and as an intergenerational project.”⁶²

My inquiry into Sufi poetry as a site of political agency is driven by both the critical sensibility of CPT studies that question the basis of such concepts being ascribed as peculiar to the “West,” and the problem-driven approach of more democratic theory-oriented work that seeks democratic possibilities in contexts outside the purview of existing studies in political theory. On my reading, the distinction or bifurcation of two traditions—which insists on viewing the “West” as champion of political agency and social emancipation while either ignoring or dismissing other traditions like the Persian/Islamic as inextricably bound to authoritarian strictures and conformity—would thus be thrown further into doubt and questioned anew.⁶³ Through this re-examination, my principal aim in this chapter will be to show how Rumi and Hafez’s political significance, though understudied, can be considerably extended to yield fresh insights for both comparative political thought and democratic theory.

III. Politics, Religion, and the Persianate Tradition of *adab* in Early Islamic Thought

The worlds inhabited by Rumi and Hafez were marked by flourishing, though often heated, debates about the meanings and applications of Islam, literature/ethics (*adab*), and

⁶² Ibid, 21.

⁶³ Among the most salient examples typifying the tracing of political agency back to generally “Western”—and more specifically Kantian—ethics include John Rawls, “Kantian Constructivism in Moral Theory,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 77, No. 9 (1980): 515-572; Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996); Christine Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity* (New York: Cambridge University Press 1996); and Onora O’Neill, *From Principles to Practice: Normativity and Judgment in Ethics and Politics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018). Rainer Forst and Seyla Benhabib are among a growing group of critical theorists expressing openness to other contexts and iterations of democratic principles beyond the strictly Kantian sources. See Rainer Forst, *Normativity and Power: Analyzing Social Orders of Justification* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 147; and Seyla Benhabib, *Another Cosmopolitanism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 18-20, 48-61. For an earlier, germinal exploration of agency in Islamic feminist thought, see Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2005), 153-199.

philosophy (*falsafeh*) in public discourse. Though Islam and *adab* occupy central positions in much of the scholarship on these two thinkers, the primary entry point should be politics. This, as I look to show in this section, is because the debates that public figures—jurists, poets, theologians, kings and viziers—engaged in to contest moral and ethical norms were invariably mediated by political decisions.

On one side, as Islamic legal theory took shape from the 9th century CE onward, the nominal trustees of God’s will who were to look after “the interests of the world and the well-being of His servants” (al-Mulk 1965, 9) tasked themselves with the maintenance of political order through divinely sanctioned sovereignty and religious orthodoxy. Kings, caliphs, and viziers employed Islamic legal scholars (*faqih*s) and judges (*qāzis*) to establish and propagate a particular understanding of “the Truth” derived from expert readings of the Quran and *hadīth*, sanctified texts believed to contain the sayings, actions, and advice of the Prophet Muhammad. These modes of control involved the mobilisation of material and discursive power through centralised authority. As various dynasties from the Abbasids to the Ghaznavids, Seljuqs and Khwarazmians looked to secure a monopoly on violence in their given territories, they regularly combined physical force and coercion with legalistic and institutional mechanisms to solidify their claims to legitimacy as proper interpreters and representatives of God’s decrees for just and virtuous rule. However, to focus on this set of discourses as exclusively or primarily illustrative of the political spirit of the age as certain scholars have done (Lapidus 1988, 31-196; March 2019, 16-32) would be to tell only half of the story. For running parallel to such longstanding efforts by executive and juridical authorities to maintain sovereignty, another tradition had been thriving and often intervening vehemently to challenge, disrupt and displace the loci of power from Damascus and Baghdad to Nishapur and Bukhara.

On the other side of political and juridical authority, dissent and contestation over the fundamental tenets and doctrines of Islam had been accumulating as far back as the religion's formative stages. The transition to the "Islamic Golden Age" in the 9th century CE inaugurated a period of cultural flourishing that remains staggering to modern interpreters for the sheer range of its output. The cosmopolitan exchange prompted by the ascendancy and intellectual patronage of the Abbasid dynasty engendered public discourse informed not only by localised traditions and knowledge but more notably a synthesis of learning through ancient texts that were rediscovered, translated and reinterpreted by scholars throughout the realm. These translations and commentaries revived ancient Greek philosophical texts,⁶⁴ alongside the homegrown *kalām* and *tafsir* traditions of Islamic theology and Quranic exegesis.⁶⁵ And they led to generative though sometimes tense disagreements among the likes of al-Kindī, al-Farabi and Ibn Sīna, some of the most foundational thinkers of what has come to be called Islamic philosophy.⁶⁶ The range of ideas and interpretations that emerged from such fruitful debates anticipated a challenge to the dominant norms and fixed meanings of Islam and "Truth" that executive and juridical authorities had sought to secure in the centuries comprising the religion's formative period. No such challenge would emerge as forcefully, as urgently, or as resolutely, as that of Sufism.

Far from a mere minor branch or "marginal" version of early Islam (cf. Gardet in Holt, Lambton and Lewis, 1970, 569-603), Sufism is based on an understanding of Islam that has

⁶⁴ Most notably Aristotle and neo-Platonists like Plotinus and Proclus. See Cristina D'Ancona, "Greek into Arabic: Neoplatonism in Translation," in Peter Adamson and Richard C. Taylor (eds.) *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 24-6.

⁶⁵ See Peter Heath, *Allegory and Philosophy in Avicenna* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 27, 116; Peter Adamson, *Al-Kindī* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 15-16; Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Mehdi Aminrazavi (eds.), *An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia Vol. 1: From Zoroaster to Omar Khayyam* (London, I.B. Tauris: 2008), 6-8; and Jon McGinnis, "Avicenna's Natural Philosophy" in Peter Adamson (ed.), *Interpreting Avicenna: Critical Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 90.

⁶⁶ As Shahab Ahmed notes (2016, 11), in light of the vast influences that went into shaping such divergent ideas, it is worth asking what precisely is Islamic about them to begin with. I follow up on this line of inquiry below.

arguably existed as far back as the religion's inception among the Prophet Muhammad and his followers.⁶⁷ This understanding is based in part on historiographical writings on, and readings of, the Quran which insist that the path to God is through the figure of the Prophet; and that through allegiance (*bay'ah*) to Muhammad, followers and seekers could experientially reach connection to God.⁶⁸ Sufism's very meaning, based on widely accepted etymological roots, refers back to the humility exemplified in the early orders' preference for simple long garments made of wool (*sūf* in Arabic) and devotion to inward spiritual searching rather than outward appearance.⁶⁹

Despite this emphasis on interiorisation and the inward dimension of spirituality, however, the accentuation of human companionship and communion as the path to unity with God and higher knowledge remained equally strong in Sufism. One of the most famous early Sufis, Mansūr Hallāj (858—922), strengthened the foundations for this line of thinking with his widely-quoted sayings and poems that sought to break down the very distinction between God and the individual human self: “Is it you or I? That would be two gods in me;/ far, far be it from you to assert duality!”⁷⁰ Taken alongside his striking declaration “I am the Truth,” Hallāj's insistence on self-annihilation, unity and one-ness with God earned him the deep suspicion and eventual grounds for persecution on the part of authorities in the Abbasid court of Baghdad. As recorded in the towering intellectual biography by Louis Massignon, Hallāj's confinement and eventual execution on orders of the Caliph Muqtadir and his vizier were undeniably motivated by

⁶⁷ See Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Garden of Truth: The Vision and Promise of Sufism, Islam's Mystical Tradition* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 166-7.

⁶⁸ The surah often referred to for this interpretation is 48:8-10: “Truly We have seen thee as a witness, as a bearer of glad tidings, and as a warner,/ that you may believe in God and His Messenger, and support Him, and honor Him, and that you may glorify Him morning and evening./ Truly those who pledge allegiance unto thee pledge allegiance only unto God. The Hand of God is over their hands.” This translation is from *The Study Quran*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (New York: HarperCollins, 2015).

⁶⁹ Nasr, *Garden of Truth*, 171.

⁷⁰ Husayn Ibn Mansūr Hallāj, *Hallāj: Poems of a Sufi Martyr*, trans. Carl Ernst (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2018), 167.

political ends, as the Sufi's preaching about unity with the divine were coupled with a sharp defiance of the legitimacy of governing authorities.⁷¹ Against the legalistic conception of Islam for political expediency, Hallāj advocated "Essential Desire" among human beings as bonds of love and mutual care that constituted the true basis of social and political order.⁷² His martyrdom provided inspiration to later efforts by Sufi poets and thinkers to critique political executives and authorities for their narrow worldly and legalistic interpretations of Islam as a basis for legitimacy.

Rumi and Hafez would stand on the shoulders of many other prominent Sufi-inspired philosophers and poets who challenged and often scandalised political authorities and the so-called "doctors of the law" with writings that espoused heterodox views on how "Truth" in matters of religion, authority, and sovereignty ought to be understood.⁷³ What binds all of them together is a recalcitrant, untiring insistence on imagining philosophy, Islam, authority and governance *otherwise*—that is, refusing to accept the legitimacy of sovereigns and the jurisconsults they employed to assert and sustain legal authority. This legacy of nonconformism, I maintain, is testament to the perennially *political* concerns of early Sufis and serves as a foundation for the radical resistance articulated in Rumi and Hafez's poetry to be elaborated in the pages that follow.

⁷¹ Louis Massignon, *The Passion of al-Hallāj: Mystic and Martyr of Islam, Vol.1* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982) 224-453.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 338.

⁷³ Anything nearing an exhaustive analysis of these other thinkers would require a book-length treatment, but to briefly list some of the most notable predecessors to Rumi and Hafez, they include 'Ayn al-Qudāt (d. 1131) and Shahāb ud-Dīn Suhrawardī (d. 1191), both of whom, like Hallāj, were put to death by authorities for their esoteric beliefs; and those who had more of an immediate impact on Rumi: Sanā'ī, (d. 1131), Farīd ud-Dīn Attār (d. 1220) and Shams-e Tabrīzī (d. 1248), on whom much more is to be said below. For an influential overview of the differences between exoteric political theology and dissident theosophy as exemplified in other sources like Ibn 'Arabi, see Henry Corbin, *Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969).

Before engaging with Rumi and Hafez’s texts to trace the contours of political resistance and agency running through them, it is important to say a word about their status *as* texts—specifically as literature, as poetry. That the two chose to write and express their thinking extensively through poetic styles—particularly the *masnavī* and *ghazal* forms—is of crucial significance for situating their ethical concerns and aims. The tradition of *adab*, which they worked within and expanded greatly, was a vital conduit for expounding ethical conduct in the vast imaginative landscape over which their words held sway. The word *adab* in Farsi denotes, by turns, proper comportment and behaviour, a suitable and sensible way of conducting oneself in relation to others, and a sense of culture and education. Etymologically, it is also directly related to the word “literature” (pluralised as *adabiyat*). As such, in the Persianate imaginary, form and conduct in ethical matters are inextricably bound up with style and aesthetic sense derived from storytelling, poetry, and the recitation of instructive anecdotes to reinforce a deeply relational understanding of the self and its place in the social world.⁷⁴ Like Sanā’ī, Attar, Saadi and numerous others who enriched the *adab* tradition, Rumi and Hafez wrote largely in poetic form in order to instruct and ethically guide their readers—to charm and convince them of their wisdom through aesthetic, affective appeal alongside substantive, critical appeal to reason.⁷⁵ More than that, their preferred mode of expression was in many ways a form of political dissidence given the precedents of persecution at the hands of juridical authorities who upheld legalistic language and doctrinal teachings of Islamic law (*fiqh*). To round out this first section on the political context and backdrop against which Rumi and Hafez wrote, I turn to a final

⁷⁴ As Mana Kia notes, the concept of *adab* is widely known and appreciated by those exposed to or raised under the tradition and is particularly salient in textual and oral recitations of the writers who inscribed it as a mode of knowing and guiding ethical conduct. See *Persianate Selves: Memories of Place and Origin Before Nationalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020), 3-20.

⁷⁵ Cyrus Ali Zargar discusses Sufi poetry as a “contradictive medium” that defies and resists the rational proofs of medieval Islamic philosophy and religious law. See *Sufi Aesthetics: Beauty, Love, and the Human Form in the Writings of Ibn ‘Arabi and ‘Iraqi* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2013), 137-8.

example of a dominant set of discourses opposed to and resisted by the *adab* tradition. This imperious force finds perhaps its fullest expression in the infamous and vastly influential figure of Nizam al-Mulk (1018—1092).

As the most important vizier of the Seljuq dynasty, which left a deep impact on the later political orders Rumi and Hafez navigated, Nizam al-Mulk had been responsible for directing vast territorial expansion and centralised political authority under the monarchs Alp Arslan and Malik Shah I. Before his ignominious end at the hands of Ismaili dissidents—the so-called *hashishiyan* from whom the word “assassin” derives—al-Mulk spent a lifetime trying to consolidate the absolute sovereignty of the Seljuq kings who upheld the directives of governance and *faqih*s who provided its legal underpinnings. One of his most significant and lasting contributions in this regard was the establishment of the *Nezamiyyeh* theological schools across the Seljuq empire.

Beginning with the first college founded in Baghdad, al-Mulk established a system that provided rigorous education in religious and legal matters under professors of law selected for their expertise in upholding a “proper” interpretation of Islamic law. The most influential of these Islamic jurists was none other than the famed *hujjat al-Islam* (“proof of Islam”) Abu Hamid al-Ghazālī, whom al-Mulk appointed as professor of law at the *Nezamiyyeh* in Baghdad. It was in this context that al-Ghazālī would come to serve as the philosophical and legally authoritative mouthpiece for Nizam al-Mulk’s political project. In reference to such authorities providing advice for “just rule,” al-Mulk held that a king should “invite religious elders to his presence and hear from them the commands of The Truth” so that “the way of prudence and rectitude in both spiritual and temporal affairs will be open to him [and] no heretic or innovator will be able to turn him from that path” (1965, 60). With these moves, al-Mulk entrenched the

material and discursive means through which the power to determine the “True” meaning of Islam and political order would be propagated in centuries to follow. Rumi would be inculcated with such teachings through his father Bahā ud-Dīn—himself a theologian and jurist—as well as through his own schooling on the correct understanding and application of Islam and moral mandates. Yet despite the deep-seated and overwhelming force of these strictures, he would go on to formulate a radically different and dissident understanding of ethical and political conduct that would reshape the imaginative landscape of the region for ages to come.

IV. The Political (in) Rumi

Rumi’s reputation, both in his homeland and beyond it, tends to rely on his association with mysticism and poetry as a means to deeper spirituality in the private realm (Lewis 2007, 1-4). In order to rescue the public, political elements of Rumi, we would need to begin by situating him in the perilous, rapidly changing social milieu of greater Iran in the 13th century. The vast landscape he traversed—from Balkh in modern-day Afghanistan to Khorasan, Baghdad, Damascus and finally Konya in the Seljuq Sultanate of Rūm from which his common moniker derives—provides an early clue into the public spirit of his life’s work, marked by a cosmopolitan disposition and dedication to writing against intolerance in all its forms. Fleeing his birthplace with his father to escape the ongoing Mongol invasions and migrating westward, Rumi came to characterise his life as a *search*—not merely for a kind of understanding to be gained through his books of learning, but of a deeper appreciation for human connection through lived experience. Nowhere is this profound search more evident than in Rumi’s *Dīvān-e Shams*, dedicated to the person who would shape his philosophical and political outlook from the time of their encounter in Konya.

Before the decisive turn in his thinking, Rumi had entered into the world of scholarship and teaching through his theological and legal training. Following in his father Bahā ud-Dīn's footsteps, he had been schooled in the rigid legal and ritual practices of the Hanafi school to prepare as an Islamic jurist. By around the year 1240, in his early thirties, he inherited his father's position as head of the local *madrasseh* where he taught and began to issue fatwas and advice to his followers in Konya. It was shortly after this time that Rumi met Shams-e Tabrizi, a wandering scholar who became his guide and upturned his worldview. The change in Rumi is notable in the first ghazal of the massive tome he dedicated to his mentor:

Unexpected rebirth and endless forgiveness,
A blazing fire in my thoughts,
Today you came with laughter, with a key to my prison,
You came to the wretched like the grace and goodness of God.
You are the way to the sun, the source of hope,
You are the seeker and the answer sought, end and beginning.
Residing in every chest, adorning every idea,
You are the desire of the self and the way to its realisation,
An irreplaceable spirit inspiring knowledge [*ilm*] and action [*amal*]...⁷⁶
(*Dīvān-e Shams*, ghazal 1).

This fervent, seemingly hyperbolic, poetic language contains much more than mere devotion to an individual human guide. In Shams, Rumi found not only a kindred spirit but especially a way to epistemological and ethical transformation. That this path is made possible through physical co-presence and dialogue—the corporeal aspect of human relationality—is deeply significant for the phenomenological shift in Rumi's thinking. That is, rather than continuing to look for knowledge and guidance for ethical comportment in his legalistic books of learning, Rumi found a path for meaning-making in the very person of Shams and in his interactions with him.⁷⁷ Hence

⁷⁶ Mawlana Jalāl ud-Dīn Mohammad Mowlavi Balkhi [Rumi], *Dīvān-e Shams-e Tabrīzī* in *Kulliyate Shams-e Tabrizi* [*The Dīvān of Shams of Tabriz in The Complete Works on Shams of Tabriz*] (Tehran: University of Tehran Press, 1396 [2017]), ghazal 1; hereafter cited as *Dīvān-e Shams*, followed by the ghazal number.

⁷⁷ In much the same way as Dante carved out a way for self-fashioning through the figure of Beatrice in his *Vita Nuova* and *Divina Commedia*.

it is Shams who inspires *ilm*, a word traditionally associated with scientific knowledge and the forms of cognition that provided the basis of epistemology and legal norms in medieval Islamic philosophy.⁷⁸ And it is also Shams who inspires *amal*, synonymous with action and praxis, providing a glimpse into a sense of agency to be developed in Rumi's thought and writings.

The shift from a rigid understanding of Islamic law and tightly controlled religious praxis to a freer, more open understanding of ethical comportment is especially salient in Rumi's language of *wine-drinking*. This practice, imbued with both literal and figurative meaning, would figure prominently in Persianate poetry and Sufi writings more widely, consolidated and perhaps made most famous by Rumi and Hafez.⁷⁹ Intoxication and the celebration of carnal love alongside Platonic and divine love may not at first glance seem befitting for the kind of spiritual leader Rumi was becoming. But that celebration is exactly what he turned to in the epistemological shift evidenced in the closing lines of the first ghazal in his *Dīvān-e Shams*: “Silence now, since I rushed to find refuge at the foot of the jurist's knowledge [*ilm*];/ Let the paper go and snap the pen, the *saqi* [wine-bearer] has entered, cheers to your health,” (lines 19-20). The figure of the *saqi* entering and bringing wine signals a new path for Rumi: away from

⁷⁸ Cf. Frank Griffel, *Al-Ghazali's Philosophical Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 210; Peter Adamson, *Al-Kindī*, 6, 16, 102; and Dimitri Gutas, “Avicenna's philosophical project,” in Adamson, ed., *Interpreting Avicenna*, 28-32. The common legalistic understanding of *ilm*, according to Wael Hallaq, would be “the genuine understanding of the quality of textual evidence and the lines of legal reasoning through which legal norms are derived.” See *Authority, Continuity, and Change in Islamic Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 4. In light of this common understanding of the term, Rumi's point of departure is all the more striking.

⁷⁹ See Zargar, *Sufi Aesthetics*, 37; and Ahmed, who lays out the context and significance of wine-drinking, anticipating Hafez: “The performative mise-en-scene for the ghazal is a drinking-assembly of the poet's social peers where the shared individual experience of loving is configured in and expressed by the consumption of wine as the definitive medium for the intoxication (that is, deepening and heightening and expanding) of the physical and imaginal senses. The ghazal became the pre-eminent literary form of self-construction and self-articulation—the literary being a discourse that is socially valorized as being rhetorically worked, experientially charged, and imaginatively invested for the purpose of creating, retaining and communicating social and existential meaning. The ghazal played this function most especially in societies of Muslims speaking Persian, (different types of) Turkish, and Urdu in the world of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex; Ḥāfiẓ being recognized as the most celebrated exemplar of this highly inter-allusive, inter-referential, and inter-textual discourse,” *What is Islam?* 32

his books of legal learning, toward a new phenomenological privileging of physical co-presence and connection as the basis of a higher knowledge. In this new conceptual frame, drunkenness and communion with the beloved form a conduit to a deeper appreciation of beauty and truth—not entirely different from the vision put forward by Socrates in Plato’s *Symposium*, but with an important theoretical lens and affective register now added by a particular understanding of Islam. Through the synthesis of medieval Islamic theology, Sufism and love poetry, Rumi forged a radical new understanding of the relationship between Self and Other, and by extension a guidebook for ethical praxis grounded in pluralism.

The pluralistic, political element of Rumi can first be gleaned through a series of ghazals elaborating the theme of communion as the path to understanding in the *Dīvān-e Shams*:

Love isn’t found in scholarly *ilm* or scattered pages or books:
Debates and disputations can never delimit the lovers’ path...
We deposed reason and made a new beginning,
For the logic and ethics that existed were not worthy of our greater knowledge.
So long as you go on longing, you become an idol-worshipper of desire;
Become one with the beloved and put an end to longing
(Ghazal 395).

Love is true government and true care of the self:
It is the meaning of a bigger heart, and true guidance.
Abu Hanifa never studied love,
Shafi’i never gave an account of it.⁸⁰
The laws of the permissible and impermissible pertain to earthly life,
But the *ilm*⁸¹ of lovers is eternal
(Ghazal 499).

Passages like these signal a movement toward a new epistemology grounded in empathy and dialogue at the most foundational level of human interaction and experience. For Rumi, knowledge is not to be found in the theological and juridical expertise of professionalized

⁸⁰ Rumi is here referring to the eponymous founders of the Shafi’i and Hanifa schools of Islamic jurisprudence dominant in his time, the latter being the one he was more closely trained in during his early years.

⁸¹ Again Rumi uses *ilm* in a different context here to differentiate it from scholarly, juridical learning and to further signal an epistemological shift toward an experiential, empathic knowledge.

scholars and the sovereigns and governors they serve. The basis of governance—of the self and the state—is to be found in the common bonds that tie human beings together in the public realm. Yet Rumi’s epistemological and political turn would be far from complete even at the end of his monumental *Dīvān-e Shams*, where in the final verse of the final ghazal he wrote: “I must stop speaking and turn to the path of silence,/ For though I speak, you keep my intelligence a secret from me” (ghazal 3230). This striking line indicates that even after all the ink spilt and all the verses sung seeking to understand the depth of meaning in his relation to Shams, Mawlana’s words still fail him. And after Shams’ disappearance, it would take many more lines in his magisterial *Masnavī* for Rumi to articulate a more complete political vision.

The *Masnavī-ye ma‘navī*, a massive composition of “Doublets of Meaning,” is frequently cited as Rumi’s magnum opus and even called “the Quran in Persian” given its influential exploration of the meanings of Islam in the Persian language. According to Shahab Ahmed, the *Masnavī* is “the historical exemplar of creative and explorative engagement with the Qur’an—that is, of exegesis by re-imagining, re-configuring, re-presenting, re-formulating, re-valorizing, and re-narrating” (Ahmed 2016, 306). This act of framing anew through a hermeneutical reappraisal of self-fashioning and ethical conduct comes to light through a narrative mode that combines the enjoinders of Quranic diction with storytelling techniques characteristic of the Persianate *adab* tradition. In some of the most striking lines in world literature, Rumi opens the *Masnavī* with an invitation to understand the pain of separation and the search for a higher union through human yearning for connection:

Listen to this reed-flute’s lament,
The story it tells of separation:
‘since they uprooted me from my reed-bed,
My song is sung through each human’s pain.
A breast torn asunder by estrangement
Is what I seek to express through this agony.

Those kept far from their true origin
Will yearn for union on the day of return'
(*Masnavi* 1:1-4).

This expression of longing and desire for communion at the heart of Rumi's work is more than mystical poetry: it is a signal toward more robust conceptions of epistemology and ethics. As Rumi makes clear between the introduction and the widely-cited fifth book of the *Masnavi*, his purposes are interpretive and didactic, going beyond the orthodox approach of Quranic exegesis through a relational path to truth that is mutually constituted among human beings through the *practice* of agency:

The Law [*shari'at*] is like learning the theory of alchemy from a teacher or a book, and the (Sufi) Path [*tariqah*] is (like) the transmutation of the copper into gold. Those who know alchemy rejoice in their knowledge of it, saying, "We know the theory of this (science)"; and those who practice it rejoice in their practice of it, saying, "We perform such works"; and those who have experienced the Real-Truth [*haqiqah*] rejoice in the Real-Truth, saying, "We have become gold and are delivered from the theory and practice of alchemy: we are God's freedmen" (*Masnavi*, 5:1-2, in Ahmed 2016, 22).

Thus freedom and intersubjectively constituted truths are acquired by praxis: on-the-ground exchanges among the people that break free of the scholarly "expertise" of juridical authorities. Through the Sufi "path," newly constructed truths are made in the act of storytelling—a narrative-based, dialogical, and pluralistic process. One of the best-known instances of such storytelling is found in the widely-cited allegory of the "elephant in the dark room":

An elephant was in a dark room, brought in by some Hindus to be exhibited.
To see it, many went, one by one, into that darkness.
As it was impossible to see it with their eyes, each one felt it with the palm of his hand.
One placed his palm on its trunk: he said 'this creature is like a water-pipe.'
Another's hand touched its ear: to him it appeared to be a fan.
Another put his palm on its leg: he said 'this is shaped like a pillar.'
Yet another laid his hand on its back: he said 'truly, this is like a throne.'
Likewise, the understanding [*fahm*] of each who heard [an account] depended on the part he touched (*Masnavi*, 3:49).

Building on this allegory, adapted from Sanā'ī,⁸² Rumi goes on to affirm the elusiveness of the *whole* truth (or *ḥaqīqat*, comparing to the passage above) based on individual perception, with the implication being that an epistemological basis for truth must be grounded in plurality, or perspectivism. More specifically, in a passage cited as an epigraph above and worth revisiting for further explication:

Expertise is gained through disputation,
A craft is gained through practice.
But the way of the dervish is found through *sohbat*
Not just the work of your tongue or hand.
This knowledge passes from soul to soul,
Not through the jurist's texts or words.⁸³

Within the background and context provided in this and the previous section, the meaning and intentions of Rumi's philosophical project should now come into sharper relief, showing how his principal concern all along has been an ethic of dialogue. The concept of *sohbat*, so central to Rumi's understanding of the dervish (Sufi) path, is taken to mean conversation in its most immediately felt phenomenological sense: physical co-presence engendering mutual understanding. The etymology of the word *sohbat*, from Arabic into Farsi, is rooted in the word for companionship and friendship (*suhba*). By extension, the physical accompaniment and amity between two or more individuals moves to talk and speech that engenders mutually constitutive meanings.⁸⁴ In either case, Rumi's emphasis on *sohbat* as dialogue is the highest expression of a re-centering of epistemology and ethics, away from the influence of political and legal

⁸² See Sanā'ī, *Hadiqat al-haqīqa*, 1:4. The story was in turn adapted from various sources in the Indian subcontinent, as variations are found in Jain, Buddhist, and Hindu sources all predating Sufism.

⁸³ Q.v. *Masnavī*, 5:47.

⁸⁴ A fairly close parallel of this mode of thinking is found in the etymology of the English words "converse" and "conversation," which in the Latin original literally denote a movement of "turning together," both in a physical and linguistic-communicative sense. The Middle English roots of the terms also reveal a now obsolete but telling usage connoting intercourse and physical relations. This is especially interesting in light of the overlapping influences in worldviews from the European to the Islamic/Persianate imaginary to be explored below through the writings of Hafez.

authorities and into the public sphere. This shift was—and remains for many modern readers of Rumi in Iran—a transgressive, political act. Yet the ramifications of Rumi’s “transformation of values”⁸⁵ have yet to be more fully situated or appreciated in light of their political significance.⁸⁶ In the foregoing section, my aim has been to provide a basis and a justification for reading Rumi *politically*, situating his discursive performances of self-making and ethical championing of relationality as transgressive acts carried out to undermine executive and juridical authorities. The intention of this reading is *not* to characterise Rumi as an explicitly political writer who sought to produce philosophical texts and treatises expounding a particular ideology to replace the system of government under which he lived. Though Rumi acquired a massive following, especially after the founding of the Mevlevi order that extended far beyond his resting place in Konya, he nevertheless continued to be seen largely as an ethical guide rather than a political philosopher or leader. His political legacy lies in what was *to be made* of his work: an ethos of self-fashioning, relationality, and resistance that would have political salience in the discourses that proliferated across the region in ages to come. As I look to show in the next section, the figure who best exemplifies the continuity and entrenchment of this legacy of political dissidence is Shams ud-Dīn Muhammad Hafez Shīrāzī.

⁸⁵ See Abdolkarim Soroush, *Reason, Freedom, and Democracy*, trans. and ed. Mahmoud Sadri and Ahmad Sadri (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 43.

⁸⁶ Again the interpreter closest to providing such an account is Soroush, but despite numerous scattered citations of Rumi, he never completes anything approaching a thoroughgoing account of the Sufi’s contributions to political thinking beyond maintaining that Rumi actually championed both reason and love as ways to freedom. See *Reason, Freedom, and Democracy*, 93-4. Likewise, Shahab Ahmed provides one of the most illuminating accounts of Rumi’s contradictory account of Islam that he set out through Sufism; but this late scholar’s explicit concerns remained *hermeneutical, aesthetic, and epistemological*, only hinting at but never spelling out the *political* undertones and significance. See *What is Islam?* 23-4, 39, 100-101, 283, 306-311, 335-6.

V. The Political (in) Hafez

Hafez's writings, like Rumi's, were unquestionably affected and shaped by the political circumstances of his age. A court poet by trade, Hafez would end up amassing his own incredibly multilayered and influential tome known as the *Dīvān-e Hafez*, and in so doing cement a reputation that set him far apart from his contemporaries in the wake of the 14th century when he lived and wrote.⁸⁷ Even if he did not write to be seen as a spiritual guide as Rumi had during his lifetime, Hafez's *Dīvān* has been cited as central "to the constitution of a paradigm of identity for Muslims in the world of the Balkans-to-Bengal complex (which... is a historically dominant paradigm of the self-construction and self-articulation of Muslims)" (Ahmed 2016, 33). That this status has been bestowed on Hafez posthumously due to the widespread dissemination of his work across a vast region is only further testament to his political significance in the social milieu of his native Shiraz from the mid to late 1300s.

Shiraz in the fourteenth century, like many cities in Iran at the time, was a place rife with social turmoil, violent upheavals, and ceaseless political contestation.⁸⁸ While the destruction wrought on the northern and eastern parts of Iran by Mongol and Timurid warlords did not reach Shiraz with the same intensity, the battle for sovereignty over the city produced other forms of devastation. Frequent conquest by competing kings and chieftains saw executive power change hands at least eight times during Hafez's lifetime. More notably for the political significance of Hafez's work as a poet, the fluctuations of power in the court meant that material and discursive forces were at stake. While Hafez flourished under the patronage and favour of the liberal Inju king Abu Esh'aq, his fortunes changed for the worse when the Mozaffarid warlord Mobarez al-

⁸⁷ For a thorough account, see Dominic Parviz Brookshaw, *Hafiz and His Contemporaries: Poetry, Performance, and Patronage in Fourteenth-century Iran* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2019).

⁸⁸ See John Limbert, *Shiraz in the Age of Hafez: The Glory of a Medieval Persian City* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2004).

Din violently overthrew the king and imposed a norm of ruthless despotism over the city. Under Mobarez al-Din's five-year rule, strict norms of piety and religious rituals were enforced, surpassing the worst of the prohibitive juridical measures witnessed in Rumi's lifetime a century earlier. Those who refused to conform or deemed rebellious were swiftly tried and executed, often at the hands of the new king himself. Moreover, to the chagrin of poets like Hafez, Mobarez al-Din closed the taverns that had given Shiraz its reputation as a liberal haven and forbade wine and music altogether. Hafez fled the city, and while no known account exists to confirm where he took refuge during the five years of tyranny, his poems were known to circulate in secret among dissidents, rebels, and others longing to return to a more tolerant political order. A change came at last when Mobarez al-Din's own son Shah Shoja instigated a new coup. Deposing and imprisoning Mobarez al-Din, Shah Shoja instituted a return to the ethos of the former king Abu Esh'aq and served as a patron to the classic forms of poetry characteristic of Shiraz and the Sufi tradition. It was through this final revolution that Hafez produced his most enduring works, which can be seen as always principally and unequivocally political.

Much has been said about Hafez as a peerless poet of sparkling wit, experimentation, and moral and rhetorical ambiguity. While he may be celebrated for his seemingly matchless wordplay and even sacred import given his moniker as "Tongue of the Invisible,"⁸⁹ an effort must be made to bring Hafez back down to earth, as it were, and situate him as the political subject he always was. More than simply placing him amongst his peers in the "highly competitive, close-knit, profoundly intertextual environment of fourteenth-century Shiraz,"⁹⁰ I argue for a distinct reading that reframes his defense of wine-drinking, companionship and love

⁸⁹ See Leonard Lewisohn, "Socio-historical and Literary Contexts; Hafiz in Shiraz," in Leonard Lewisohn, ed. *Hafiz and the Religion of Love in Classical Persian Poetry* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 16.

⁹⁰ Brookshaw, *Hafiz and His Contemporaries*, 1-2.

as a political act that affirms and reinscribes agency among his readers. In continuity with the tradition advanced by Rumi, Hafez's poetry is nonconforming, contestatory, and ultimately aimed at political emancipation.

In one of his many characteristic entreaties—a common refrain in which he addresses the reader directly to propose action—Hafez writes:

Come so we can scatter flowers and fill our glasses with wine,
Split the heavens and put a new plan in motion.
If sorrow sends soldiers to spill the blood of lovers,
The *saqi* and I will send them all running...
If you seek paradise, come join us in the tavern,
And we'll dip you into the heavenly wine-stream.
Since poetry and song are unloved in Shiraz,
Come, Hafez, to pledge allegiance to another sovereign (Ghazal 374).

This representative poem, while it contains Hafez's signature ambiguity and polyvalence, is notable for the directness with which addresses the actual political circumstances of the time. While the first set of lines implore the reader to join Hafez and his consort of revellers to bask in the physical and spiritual jouissance of wine drinking, the battle lines are drawn in the middle to make the political stakes clear. Just as "sorrow sending soldiers to spill the blood of lovers" is an unmistakable reference to political authorities who executed or exiled nonconformists, the final lines in which Hafez refers to himself signal his confrontation with those powers. In the last turn of phrase, Hafez twists the opening enjoinder ("come so we can...") reflexively toward himself to indicate his political stance, refusing to pledge allegiance to the reigning despot, which at the time this poem was composed was undoubtedly Mobarez al-Din. Against this temporal rule, Hafez juxtaposes a more resilient and lasting source of power known to his readers and those familiar with the Sufi path elaborated by Rumi:

Don't marvel at the revolutions in these strange times:
There are thousands of these living in our memory.
Take the wine-cup in your hand as an example,

For there you hold the skull of Jamshid, Bahman and King Qobad...⁹¹
Come quickly, this wine will bring us to ruin in time,
Unless those ruins turn out to hold a treasure.
They won't permit me to leave this city...
Don't drink, like Hafez, till you hear the harp's lament,
For it's tied with silk threads to his joyful heart (Ghazal 101).

Through these lyrical permutations, Hafez moves across three stages of political, historical, and ethical commentary. On the one hand, he alludes to the despotism of his own day and quickly evokes past kings of Iran to demonstrate their collective transience.⁹² Then, in another turn, he crowns his own ethical conduct—and by extension that of Sufis and dissenters writ large—as an inextinguishable, perpetual presence in his native city and beyond. The rebellious voices are not going anywhere, Hafez affirms. They hold a fixed place in the social and political imaginary of those swayed by Sufi and *adab* literature.

The final call to arms by Hafez looks beyond political leaders to all would-be purveyors of sanctimony and rigid piety. It is a staunch defense of the *rendi* way of life, characterised by a devotion to love and an unapologetically libertine attitude in religious and ethical matters:

Don't go finding faults with *rendis*, you pure pious preachers,
For their sins don't need to be linked with your name.
Don't worry whether I'm good or bad—go work on who *you* are:
Each one of us weaves his own fortune with work and practice.
Each one of us searches for the Beloved, whether drunk or sober;
And each place is a house of love, whether mosque or synagogue.
My head is bowed in worship at the wine-shop's door,
And these pretenders to knowledge don't understand a thing about it.
Don't sadden me with stories of eternal grace,
What do you know of the true beauty that hides behind the veil?...
Hafez, if you carry a wine-cup in your hand on the day of judgment,
You'll be carried straight from drunkenness into true paradise (Ghazal 80).

In this direct address to theological-judicial authorities, Hafez mirrors the language of Rumi and other Sufi poets before him with the extolment of intoxication as the way to better understanding

⁹¹ All former kings in Iranian lore, whether real or mythical.

⁹² C.f. Percy Bysshe Shelley's "Ozymandias"

beauty and truth. More notably, Hafez articulates a sense of agency that defies the rigid ethical conduct of authorities. He affirms self-care alongside an unwavering commitment to love as a socially bonding force across ideological divides. And he remains steadfast in his own *rendi* way of living, derided as shameful by the falsely pious but precious to those who understand and live by its principles. In these and so many other lines, Hafez was composing much more than “mere” poetry: he was issuing a challenge to imposing, rigid understandings of Islam and political authority through a resistant and resilient discourse that sought to preserve the ethos of thinking otherwise.

VI. Sufism and Comparative Political Theory

A political reading of Rumi and Hafez reveals new iterations of agency across traditions and narrative forms to push the boundaries of comparative political thought. The Sufi thinkers’ formulations of selfhood as bound up with otherness and their insistence on ethical transformation to question authoritative norms of acceptable thought and behaviour set them apart as innovators in the political realm of the Persianate-Islamic world. The form of political agency to which I have drawn attention could therefore be seen as a specific articulation of relationality and resistance grounded in a particular context that has received relatively little attention in political theory. This study may also contribute to conversations among proponents of individual and relational autonomy, particularly by adding a perspective to broaden the outlook of the latter group. As they distinguish themselves from those who defend the largely Kantian views of the self as a free moral agent who imposes moral laws and responsibilities on herself,⁹³ supporters of relational autonomy stress the ways in which the self is always

⁹³ Cf. Korsgaard, *The Sources of Normativity*; and O’Neill, *From Principles to Practice: Normativity and Judgment in Ethics and Politics*.

constituted in and through a web of social relationships and determinants. The “focus of relational approaches,” its framers contend, “is to analyze the implications of the intersubjective and social dimensions of selfhood and identity for conceptions of individual autonomy and moral and political agency.”⁹⁴ One of the valuable aspects of this approach is the corrective it provides to liberalism’s “alleged hyper-individualism of the conception of autonomy and the autonomous person operating at its center.”⁹⁵ But another promising line of connection is the way in which relational autonomy can be seen operating in a political context outside the confines of Western philosophy to which the abovementioned framers have so far remained limited. The two thinkers I have examined would provide valuable insights not only for philosophical perspectives on autonomy, but also for CPT scholarship as it continues to expand its frontiers to new contexts with the aim of critically reappraising key political concepts.

Through their wide-ranging and widely influential writings, Rumi and Hafez shed light on the articulations and functions of agency and resistance in a particular tradition that should be understood on its own terms. While much of recent comparative political theory has carried forward the laudable aims of “deparochializing” attitudes and practices and arguing for a methodological pluralism in our approach to political ideas at the global level,⁹⁶ the tendency to expect ideas and concepts from “other traditions” to conform to “Western” understandings remains a predisposition that has to be constantly overcome through new readings and the expansion of interpretive horizons.⁹⁷ Likewise, reexamining concepts like “resistance” in

⁹⁴ Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar, “Introduction” to *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency, and the Social Self* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 4.

⁹⁵ John Christman, “Relational Autonomy, Liberal Individualism, and the Social Constitution of Selves,” *Philosophical Studies* 117 (2004): 143. See also John Christman and Joel Anderson, eds. *Autonomy and the Challenges to Liberalism: New Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁹⁶ Melissa Williams, ed. *De-parochializing Political Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 6.

⁹⁷ See, for comparison, Humeira Iqtidar, “Searching for ‘Tolerance’ in Islamic Thought,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Political Theory*, eds. Leigh Jenco, Murad Idris, and Megan C. Thomas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 525-545.

understudied areas can help sharpen political theorists' ability to appreciate the particularities of agentic discourses in different settings.⁹⁸ Rereading thinkers like Rumi and Hafez with particular attention to the ways they formulated and upheld a form of resistance across time and place should help expand the ongoing projects of comparative political theorists in this regard. Reevaluating narrative forms outside the usual purview of texts marked as part of "the canon" can turn out to uncover surprising new sites of political contestation and may create further pathways to be explored by scholars interested in expanding the scope of political thought.

⁹⁸ See Burke A. Hendrix and Deborah Baumgold, eds. *Colonial Exchanges: Political Theory and the Agency of the Colonized* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017) and Adom Getachew's review essay in *Perspectives on Politics* 16:3 (2018): 818-9.

Chapter Three: Dante, Machiavelli, and the Poetics of Exilic Thinking in the West

The greatest gift that God in His largess
created, the one most suited
to His goodness, and the one He most prizes
was the freedom of the will
—Dante, *Paradiso*⁹⁹

God does not want to do everything, in order not to deprive us of our free will and part of
that glory which belongs to us.
—Machiavelli, *The Prince*¹⁰⁰

in pursuit of those things that I believe will bring common benefit for all, I have decided to
enter on a path never trodden by anyone else...
—Machiavelli, *The Discourses*¹⁰¹

I. Narratives of Agency in the West

Agency has no unilinear genealogy. It can expand and ramify in myriad ways. Tracing an understudied trajectory of the development of agency in the West, I look in this chapter to a distinct set of narratives that were instrumental in its transposition from literary and cultural spheres to the wider political realm of European city-states. I highlight the development of these ideas by focusing on two thinkers who each elaborate a vision through which new ways of thinking and acting in the world become possible. Dante plays a decisive role in the shaping of a secular narrative, whereby each human life comes to be seen as unique, meaningful, to be given

⁹⁹ Dante Alighieri, *La Divina Commedia* (Torino: Unione Tipografico-Editrice Torinese, 2000), 658; references to *Inferno* are hereafter marked by *Inf.*; *Purgatorio* by *Purg.*; and *Paradiso* by *Par.* followed by canto and line numbers. All translations of Dante and Machiavelli are my own, unless stated otherwise. In some places, I have relied on existing translations by Mandelbaum in the case of the former; and Gilbert, Mansfield, and Tarcov for the latter. Where comparisons have been needed to further flesh out the intentions of each author, I have included existing translations as well as my own interpretations.

¹⁰⁰ Niccolò Machiavelli, *Il Principe* in *Tutte le Opere*, ed. Mario Martelli (Firenze: Bompiani, 2018), 902; hereafter cited as P followed by chapter numbers.

¹⁰¹ Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discorsi Sopra la Prima Deca di Tito Livio* in *Tutte le Opere*, 307; hereafter cited as D with book and chapter numbers.

shape through actions in life's journey on this earth. Machiavelli takes up Dante's ideas more explicitly in the realm of politics, whereby human agents are increasingly seen as capable of making meaningful changes in the political realm, expanding the possibilities of resistance against exclusion in centuries to come. While these two thinkers represent the core of this chapter's focus on a distinct iteration of agency in a particular tradition, I will also look to situate them in relation to the broader connections between literature and politics across time and place.

What I am most interested in through the rest of this chapter is uncovering how the development of certain ideas in a particular tradition allows those influenced by the tradition to change how they think and act in the world. In the nominal Western tradition of political thought, I would identify the thread connecting the ideas of St. Augustine to Dante and Machiavelli as a crucial linkage for explaining the growth of agency among citizens who would increasingly come to recognise their capacity for freedom and virtue in the political sphere. This is a connection I believe is underappreciated, but potentially instructive insofar as it locates the sources of agency in the literary endeavours of writers working in a variety of genres to rethink philosophy and politics. As foundational writers, Dante and Machiavelli helped institute a form of memorialisation at two levels: Dante asserted the power of the individual to write his or her life as a meaningful whole through the creation of a personal secular narrative; while Machiavelli reasserted what people are capable of enacting collectively in the political realm, rewriting themselves and the state, choosing what they want to memorialise together. In both there is an exilic element: at a personal level they sought to write their way back into existence after being banished; and at a public level they sought to champion exiles and the excluded, inscribing ways for all such people to assert their agency against exclusion and domination.

II. Early Iterations of Agency in Augustine

While the notion of agency in the West can hardly be said to have a single identifiable foundation, one of its strongest and most enduring pillars has to be found in Augustine's narrative conceptualisation of the self. Given the influence of his thinking on Dante—and, by extension, Machiavelli—it is necessary to note Augustine as a significant forerunner of agency, even if the early theologian foreclosed the possibility of its use in the political realm. Specifically, there are three crucial movements in Augustine's writings that are worth noting for their influence on the later thinkers approaching agency: 1) his defense of *liberum arbitrium* or metaphysical freedom in *On Free Choice of the Will*; 2) his exploration of temporality and wholeness of the self through narrative in *Confessions*; and 3) and his exclusion of human agency from the realm of politics in *City of God*. In tracing these three movements, I maintain that the literary, narrative-based conception of agency remained the most prominent and persuasive aspect of his thinking; and this would mean that even if autonomy and political agency dropped off, the vital element of self-fashioning through narrative remained intact and available for later thinkers to use.¹⁰²

Among Augustine's early writings, *De libero arbitrio* is a short but foundational text that helped establish several of his innovative ideas in epistemology and ethics. This text is notable for his radical defense of free choice, which in his view constituted a break from the Neoplatonists, whose views he troubled as deterministic, and other early Christian theologians whose characterisations he would come to regard as blasphemous. Recognising a good will as one “by which we desire to live upright and honorable lives and to attain the highest wisdom,”¹⁰³

¹⁰² The narrative-based conception of agency that situates humans as future-oriented beings with “freedom of spontaneity” is also precisely what leads Arendt to call Augustine “the first philosopher of the Will.” See *The Life of the Mind*, vol. 2, *Willing* (Harcourt: New York, 1978), 110.

¹⁰³ Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will*, trans. Thomas Williams (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), 19.

he would go on to identify that will as one we arrive at and instill by choice rather than predestination. By the same token, he maintained that “we do evil by the free choice of the will.”¹⁰⁴ In making these claims, Augustine sought to establish the freedom of *decision*, which implies we are responsible for our actions and can direct them one way or another without predetermined external constraints. Crucially, he did not champion *autonomy* as we understand it today, following its mediation by Kant’s moral philosophy. In this later view, agency would be seen as the freedom to challenge and refute the will of would-be masters, to use one’s own understanding and to give oneself laws to govern one’s own actions. But that later formulation would hinge on Kant’s championing of the use of reason and the intrinsic goodness of a “good will” as the basis of laws we give ourselves.¹⁰⁵ Many steps would need to be taken to arrive at Kant’s elaboration, and Augustine was of course limited in his much earlier, theological formulations. Avowedly, he was more invested in “the only genuine freedom” which he defined as “that possessed by those who are happy and cleave to the eternal law.” This meant that he was less interested in “the sort of freedom that people have in mind when they think they are free because they have no human masters, or that people desire when they want to be set free by their masters.”¹⁰⁶ What Augustine’s ideas boil down to in *De libero arbitrio* is a conception of metaphysical free will bound by theological strictures, meant for use by individuals hoping to save their souls, not for struggle against domination in the political realm.

A more promising iteration of agency offered by Augustine can be found in his *Confessions*. Here Augustine would test and refine his claim that God is “the orderly ruler of

¹⁰⁴ *Free Choice of the Will*, 27.

¹⁰⁵ See Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, 393.

¹⁰⁶ *Free Choice of the Will*, 25.

all”¹⁰⁷ by looking for that sense of order in the creativity and cohesiveness found in individual selfhood. In putting together his *Confessions*, Augustine would simultaneously explore and act out the sense of cohesion he believed was not only bestowed by God but also found through the very act of writing and narrating one’s life. This is what he hoped to achieve in retelling the story of his life from infancy to adulthood. Against the “bitterness of recollection” from the many deeds he came to see as regrettable in his early life, Augustine sought in his act of writing what he called *dulcedo*, “a sweetness which does not deceive, a sweetness which brings happiness and peace, pulling me back together from the disintegration in which I was being shattered and torn apart.”¹⁰⁸ What is remarkable about this sense of fulfilment in Augustine’s narration is that he is aware of his own agency in the process, all the while invoking God for inspiration. Having redrawn his life using memory and storytelling, he arrives at a striking meditation on how experience is brought together through the use of one’s own will:

I come to the fields and the grand palaces of my memory where there are treasure stores of countless impressions brought there from every imaginable kind of thing that my senses perceived. Stowed away there is everything we reflect upon either by accentuating or depreciating it or in any way whatever modifying the actual things which our sense apprehended; and anything else that has been preserved and deposited and that forgetfulness has not yet consumed and buried. When I am there, I call for whatever I want to be produced: some things are immediately forthcoming; others take longer to look for, and are, as it were, unearthed from more inaccessible places; and yet others cascade out in a rush, and while one particular item is searched and hunted for, they thrust themselves forward en masse as if saying ‘Can we be the ones?’ With the hand of my heart I drive them away from the forefront of my recollection, until what I am after emerges from obscurity and comes out of hiding into plain sight.¹⁰⁹

Whatever illusions Augustine may have been harbouring about the reliability and clarity of memory, his recognition that as human beings we are capable of giving order and meaning to our

¹⁰⁷ In his formulation: “*Quis neget, Deus magne, inquit, te cuncta ordine administrare?*” *On Order [De Ordine]* trans. Silvano Borruso (South Bend: St. Augustine’s Press, 2007), 19.

¹⁰⁸ Augustine, *Confessions I*, trans. Carolyn J.B. Hammond (Cambridge, Mass: Loeb Classical Library, 2014), 60-1.

¹⁰⁹ Augustine, *Confessions II*, trans. Carolyn J.B. Hammond (Cambridge, Mass: Loeb Classical Library, 2016), 87-9.

thoughts by recollection and narration would prove to have an undeniable impact. In particular, the crucial connection between memory and time would allow for the formulation of narrative agency: the recognised ability of human beings to tell a story about their lives and in so doing create a cohesive identity.

“By thinking,” Augustine would say, we “gather together ideas which the memory contains in a dispersed and disordered way, and by concentrating our attention we arrange them in order as if ready to hand, stored in the very memory where previously they lay hidden, scattered, and neglected.”¹¹⁰ Situating ourselves temporally in relation to the world involves recognising a capacity to give a sense of order to that world through narrative. Augustine would come to see this ability in book XI, a reflection on time to accompany the previous one on memory. “And if I have the capacity to proclaim this in an ordered narrative,” he wrote, “yet the drops of time are too precious to me.”¹¹¹ Here, nearing the end of his confessions, Augustine self-reflexively examines what he has been doing all along in crafting such a narrative and in the process realises none of it would have meaning without a grasp of earthly time. To characterise this form of time to which all human beings are subjected, he postulates “three times—past, present, and future”¹¹² which, though we may take for granted, reveal a crucial point about our capacity for agency on closer examination. That is, as Augustine affirms the existence of the present, he portrays it as a moment of possibility, such that we are able to recognise ourselves in the current moment, seeing the past before us and the future ahead of us. Through the memorable example of the recitation of the song, he notes that the act of singing “is stretched in two ways, into my memory because of the words I have already said and into my expectation because of

¹¹⁰ Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 189.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 221.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 235.

those which I am about to say.”¹¹³ Further, he concludes that such an act exemplifies our narrative capacities in general and “is also valid of the entire life of an individual person, where all actions are parts of a whole.”¹¹⁴ This again may seem like a simple formulation which many in ages to come would take for granted. Yet it is still a novel and crucial affirmation that would allow later thinkers—like Dante to be examined in the section to follow—to see human beings as essentially future-oriented and capable of political agency.

Despite the important strides that Augustine made toward a conception of human autonomy, it is hard to deny that he foreclosed the possibility of its fuller fruition in his conclusions to the *Confessions*, and especially in his *City of God*. In the former, shortly after positing the agentic capacities of the individual to create herself by projecting into the future, he would regress into the language of a more circumscribed Christian theology in which the ultimate and only true agent is meant to be God. Doubling back on the claims he had made about his own ability to piece his life together in a narrative, he recalls how frequently he is thrown into disorder and uncertainty, and turns back to God as the ultimate provider of order: “You are my eternal Father, but I am scattered in times whose order I do not understand. The storms of incoherent events tear to pieces my thoughts, the inmost entrails of my soul, until that day when, purified and molten by the fire of your love, I flow together and merge into you. Then I shall find stability and solidity in you, in your truth which imparts form to me.”¹¹⁵ In Erich Auerbach’s estimation, this kind of fall-back exemplifies the inchoate forms of early modern thinking in the Western tradition, whereby classical ideals of “individualistic, aristocratic, moderate, and rational self-discipline” were combined with emotion and faith by “Church Fathers” like

¹¹³ Ibid., 243.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 244.

Augustine to fight against chaos and irrational impulses (2003 [1946], 69). The “magic” of this newly emergent faith “is no less a magic than is bloodlust, and it is stronger because it is a more ordered, a more human magic, filled with hope” (69-70). Such hope was ultimately applied to the realm beyond—the afterlife—as the only place where true redemption, order and grace could be found.

By the time Augustine wrote *City of God*, after the Gothic sacking of Rome in 410 CE, the notion of political agency on earth seemed a dim possibility. Though a massive undertaking with numerous themes and aims, *City of God*’s sense of resignation about earthly politics stands out as perhaps the most telling indication of how human agency would be foreclosed. In the final book of this work, Augustine claimed:

God inflicted on the apostate angels, for their self-chosen fall, the just punishment of everlasting misery... And God made man also upright, with the same power of free choice, an animal of earth, yet worthy of heaven if he adhered to the author of his being, but, by the same token, destined, if he abandoned God, for a misery appropriate to his kind of nature. Now God foreknew that man would sin by breaking God’s Law through his apostasy from God; and yet, as in the case of the angels, God did not deprive man of the power of free choice, foreseeing, at the same time, the good that he was to bring out of man’s evil. For out of this mortal progeny, so rightly and justly condemned, God by his grace is gathering a people so great that from them he may fill the place of the fallen angels and restore their number. And thus that beloved Heavenly City will not be deprived of its full number of citizens; it may perhaps rejoice in a still more abundant population.¹¹⁶

Using this Christian eschatological framework, which was to leave a lasting impact on Western political thought, Augustine once again affirmed human free will only to reassert more strongly the preponderant will of God. In so doing, moreover, he banished earthly existence—and with it, earthly politics—to the realm of the ephemeral, relatively insignificant when juxtaposed to the afterlife and the promise of heaven. “There,” in that heavenly city, he would say, “we shall be still and see; we shall see and we shall love; we shall love and we shall praise. Beyond what will

¹¹⁶ Augustine, *City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (New York: Penguin Books, 1972), 1023.

be, in the end, without end! For what is our end but to reach that kingdom which has no end?”¹¹⁷

The weight of these striking final lines, and the whole of his monumental work, would be felt on Western political life throughout Europe for centuries to follow. As I maintain in the next section, it would take the genius of Dante Alighieri in the 14th Century to decisively move beyond such limits and enable new beginnings in political thought through a stronger affirmation of human agency.

III. Dante and the Secular Self

Dante has as much to teach us about new beginnings in politics through his life and literary strivings as through his explicitly philosophical and political tomes. Though scholars have discussed his literary, his philosophical, and his political significance separately, relatively little work has been done to consider how his life experiences and life’s work—particularly his *Commedia*—spurred newly emerging worldviews of great import for European political life after the Renaissance. Quentin Skinner, for example, in volume one of his widely influential *Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, considers Dante as “by far the most important Florentine writer of [the early 14th century] to offer his support to the Emperor as the counterbalance to the Pope” (16). Skinner’s account is written in the context of tensions and conflicts in Italian city states between the 12th to 14th centuries, pitting monarchical, tyrannical, and Papal authority against the love of virtue and liberty among the newly emerging *popolani* in those Italian Republics (15-16, 23). Highlighting his *Monarchia*—the text most widely cited to characterise Dante’s political views—Skinner renders Dante as a supporter of Henry of Luxembourg’s imperial ambitions and a virulent critic of the temporal power of the church (16-17). Nearly taking it one step further, Skinner goes on to say: “Dante’s eventual perspective on

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 1091.

these problems in *The Divine Comedy* takes him far beyond the realm of politics, and leads him to stress the ideal of religious regeneration, the need for a change of heart, as the only means of saving the world” (17). But he stops short of analysing the significance of that other work and only returns to Dante’s *Monarchia* to further explain his political contributions.¹¹⁸ Skinner’s account is intriguing and leaves plenty to be uncovered. Considering interpretations and uses of Dante by Hannah Arendt and Erich Auerbach, I believe there is much more to be said about the poet’s significance for reimagining the role of the people in social and political life.

In a fascinating passage that has already received close attention, Arendt opens the fifth chapter of the *Human Condition* with a “curious epigraph” (Markell 2006, 2) from Dante’s *De Monarchia*:

Nam in omni actione principaliter intenditur ab agente, sive necessitate naturae sive voluntarie agat, propriam similitudinem explicare; unde fit quod omne agens, in quantum huiusmodi, delectatur, quia, cum omne quod est appetat suum esse, ac in agenda agentis esse modammodo ampliatur, sequitur de necessitate delectatio. . . . Nihil igitur agit nisi tale existens quale patiens fieri debet.

(For in every action what is primarily intended by the doer, whether he acts from natural necessity or out of free will, is the disclosure of his own image. Hence it comes about that every doer, in so far as he does, takes delight in doing; since everything that is desires its own being, and since in action the being of the doer is somehow intensified, delight necessarily follows. . . . Thus, nothing acts unless [by acting] it makes patent its latent self.)¹¹⁹

Patchen Markell has noted several interesting points about this passage. In his view, firstly, Arendt is in a way reading Dante against himself to critique monarchical and hierarchical rule generally (2006, 8). Secondly, she is reimagining the Aristotelian philosophy in Dante’s thinking

¹¹⁸ One Dante scholar whom Skinner cites, A.P. d’Entreves, had already advised against such a selective reading: “The views which are laid down in the *Monarchia* are not the only nor the final word which Dante pronounced on the subject of politics. In order to assess the importance of Dante as a political thinker it would therefore seem advisable first of all to assess the part which politics played in the formation of his unique personality.” See *Dante as a Political Thinker* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952), 2.

¹¹⁹ Arendt, *Human Condition*, 175.

to emphasise action and speech as actualisation of the self (9). And thirdly, by taking some liberties with the translation (including, as Markell sees it, her rendering of *explicare* as “to make patent”) she is further critiquing the concept of ruling (*archein*) and bringing emphasis back to the individual agent as a *maker* in the political realm, capable of engaging in that sphere through attunement to events that call for a response (9-11). Beyond these well-taken points, I believe there are further elements of Arendt’s use of Dante to be unpacked, namely Dante’s own act of self-creation through his literary endeavours.

In addition to the epigraph mentioned, Arendt cites another memorable line from Isak Dinesen: “All sorrows can be borne if you put them into a story or tell a story about them.” The fact that Arendt includes this line as the first epigraph is “[e]vocative and puzzling,” as the words “seem to point to Hannah Arendt’s own story, which goes largely untold in her own writing, but they also jar against both the Latin quotation by Dante that follows and, to an even greater extent, the discussion of Greek philosophy and politics in the body of the chapter itself” (Wilkinson 2004, 77). A closer look at the first passage points to other interesting details: it “reveals the epigraph to be a misquotation” and hints that Arendt was likely looking to juxtapose her own views about storytelling with Dinesen’s (Ibid., 77-8). The actual quote from Dinesen, adapted from a 1957 interview for the *New York Times Book Review*, reads: “I am not a novelist, really not even a writer; I am a storyteller. One of my friends said about me that I think all sorrows can be borne if you put them into a story or tell a story about them, and perhaps this is not entirely untrue. To me, the explanation of life seems to be its melody, its pattern. And I feel in life such an infinite, truly inconceivable fantasy” (quoted in Wilkinson, 77). Here we may note Arendt’s own self-perception and commitment to seeing “the theorist as storyteller” (Benhabib 1990, 188). On this view, there is “a continuum between the attempt of the theorist to understand

the past and the need of the acting person to interpret the past as part of a coherent and continuing life story” (Ibid.). More than that, we may see in Arendt’s appropriation of Dinesen and Dante a hint of how one’s own life’s work—the very act of writing as *willing* oneself into the world—becomes the fundamental way to instantiate new beginnings in the public sphere. In other words, what mattered most was not so much the exact words in the case of the misquoted Dinesen (from whom Arendt never provided an exact citation); nor the precise philosophical claims in the case of Dante (whose passage, according to Arendt, “though quite clear and simple in the Latin original, defies translation” [HC 208, n41]). What mattered most was the way in which both actualised themselves through the very acts of speaking and writing, no matter the sorrow and suffering they faced:

The human sense of reality demands that men actualize the sheer passive givenness of their being not in order to change it but in order to make articulate and call into full existence what otherwise they would have to suffer passively anyhow. This actualization resides and comes to pass in those activities that exist only in sheer actuality (HC 208).

Arendt’s absorbing use of Dante can be read alongside that of another interpreter who outlines his contributions to understandings of the human sense of reality. Here Erich Auerbach can be instructive in providing a final set of exploratory notes to anticipate a closer reading of Dante’s life and works.

Auerbach’s Dante is a creator and innovator of the highest order. To build on his depiction, it is not only Dante’s explicit philosophical and political views that matter; more than that, it is the poet’s will to transform his own arduous life experiences into possibilities for the future. The most difficult and most bitter of these experiences were undoubtedly the loss of his beloved Beatrice and his subsequent exile from Florence. After the promises of his early years as a member of the White Guelphs in the flourishing but intensely contentious atmosphere of the

Florentine Republic in the last decade of the 13th century, Dante was ignominiously banished from the city in absentia when the Black Guelphs reclaimed power. A decree in 1302 not only excluded him from holding public office again, but even condemned him to be burned to death if he dared return to the city. Worse still, his enmity with Pope Boniface VIII and rift with the Whites would “turn him into a ‘party of one’” (Anderson 1983, 159). But as Auerbach claims, it was precisely out of this experience that Dante was able to craft a new vision in his *Divine Comedy*, which “is essentially a product of Dante’s life and time; he chose [its] form because it was wholly in keeping with his inner purpose” (Auerbach, 1961 [1929], 81). The form of his magnum opus is the famous three-part ascendance of the titular pilgrim through hell, purgatory, and paradise, each consisting of 33 cantos to narrate the journey. The poem is, above all else, a human journey in the deepest sense, asking what it means to remember, to forge a will, and to act meaningfully in the world.

What sets Dante apart as a pioneer of literature, language and artistic self-creation is his willingness to confront the reality of temporal earthly existence—with all its attendant hardships, including the bitterness of exile—and transfigure the experience through a form of art to show that *what we do on earth matters*. Against past literary endeavours of antiquity and the Middle Ages, the “beyond” is overshadowed by the present in all its concreteness and actuality:

What radically distinguishes the *Comedy* from all other visions of the other world is that in it the unity of man’s earthly personality is preserved and fixed; the scene of action thus becomes the source of its poetic value, of its infinite truth, of the quality of direct empirical evidence which makes us feel that everything that happens in the work is real and credible and relevant to ourselves. The earthly world is encompassed in the other world of the *Comedy* (90).

Dante’s work is not merely inhabited by mythical, semi-legendary, or historical figures from the deep past: it is full of flesh-and-blood human beings with whom he and his contemporaries were intimately familiar, fixed in place through memory of their deeds—what essentially made them

who they were. This unprecedented form of representation is what makes Dante—despite his ostensible concern with a vision of a world beyond—more accurately deserving of being called “poet of the secular world.” Despite the inimitability of his unique form of poetry, Dante’s influence on so much of Western literature to follow would in part manifest itself in the way posterity would adopt his stance of portraying the world and the role of human beings in it:

the art of imitating reality continued to develop quite independently of the presuppositions which seem to have been at the base of Dante’s work. No poet or artist after Dante required an ultimate, eschatological destiny in order to perceive the unity of the human person: sheer intuitive power seems to have enabled subsequent writers to combine inner and outward observation into a whole (177).

More than that, as I look to elaborate below, a distinct sense of agency arose through Dante’s work. As Auerbach claimed, “[w]ith Dante the historical individual was reborn in his manifest unity of body and spirit; he was both old and new, rising from long oblivion with greater power and scope than ever before” (178). But Auerbach’s analysis is largely grounded in the poet’s use of language, stylistic innovation, and representation. In his extended comments on Dante in *Mimesis*, for example, Auerbach largely focuses on the case of two figures in the *Inferno*—Farinata and Cavalcante—who serve as catalysts for his discussion of Dante’s artistic depictions. These two men, Ghibelline and Guelph party members respectively, were of course actual historical figures known to Dante. The fact that Dante portrays an encounter with them in his imagined hell is already enough to set him apart as a visionary. Though clearly influenced by the conceptualisation of the underworld in past epics like Homer’s *Odyssey* and Virgil’s *Aeneid*, Dante was more deeply concerned with literary and political tradition rather than allusions to mythic symbolism as with those authors. Thus his underworld is not merely populated with mythical, imaginary figures like Tiresias in the former and Sybil in the latter. In fact, even Dante’s own guides through the *Comedy*—from Virgil to Beatrice to Bernard of Clairvaux—

were based on real people. This move itself, along with his linguistic turns to change events and subjects within a single scene, leads Auerbach to describe the poet's language as "a well-nigh incomprehensible miracle" (2003 [1946], 182).

Though in approaching much of modern Western literature, critics can take his basic stylistic devices for granted, Dante's genius lay in the fact that he "used his language to discover the world anew" (183). His use of the vernacular allowed him to mix the stylistically sublime with perfectly ordinary, or even at times vulgar and offensive, language such that it spoke directly to people from all walks of life who read his work (186). Thus his *Comedy* holds a status as "a literary work which imitates reality and in which all imaginable spheres of reality appear: past and present, sublime grandeur and vile vulgarity, history and legend, tragic and comic occurrences, man and nature; finally, it is the story of Dante's—i.e. one individual's—life and salvation, and thus a figure of the story of mankind's salvation in general" (189). For Auerbach, Dante's efforts to conceive of the human individual as a coherent self were crucial: "it was precisely by producing this effect with such power and so much realism that he opened the way for that aspiration toward autonomy which possesses all earthly existence" (199-200). Such an effect, in Auerbach's estimation, was largely felt in the literary and cultural sphere in and beyond Dante's time. As cited by Edward Said, Auerbach's verdict on Dante was that the poet held to

[an] extreme subjectivity, or at least a subjectivity hitherto unequalled in its vast range and sharpness of expression, [which on the other hand] had sprung from a devoted Imitation of Christ and an endeavor to record faithfully what is enacted (not only decided, but actually carried out) in the kingdom of God.... Dante [thus] created a public not for himself alone but for his successors as well. He molded, as potential readers of his poem, a community which was scarcely in existence at the time when he wrote and which was gradually built up by his poem and by the poets who came after him.¹²⁰

¹²⁰ Erich Auerbach, *Literary Language and its Public in Late Latin Antiquity*, pp. 310, 312, quoted in Said, *Beginnings*, 212.

But to further consider the scope of Dante's social and political significance, it is necessary to delve into how he conceived of this sense of agency, how he enacted it in his own life, and just how far his influences extended beyond the literary realm. Departing from Arendt's earlier emphasis on action and Auerbach's focus on linguistic innovation, therefore, I ask: where did Dante's will to create come from, and in what way did it turn out to be influential in Western politics after his time?

I contend that Dante's will to create, and the sense of agency it helped spur in political life, came from three equally important sources: 1) the language of love crafted through trials and experimentation¹²¹; 2) a rich and varied philosophical tradition informed not only by Augustine, Boethius and Aquinas, but by extension non-Western thinkers like Ibn Arabi and Ibn Rushd (Averroes); and 3) the experience of exile.

The language of love is a powerful, indispensable element in Dante's project of self-fashioning. His narrative, built from memories and encounters with love, is self-reflexively brought in from the opening of his *Vita Nuova*: "In that part of the book of my memory, following the parts that are faded and hard to read, there is a chapter title that says: *here begins a new life*. Beneath this chapter I find the words which it is my intention to copy into the smaller book I write now; and if not all the words, at least their significance."¹²² Dante traces this formative moment specifically in his first encounter with Beatrice, who would represent the power of love throughout the rest of his oeuvre: "From that time on I affirm that Love governed my soul, which became wedded to her inextricably, and over which she ruled with such assurance and strength given by my imagination that I was obliged to tend to all her desires

¹²¹ The Latin *experimentum* may help capture this, denoting both "experiment" and "experience"

¹²² *Vita Nuova* in *Tutte le Opere: Opere Minori, Volume Primo* (Torino: Unione Tipografico-Editrice Torinese, 1983), 70.

completely.”¹²³ The unfolding of Dante’s narrative in the *Vita Nuova* is an extended description of the impressions Beatrice leaves on him: he sees her, becomes intoxicated with love, and dreams of her. In his first dream a figure appears and presents Beatrice with a fiery object described as her heart. She eats this burning object, after which they ascend towards the heavens. This theme, prefiguring Beatrice’s early death but memorialised presence, is captured through the sonnets Dante composes throughout the work, hinting at their extended elaboration in the *Divine Comedy*.¹²⁴ The last section of the *Vita Nuova* is marked by a projection into the future. To write of Beatrice in a more worthy way, Dante prepares himself with a newfound sense of agency: “I am striving as much as I can, as she truly knows.”¹²⁵ This sense of hope and belief in the need for strivings to make a mark on this earth is precisely what signals the new beginning Dante is after. It is based on love and the desire to be better. But it will extend beyond the individual to the political as his ambitions and projects grow.

In *Convivio*, Dante begins to mix the personal with higher ambitions. Though it is an individual quest, it is also meant to serve others and be useful through “moderation and maturity”¹²⁶ to contrast with the fervor and passion of the *Vita Nuova* (hence the title *Convivio* or Banquet). In this project, Dante defends his choice to refer to himself, citing Boethius and Augustine,¹²⁷ and to mix styles of poetry and philosophical discourse.¹²⁸ Here an interesting commentary on his exile emerges. Dante begins to use the license for autobiographical notes that he has just defended, noting that he has suffered, unjustly, a *pena*: the punishment and pain “of

¹²³ *Vita Nuova*, 72.

¹²⁴ *Vita Nuova*, 151-5.

¹²⁵ *Vita Nuova*, 155.

¹²⁶ *Il Convivio* in *Tutte le Opere: Opere Minori, Volume Secondo* (Torino: Unione Tipografico-Editrice Torinese, 1983), 68.

¹²⁷ *Convivio*, 71.

¹²⁸ *Convivio*, 72.

exile and poverty.”¹²⁹ As he goes on, he pits himself against the familiar figure of *fortuna*—to re-emerge memorably in Machiavelli’s thinking—to further identify his purpose and the autobiographical nature of his journey:

Ever since it was the will of the citizens of the beautiful and famous daughter of Rome, Florence, to expel me from her sweet breast—on which I was born and raised until I reached the prime of my life, an in which, with all due respect to her, I wish with all my heart to rest my weary soul in the time given to me—I have been wandering like a pilgrim, almost a mendicant, showing despite myself the wound caused by *fortuna*.¹³⁰

Dante ascribes his wound to *fortuna*, but he does not give in to the idea that it is fated or impossible to overcome. Here he takes his cue from one of his most important predecessors in Boethius. A philosopher of late antiquity who would have perhaps unparalleled influence on Medieval European thinking, Boethius responded to his imprisonment at the hands of the emperor Theodoric by writing a treatise to “lift up [his] mind to the right kind of hope” and to write his way out of the misery imposed on him by fortune (Boethius 1969, 169). Initially lifted by the “muses of poetry,” he would reflect how “First fickle Fortune gave me wealth short-lived,/ Then in a moment all but ruined me./ Since Fortune changed her trustless countenance,/ Small welcome to the days prolonging life” (35). But soon after these musings, he would find strength and hope in another female character representing philosophy. This figure would convince him that despite the vicissitudes of life thrown at us by fortune, fate, and providence (134-143), “[i]t is in your own hands what fortune you wish to shape for yourself, for the only function of adversity apart from discipline and correction, is punishment” (144). As with Cicero before him, Boethius would collapse the ideas of *virtus* and *vires*—virtue and strength

¹²⁹ *Convivio*, *Ibid.*. *Pena* here signifies penalty, punishment, and pain all at once.

¹³⁰ *Convivio*, 72-3. The classical image of *fortuna* is of a spirit-like, female figure who distributes, by divine providence, external goods such as beauty, riches, honour, and glory. Dante is clearly influenced by—and arguably sees himself as a kindred spirit to—Boethius as he considers his task as a struggle against *fortuna*.

respectively—to form an answer to fate and fortuna. He became convinced that there is freedom of the will, “[f]or it would be impossible for any rational nature to exist without it” (149).

Despite the thorniness of the problem of free will—already anticipated by St. Augustine as discussed above—Boethius lay his trust in philosophy to maintain that “man’s freedom of will remains inviolate... because the will is free from all necessity” (168). These ideas would guide Dante throughout the rest of the *Convivio*. Aside from Boethius and Augustine, Dante would also refer frequently to St. Thomas Aquinas and draw liberally from Aristotle. It is worth noting, however, that Dante was equally likely to have been influenced by Albert the Great, the 13th century scholar who espoused a more Averroist conception of intellect and agency (Gilson 1948). This would in turn hint at the way an Islamic thinker like Averroes—referred to as the great “Commentator” on Aristotle for his part in interpreting and disseminating the earlier philosopher’s work¹³¹—also found his way into Dante’s imagination. Using all such influences, Dante would begin to bring together the methods of philosophy and the poetry of love to forge a new will in the *Convivio*. And though this work was left unfinished, he would further shape and strengthen the discourse of free will in his better-known *Divine Comedy* to carve out a legacy despite the weight of fortune.

The entirety of the *Divine Comedy* can be read as an attempt to create a narrative to surmount exile and affirm the ascendancy of human agency. The memorable opening to the *Inferno* signals a quest of self-discovery: “When I had journeyed half of our life’s way,/ I found myself within a shadowed forest,/ for I had lost the path that does not stray.”¹³² These grand, memorable lines immediately lay out the narrative structure and themes of the work: Dante’s

¹³¹ See, for example, *Convivio* IV, xiv

¹³² Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. Allen Mandelbaum (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 59.

subjectivity, the seeming reality of his symbolic journey, the search for a will to carry forward. The significance of memory and narrative self-creation is then made clearer in the lines that follow, through a tense switch: “Ah, it is hard to speak of what it was,/ that savage forest, dense and difficult,/ which even in recall renews my fear.” Here already we have a self-reflexive moment in which Dante as a poet recognises the act of self-fashioning through narrativity just as he carries it out by remembering. Dante’s encounters through this act of self-fashioning are overwhelming in scope. Auerbach’s chapter-length commentary on the figures of Farinata and Cavalcante alone serves as testament to the density and significance of the appearance of various spirits as the journey unfolds. For the purposes of the rest of my analysis, a few will have to suffice in illuminating Dante’s views on agency and self-creation.

The presence of and inspiration provided by Virgil and Beatrice are undoubtedly among the most important factors for Dante’s will to create and continue his journey. The second book of the *Inferno* is a liminal space of deliberation that foregrounds and makes possible the action to follow. In this space, the representative figures of Virgil—who chiefly symbolises tradition—and Beatrice—who stands for love—push Dante forward into the imagined realm of the afterlife. After he is invited to go on the voyage to visit the souls of the departed, the pilgrim hesitates due to his lowly stature as an ordinary human being: “I am not Aeneas, am not Paul/ nor I nor others think myself so worthy.”¹³³ But his predecessor Virgil tells him to overcome the cowardice weighing on him, and to trust the message he carries from Beatrice: “my friend, who has not been the friend of fortune,/ is hindered in his path along that lonely/ hillside... Go now; with your persuasive word, with all/ that is required to see that he escapes,/ bring help to him, that I may be consoled./ For I am Beatrice who send you on;/ I come from where I most long to

¹³³ Ibid., 64.

return;/ Love prompted me, that Love which makes me speak” (*Inf.* II.61-63, 67-72). Through these words and the inspiration they bring, Dante is able to forge a will and decidedly embark on a new beginning:

‘O she, compassionate, who has helped me!
And you [Virgil] who, courteous, obeyed so quickly
The true words that she had addressed to you!
You, with your words, have so disposed my heart
To longing for this journey—I return
To what I was at first prepared to do.
Now go; *a single will fills both of us*:
You are my guide, my governor, my master.’
These were my words to him; when he advanced,
I entered on the steep and savage path (*Inf.* II.133-142, emphasis added).

As the *Commedia* gains in depth and complexity, Dante suffuses his narrative with philosophical musings to further shape his conceptualisation and use of agency. Among the passages that deal directly with these ideas, two are especially noteworthy: the discussions of love and free will in *Purgatorio* 16-18, and their amplification in *Paradiso* 4 and 5.

Right at the heart of the entire work—exactly at the midpoint of the *Purgatorio*—Dante introduces a discourse on free will with implications for what must be done in the earthly realm to overcome political corruption and fatalism. This discourse comes through a conversation with Marco Lombardo, an interlocutor who spurs the pilgrim’s ongoing search for the meaning and applications of free will. When he encounters Lombardo, the pilgrim approaches him with an urgent inquiry: “a doubt/ will burst in me if it finds no way out... The world indeed has been stripped utterly/ of every virtue; as you said to me,/ it cloaks—and is cloaked by—perversity./ Some place the cause in heaven, some, below;/ but I beseech you to define the cause,/ that, seeing it, I may show it to others” (*Purg.* XVI, 53-4, 58-63). Lombardo’s reply, a refutation of astrological determinism, anticipates Dante’s own position to be solidified through the rest of the work: ““Brother,/ the world is blind, and you come from the world./ You living ones continue to

assign/ to heaven every cause, as if it were/ the necessary source of every motion./ If this were so, then your free will would be/ destroyed, and there would be no equity/ in joy for doing good, in grief for evil” (*Purg.* XVI, 65-72). As noted above, aside from the Thomist philosophical influence on Dante’s thinking, the elaboration of the human being’s power to act follows an Averroist conception, wherein the earlier philosopher had likewise critiqued those who ascribed all causes to another source beyond human will: “Those people of our time preclude that man has any capability or power [to act]. As a consequence [their doctrine] nullifies practical philosophy as well as will and free choice and all productive disciplines.”¹³⁴ Like Averroes, Dante refutes such fatalism, but through the mouth of Marco Lombardo it is delivered to the pilgrim with a distinctly political edge:

you have received both light
 On good and evil, and free will, which through
 It struggle in its first wars with the heavens,
 Then conquers all, if it has been well nurtured.
 On greater power and a better nature
 You, who are free, depend; that Force engenders
 The mind in you, outside the heavens’ sway.
 Thus, if the present world has gone astray,
 In you is the cause, in you it’s to be sought (75-83).

In response to the politics of the age against which Dante had pitted himself, he condemns emperors and popes alike, citing human failings that should not be simply explained away by determinism: “Misrule, you see, has caused the world to be/ malevolent; your nature is not corrupt, not prey to any fatal astral force” (103-5). Therefore, Dante begins to conclude, political

¹³⁴ Averroes, *On Aristotle’s “Metaphysics”* ed. and trans. Rudiger Arnzen (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 100. Majid Fakhry, citing *Al-Kashf ‘an Manahij al-Adillah [Exposition of the Methods of Proof]*, further maintains that Averroes “lays down two lines of determination, the human will or choice, and the concatenation of external causes or factors, determined ultimately by God’s decree. For him, those two lines of determination are concurrent, rather than contradictory.” See *Averroes: His Life, Works, and Influence* (Oxford: OneWorld, 2008), 103. This characterises lines up directly with the account Dante provides throughout the *Divine Comedy*.

change is ultimately in the hands of the individual agent who cultivates a sense of responsibility toward the world.

To further defend free will and responsibility, Dante builds his account in the following two cantos of *Purgatorio* by adding a discussion about the role of love in judgment. In canto 17, where the pilgrim encounters terraces punishing those guilty of the seven sins, Virgil attributes the corruption to misguided forms of love: insufficient love in the case of sloth; perverted love in envy, pride and wrath; and inordinate love for lust, gluttony and greed. There is, as Virgil maintains, “no creature who ever was without love—natural/ or mental... The natural is always without error,/ but mental love may choose an evil object” (*Purg.* XVII 91-95). It is precisely the act of choosing that is at stake in the exercise of free will: to judge and choose the good, one must direct love the right way. Dante, yet to be fully convinced of how this is supposed to happen, asks Virgil to explain it to him further in the following canto. Here, his guide tells him about the nature of the will in anticipation of a final elaboration toward the end of the narrative:

Now, that all other longings may conform
To this first will, there is in you, inborn,
The power that counsels, keeper of the threshold
Of your assent: this is the principle
On which your merit may be judged, for it
Garners and winnows good and evil longings.
Those reasoners who reached the roots of things
Learned of this inborn freedom; the bequest
That, thus, they left unto the world is ethics.
Even if we allow necessity
As source for every love that flames in you,
The power to curb that love is still your own.
This noble power is what Beatrice
Means by free will; therefore, remember it,
If she should ever speak it to you (*Purg.* XVIII, 61-75).

These telling lines encapsulate what I have mentioned as two of the major elements at the heart of Dante’s project of self-fashioning: a diverse philosophical tradition and the personal

experience of love. Dante's narrative undoubtedly includes, on the one hand, a discursive philosophical tone that refers to predecessors who wrote on matters of epistemology and ethics—"those reasoners" like Aristotle, Boethius, Aquinas and Averroes. But, on the other hand, it is ultimately a narrative that has to be told *artfully*, combining personal experience and poetic language to produce a convincing effect that lingers in the memory. Thus Virgil's injunction to "remember" is as much meant for Dante's audience as it is for his pilgrim. When Beatrice, as foreshadowed, appears in the *Paradiso* to reaffirm the importance of free will, its significance comes across even more powerfully to the reader.

Virgil leaves Dante toward the end of the *Purgatorio*, telling him, "I've brought you here through intellect and art;/ from now on, let your pleasure be your guide... Await no further word or sign from me:/ your will is free, erect, and whole—to act/ against that will would be to err: therefore/ I crown and miter you over yourself" (*Purg.* XXVII, 130-131, 139-142). When Beatrice comes to Dante as his new guide to take him in and through the *Paradiso*, she first reprimands him harshly for stumbling and hesitating to pursue the good that her love represents (*Purg.* XXXI, 22-27). But the most memorable lines follow in *Paradiso* 4 and 5, where she speaks to him directly about the will, as Virgil had intimated. Refuting again the trope of fortuna and a sense of fatedness associated with the stars (*Par.* IV, 61-63), Beatrice tells the pilgrim that to reach the highest stages of ascension, the will has to be strong, absolute, and able to resist the forces of temptation against it at all costs, as in the cases of martyrs and saints (73-87). Here, in speaking of an "absolute will" (109), Beatrice builds on the arguments of the philosophers Dante has had in mind, but she adds to it the element of her own presence in Dante's imagination, which has played an equally important part in guiding his journey. And from Dante's own words, it is ultimately through conversing with her that he feels he is able to finish the ascent:

“O beloved of the First/ Love, o you—divine—whose speech so floods/ and warms me that I feel more and more life... our doubting blossoms like a shoot/ out from the root of truth; this natural/ urge spurs us toward the peak, from height to height” (118-120, 130-132). Inspired and guided in this way, Dante comes to appreciate more fully the lines that would culminate in an understanding of agency for him and a line of thinkers to follow in his wake:

‘The greatest gift that God in His largess
created, the one most suited
to His goodness, and the one He most prizes
was the freedom of the will;
all creatures that have intellect—all of these
and only these—received and still receive this gift.
So you may draw, as consequence,
the high value of a vow, as long as what is pledged
with your consent encounters God’s consent’ (V, 19-27).

I identify these lines from canto 5 of *Paradiso* as among the most significant of the *Divine Comedy* as a whole, and among the most influential for political thought both immediately and long after Dante’s lifetime. The notion of the *vow* already contains the seeds of an important set of ideas to be elaborated by Nietzsche when he identified the instinct for freedom to be rooted in bad conscience and the need to keep one’s promises (1989, 84-7). Beyond that, there are inklings in Dante that point to the notion of mutual pledges in Arendt’s work, wherein she identified “binding and promising, combining and covenanting” as “the means by which power is kept in existence” (2006 [1963], 166). It is interesting to compare her references to Virgil and the Roman tradition as well, given their influence over Dante. But the most significant and immediate impact of Dante’s thinking, as I will go on to show, would be on Machiavelli and his beliefs about agency in the political realm.

Dante’s concerns in the *Divine Comedy* were, of course, not *primarily* political. They were in many ways motivated by and responding to political crises, corruption, and what Dante

perceived as the illegitimacy of the Papacy. More than that, his journey was a personal one through which he sought to use the will he had forged to achieve redemption. It was the culmination of decades-long exilic strivings for meaning-making, unity of the self, and agency in the secular realm. To anticipate, finally, the impact that his work would have on Machiavelli, I will sum up here how the personal experience of exile and its exploration through a literary narrative would have so much influence on possibilities of new beginnings in the political realm.

Among Dante's most self-reflexive moments in the *Commedia*, the seventeenth canto of *Paradiso* finds him half-way through his final ascent to the Empyrean. Here Dante receives a prophecy from his ancestor Cacciaguida—ostensibly his great-great-grandfather—who tells him about the tribulations he will encounter after he has journeyed beyond half his life's way: "You shall leave everything you love most dearly:/ this is the arrow that the bow of exile/ shoots first. You are to know the bitter taste/ of others' bread, how salt it is, and know/ how hard a path it is for one who goes/ descending and ascending others' stairs" (XVII, 55-60). Against this seemingly fated outcome, however, Dante prepares himself to think beyond exile with an eye to futurity and the consolation of writing:

it is right to arm myself with foresight,
that if I lose the place most dear, I may
not lose the rest through what my poems say.
Down in the world of endless bitterness,
and on the mountain from whose lovely peak
I was drawn upward by my lady's eyes,
and afterward, from light to light in Heaven,
I learned that which, if I retell it, must
for many have a taste too sharp, too harsh;
yet if I am a timid friend of truth,
I fear that I may lose my life among
those who will call this present, ancient times" (XVII, 109-120).

Here Dante evocatively lays out his own life's work and his place in the tradition of which he expects to become a part—an imagined conversation with distant others who will come to know

his story and his contributions in the future. As Giuseppe Mazzotta maintains, for Dante “tradition cannot be construed as an archive where one traces roots and records of the past. Tradition is the movement of history, the process by which the past is retrieved and is opened up to the future” (1979, 10). Thus the poet’s very act of attempting to write his way out of exile signals the secularity and historicity that his work would enable. Out of the symbolic and religiously laden space of the desert,¹³⁵ he conceives of another kind of space, such that “the desert [becomes] also the radical emblem of history in the *Divine Comedy*.” Accordingly, “Dante removes man’s utopian visions and pastoral dreams away from the boundaries of romances, where man’s longing and disillusion have consigned them, to the world of the possibilities of history,” which is “the place where exiles work and wait” (12). Ultimately, it is the story that Dante told to document his journey—its narrative structure, its appeals to the intellect and the senses, its power to convince through sympathy—that would make it linger in the memory and secure his place in history.

IV. Machiavelli: Agency between Poetics and Politics

...re clothed appropriately, I enter the ancient courts of ancient men, where, received by them with affection, I feed on that food which only is mine and which I was born for, where I am not ashamed to speak with them and to ask them the reason for their actions; and they in their kindness answer me; and for four hours of time I do not feel boredom, I forget every trouble, I do not dread poverty, I am not frightened by death; entirely I give myself over to them.¹³⁶

Machiavelli’s letter to Francesco Vettori, written December 10, 1513, after his banishment from Florentine politics, is not only his most widely cited, but even “perhaps the most famous letter in

¹³⁵ As Mazzotta notes, the ‘*gran disierto*’ in which Dante finds himself in *Inferno* I.64 is akin to the desert in Exodus where the Jews enter into a covenant with God to find salvation from exile. The salvation that Dante looks for is not of an otherworldly variety, concerned with an afterlife beyond the earth, but a legacy to be preserved on earth through history.

¹³⁶ Machiavelli, letter no. 137 in Allan Gilbert, trans. and ed., *The Letters of Machiavelli: A Selection* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 142.

Italian Renaissance literature.”¹³⁷ Though its significance with regard to Machiavelli’s aims and ambitions with regard to writing *The Prince* has been widely discussed, I approach it with a new question: what else can be gleaned from it in light of the relation to Dante? In the paragraph before the well-known lines cited above, Machiavelli notes Dante’s presence among his thoughts: “Leaving the grove, I go to a spring, and thence to my aviary. I have a book in my pocket, either Dante or Petrarch, or one of the lesser poets” (Gilbert 141). And in the lines that immediately follow the same passage, the earlier poet is there again: “because Dante says it does not produce knowledge when we hear but do not remember, I have noted everything in their conversation which has profited me, and have composed a little work *On Principedoms*” (142). The beginning of this line may seem rather obscure, owing in part to the difficulty of translation. Turning to the original Italian, the letter reads as follows: “E perche Dante dice *che non fa scienza senza lo ritenere lo havere inteso*, io ho notato quello di che per la loro conversatione ho fatto capitale, et composto uno opusculo De principatibus.”¹³⁸ The line attributed to Dante turns out to be word for word the same in the latter’s *Paradiso*: *ché non fa scienza,/ senza lo ritenere, avere inteso* (*Paradiso* V, 41-2). One English translation has been rendered differently, and I think less awkwardly, by Mandelbaum who has it as “he who hears,/ but does not hold what he has heard, learns nothing.”¹³⁹ The more important questions emerging from the concerns of translation are: what is the significance of what Machiavelli has learned through retention? Why the reference to Dante? And more specifically, why the reference to that part of Dante’s work?

¹³⁷ Peter Bondanella and Mark Musa, trans. and ed. *The Portable Machiavelli* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1979), 64-6.

¹³⁸ Machiavelli, *Lettere in Tutte le Opere*, 2876, emphasis added. Hereafter cited as L followed by the page number from this edition.

¹³⁹ *Divine Comedy*, trans. Mandelbaum, 399.

As discussed in the previous section, canto V of the *Paradiso* is significant for Dante's affirmation of the will as well as the significance of the vow. As Beatrice would go on to tell Dante in the rest of the above passage:

Two things are of the essence when one vows
A sacrifice: the matter of the pledge
And then the formal compact one accepts.
This last can never be annulled until the compact is fulfilled: it is of this
That I have spoke to you so precisely..."(*Par. V*, 43-48).

"You have both Testaments, the Old and New,
You have the shepherd of the Church to guide you;
You need no more than this for your salvation...
Do not act like the foolish, wanton lamb
That leaves its mother's milk and, heedless, wants
To war against—and harm—its very self" (76-84).

Of course, Machiavelli looked to more than the Old and New Testaments for anything like salvation or redemption. He was moved less by the substance of Christian teachings alluded to by Dante than by the spirit of Dante's work and message: conversing with history and willing his own vision into the world through that conversation. In this final section, I show that, aside from the influence of the discourse of virtue from Cicero and Petrarch, it was ultimately Dante's narratives that spurred Machiavelli's thoughts about reform and innovation in the political realm. Using the discourse of creative self-invention, Machiavelli would go on to envision an increasingly democratic form of politics that would enable greater numbers of citizens to collectively determine their political destinies.

As with Dante, Machiavelli's narratives about the political stem from the personal. The element of exile binds them, as does the need to leave behind great and lasting works for posterity. The creative impulse in Machiavelli vacillates between the poetic and the political. Bringing together scholarship that separately focus on Machiavelli's personal, literary, and political endeavours, I will illustrate here that there is a significant continuity among the three,

and that this convergence sets up an important precedent for resistance against exclusion in later Western thinking.

Machiavelli's eminent interpreters can be generally classified as those more concerned with his explicitly political concerns and those taking a more holistic approach to his personal experiences and literary efforts. Those associated with the Cambridge School—including J.G.A. Pocock, Quentin Skinner and Maurizio Viroli—have focused largely on the republican strains of Machiavelli's thought, while more recent work by John McCormick has challenged and extended their long-standing studies by considering the broader elements of popular agency and participation in his political vision. On the other hand, literary theorists and historians like John Najemy, Albert Ascoli and Victoria Kahn have closely examined Machiavelli's experience of exile and his literary ambitions as integral to his larger legacy. Both disciplinary approaches shed light on Machiavelli's significance in different ways.

Pocock's influential *Machiavellian Moment* examined the Florentine's innovations considering the uses made of the concept of *virtù* in both its military and civic iterations (181). Tracing Machiavelli's contributions to the later republican tradition witnessed in English and American thought of the 17th and 18th centuries, Pocock explicitly confined himself to *The Prince* and *The Discourses* “because they may be used to present those aspects of his thought which tell us most about the context [of republican thinking] and about his role in it” (183). Likewise, Skinner contended that Machiavelli was essentially defending republican values in traditional terms (1990, 123), also focusing on the *Discorsi* (135). Viroli's (1998) nuanced approach of highlighting Machiavelli's rhetorical aims is useful, as it incorporates an important narrative aspect into his methods. But even if “*The Prince*, the *Discourses on Livy* and the *Florentine Histories* were also written to move the readers to pursue the useful” (97), there is

reasonable evidence to suggest that Machiavelli was seeking more than a defence of republican values. John McCormick, in his democratic approach to Machiavelli, holds that his Cambridge School readers “blunt the Florentine’s historical originality and obscure his value for contemporary reflections on political reform and institutional innovations” (2011, 9). His advocacy for “class-specific magistrates and popularly inclusive assemblies” (ibid.), however, can be further explained by his own exclusion and personally motivated reasons behind his calls for political reform. All the political readings cited above stop short of assessing Machiavelli’s personal experiences and manifold ambitions. Machiavelli’s *virtù* was not simply that of Boethius or Cicero or Petrarch. It was, as with Dante, inflected by his own trials and tribulations and the narrative he built out of them.

Taking a more rounded, biographical view of Machiavelli reveals an even more complicated legacy than the ones with which many political theorists have engaged. Scholars more attuned to Machiavelli’s personal ordeals and desires have noted how he used the experience of his own personal hell to envision a new world (de Grazia 1989, 382-5); how he used rhetorical strategies generated by his imaginative re-readings of humanists to rethink politics (Kahn 1994, 17); how he strove to reinvent himself and contribute noteworthy and lasting works in the literary realm when he had been left out of the political (Ascoli and Kahn 1993, 1-6); and how he relied on a poetic impulse to give life to his political discourse (Najemy 1993, 335-349). Adding in the significant presence of Dante, I look to elaborate the personal element in Machiavelli’s aims. Chief among those aims, I highlight the following three: 1) to write his way out of exile; 2) to secure a kind of glory with his innovations; and 3) to instantiate a new way of thinking about politics, with consequences for future republican and democratic

conceptions of government. In light of these experiences, Machiavelli ultimately shows how the people can cultivate agency, resist exclusion, and challenge political authorities directly.

To arrive at Machiavelli's emancipatory politics of "the people," it is essential to consider how he situated himself in relation to that large, seemingly amorphous group. One of the most common terms in his original Italian is *popolo*, used at least a dozen times in the opening six chapters of his *Discorsi* (D I.1-6). He uses this alternately to mean generally "the Roman people" ("il Popolo romano", [D I.1]), and popular assemblies, opposed to the nobility ("la Nobilità romana" and "il Popolo contro di quella" [D I.2]). Likewise, he would also use terms like *la universalità* (D I.7) to differentiate the former from the latter group, which he also often called the *grandi* (D I.5).¹⁴⁰ Throughout the *Discourses*, Machiavelli portrays the *popolo* as the excluded and disenfranchised, fighting against domination imposed by the political elites. Given his family's background—his father Bernardo's middling social rank and debts—and his own inability to gain membership in the Florentine lawyer's guild, it is not only remarkable but telling that he attained the head position of the Second Chancery by 1498. He had already seen how exclusion worked against citizens of his station and how difficult it was for ordinary people to contend with the established classes.¹⁴¹ With this important background in mind, we can better appreciate his positionality and the impetus behind his writing.

As the well-known story goes, Machiavelli was infamously ousted from political life, imprisoned, tortured, and forced into exile after the collapse of the Florentine republic in 1512. In dedicating *The Prince* to Lorenzo de Medici, he would dramatically write that if "His Magnificence" would deign to look down to his lowly place, "you will recognize how unjustly I

¹⁴⁰ Another, more specific term would be *plebe*, which of course referred to the plebeian class in ancient Rome.

¹⁴¹ Here again we can anticipate another usage in the *Discourses* where he distinguishes between "*chi vuole acquistare*" and "*chi vuole mantenere*": those who wish to acquire and those who wish to maintain, referring to the nobility and the people respectively (D I.5, 323).

suffer the great and continuous malignity of fortune.”¹⁴² But as we also know from the rest of the dedication and so much of his work to follow, Machiavelli refused to accept the position afforded to him by chance. Identifying himself as of a “low and inferior social rank,” he would nevertheless tell the prince he had an important perspective to offer from the “low ground” by virtue of being “of the people” (Ibid.). More than that, beyond his advocacy of *virtù* in *The Prince* and the *Discourses*, he would live out his resistance against exclusion by consistently writing with conviction against his fate, especially between 1513 and 1515. These years stand as among the most important in Machiavelli’s intellectual development. The personal crisis he suffered would engender many creative efforts in different fields. Aside from *The Prince*, he would dedicate himself to letter-writing, poetry and, likely later, the *Discourses* (Skinner 1978, 154; Pocock 1975, 186; Najemy 1993, 336). The surprising turn to poetry after his exile reveals a sense of urgency and a creative impulse that would flourish all the way through his composition of the *Discourses*, sharpening his sense of self and the political vision he held for people like himself.

As early as 1513, shortly after his imprisonment and exile, Machiavelli already imagined himself a poet. In a sonnet written to Giuliano de’ Medici—who had recently been appointed to rule Florence, and to whom *The Prince* was originally dedicated—Machiavelli wrote:

Io ho, Giuliano, in gamba un paio di geti
con sei tratti di fune in su le spalle:
l’altre miserie mie non vo’ contalle,
poiché così si trattano e’ poeti!

I have, Giuliano, a pair of shackles on my legs
with six pieces of rope on my shoulders:
other miseries I don’t want to count,
because this is how poets are treated!¹⁴³

¹⁴² *Il Principe* in *Tutte le Opere*, 804.

¹⁴³ Machiavelli, “A Giuliano di Lorenzo de’ Medici,” *Scritti Litterari* in *Tutte le Opere*, 2514.

Machiavelli's dubbing himself a poet serves as testament to a kind of self-perception where he linked his character and his endeavours with predecessors like Dante. Dante is present not only in the *terza rima* structure Machiavelli used in poems like the *Decennali*, *capitoli*, and *Asino* (Ascoli and Capodivacca 2010, 194), but even more importantly in the spirit that the latter writer wanted to capture. Dante is "undoubtedly Machiavelli's most powerful poetic influence" due to "innumerable verbal echoes" and themes like the *Asino*'s first-person protagonist who is "lost in a dark wood at a critical moment in his life" (Ibid., 199). More than this, he is a constant companion to Machiavelli in practically all his literary and political strivings. On this point, Machiavelli's personal correspondences have even more to reveal.

Between 1513 and 1515, Machiavelli wrote a copious number of letters, with at least two dozen of them addressed to Francesco Vettori. As a friend and potential saviour, the Florentine ambassador to Rome promised Machiavelli a lifeline back to politics. But the highs and lows and the tensions of their correspondence show more than Machiavelli's desire to be included in the political realm: they show how he committed himself to trying to reshape it from the outside. On March 13, 1513, Machiavelli wrote to Vettori to inform him he'd been released from prison following the political amnesty recently given by Pope Leo X—not without indignation in his less than sincere thanks: "as Pagolo Vettori has told you, I have been released from prison during the universal rejoicing of this city, though I had hoped for Pagolo's and your intervention; for which I thank you" (L 2806). Passing over the "long story of [his] misfortune," he only blames fate for the calumny ("la ingiuria") he's fallen victim to and pithily asks about the possibility of a position in the Pope's newly instituted government (L 2807). Vettori's warm and apologetic reply, addressing Machiavelli as "my dear friend [mio caro chompare]" and complaining of the "greatest pains [maggiori dolori]" he has faced in recent months—not least from learning of

Niccolo's arrest—serves as a prelude to a more promising situation in which Machiavelli may hope to have freedom of movement and an improvement of his situation under the Medici (L 2808). This letter filled Machiavelli with so much hope that he replied soon after in a very different tone from his letter of the past week: “Your very loving letter,” he wrote to Vettori, “has made me forget all my past afflictions” (L 2808). But even more strongly, a sense of self-belief and defiance now clearly characterised his state of mind: “As for turning my face to Fortuna, I want you to derive this pleasure from my afflictions: I have endured them so bravely that I love myself for it, and it seems to me I am even stronger than I had thought” (L 2809). So, Machiavelli intones, he will go his own way, whether or not he is accepted by the Medici: “and if these masters of ours [questi patroni nostri] would not leave me on the ground, I will cherish the opportunity and carry myself in such a way that they will have reason to approve; if they act otherwise, I will go on living as I came, *since I was born poor and learned first to struggle rather than prosper* [che nacqui povero, et imparai prima a stentare che a godere]” (Ibid., my emphasis). Spurred by his near-death experience and the indignity he faced as a would-be poet, Machiavelli would give voice to his pain and, even more importantly, the resilience of the excluded class he represented.

After the initial promises of his first correspondence, Vettori's letters would increasingly take on a grey, remorseful tone. On March 30th, he would inform his “compare caro” that he had failed to secure any position for Niccolo's brother, Totto, among the papal family, implying that prospects for the former were equally dim (L 2810-12). Machiavelli's noteworthy reply would be sent over a week later, showing he had had time to process and write an eloquent rejoinder. His letter to Vettori on April 9th opens with an epigraph from Dante: “And I, who'd become aware of his colour,/ said: ‘How shall I go on if you are frightened,/ you who always comfort me in my

doubts?” (L 2813). Here Machiavelli alludes to the fourth canto of the *Inferno*, where the pilgrim Dante finds himself in limbo and looks to his guide Virgil for strength to continue through “that first circle girdling the abyss” (*Inf.* IV.24). What’s remarkable about this insinuation is Machiavelli’s self-reflexivity and playful positioning in relation to Dante’s text and status. Passing through limbo, the pilgrim in the poem is about to encounter those he considered the great poets alongside Virgil: Homer, Horace, Ovid, and Lucan—a fascinating mix, given Machiavelli’s further engagements with the same group.¹⁴⁴ Just as Dante placed himself within their ranks—“I was the sixth among such intellects” (*Inf.* IV.104)—we can see Machiavelli skillfully attempting to insert himself into the conversation. As he says to Vettori after the epigraph, “This letter of yours [Vettori’s previous correspondence] has terrified me more than the rope” (L 2813), referring again—as he had in his poem to Giuliano de Medici—to the rope that had been used to painfully hoist him up during the torture he faced in prison. But despite the pain and the anxiety of his own present limbo, he expresses only disinterest about the potential government post he had been hoping for and refuses to “carry any passion about not having it [non le havendo, non ne pigliero passione alcuna]” (*Ibid.*). Shortly after this, he goes on to make his famous declaration that no matter what happens, he must “talk about the government, or else be silent [e’ mi conviene ragionare dello stato, et mi bisogna o botarmi di stare cheto, o ragionare di questo]” (*Ibid.*).¹⁴⁵ Aside from his dedication to discussing politics at all costs, we can witness

¹⁴⁴ Homer has had perennial significance for his status as “the consummate poet” (*Inf.* IV.88) and his influence over all others after him; Horace is remembered as a Roman satirist who used lyric poetry to produce fierce invectives against social and political abuses; Ovid is the famed author of the *Metamorphosis* and one of the foremost representatives of exilic writing; and Lucan is best known for his epic poem *Civil War*, in which he confronted Rome, “a mighty people/ attacking its own guts” with the lingering question: “What madness was this, O citizens?” See Lucan, *Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 3. The bravery of each of these poets and their willingness to grapple with political questions of their age clearly left a mark on Dante, who gave them such a high station in his *Divine Comedy*, and on Machiavelli, who in turn took them to be exemplary.

¹⁴⁵ Commenting on these lines, John Najemy maintains that Machiavelli’s use of “ragionare” implies more than simply talking about something (as would another word like “parlare”) but rather points to an internal dialogue that seeks to arrive at understanding: “‘Ragionare’... exists somewhere between reason and speech, incorporating

here also a growing impulse for Machiavelli to carve out a path for himself, using poetry as his true guide.

By the end of 1514, the extent of Machiavelli's metamorphosis and his reliance on poetry come into sharper relief. After a year-long series of exchanges about shifting political alliances among the French, the Spanish, and the Italian city-states, Vettori would reach out on December 3rd with yet another (potentially empty) promise to bring Machiavelli back into the political fray. In a reference to Horace, he would open his letter by tempting the self-styled poet back to politics: "My dear friend, don't be surprised if 'I try to entrap you in the old game, though you have made plenty of appearances and received the foil'; because I do it only with the intention of helping you [Compar mio caro, non vi maravigliate, che, benché siate «spectatus satis, et donatus iam rude, quaeram iterum te antiquo includere ludo»; perché non lo fo se non perprovare se vi potessi giovare]" (L 2919).¹⁴⁶ As a mirror-image, inverted, Horace had left poetry to pursue philosophy when he was called on by his patron Maecenas to return to "the old game"¹⁴⁷; and now in his playfully allusive reversal, Vettori was calling on Machiavelli to leave poetry and come back to politics. To be *included* again is a major question for Machiavelli and the significance of his oeuvre. "I don't think you've forgotten the craft [non credo habbiate dimenticato l'arte]" Vettori would tell him (L 2921). But which craft, which *arte*, did Machiavelli want to be involved in now? Did he *want* to be included in politics as such? His

aspects of both and implying some mastery or control over a subject matter that could be both learned and taught: over something that could be described as an *arte*, whether in business or politics." See Najemy, 1993, 109.

¹⁴⁶ Here the use of the Latin-rooted *includere*, alluded to in the introduction of my dissertation, is noteworthy. The term, which has begotten the English *include*, denotes not only "bringing in" but "trapping in" or enclosing, as with walls. Vettori's invitation, and his reference to Horace, belies trepidation about enlisting Machiavelli again in politics, and hemming him in in the process; hence my translation of *te antiquo includere ludo* as "to entrap you in the old game."

¹⁴⁷ Horace begins the first of his epistles with the line referred to by Vettori. The translation in the Loeb edition of his text reads, "you, Maecenas, seek to shut me up again in my old school." See *Satires, Epistles and Ars Poetica*, trans. and ed. H. Rushton Fairclough (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1926), p. 251.

letter on December 4th—curiously sent just a day after Vettori’s without knowing that his friend had written to him with this question—provides a telling answer.

In a letter written entirely in Latin, Machiavelli would turn back to Ovid in the process of consummating his status as a poet. Quoting the older poet’s *Metamorphosis*—“to me alone Troy remains” which would have been followed by the lines “my woes still run their course”¹⁴⁸—he signals yet again the condition of his own exile, akin to Ovid’s. He describes his own life as “sordid and inglorious,”¹⁴⁹ seemingly in a hopeless position after such a long exclusion from politics. But in the very act of returning to Ovid again, Machiavelli shows “[t]he signs of a prolonged encounter with the great exile poet” whose words “had put him ‘a thousand years’ away from himself” (Najemy 1993, 294). Najemy’s characterisation is striking and crucial for understanding the way Machiavelli had come to think and write. Machiavelli had undergone his own metamorphosis: his ambitions, his intentions, and very way of speaking had changed. He now consorted with poets because they were the ones who had taught him to speak in a new way. In Najemy’s pithy words: “In exile, even one’s language becomes a stranger. And the exile becomes a child who must learn to read and speak all over again” (295). One of the most intriguing aspects of Machiavelli’s later thought and influence is that it could be precisely this new way of speaking that would instantiate a turn to a more radically democratic politics.

Having turned to poetry, Machiavelli embraced exile and imagined the promise of writing one’s way out as *writing oneself into the world*. After his correspondence with Vettori at the end of 1514 (perhaps predictably) came to nothing as far as finding a post in the government was concerned, Machiavelli would write one last letter to his friend on January 31st, 1515. This

¹⁴⁸ See Allan Gilbert’s translation of Machiavelli’s letter and the note about Ovid in *The Letters of Machiavelli: A Selection*, 166, n1.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

letter is fascinating for the way it opposes a seeming sense of resignation with a will to act on the world by beginning anew. Opening with a sonnet about the way love (in the form of Cupid) has struck him and chained him down, Machiavelli juxtaposes his poetic endeavours with his impeded political ambitions:

con questo sonetto... vedrete quanta industria habbia usato quello ladroncello dello Amore per incatenarmi. Et sono, quelle che mi ha messo, sì forte catene, che io sono al tutto disperato della libertà né posso pensare via come io habbia a scatenarmi; et quando pure la sorte o altro aggiramento humano mi aprisse qualche cammino ad uscirmene, et per avventura non vorrei entrarvi, tanto mi paiono hor dolci, hor leggiere, hor gravi quelle catene, et fanno un mescolo di sorte, che io giudico non potere vivere contento senza quella qualità di vita.

from this sonnet... you can see how much industry that little thief Love has spent to chain me. And these chains that [Love] has put on me are so strong that I completely despair of my liberty and cannot think of any way in which I can unchain myself; and if chance or some twist in human affairs were to offer me some way of getting out of them, perhaps I will not wish to take it, so much now sweet, now light, now heavy do I find those chains, and they make such a mixture that I judge I cannot live content without this way of life (L 2944).

Here Machiavelli has resigned himself to Love—"Amore" capitalised for personification—in the same way that Dante had in the aforementioned section of his *Vita Nuova* after he first met Beatrice and dedicated himself to poetry.¹⁵⁰ This final link to Dante is especially important in my analysis. Najemy's convincing take on the significance of Ovid provides another pillar of support for that final argument. In Najemy's analysis, the final letter to Vettori shows how "[a]s a political exile, Machiavelli had come to see himself as a kind of *exclusus amator* whose passion was as much his own comic doing as a painful undoing of self. Like other frustrated lovers, Machiavelli in exile has sung in vain" (1993, 325). Reading further into Ovid's significance, however, he notes that Machiavelli was doing something more by comparing himself to the

¹⁵⁰ See above in the section on Dante. The parallel lines in Dante's original read: "D'allora innanzi dichò che Amore signoreggiò la mia anima, la quale fu sì tosto a lui disponsata, e cominciò a prendere sopra me tanta sicurtade e tanta signori aver la virtù che li dava la mia imaginazione, che me convenia fare tutti li suoi piaceri compiutamente" (*Vita Nuova* II.7 in *Tutte le Opere*, 72).

version of Apollo portrayed by Ovid, as “Ovid’s Apollo... does not merely accept defeat in disgrace. The elusive object of desire is [in his portrayal] transformed, beyond recognition or the possibility of possession, into the laurel that the god now adopts as the symbol of all the triumphs—political and poetic—to be achieved in his name” (Ibid.). This comparison leads, finally, to what is perhaps Machiavelli’s most enduring and significant work for future republican and democratic conceptions of government: the *Discourses on Livy*.

There is a convincing amount of evidence that the *Discourses* were very likely written after Machiavelli’s last set of exchanges with Vettori in January 1515 (Najemy 1993, 335-6; Baron, 1988 vol.2, 101-51; Skinner 1978, vol.1, 154; Pocock 1975, 185-6). Najemy maintains that the correspondence between Machiavelli and Vettori itself attests to this likelihood, given the shift to what he also identifies as a kind of new poetic voice in Machiavelli’s writing (337). Poetry was of course present to some extent in *The Prince*, most notably in the final lines of the exhortation to save Italy, in which Machiavelli echoed Petrarch to call for virtue against the “barbarian” threat.¹⁵¹ However, in line with the above chronology that sees *The Prince* as being written before the *Discourses*, I follow Pocock in seeing Machiavelli shift from a Petrarchan *virtù militare* to a civic *virtù* as he moved from one text to the next (1975, 181).¹⁵² On close analysis, the *Discourses* are full of new poetic language that indicate Machiavelli’s radical rethinking of democratic politics. This self-reflexively innovative way of speaking is evident from the preface to book I, where Machiavelli famously sets out to discover “new ways and methods” akin to the way one would “set off in search of new seas and unknown lands” (1970,

¹⁵¹ Petrarch’s original reads: “then virtue against rage/ will take up arms, and battle will be short,/ for all that ancient valor/ in the Italian heart is not yet dead [vertù contra furore/ prendera l’arme, et fia ‘l combatter corto;/ che l’antico valore/ ne l’italici cor non é ancor morto]. See Petrarch, *The Canzonere*, trans. Mark Musa (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999) canzone 128, 93-6, p.208.

¹⁵² For this reason, I also largely bypass *The Prince* to focus on the *Discourses*, as the democratic iterations of Machiavelli in which I am interested (civic *virtù* and the sovereignty of the people as popular agency) are much more pronounced in the latter.

97).¹⁵³ Aside from the interesting way this simile anticipates politics after European colonialism, it is also extraordinary for the way it signals a kind of poetic, heroic endeavour. “[F]or the common benefit of all, I have decided,” Machiavelli repeats, “to enter upon a new way, as yet untrodden by anyone else” (Ibid.). As Najemy points out, “this dramatic declaration of lonely and heroic independence is in fact a paraphrase of the opening line of book 4 of Lucretius’s *De rerum natura*,” the work of another Roman poet who had influenced Virgil, Horace, and Ovid (1993, 337). Machiavelli’s personal experiences, his growth through exile, and his closeness to poetry are all at work here.

Though Machiavelli explicitly states in his preface that his aim is to learn from history through engagement with Livy, he alludes to multiple unnamed sources for his inspiration: “with the help of those who have encouraged me to undertake the task, I think I can carry it out in such a way that there shall remain to another but a short road to traverse in order to reach the place assigned” (1970, 99). His impetus comes from the agency demonstrated by the great poets before him and the experience he has gained from engaging with them. In their introduction to *Machiavelli and the Discourses of Literature*, Ascoli and Kahn maintain that “Machiavelli’s work is rhetorical because persuasion is an art that is relevant to politics as well as to literature. And if Machiavelli at times disparages the merely literary uses of rhetoric, he does so in order to highlight the strategic use of rhetoric in the realm of politics” (5). Despite his failure to achieve fame as a poet—reflected in the more successful Ariosto’s refusal to include him among significant writers of his age in his *Orlando Furioso*¹⁵⁴—Machiavelli knew he still had a way to

¹⁵³ This rendering of “modi ed ordini nuovi” (*Discorsi* in *Tutte le Opere*, 307) is different from the more cognate-based translation of “new modes and orders,” but in citing the *Discourses*, I shift this time to Walker’s translation in Machiavelli, *The Discourses*, ed. Bernard Crick (New York: Viking Penguin, 1970). For a comparison, see Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 5.

¹⁵⁴ See Ascoli and Kahn, 1993, 1; and Machiavelli’s letter to his friend Lodovico Alamanni to make this complaint in *Scritti Letterati*, 1953.

write his way out of exile and secure a different kind of fame with his political innovations. To do so, he would channel the rhetorical force and poetic energy he had garnered during exile into the power of ordinary people like himself who had been left out of politics. It would be in the political realm that Machiavelli sought to leave his influence, all the while with exilic and poetic attunement. In undertaking this task, he never called for inclusion per se—the language of inclusion is not present in his writings and would not gain currency until the following century—but prescribed the use of popular agency against exclusion.

The *Discourses* can be read as Machiavelli's story about the growth and cultivation of popular agency. It is, in many ways, a story about how to expand the democratic aims of citizens. To support this story, John McCormick has advanced a thorough and convincing account that traces specific democratic institutions and measures in Machiavelli's writing to leave us with a lesson on "how common people might control elites" (2011, 3). But beyond Machiavelli's "prescriptions for a widely inclusive and popularly empowered form of government" (65), I believe the personal details of his life outlined above warrant reading him as an opponent to exclusion first and foremost. The other story at work in the *Discourses* is the one haunted by the poets in Machiavelli's imaginary—not least Dante, as I have shown. So it is, again, Dante in the background when Machiavelli sets off, echoes of "The waves I take were never sailed before" (*Par.* II.7) ringing in the later writer's mind. Of course Machiavelli would take care to be as thorough and systematic as possible in a work he planned to leave as among his greatest achievements, bringing all his political expertise to bear on it. He would refer copiously to historians and theorists before him to recommend mechanisms and institutions by which powerful elites could be held in check. But the active contestation against exclusion in his work was not only a matter of measures and policies for such ends: it was also a spirit, grown out of

exilic thinking, finding expression in poetry, and left behind for future communities of resisters. The enduring appeal of Machiavelli's narrative rests on the way it reasserts the agency of those excluded from the political realm and empowers them to rewrite themselves and the polis together. A look through some of the most important passages of the *Discourses* will serve to support and cap off this final argument.

After opening the *Discourses* by praising the *virtù* maintained in the Roman republic for so many centuries (D I.1), Machiavelli works his way toward a discussion of different regime types to determine why the form of government it settled on turned out to be best. Here he sets out the famous cycle through which all commonwealths pass: “principality easily becomes tyranny; aristocracy easily turns to oligarchy; and democracy is without difficulty converted into anarchy” [“il Principato facilmente diventa tirannico; gli Ottimati con facilità diventano stato di pochi; il Popolare senza difficoltà in licenzioso si converte”] (D I.2). Machiavelli clearly has Aristotle¹⁵⁵ and Polybius¹⁵⁶ in mind with his typology and cycle of revolutions. But when he comes to Rome and its later lessons for Italy, he turns more directly to Livy to discuss the ancient republic's institutions. This turn constitutes a crucial aspect of Machiavelli's democratic thinking. Noting that “prudent legislators” chose a mixed republic as the way to escape the cycle of revolutions and ensure a stable government, he begins to consider how the Roman republic was created in such a way that it could “pave the way to perfection” (D I.2). The critical component for this, he notes, was to “find a place for popular government” [Restavale solo a dare luogo al governo popolare]” (D I.2). And the mechanism for securing this element and keeping in check the nobility's “insolence” was, in the Roman republic's experience, the creation of the tribunes of the plebs. In this way, the people would rise against the establishment (“il

¹⁵⁵ See *Politics*, books III-VI

¹⁵⁶ See *Rise of the Roman Empire*, VI

Popolo contro di quella”), fighting to secure their own space and remaining in opposition to the senate, so that the friction and discord between them (“la disunione della Plebe o del Senato”) would produce an unlikely “perfection” (Ibid.). The language of contestation and discord is vital in Machiavelli’s radically democratic portrayal, which primarily takes the form of resistance to exclusion.

In tracing the creation of the tribunes of the plebs, Machiavelli claims it must be taken for granted that “all men are wicked” and will act against others in their own interests when opportunities present themselves (D I.3). While this sounds similar to the earlier presuppositions of *The Prince*, it is important to note that in the *Discourses*, such an assumption is especially relevant to kings and the nobility, whom Machiavelli singles out both before and after his claim. Having mentioned in the previous section the “insolence” of the Nobilità, he focuses on the Tarquins and the Roman senate in part three to illustrate the “wickedness” he has referred to. The Tarquins—particularly the last Roman king, Lucius Tarquinius Superbus or “Tarquin the Proud”—represent arrogance and rule by force, putting fear into the senate and the plebs alike; but as soon as they are gone, Machiavelli states, the senate turns into the oppressor of the plebs and shows its true colours. Therefore the creation of the tribunes of the plebs becomes necessary to prevent such domination, as they “were invested with such pre-eminence and reputation that henceforth they could always mediate between the plebs and the senate and curb the insolence of the nobility” (D I.3). Here Machiavelli’s contestatory politics is evidenced by the reliance on Livy’s account. According to Livy, “[t]he hard-won liberty of Rome was rendered the more welcome, and the more fruitful, by the character of the last king, Tarquin the Proud.”¹⁵⁷ The tribunes of the plebs were justified by their main advocate, Menenius, using the classic image of

¹⁵⁷ See Livy, 2.1 in *The Early History of Rome*, trans. Aubrey de Selincourt (New York: Penguin Books, 2002), 107.

the body politic: all in a republic are members of a whole and depend on one another to function well. Through the use of this story, the populace found a voice and a way to have that voice heard: “an agreement was reached on the condition that special magistrates should be appointed to represent the commons; these officers—‘tribunes of the people’—should be above the law, and their function should be to protect the commons against the consuls.”¹⁵⁸ Such empowerment comes about through friction and disagreement: it is, as Livy has noted, “hard-won.” Machiavelli notes that such discord between the plebs and the senate made the Roman republic free and powerful because they helped maintain the “common good” and “led to laws and institutions that benefited the liberty of the public” (D I.4). The “people” thus play the part of the excluded and oppressed, and the narratives they advance in service of their own agency and against the power of the existing structure are necessary to keep that power in check: “[t]he demands of a free populace are rarely pernicious to liberty, because they are due either to the people being oppressed or to the suspicion that they will be oppressed” (Ibid.). The tumults [“furano”] that they cause—as in what led to the creation of the tribunes of the plebs— “deserve the highest praise” because it is such acts of resistance that constitute them as “the guardians of Roman liberty [“furano costituiti per guardia della libertà]” (Ibid.).

Machiavelli thus makes use of several different sources to argue for the strength and importance of democratic agency, but the spirit of resistance born of exile and poetry remains his principal inspiration. The lessons of Livy and Cicero serve as reminders of the power of narratives to bind people and decide how they want to constitute themselves. The people want to avoid being dominated, and their active contestation against elites is crucial. Their active participation in government represents their desire “not to be ill-treated” (D I.46) but also

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 2.33, 147.

displays good judgment in the face of partisanship: hence Machiavelli's explanation of the plebs' occasional decisions to elect nobles instead of one of their own (D I.47). This propensity for good judgment finds greater expression in the oft-quoted claim that "the masses are more knowing and more constant than is a prince" (D I.58). Over and above these contentions, more thoroughly covered by McCormick (2011, 21-35, 65-90), my main concern has been with the source and impetus of Machiavelli's resistance against exclusion. Whether it is a set of "prescriptions for a widely inclusive and popularly empowered form of government" (65) rests on the larger intentions; and here, the poetic and exilic impulses are more significant than has been acknowledged by political theorists. As John Najemy has argued, the poetic impulse runs all the way through the *Discourses* and finds expression in his way of speaking about what he will leave behind to others contesting the politics of their own present and fighting for a future, as in the preface to book II where Machiavelli states: "I shall make so bold as to declare plainly what I think of [past] days and of our own, so that the minds of young men who read what I have written may turn from the one and prepare to imitate the other whenever fortune provides them with occasion for so doing" (D II, preface). Najemy goes on to conclude by engaging extensively with Ovid's influence (1993, 342-9), but in concluding this chapter, I return to Dante and his underappreciated presence in Machiavelli's exilic, contestatory politics.

From the time of his exile and the composition of *The Prince* to his more artistic endeavours and the writing of the *Discourses* in later years, Machiavelli sought to write his way into history and leave behind a legacy of resistance. Aside from the numerous references in his letters to Vettori, Machiavelli evinced a reliance on Dante's conception of *virtù* as agency and self-invention when he noted that our free will ["libero arbitrio"] should not be given up (P XXV). While fortune always played a part, Machiavelli affirmed, "the rest is up to you; God

does not want to do everything, in order not to deprive us of our free will and part of that glory which belongs to us [el rimanente dovete fare voi; Dio non vuole fare ogni cosa per non ci tôrre el libero arbitrio e parte di quella gloria che tocca a noi] (P XXVI). These lines, forming the core of Machiavelli's beliefs and endeavours, directly echo Dante's refutation of fatalism (*Purg.* XVI, 65-83; *Purg.* XXVII, 130-131, 139-142) and especially his affirmation of the use of free will discussed above (*Par.* V, 19-22). Machiavelli would not be the only thinker to pick up on this thread of secular agency, so crucial to the unfolding of Western politics to follow. But his use of it to secure something much more than princely glory (D I.10)—viz. the role of the people in constituting and maintaining the survival and identity of the state (D I.11)—would be crucial. In the *Discourses*, Dante appears one final time in a “wise remark”: “Rarely to the branches/ Does human worth ascend; for ‘tis the will/ Of its donor that men may recognize it as his gift” (D I.11, quoting *Purgatorio* VII.121). The gift of free will, recognised and appreciated in the suffering of exile, becomes the means through which the people challenge tyranny and oppression, as Dante had in his invective against the corruption of Florence in his own time:

For all the town of Italy are full
Of tyrants, and each townsman who becomes
A partisan is soon a new Marcellus.
My Florence, you indeed may be content
That this digression would leave you exempt:
Your people's strivings spare you this lament.
Others have justice in their hearts, and thought
Is slow to let it fly off from their bow;
But your folk keep it ready—on their lips.
Others refuse the weight of public service;
Whereas your people—eagerly—respond,
Even unasked, and shout: ‘I’ll take it on’
(*Purg.* VI, 127-135).

Machiavelli had the people in mind from the time of his earliest political writings.¹⁵⁹ The *popolo* represent the most important political unit in his thinking, and he made a powerful case for the kinds of measures and mechanisms that ought to be instituted to secure their participation in government. But, more than that, his impulses and ambitions after his exile and his immersion into poetry brought him to give more compelling reasons for the priority given to the people. As the development of his writing traced in this chapter shows, his aims were not simply about inclusion per se, but resistance against exclusion and domination. They were about holding elites accountable but also about striving to make a contribution to history by empowering his readers to become a community of resisters. The legacy his writings leave behind is far more important than merely for the republican tradition to which numerous interpreters have wed him. Taking inspiration from Dante, Machiavelli reaffirmed the people's capacity to write themselves and the state into existence, choosing to memorialise the narratives that matter most to their identity. Beyond Machiavelli, these proto-democratic impulses will be seen in other strivings to be analysed in the chapters to follow. Departing from the inclusionary language of Locke and Kant, a community of resisters ranging from Fanon, Shari'ati, and Baldwin to ordinary citizens in contemporary Iran and the United States will serve as examples of the vigorous spirit of exilic thinking and agency against domination.

¹⁵⁹ See *Ai Paleschi* in *Tutte le Opere*, 137-139.

Chapter Four: Resistance to Exclusion Reframed: From Fanon and Shari’ati to Poetic Popular Dissent in Modern Iran

Two forms of religion have existed in history—that is, two groups, two forces. One has been a force of oppression, an enemy of progress, truth, justice, the freedom of the people, development and civilisation. This force has served to justify greed, deviant instincts, and domination over the people; and this force remains after all a religion, not disbelief or non-religion. On the other side, there is the force of *rightful* [*hagh*] religion, and this rightful religion has arrived to destroy the opposite force.

—Ali Shari’ati, *Mazhab alahye Mazhab [Religion versus Religion]*¹⁶⁰

At times, we do not find the right words, to convey how we feel inside; poetry does this for us. Poetry comes to our aid. Yes, it is true that when I recite this poetry, the poem is not mine, but I am the one who is expressing it [*bayānesh mikonam*]. And when I recite it on the right occasion, with good delivery, this really helps me express myself.

—“Mina,” an interviewee quoted in *Say What Your Longing Heart Desires*¹⁶¹

We say that Islam, and Muslim, mean that one must have a head bowed in submission [*sar-e taslim*]. But if we want to submit, then how can we ask questions and how can we learn? Are we to just say yes, right, to whatever they tell us is our true religion? No, I don’t think so.

—“Parvin,” another interviewee quoted in *Say What Your Longing Heart Desires*¹⁶²

I. The Ubiquity of Resistance across Time and Place

A few short years before his assassination at the hands of right-wing nationalists at the onset of the Spanish Civil War in 1936, the playwright and poet Federico García Lorca wrote in a ghazal: “I want to sleep a moment,/ a moment, a minute, a century;/ but everyone should know that I have not died;/ that there is a golden manger inside my lips;/ that I’m the little friend of the West Wind;/ that I’m the immense shadow of my tears” (2002, 782). Lorca wanted to live on through his art, through his words, even as an ascendant political regime founded on fanaticism and violence threatened to sweep them away. Centuries had passed since Rumi and Hafez, Dante

¹⁶⁰ Ali Shari’ati, *Mazhab alahye Mazhab [Religion versus Religion]* (Tehran: Intisharat-I Chapakhsh, 1369 AH [1990 AD]), 52.

¹⁶¹ Niloofar Haeri, *Say What Your Longing Heart Desires: Women, Prayer, and Poetry in Iran* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020), 49.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 161.

and Machiavelli, and so many other proponents of poetic dissidence had made their mark on politics in the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance. What had remained the same in the spirit they passed on, what had changed?

Lorca was not officially a member of any political party (Beevor 2006, 103) but he stood for freedom and self-expression, against hate and intolerance in all their forms. He wrote in the ghazal form, inspired by a culture he considered close to his own; he stated that in his poetry “where the affinity is evident beyond question of coincidence is in the sublime *Amorous Ghazals* of Hafiz” (Kanani 2016, 387) and that he shared with the earlier poet “the same sentiments” (388). The poet from Shiraz had sung about the immortality of love and, comparing those songs to his own *Poem of the Deep Song*, Lorca noted “the exact same resolution proclaimed by countless songs of the *cante jondo*. That love is far stronger than death” (Ibid.). The right-wing political representative who arrested him, Ramón Ruiz Alonso, said of Lorca: ““He did more damage with his pen than others did with their guns”” (Gibson 1983, 142). Lorca’s persistence through words after his death speaks to the unassailable power of poetic dissidence; he is one among many presences exemplifying that wherever intolerance and domination appear, a spirit of defiance that transcends borders and cultures will be there to resist it. At the same time, he is one among many in a community of resisters whose expression of that spirit would change according to historical circumstances and accompanying artistic and intellectual currents.

In this chapter, I examine three expressions of poetic resistance from the twentieth century to the present, demonstrating how narrative world-building persists as the lifeblood of democratic agency against domination and exclusion. Specifically, I focus on two figures—Frantz Fanon and Ali Shari’ati—and their anti-colonial rhetoric of contention before turning to ordinary citizens in Iran to examine how new forms of oppression based on gender and religious

belief are continually contested. Examining agency in a new light, I consider the ways contemporary manifestations of exclusion have necessitated ever-new forms of dissidence to assert the ideals of self-government through popular empowerment.

Agency, as I have shown in the previous two chapters, persistently emerges among the people in the form of counter-narratives. These narratives become a way for agents to know who they are, and to express themselves as such against constraining views imposed on them through discursive and material power structures. Poetry and literary expressions of selfhood have already figured prominently in the scope of my study and, in preparing to analyse the poetics of dissent in modern contexts, it is worth reasserting why this form of contestation remains a noteworthy point of emphasis. To reiterate the method, let me turn briefly again to Arendt and Said. Before her noted discussions of action and self-disclosure in *The Human Condition*, Arendt wrote that “works of art are the most intensely worldly of all tangible things; their durability is almost untouched by the corroding effect of natural processes” (167). This “worldliness” consists in the function of works of art to create and conserve “a suitable world” such as a polis, or a process in which plurality and publicity play out and allow agents to create a shared space of meaning (Kateb 1977, 142-3). Arendt highlighted poetry as having a peculiar but significant status: “poetry is closest to thought, and a poem is less a thing than any other work of art” (HC 170). That is, because of its reliance on memory and rhythm, poetry remains “closest to the thought that inspired it” and by the same token gains a distance from its status as a “thing” on the printed or written page (169). Nevertheless, “even a poem, no matter how long it existed as a living spoken word in the recollection of the bard and those who listened to him, will eventually be ‘made,’ that is, written down and transformed into a tangible thing among things, because remembrance and the gift of recollection, from which all desire for imperishability springs, need

tangible things to remind them, lest they perish themselves” (170). In short, the preservation of poetry and other forms of art goes hand-in-hand with the preservation of the narratives through which agents disclose themselves and build a world:

acting and speaking men need the help of *homo faber* in his highest capacity, that is, the help of the artist, of poets and historiographers, of monument-builders or writers, because without them the only product of their activity, the story they enact and tell, would not survive at all. In order to be what the world is always meant to be, a home for men during their life on earth, the human artifice must be a place fit for action and speech, for activities not only entirely useless for the necessities of life but of an entirely different nature from the manifold activities of fabrication by which the world itself and all things in it are produced (173-4).

Taking Arendt’s analysis a step further, it can be shown that in certain contexts of resistance against oppression and exclusion, poetic dissidence takes on tones of utmost necessity.

Counter-narratives of democratic agency taking on poetic form can represent dissatisfaction with the status quo—particularly when this arrangement is exclusionary. Whether against Ilkhanate, colonial regime, monarchy, or Islamic Republic, the discontent expressed in such narratives typifies a vital democratic strain. This resource alone is not sufficient for a democratic regime in and of itself, but it is necessary insofar as it asserts the agency of the excluded—and this again is why it can be characterised as the lifeblood of democracy.

Narratives of contestation repeat the democratic imperative that every individual ought to have agency over his or her future: this is a democratic ideal of self-government to be found across cultures. In countless contexts in world history, those having their agency suppressed have found new ways to empower themselves and in so doing seek to instantiate a new political order to be legitimated. “Power,” in Arendt’s refrain, “corresponds to the human ability not just to act but to act in concert” (1970, 44). It “needs no justification, being inherent in the very existence of political communities; what it does need is legitimacy” (52). The poetic forms of dissidence I aim to examine in this chapter do not always end up creating political orders that can be

considered democratically legitimate. In different but related contexts, Frantz Fanon and Ali Shari'ati compellingly argue for liberation only to help cement political orders that generate new exclusions and forms of oppression that can scarcely be considered democratic. Here, Said's notes on traveling theory and resistance culture are again instructive alongside Arendt's schema.

Said's traveling theory continues to provoke and inspire new explorations of the way ideas and worldviews become transfigured as they move from one place to another. His self-admittedly incomplete overview of the movement of ideas takes the form of a concise but generative sketch worth revisiting in its entirety:

First, there is the point of origin, or what seems like one, a set of initial circumstances in which the idea came to birth or entered discourse. Second, there is a distance transversed, a passage through the pressure of various contexts as the idea comes from an earlier point to another time and place where it will come into a new prominence. Third, there is a set of conditions—call them conditions of acceptance or, as an inevitable part of acceptance, resistances—which then confronts the transplanted theory or idea, making possible its introduction or toleration, however alien it might appear to be. Fourth, the now full (or partly) accommodated (or incorporated) idea is to some extent transformed by its new uses, its new position in a new time and place (1983, 226-7).

Said notes that anything like a full account of these stages would require a monumental effort and, leaving it open to further study, confines himself to just one example of a series of movements to consider what the process may look like. The central questions he is concerned with are: “What happens to [a theory] when, in different circumstances and for new reasons, it is used again and, in still more different circumstances, again? What can this tell us about theory itself—its limits, its possibilities, its inherent problems—and what can it suggest to us about the relationship between theory and criticism, on the one hand, and society and culture on the other?” (230).

The example Said takes up in his initial exploration of traveling theory is the development of the idea of class consciousness by Georg Lukacs, its subsequent uses and

reorientations by his student Lucien Goldmann, and still later the uses of what had become a transformed idea by Raymond Williams. To become reconfigured and rewritten, the idea undergoes translation and new interpretation across context—most importantly for Said’s purposes, due to being transplanted from one historical and political situation to another. Lukacs’ original idea, developed in *History and Class Consciousness* in 1923, was bound up with revolutionary thinking and practice, portending the coming of a new world. Seeking to give new life to Marx’s ideas by emphasising the agency of the working class to overthrow existing conditions of oppression, Lukacs maintained that “Any transformation can only come about as the product of the—free—action of the proletariat itself” (1971, 209). Further, accentuating the Hegelian strain in Marx, he reasserted the inevitability of the historical progression by which subject and object are to be reconciled, making class consciousness the engine in the revolutionary process of emancipation (252-3). In Said’s estimation, Lukacs’ account was “powerfully responsive... to the political order he described with such formidable gravity and dread” (1983, 234). It was, in the common refrain, a product of its time. As Said goes on to examine the effects of Lukacs’ idea on his disciple Lucien Goldmann, he highlights a distinct modification: Goldmann changes class consciousness to “vision du monde,” attributing a totalising world vision to privileged writers like Pascal and Racine (234-5). Instead of the proletariat, Goldmann focuses on group consciousness among individual writers to make a new theory about how a world vision is constituted and expressed. The details of these reconfigurations are less important than the general insight they reveal about the movement, the *traveling* of theory: as the original idea is uprooted from its point of origin in Lukacs’ Hungarian Soviet Republic to the Sorbonne in Paris where Goldmann brings it to new life in the form of a doctoral dissertation, it undergoes a significant transformation. Specifically, Said claims, it can

be said that “Goldmann’s adaptation of Lukacs degrades theory, lowers it in importance, domesticates it somewhat.” While this degradation does not have a moral implication, it signals something important about what can happen to a theory when it travels: “degradation conveys the lowering of color, the greater degree of distance, the loss of immediate force that occurs when Goldmann’s notion of consciousness and theory are compared with the meaning and role intended by Lukacs for theory” (236). Further still, Raymond Williams’ uses of Lukacs and Goldmann in late twentieth-century Cambridge indicate another degree of estrangement even while signalling a basic continuity (238-9). The crucial point made by Said at the end of his essay is that context—historical, intellectual, cultural—matters, and we ought to remain aware of this fact when examining theories so that they do not congeal into cultural dogma. *Resistances* to theory are crucial because they exercise a form of critical consciousness to scrutinise ideas handed down to us, considering where they come from and how they may speak to us as we appropriate and rework them.

Said, of course, did not consider the assessment of traveling theory to be anything like a settled matter. Revisiting the question over a decade later in “Traveling Theory Reconsidered,” he adds another perspective that, in my estimation, is even more valuable in tracing the paths resistance can take. His reconsideration rests, this time around, on the corrective that ideas do not always necessarily diminish in weight and force in moving across contexts, but may undergo other forms of transfiguration. If they are not rejected altogether, theories may be taken up in such a way that they become even more fiery and impactful, fitted more appropriately to the situation in which they become used. To make this point, he returns to Lukacs once again, this time considering the ways Theodor Adorno and Frantz Fanon take up, resist, and redirect his ideas. Specifically, he asks what happens to a revolutionary theory like that of Lukacs if some of

his readers do not accept its “reconciliatory denouement,” that is, the way subject and object are supposed to be transcended through a Hegelian *Aufhebung* (Said 2000, 438). In the case of Adorno, the idea becomes a good deal “tougher, harder, more recalcitrant” once directed toward the subject of modern music. In Adorno’s heroic portrayal of Arnold Schoenberg, the possibilities of synthesis and reconciliation are rejected outright in favour of dissonance and refusal (440-3). But in the case of Fanon, the redirection of the idea in the political arena is even more interesting. In Fanon’s hands, the notion of the dialectic becomes the site of a great battleground with potentially explosive results. Moving from *Black Skins, White Masks* to *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon engages with Lukacs’ class consciousness with a hardened perspective shaped by his encounters with colonialism, particularly in Algeria, up to 1961. Again, the geographical and historical circumstances are of great importance. Fanon looks at colonial Algeria and, armed—as Said argues he was—with Lukacs’ ideas, can find no place for appeasement and synthesis. The separate worlds of coloniser and colonised—the former bright and comfortable, the latter dark and miserable—are far too removed from one another to show any promise of reconciliation (445). To overcome the colonial situation, the only way forward becomes uncompromising confrontation and armed resistance by the colonised. This is of course a simplified account of a far more complex treatment by Fanon, which I will examine at length in the section to follow, but it speaks to an undeniable fact at the core of his theory, so radically reshaped since its use by Lukacs: those excluded by dominating forms of oppression must rely on their own narratives and their own capacity for agency to liberate themselves. Thus the original idea again travels far, only in this instance it *gains* in intensity and becomes redirected for new purposes. Fanon reveals the importance of adaptability: a core feature of Said’s view of traveling theory. In a sense Fanon concurs with, even relies on, a certain aspect of Lukacs’

thinking, but he does not stay confined within it, thus illustrating the movement of exilic work: “The point of theory therefore is to travel, always to move beyond its confinements, to emigrate, to remain in a sense in exile” (451). Finally, visible in each instance of movement and borrowing “There is in particular an intellectual, and perhaps moral, community of a remarkable kind, *affiliation* in the deepest and most interesting sense of the word” (452). Intellectuals and political polemicists use and adapt theories from other times and places to forge new narratives of contestation, at times reigniting the “fiery core” of those past theories to suit their own purposes (Ibid.).

In my view, these insights from Said are foundational and revealing, but they can be extended further. Specifically, I want to ask how much more the form of narrative resistance can tell us about the durability and malleability of ideas as they travel, and whether some forms of contestation such as poetry retain greater potential for democratic agency. That is to say, how does poetic dissidence differ from the fiery language of revolution and violence? How does poetry as a form of art serve to transform individual consciousness in such a way that it enables democratic agency? The answer that I look to develop through the sections to follow is that poetic dissidence is consonant with a mode of self-questioning and self-understanding that enables agents to challenge oppressive political structures and undertake projects of world-building on their own terms. To make this case, I look beyond considerations of the social function of the work of art, or the potentially problematic claim that aestheticising politics or politicising art are necessarily desirable.¹⁶³ Rather, I am more interested here in the expressions

¹⁶³ That is, with a nod to Walter Benjamin’s warning in “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” included in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 242; but also acknowledging Martin Jay’s cautionary notes about making too much of that warning (and thereby advocating the wholesale separation of aesthetics and politics) in “‘The Aesthetic Ideology’ as Ideology; Or, What Does It Mean to Aestheticize Politics?” *Cultural Critique* 21 (Spring 1992): 41-61.

of self-questioning and dissatisfaction that are fundamental to the poetic mode employed by agents. In the hands of these agents—writers, polemicists, and ordinary citizens—poetry becomes a way of becoming situated in the world, using language to describe the oppressive structures present in it, and questioning those structures.¹⁶⁴ It is in this way that poetry works to preserve a critical consciousness, providing a robust sense of democratic agency among those who use it for self-expression and contestation against ideologies imposed on them. I take up this exploration with one final reference to Said, preparing to pick up Fanon’s ideas where he left them, with particular attention to the way poetic dissidence can become democratised.

Fanon and Shari’ati’s ideas of resistance do not at first blush appear to enable particularly democratic ends. Rather, they appear as forms of anti-imperialist rhetoric with an emphasis on liberation over the preservation of liberty after the struggle. As Said notes, Fanon identifies the difficulties of nationalism after the struggle for liberation, but he does not arrive at a solution for it; he only announces that a new world must be born and describes the struggle that must take place to deliver it (Said 2000, 450). Culture wars against colonialism and imperialism through the twentieth century illustrate that such forms of opposition and struggle do not by themselves build the institutional structures necessary for democratic regimes: “Fanon turned out to be right about the rapacity and divisiveness of national bourgeoisies, but he did not and could not furnish an institutional, or even theoretical, antidote for its ravage” (Said 1993, 277). As he argues, we should not try to read Fanon this way to begin with: he was not a state builder or a “founding father,” but primarily a proponent of self-affirmation and liberation. Likewise, Ali Shari’ati—who would in many ways be inspired by Fanon’s discourse and seek to apply anti-colonial

¹⁶⁴ Reiterating my methodology from the introduction, in addition to Arendt and Said’s views on narrative disclosure of the self, I also rely on hermeneutics and phenomenology, especially as employed by Ricoeur in *Time and Narrative* and *Oneself as Another*.

insights from Africa onto the imperial situation in mid-20th century Iran—emphasised liberation above all else, leaving his ideas to be appropriated by the authoritarian regime that came to power in his wake. As Hamid Dabashi has argued in his *Theology of Discontent*, the desire for “permanent rebirth” and change of the status quo is a *drive* that those involved in revolutionary struggles draw on to imagine the world anew; and all too often, the success or failure of a revolution becomes “an irrelevant question” (489-90). Violence, which has been a common feature of such struggles, was in Arendt’s estimation “justifiable” but never “legitimate” (1970, 52). Fanon and Shari’ati each envisioned a new world, but the violence at the core of their visions prevented each from making them democratically legitimate. Still, they retained a spirit: a diligent, fierce, exilic work that called for challenging the status quo. This is a spirit that has been picked up again by ordinary citizens reimagining the poetic modes of contestation in new, democratic ways, demonstrating that there are different paths to self-understanding and empowerment. To see how these everyday resisters have arrived at this empowerment through poetic dissidence, we will first need a fuller story of the precedents set by Fanon and Shari’ati, whose ideas have travelled so widely across time and place.

II. Fanon: Personal, Poetic, and Political

Fanon remains a thinker whose remarkable life story and personal narrative can scarcely be detached from the political vision he left for posterity. Much more than a proponent of violent revolution, he not only evinced a will to write back forcefully against those who sought to diminish his humanity, but all along articulated a poetic longing to be understood to himself and others. The personal and the poetic were fundamental to his work, laying aesthetics as a foundation to resist objectification and racism. To appreciate these aspects of his thinking, it is crucial to give attention to both of his major texts—*Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched*

of the Earth—and use them to follow the trajectory of his life and his influence on others seeking poetic self-transformation and concrete social change.

To respond to the damaging psychological and social effects of colonialism, Fanon sought to construct a robust sense of selfhood. This is where the personal and the poetic come together to challenge the political, beginning with his life experiences. Born in Martinique in 1925, Fanon became intrigued early in life by the “poetic philosophical challenge” of Aimé Césaire, who was to have a formative influence on his political views (Gordon 2015, 11). Césaire had written of his experience with colonialism in evocative tones that mingled poetry with the raw speech of his everyday encounters with those who sought to degrade his existence—tones that Fanon would take up and make his own in his first major book. Consider Césaire’s opening to his prose poem *Return to My Native Land*: “At the end of the small hours... Get away, I said, you bastard of a cop, swine get away,” which is then followed by a flourish of self-affirmation against a diseased social order: “a river in my depths as deep as the brazen twentieth storey is high: a river to protect me against the corruptions of the dusk” (Césaire, 1969 [1939], 9). Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* is in many ways a poetic search for this same sense of self-affirmation, picking up on Césaire, who is quoted in the epigraph to its introduction, and proceeding as if with hesitation, with ellipses:

Don’t expect to see any explosion today. It’s too early... or too late.
I’m not the bearer of absolute truths.
No fundamental inspiration has flashed across my mind.
I honestly think, however, it’s time some things were said.
Things I’m going to say, not shout. I’ve long given up shouting.
A long time ago...
Why am I writing this book? Nobody asked me to.”¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁵ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 2008), xi; hereafter cited as BSWM.

With time it becomes clear that Fanon is writing this book to affirm his sense of self, his agency, much as Césaire had sought to do. The centre of his work—the end of his famed fifth chapter on lived experience—elucidates the reason for undertaking a philosophical investigation mingled with forceful narrative that resists the trauma of being figuratively severed from the body politic: “with all my being I refuse to accept this amputation. I feel my soul as vast as the world, truly a soul as deep as the deepest of rivers; my chest has the power to expand to infinity” (BSWM 119). While Fanon has been the subject of much criticism for his seemingly uncompromising political views fed by personal anxieties (Gordon 9-10), the heart of his work constitutes a desire to be understood to himself and others. Following Césaire, who in Robin D.G. Kelley’s phrase revealed “a poetics of anticolonialism,”¹⁶⁶ Fanon sought a new path in the struggle against dehumanisation and exclusion.

Fanon evinces a sense of urgency in *Black Skin, White Masks*, building up toward the need for concrete political action, but remains grounded principally in the inner search for self-creation and articulation of agency through language. Aside from studentship under Césaire, his studies in Paris—where he gained a closer exposure to phenomenology, psychoanalysis, and existentialism—had an immense influence on the development of his narrative construction of selfhood. The sense of urgency was a clear and immediate goal from the beginning: “nothing less than to liberate the black man from himself” (BSWM xii). But in his exploration, the complexity of language would make this task fraught at every turn. Language is of course key if one is searching for authentic expression of the self in relation to others, “it being understood that to speak is to exist absolutely for the other” (1). To reach anything like authenticity in selfhood and overcome perceived feelings of inferiority, colonised people would need to speak for themselves,

¹⁶⁶ Kelley in Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), 7-28.

in forms of speech they could feel that they own. But this imperative is beset by a double bind: speaking in, and mastering, the coloniser's language involves a kind of dependency on the metropole; while at the same time there is distrust and fear on the part of those who are farther removed from this mastery of language (2). Moving from the Antilles to other colonial contexts, Fanon finds the difficulty to be ever-present, not only because of the discursive dilemmas of linguistic dependence, but even more pressingly because of the material conditions that inflict palpable damage on colonised peoples. Therefore, instead of understanding the relationship through the "Prospero complex" proposed by Octave Mannoni (61-7), Fanon looks to the structure of the colonial situation in material terms as the root of the problem of authentic self-expression. Colonialism imposes real, tangible conditions based on exploitation and oppression. There are those that wield material forms of power, and those that suffer it. For Fanon it is necessary to understand this structure before trying to eliminate it. A post-colonial society like Madagascar, he says, underwent "destructuralization," the loss of its basic structure, and this event has "inflicted an unmistakable wound" (77). Thus the work of decolonisation has to take this very real, tangible damage as a central focus of what has to be healed. Over and above the exploration of this palpable damage, Fanon arrives at self-affirmation through poetic narrativity.

The process of healing from the damaging effects of colonialism, Fanon claims, must involve 1) *consciousness* and 2) *acting* in the direction of a change in the social structure. A narrative sense of agency based on lived experience turn out to be fundamental for both of these imperatives, hence the centrality of the fifth chapter to *Black Skin, White Masks*. The title of the chapter, "The Lived Experience of the Black Man," reflects the primacy of consciousness "in flesh and blood," starting phenomenologically with the experience of the physical body and

situatedness in the world.¹⁶⁷ Fanon’s original French, “*L’expérience vécue du Noir*,”¹⁶⁸ reveals a direct engagement with phenomenological predecessors in Hegel, Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre, who used *vécue* to mean the lived—that which we experience—akin to the earlier German term, *Erlebnis*.¹⁶⁹ Fanon *feels* racism, and seeks to convey its tangibility to the reader by first invoking the universal experience of being thrown into the world and seeking to imbue it with meaning through subjectivity. Merleau-Ponty’s version of this experience runs: “I am thrown into a nature, and nature does not appear only outside me, in objects without history, but also visible at the centre of subjectivity [Je suis jeté dans une nature et la nature n’apparaît pas seulement hors de moi, dans les objets sans histoire, elle est visible au centre de la subjectivité].”¹⁷⁰ For Fanon, the very facticity of the blackness he wants to convey lends another, essential layer to the matter: “I arrived in the world, anxious to make sense of things, my soul full of desire to be at the origin of the world, only to discover that I am an object among other objects [J’arrivais dans le monde, soucieux de faire lever un sens aux choses, mon âme pleine du désir d’être à l’origine du monde, et voici que je me découvrais objet au milieu d’autres objets]” (PNMB 88). Further, the engagement with Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness* and, more explicitly, *Anti-Semite and Jew*, bring Fanon to face a seeming impasse: he senses he is sealed into a state of “enclosure and suffocating objecthood [Enfermé dans (une) objectivité écrasante]” (88) because he is made to think he needs the recognition of the subjects who have made “the white world” (89). Yet, despite acknowledging the obstacles that beset him, Fanon signals his intention to craft a sense of self and agency when he declares: “Since the Other

¹⁶⁷ Cf. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 402-3.

¹⁶⁸ Frantz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Paris: Editions de Seuil, 1952), 88; hereafter cited as PNMB.

¹⁶⁹ See Simone de Beauvoir, *Le deuxième sexe II: L’expérience vécue* (Paris: Gallimard, 2011); and Jean-Paul Sartre, *L’Être et le néant*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1943), 131.

¹⁷⁰ Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, 398.

was reluctant to recognize me, there was only one answer: *to make myself known*” (BSWM 95, my emphasis). Poetic self-affirmation, pursued throughout the rest of the chapter, would become key to his sense of agency.

Fanon would arrive at self-fashioning and self-empowerment through a series of memorable twists and turns, grappling with dominant traditions and interlocutors along the way. Hegel’s paradigm of recognition as dependence on the acknowledgement of others is taken up and compounded by Sartre, who makes Fanon feel he is trapped in the gaze of the other. Noting the irrationality of the other who makes him feel “hated, detested, and despised,” Fanon looks to reason as a form of self-defence, seeking to “rationalize the world and show the white man he was mistaken” (98). A brief reprieve: “Reason was assured of victory on every level. I reintegrated the brotherhood of man. But I was soon disillusioned” (99). Considering the discourse of Enlightenment reason, he senses it does not belong to him; or rather that it is part of a tradition—“the long, historical past and the blood ties with Pascal and Descartes”—to which he, like the Jewish people with whom he feels an affinity, do not belong (101). However, I think it is precisely at this point that Fanon can be seen as establishing his own sense of agency through an engagement with *negritude* and its poetry. Of course, this conversation with *negritude* is in many ways complex and open to interpretation. As Glen Coulthard (2014) notes, “no clear consensus has been reached regarding the extent to which [Fanon] ought to be read as a critic or supporter of the movement’s claims and achievements” (131-2). Nevertheless, Coulthard maintains, Fanon found *negritude*’s “practices of individual and collective self-recognition through the revaluation of black culture, history, and identity as a potentially crucial feature of the broader struggle for freedom against colonial domination” (132). That is, “Fanon argued that insofar as the *negritude* movement sought to undercut the incapacitating effects of internalized

racism by discursively reinscribing value and worth to those identity-related differences that colonial discourse had hitherto characterized as savage, dirty, and evil, it constituted a potentially powerful first move in the struggle for freedom” (140). Agreeing with this reading and noting further iterations of self-empowerment throughout *Black Skin, White Masks*, I focus on the particular mode of poetic discursivity at the root of Fanon’s reclaimed sense of self and agency.

The first major move for Fanon in affirming selfhood and agency comes through an engagement with poetry. Abandoning the discourse of Enlightenment reason and stating “I finally made up my mind to shout my blackness,” (BSWM 101) he looks immediately to Leopold Senghor’s celebration of rhythm as a vital feature of black art and culture (102). Returning to Césaire, he finds further inspiration in the other triumphant lines: ““My negritude is neither a tower nor a cathedral/ It reaches deep down into the red flesh of the soil/ It reaches deep into the blazing flesh of the sky” (103). More lines from Césaire’s poetry lead into a crescendo: ““Ignorant of surfaces but enraptured by the movement of all things/... Flesh of the flesh of the world palpitating with the very movement of the world”” (104). Soon Fanon begins to associate the spirit of negritude with what Nietzsche called the Dionysian impulse. In Nietzsche’s earlier work, *The Birth of Tragedy*, the Dionysian represented a key aspect of the duality needed to produce art—the principle of a seemingly primitive tendency to be found across different times and cultures:

Either under the influence of the narcotic draught, of which the songs of all primitive men and peoples speak, or with the potent coming of spring that penetrates all nature with joy, these Dionysian emotions awake, and as they grow in intensity everything subjective vanishes into complete self-forgetfulness. In the German Middle Ages, too, singing and dancing crowds, ever increasing in number, whirled themselves from place to place under this same Dionysian impulse. In these dancers of St. John and St. Vitus, we rediscover the Bacchic choruses of the Greeks, with their prehistory in Asia Minor, as far back as Babylon and the orgiastic Sacaea.¹⁷¹

¹⁷¹ In *Basic Writings of Nietzsche* (New York: Modern Library, 2000), 36-7.

Nietzsche's expressive passage is worth revisiting here for both the way it foregrounds but also nearly undermines Fanon's "rediscoveries." Lifted by Senghor and Césaire's lines, Fanon tunes in further to the coinciding feelings of communion and danger accompanying the Dionysian: "it wasn't origins I rediscovered, but the Origin. Nevertheless, beware of rhythm, the Mother Earth bond, and that mystic, carnal marriage between man and the cosmos" (BSWM 104). The danger of slipping too far into unreason is further compounded by the threat of essentialism hinted at by Senghor: "Emotive sensitivity. Emotion is Negro as reason is Greek.... Rhythmic attitude: remember the word" (106). Fanon is initially taken with this idea: "So here I was poet of the world. The white man had discovered poetry that had nothing poetic about it.... At last I had been recognized; I was no longer a nonentity" (108). But the essentialist ascription becomes problematic. It entraps negritude as a celebration of the past, which the carriers of Enlightenment reason—Nietzsche's modern Europeans looking back—have left behind. These imagined interlocutors remind Fanon that he "represented a phase. 'Your distinctive qualities have been exhausted by us. We have had our back-to-nature mystics such as you will never have. Take a closer look at our history and you'll understand how far this fusion has gone'" (Ibid.). Despite his best efforts to respond with the civilisational accomplishments noted across Africa, he feels rebuffed once more: "Lay aside your history, your research into the past, and try to get in step with our rhythm. In a society such as ours, industrialized to the extreme, dominated by science, there is no longer room for your sensitivity" (111). Finally, Sartre's re-emergence and his damning Hegelian characterisation of negritude as "the weak stage of a dialectical progression... transition and not result, a means and not the ultimate goal" seems to deal a final blow to Fanon's hope of self-affirmation. Even the poetry he has been celebrating becomes

subsumed in Sartre's Hegelian synthesis (113). But far from being defeated by a final blow, Fanon's reliance on poetry subsists and fuels his final self-affirmative stance, carrying through the rest of *Black Skin, White Masks* and into *The Wretched of the Earth*.

The pivotal moment in Fanon's self-affirmation comes toward the end of the fifth chapter of *Black Skin, White Masks*, arriving not through a celebration of essentialist attributes from the past, but an avowal of poetic self-creation in the present. On the one hand, his act of self-recognition hinges on the phenomenological revision with which he began the chapter, now directed toward his opponent: "Jean-Paul Sartre forgets that the black man suffers in his body quite differently from the white man" (117). There is a particular *feeling* inherent in the experience of racism, to which the poetry of negritude responds with affirmations of dignity and agency. Even if the movement falls into essentialism by overly glorifying the past, its poetry awakens a present consciousness that allows Fanon to sustain this agency. Thus he salvages and reconstructs the spirit of negritude: "I take this negritude and with tears in my eyes I piece together the mechanism. That which had been shattered is rebuilt and constructed by the intuitive lianas of my hands" (117). This is owing to what he calls his "constancy in love," a form of poetic self-expression that echoes Langston Hughes' lines—"I have known rivers/ Ancient dark rivers/ My soul has grown deep/ Like the deep rivers" (quoted on 106)—with his own refrain: "I feel my soul as vast as the world, truly a soul as deep as the rivers" (119).

The reliance on poetry, despite several moments of defeat, never fades in Fanon's imaginary. It sustains his sense of agency. The return to Césaire near the end of chapter 7 (174-5) is an important marker of Fanon's reconstructed self-affirmation, which he uses to answer Hegel's process of mutual recognition. At this point, the pronouncement of his selfhood becomes crucial, as he looks beyond the "benevolent" recognition of those granting him his freedom

(194); Fanon stakes the claim for freedom himself, on newly defined terms: “I am not only here-now, locked in thinghood. I desire somewhere else and something else. I demand that an account be taken of my contradictory activity insofar as I pursue something other than life, insofar as I am fighting for the birth of a human world” (193). Fanon thus comes full circle, back to his vision of liberation: “We said in our introduction that man was an *affirmation*. We shall never stop repeat it. Yes to life. Yes to love. Yes to generosity. But man is also a *negation*. No to man’s contempt. No to the indignity of man. To the exploitation of man. To the massacre of what is most human in man: freedom” (197). This freedom, so hard-won in Fanon, is ultimately rooted in the poetic consciousness that he rescues and clings on to in his future-oriented vision at the very end of the book. Thus it is fitting that the epigraph he quotes from Marx’s *Eighteenth Brumaire* reads ““The social revolution *cannot draw its poetry from the past, but only from the future*”” (198, my emphasis). This quote in part carries forward Fanon’s imperative “To induce man to be *actional*” (197) and prepare the ground for praxis, but it also signals a sense of futurity for the poetic impulse that has allowed him to acquire a sense of self-recognition. Finally, in the memorable lines at the closing of *Black Skin, White Masks*, he extends this poetic impulse outward, appealing to emotion and the willingness to struggle: “We would not be so naïve as to believe that the appeals for reason or respect for human dignity can change reality... to fight is the only solution” (199). Returning to the Césaire-inspired poetic prose with which he began the book, Fanon issues a series of singular declarative statements:

I find myself one day in the world, and I acknowledge one right for myself: the right to demand human behavior from the other.
And one duty: the duty never to let my decisions renounce my freedom...
I must constantly remind myself that the real leap consists of introducing invention into life.
In the world I am heading for, I am endlessly creating myself (204).

Poetry carries Fanon toward not only self-consciousness, but also a desire for communion and understanding. *Black Skin, White Masks* thus ends in a search, grounded in a newfound sense of agency: “Superiority? Inferiority? Why not simply try to touch the other, feel the other, discover each other? Was my freedom not given me to build the world of you, man? At the end of this book we would like the reader to feel with us the open dimension of every consciousness” (206). Of course, Fanon would go on to demand much more in the fiery language of *The Wretched of the Earth*, which followed nearly ten years later. But even while new experiences and circumstances changed his tone in significant ways, the sense of agency he cultivated through poetry would remain valuable and relevant for the legacy he left behind.

Fanon’s movements between the writing of *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth* are crucial for understanding the veritable explosiveness of the latter work. A year after publishing his first book, Fanon moved to Algeria in 1953 to practice clinical psychiatry. Within a year after that move, he found himself in the midst of Algeria’s armed struggle for liberation from France, treating both French soldiers and the victims whom they tortured. This experience transformed Fanon from a promising psychiatrist with a gift for literary expression to a proponent of revolutionary doctrines and liberation through armed struggle. In the words of biographer David Macey, “The Fanon of *Les Damnés de la terre* was a product of Algeria and its war of independence” (2012, 202). Fanon’s eventual resignation from the Blida-Joinville hospital, open alignment with the Front de libération nationale, and years of work in exile in Tunis laid the groundwork for what was to be his last book. Treating resistance fighters and writing articles for the FLN’s revolutionary paper *El Moudjahid*, he was also diagnosed with leukemia during this period, leading him to compose *The Wretched of the Earth* with a sense of haste. This urgency can hardly be overstated: much of the book would end up being dictated

feverishly in a few short months in 1961, before his death at the end of the year (Macey 2012, 450). All of these facts leading up to the final form of the book are significant because they foreground changes in Fanon's tone, purpose, and later conceptualisation of revolutionary agency.

Where the end of *Black Skin, White Masks* had hinted at a remote possibility for mutual understanding and recognition, *The Wretched of the Earth* is marked from the beginning by open confrontation and rejection of the Hegelian dialectic. “[D]ecolonization,” Fanon memorably states, “is always a violent event.”¹⁷² What he sees in a colonial setting like Algeria is a “compartmentalized world,” a literal separation between the clean, comfortable European zone and the so-called “‘native’ sector” where the colonised live in squalor, “kept under close security, and contained by rifle butts and napalm” (WE 4). These sectors are not “complementary” to one another: “The two confront each other, but not in the service of a higher unity. Governed by a purely Aristotelian logic, they follow the dictates of mutual exclusion” (Ibid.). The solution to the exclusion of the colonised quickly becomes clear when the significance of violence comes to the fore—it is active resistance, armed struggle to bring a definitive end to the unjust domination imposed by the colonisers: “To blow the colonial world to smithereens is henceforth a clear image within the grasp and imagination of every colonized subject.... To destroy the colonial world means nothing less than demolishing the colonist’s sector, burying it deep within the earth or banishing it from the territory” (6). These lines would become well-known to many proponents of anti-colonial resistance in years to come, including Ali Shari’ati who made use of similar fiery rhetoric in pre-revolutionary Iran. Yet to focus solely

¹⁷² Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 2004), 1; hereafter cited as WE.

on the incendiary nature of these oft-quoted lines would be to miss the nuance in Fanon's work, particularly the uses of his revised sense of agency and self-affirmation.

Over and above the rhythm of self-recognition he asserted in his earlier book, the praxis-oriented activity of decolonisation in *The Wretched of the Earth* would now bring with it aspirations of futurity: [decolonisation] infuses a new rhythm, specific to a new generation of men, with a new language and a new humanity. Decolonization is truly the creation of new men" (2). The creation of new selves and a new world may have to involve physical resistance to alter the material reality of societies plagued by colonialism, but in Fanon's view it does not require or propose arbitrary violence; as he states further in the book, leaders of liberation fronts "will come to realize that hatred is not an agenda" (89). As Fanon sees it, violence in the anti-colonial context is strategic and pragmatic. Most significantly, in his transmuted conception of agency, violence plays a crucial role in allowing the colonised to come to know and assert themselves. In the face of the forces that over time attempted to convince the "wretched" that they deserve their condition, the colonised come to rely on a new method to *humanise* themselves where colonisers failed or refused to recognise their humanity. "At the individual level," Fanon famously says, "violence is a cleansing force. It rids the colonized of their inferiority complex, of their passive and despairing attitude. It emboldens them, and restores their self-confidence" (51). Moreover, in keeping with the Marxist strains increasingly present in Fanon's views, violence presents a massive shock to the colonial system, potentially liberating the people from social and economic underdevelopment (51-2). The promise of the future must first come to grips with the ongoing reality: "Today, national independence and nation building in the underdeveloped regions take on an entirely new aspect. In these regions, except for some remarkable achievements, every country suffers from the same lack of infrastructure" (53). Meanwhile, "Facing this world, the

European nations wallow in the most ostentatious opulence” (Ibid.). This disparity, Fanon says, cannot be forgotten. And the scope of inequality shows that it goes beyond borders and nation-states: liberation is an international struggle. But it must be undertaken, he says, by the colonised, by the people themselves, liberating themselves through decolonisation of the mind and of material conditions at a global level. This sense of self-affirmation in the people would remain at the core of Fanon’s vision for the creation of a new world.

Fanon recognised, in the second chapter of *The Wretched of the Earth*, that preserving the agency of the people in the wake of liberation led by nationalist movements would entail great practical difficulty. Probing the central question of nationalism in decolonisation efforts, he turned with a critical eye toward the real likelihood of the way liberation struggles would unfold. In his depiction, continued tension marks the relationship between colonised intellectuals and revolutionary masses. Revolutionary potential is revealed when “Spontaneously the peasants create a widespread sense of insecurity; colonialism takes fright, settles into a state of war, or else negotiates” (70). For those leading the struggles, the peasantry represents a potential threat, and “The temptation is great therefore to crush this body [of the peasants] by centralizing the administration and keeping a firm control over the people. This is one of the reasons why we often hear that the underdeveloped countries need a dose of dictatorship” (72). Eventually, armed struggle and insurrection are led by unofficial party factions and those left out of political decision-making by party elites. These undesirable and shunned factions come to see themselves as attuned to the people: “their ears hear the true voice of the country and their eyes see the great and infinite misery of the people” (79). This in turn sparks action as they gather force, and “The armed struggle is triggered” (Ibid.). Because it is the people themselves who affirm their agency and propel the struggles of liberation, it is to their sense of consciousness and agency to which

leaders of national independence must then conform. The actions of the people and their strategic use of violence provide the basis for their self-understanding and sense of empowerment. As Fanon repeats, “Violence alone, perpetrated by the people, violence organized and guided by the leadership, provides the key for the masses to decipher social reality. Without this struggle, without this praxis there is nothing but a carnival parade and a lot of hot air” (96). We are now a long way away from Fanon’s affirmations of self-recognition and poetic dissidence in *Black Skin, White Masks*; yet the sense of agency originally derived from that earlier work remains at the core of his most radical calls for revolutionary change.

Fanon’s conclusion to *The Wretched of the Earth* in a way returns to the form of the conclusion of his earlier book, but is modified by an action-oriented call to arms akin to Marx and Engels’ *Communist Manifesto*. Addressing his “comrades,” Fanon declares: “now is the time to decide to change sides... The new day which is dawning must find us determined, enlightened, and resolute” (235). Agency takes on higher tones of resistance, directing the aspirations of colonised people away from dominant orders of the past: “the European game is finally over, we must look for something else. We can do anything today provided we do not ape Europe, provided we are not obsessed with catching up with Europe” (236). On the other side of this rejection of European identity and institutions is a pronouncement of a new future, a chance to make the world anew: “if we want humanity to take one step forward, if we want to take it to another level than the one where Europe has placed it, then we must innovate, we must be pioneers.... we must make a new start, develop a new way of thinking, and endeavor to create a new man” (239). As we know, Fanon would not live to see this nebulously envisioned world—he was racing against death when he uttered these lines, and had few tangible facts to justify its possibility (Macey 2012, 451). Still he left behind two forceful imperatives that would resonate

not only across Africa but as far as pre- and post-revolutionary Iran: a poetic consciousness to assert agency against domination, and a will to use that agency for radical social and political transformation.

III. Shari'ati: Agency, Spirituality, and Revolutionary Social Action

What happened to Fanon's ideas as they traversed the distance from pre-independence Algeria to Iran, helping to prepare a new revolution? How did they retain their insurrectionary force when they were taken up and used in a new setting where the encounters against colonialism and imperialism had played out very differently than they had throughout Africa? Answering these questions and revisiting the process of travel, transfiguration, and accommodation brings us back to the figure of Ali Shari'ati. Shari'ati in many ways embodied the revolutionary spirit of Fanon's ideas and added crucial new dimensions to it by bringing it into conversation with Islam. These reconfigurations are far from simple. Shari'ati remains a contested figure. Long considered an "Islamic ideologue" who helped launch the Iranian Revolution (Abrahamian 1982, 24-8; Dabashi 2006, 145-6) through a nativist discourse that dishonestly dichotomised the Orient and the Occident (Boroujerdi 1996, 108-9), he has in recent years been re-evaluated as a figure who purportedly sought to go *beyond* binaries—such as East and West, Islam and modernity—and ostensibly heralded an anticolonial form of cosmopolitanism (Saffari 2017, 135). Taking into account these different possible readings, I revisit Shari'ati's significance as a revolutionary thinker representing a tension between potentially democratic and exclusionary tendencies.

Shari'ati did not simply reproduce Fanon's discourse, but altered it according to his conceptions of Islam, authenticity, and social justice. More specifically, three themes re-emerged and underwent change in Shari'ati's use of Fanon: 1) the question of agency reappeared through

a new debate with proponents of existentialism; 2) poetic consciousness and self-affirmation became imbued with the spirituality integral to Shari'ati's version of Islam; and 3) revolutionary action likewise became infused with a spirit of resistance that Shari'ati insisted was inherent in a socially responsible and true version of Islam.

The tensions in Shari'ati's blend of ideas—borrowing from Fanon, existentialists like Heidegger and Sartre, and a particular set of stories constituting a mystical yet revolutionary Islam—make him a difficult thinker with a complicated legacy. Shari'ati simultaneously added new dimensions of poetic dissidence to form a new conception of agency just as he incapacitated that sense of agency by laying the groundwork for a post-revolutionary authoritarian government. Approaches to Shari'ati by those who have sought to rescue a cosmopolitan, potentially democratic strain in his thinking (Saffari 2017, 11-15; Davari 2014, 104) still must be balanced against the anti-democratic institutions his revolutionary paradigm engendered. That is, what was *made* of Shari'ati's work by the architects of the Iranian Revolution—including their assertions of being the rightful guardians of an emergent theocratic republic (Soroush 2006; Jahanbegloo and Khatami 2013, 329-30)—still has to be brought under consideration. The ideological leanings he evinced forcefully in his speeches and lectures continue to weigh against the potentially cosmopolitan and democratic promises advanced in other aspects of his oeuvre. One of the most favourable facets for democratic agency and resistance in Shari'ati's thought remains the poetic consciousness he found in Fanon and refigured through a spiritual lens. Ultimately, however, this sense of poetic dissidence would need to be further cultivated among the people if it were to be used democratically against the ascendant theocratic regime for which Shari'ati partly paved the way. Hence it will be necessary, after reading Shari'ati, to return to the people themselves—ordinary citizens who have been living under the authoritarian regime he

helped usher in—to pursue the promise of democratic agency through poetic resistance. The rest of this section reevaluates Shari’ati’s complex synthesis of ideas in closer detail to consider what can be made of the political discourse he left for posterity.

Before his encounter with Fanon, Shari’ati’s early influences reveal that he was long immersed in Islamic thought and practice. Ali Rahnama’s authoritative biography remains a crucial resource for tracing these influences and situating him in the currents of Islamic anticolonial discourses. Born in 1933 in the small village of Mazinan in Northeastern Iran during the authoritarian reign of the Pahlavi dynasty, Shari’ati soon became a close witness to calls for major social change. Early in life, he was brought up in the midst of a committed group of thinkers chiefly devoted to Islamic thought and social justice, including his own father, Mohammad-Taqi Shari’ati. As founder of the Centre for the Propagation of Islamic Truths, Mohammad-Taqi was very influential in “creating a group of young men with modern and, for their own epoch, progressive socio-political ideas steeped in Islam” (Rahnama 1998, 22-3). As part of this group, the young Ali Shari’ati was moulded early on to think along the same lines as his father. More importantly, he was also drawn to the more radical Movement of God-Worshipping Socialists, to which his later work would be greatly indebted (34). The God-Worshipping Socialists, as their name suggests, were concerned with both religious and political matters. They looked to put forward a revolutionary ideology that downplayed its Western tones in favour of “homespun” ideas to battle economic and social inequality. The uncompromising road they chose rejected Western ideologies and acquiescent clerics alike: “The God-Worshipping Socialists sought to identify themselves as the pioneers of a new and independent strand of thought, not only superior to both Western ideologies of capitalism and communism, but also transcending the institutional Islam of the clergy” (30). However, as much as adherents

of this school insisted on Islam being prior to communism and containing within it seeds of social justice, their ideas were already painted—whether they were aware of it or not—largely by foreign ideology: “[the movement’s] assessment of international power relations remained essentially anchored in a Leninist conception of antagonistic contradictions between the imperialist and subjugated countries of the world” (33). Shari’ati later wrote articles about the Median school of Islam, supposedly situated between communism and capitalism, following that with articles on materialism and dialectics. In these articles, and in many of his other works, Shari’ati downplayed the role of the West: “he argued that even though today it seems as if the scientific analysis of historical events was initiated by contemporary European historians, it must be admitted that the first steps in this path were taken by Muslims” (62). As Rahnema suggests, there were perhaps private and psychological reasons underlying his aims: “Shari’ati probably felt that this provocative approach was necessary... to break the vicious circle of underachievement and political failure which led to a loss of faith in one’s own identity and culture, subsequently giving way to blind faith in the ways of the Westerners and therefore their imitation” (Ibid.). Shari’ati’s move to study in Paris, and his subsequent encounter with the ideas of Fanon and Sartre, would play a pivotal role in furthering these aims with an increasingly revolutionary language.

Emerging from a period of intense interaction with Islam and the attempts to put together an organic ideology—one that supposedly grew out of the soil of Iran and the seed of Islam—Shari’ati departed for France, not without a sense of openness: “Even before his arrival in Paris he had been influenced and touched by some Western intellectuals, hence the realization that all which is Western was not necessarily ‘bad’” (Rahnema 1998, 88). A long process of analysis and selection, rejecting and accepting new ideas “eventually gave birth to a synthesis and a new

paradigm – the potent revolutionary tool that he took back home” (Ibid.). In this process, Fanon’s anticolonial discourse would prove crucial, though not singular. Shari’ati became familiarised with Fanon’s ideas while completing his doctorate at the Sorbonne, including through Jean-Paul Sartre’s lecture on the late revolutionary thinker’s *Wretched of the Earth* in 1962 (119). In addition to Sartre and the French Islamologist Louis Massignon—who had written an impressive tome on the Sufi dissident Mansūr Hallāj¹⁷³—Shari’ati found Fanon fascinating. Already filled with the sense that Islam held an emancipatory potential as a source of justice, he became further taken with the revolutionary force of the idea through Fanon’s anticolonial discourse of creating “a new man.” As Arash Davari contends, Shari’ati in a sense would go beyond Fanon’s discourse of self-creation in part by focusing on the notion of *choice*, which he attributed to both existentialism and Shia Islam (2014, 99-100). The figure of Husayn, the Shia Imam who was martyred in the 7th century CE at the Battle of Karbala, came to exemplify for Shari’ati not only a stand against oppression but an affirmation of self through choice: the willingness to die for one’s beliefs in the face of perceived injustice. Hence in Davari’s reading, Shari’ati would call on the Iranian masses to revolt against the domination of the Pahlavi regime in a similar fashion, exercising their choice to be who they are and constituting themselves as a sovereign democratic entity in the process (103-4). In response to this generative interpretation, I would further posit that if there is a democratic potential to Shari’ati’s ideas, his sense of poetic dissidence—which he combined through Fanon and his understanding of a mystical and socially responsible religion—is equally important to note in his writings.

¹⁷³ Op. cit. Massignon, 1982, discussed in chapter 2. Interestingly, Shari’ati was so impressed by Massignon that he is said to have compared their encounter with that of Rumi and Shams-e Tabrizi: placing himself as a poet in the role of Mawlana, he characterised Massignon as the great teacher who came into his life and transformed him (Rahnema 121).

Before the completion of his studies and return to his homeland, Shari'ati actively promoted rebellion against Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi's regime from afar by writing for the Paris-based newspaper *Iran-e Azad* ("Free Iran"). June 1963 witnessed an uprising by the increasingly popular religious dissident Ruhollah Khomeini, stirring Shari'ati's zeal for immediate social change. He sought to respond to this event with fiery rhetoric:

Yes! The epoch of non-violent struggle has come to an end and from now on in order to assure the vitality of the revolution and defend our nationalist slogans, the most important of which is the overthrow of Mohammad Reza Shah, we should respond to the enemy's flood of fire and steel with the expressive language of guns and the destructive force of war (quoted in Rahnema 1998, 113-4).

Though his article was not published by the newspaper as intended, it signalled an increasingly fervent tone fed by his encounters with Fanon. More than this, however, Shari'ati's desire for social change became a matter associated with mysticism and poetry. Following his exposure to Fanon, Shari'ati returned to Iran in 1964 with the aim to make himself anew and play a decisive role in the future of his homeland. He delved into Sufism in search of this new self, imagining himself as Rumi emerging from the desert to find meaning through communion with God, nature, and other human beings (Rahnema 1998, 144-5). Having earlier described himself as more of a poet than a political thinker (102-3), Shari'ati undertook a deeper spiritual quest on his return to Iran, feeding into his subsequent lectures and writings on which they would be based. Beyond important texts like *Husayn Vāris-e Adam* (*Husayn, Heir to Adam*) and *Bāzgasht be Khishtan* (*A Return to Self*) already discussed discerningly by Davari (2014), I look to his *Mazhab alahye Mazhab* (*Religion versus Religion*) as a crucial source for the agentic, poetic self he sought to construct.

The text of *Mazhab alahye Mazhab* derives from a set of lectures Shari'ati gave at the Hosseiniyeh Ershad Centre in Tehran in August 1970. Shari'ati had by this time engaged

extensively with Fanon, Sufism, and the revolutionary paradigm of Imam Hussayn. He was now in the process of translating them into a radical revolutionary discourse, urging the students who attended his lectures to take action against the Pahlavi regime. Shari'ati attempted to embed the notion of authenticity within Islam through an *organic* terminology which implied that the truth is within individuals and has merely been concealed by something unnatural. He states, for instance,

Kufr means to cover or to plant, i.e. where in farming, a seed is planted and then covered over with earth. In the hearts of people, a truth exists. However, because for certain reasons, the truth is covered over by a curtain of ignorance, malice, self-seeking interests or absolute foolishness, it is called *kufr*. This *kufr*, however, does not mean the covering over the truth of religion by means of a non-religion. Rather, it means covering over the truth of religion by means of another religion (2010 [1970], 26-7).

Later, the realisation of this supposed inner truth is given a radical significance, as Shari'ati, in asking what a revolutionary religion means, answers:

A revolutionary religion gives an individual, that is, an individual who believes in it, who is trained in the school of thought or *maktab* of this religion, the ability to criticise life in all its material, spiritual and social aspects. It gives the mission and duty to destroy, to change and to eliminate that which one does not accept and believes to be invalid and replace it with that which one knows and recognizes as being the truth (Ibid., 35).

How does Shari'ati arrive at his notion of what constitutes a “true,” or rightful religion? First, he looks to the root of what he perceives as the true spirit of religion in general, and finds revolt as a common feature: “Look at all religions. Look at Moses. Did Moses not rebel before three symbols? Korah, the greatest capitalist of his time. Balaam, the greatest priest of that deviated religion of multitheism. And the Pharaoh, the greatest symbol of political power of his time. Did he not arise against the status quo?” (36). More importantly, in distinguishing between multitheistic (“false”) and monotheistic (“true”) religion, he ascribes a revolutionary significance to Shi'ism, claiming that the murderer of the first Shia Imam Ali “strikes a blow at God’s

religion and the Prophet. In the name of the religion of Islam, once again, the religion of multitheism rules over history in the name of the caliphate of God's Messenger" (43). Through these assertions, Shari'ati further maintains that Shi'ism, as a religion of revolt, contains social awareness and a desire for social justice, while the dominant manifestations of religion have tended toward complacency, corruption and exploitation.

Throughout *Mazhab alahye Mazhab*, Shari'ati radicalises the discourse of Shi'ism, blending a Marxist tone with the language of "true" religion. He concedes the same point that Marx makes in his *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, and like Marx wants to go to the root of the problem, from the criticism of theology to the criticism of politics:

Thus, these words, spoken in the 19th century to the effect that 'religion is the opium of the people,' or 'religion is so that people will patiently bear their abasement and wretchedness in this world in the name of hope after death,' are correct. It is the opium of the people so that people find belief in the idea that whatever happens is in God's hands. It is because of God's Will and any efforts to try and change the situation, to try to improve the life of the people is to oppose God's Will (42).

Here Shari'ati calls for a return to the spirit of Hussayn and the paradigm of Karbala. Hence the significance of choice as a democratic form of agency takes further shape in the thinking he proposes to the people. It is up to the people to choose who they want to be, and what kind of regime they want to be ruled by; and this choice lies in the religious paradigm that they hold to. Shari'ati proposes the paradigm of Hussayn—who chose to die in his fight against injustice—as the one that opposes domination and exploitation by the oppressive regime ruling over them. He tells the people to make a choice, and to decide which kind of religion they want to uphold. More than this, he appeals to a poetic sensibility to stir the consciousness of the people. The form of religion he adheres to, consonant with Shi'ism and Sufism, questions the status quo through poetic dissidence—not only the bravery exemplified by Hussayn in battle but the willingness of Rumi and Hafez to write themselves otherwise in the face of dominant authorities. Ultimately,

however, his conception of “true” religion would be appropriated by representatives of a new authoritarian regime in the Islamic Republic, selective interpreters who would wrestle Shari’ati’s ideas to fit in with a monolithic institutional structure imposing new forms of domination.

The Islamic Republic of Iran today is a long-lingering, hazy reflection of revolutionary dreams, far removed from what the nation’s liberators intended it to be. Instead of Shari’ati’s vision of the people exercising control over their political destinies, there is the Council of Guardians, the Assembly of Experts, and carefully vetted presidents, all under the imperium of a Supreme Leader who wields ultimate authority and veto power through the legalistic mechanism of *velayat-e faqih*.¹⁷⁴ There is the memory of martyrs of the revolution, the Iraq war, venerated on murals in major cities across Iran; and the memory of countless others murdered by the regime without fair trial, condemned to oblivion by the makers of the nation’s narratives. There are the excluded and the exiled, the millions who were forced to leave or chose to leave because life under this repressive government became unbearable, no longer life as they knew it. And then there are those who have fought back on the ground, in every way they know how: decades of protest coming in waves, marches, riots, online campaigns, petitions to the government, steady production of dissident music, films, and literature. These waves of protest crash continually against the forms of gendered, cultural, religious, and economic inequality instituted by the regime. Iran’s government has endured, vacillating between minor concessions and heavy-handed suppression, relying on the brutal methods of its Revolutionary Guard and Basij militia, killing protestors and executing their leaders whenever it judges the dissent has gone too far. In Levitsky and Way’s sobering analysis, revolutionary regimes like Iran’s have a particular staying

¹⁷⁴ This term refers to the notion of “guardianship of the Islamic jurist,” through which the Supreme Leader claims irrefragable authority due to his supposed legitimacy as final interpreter of God’s words on earth. See Jahanbegloo and Khatami 2013, 330-4, and 344 n16.

power owing to state centralisation, cohesion, control over security forces, and coercive state apparatuses arising out of nation-building following armed struggle (2013, 6-7). The imperatives for the people—if they are to preserve and exercise their democratic agency—then become resilience and creativity. If there is to be any hope of securing a democratic future, they are compelled to cultivate their agency in exilic spaces, outside the coercive institutional mechanisms of the state. The astounding fact about the endurance of poetic dissidence is that they do—against all odds, in their everyday lives, sustained by a spirit that draws on deep-rooted poetry to nurture the possibility of another future. Looking beyond the precedents of Fanon and Shari’ati, I turn in the final section to examine these ordinary practices as vital instances of resistance against exclusion in contemporary Iran.

IV. Reciting Resistance Anew

Those engaged in the long struggle against the Islamic Republic’s exclusionary political structures and institutions may have found themselves dismayed at many turns, but they have never been lacking in creativity. The path of this struggle has been long and winding. Following the harsh repressive atmosphere of the 1980s, in which the eight-year war with Iraq provided the state with extra leverage to suppress any outward signs of dissent, Iranians began to incite waves of protest in the ensuing decades. The early 2000s saw the build-up of a restless anti-government crescendo that reached an apex in 2009 with the massive protests following the fraudulent presidential election won by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. The blatant government manipulation of the election—one of the few vestiges of anything like popular sovereignty in the Islamic Republic—triggered the rise of what came to be known as the Green Movement: a prolonged series of protests, campaigns, and displays of public outcry by ordinary Iranian citizens against

the state. While the movement itself was gradually quelled by violent and coercive means—including the killing, jailing, or exile of protestors and prominent dissidents—it came to be seen as a transformative moment. In the wake of the moment, increasing attention was paid to grassroots democratic contention “in the streets” (Bayat and Halliday in Hashemi and Postel 2010); to the democratic avenues offered by a burgeoning civil society (Vahdat, Khosrokhavar, and Mahdavi in Jahanbegloo 2012); and to the role of women pursuing a feminist agenda to contest the regime’s exclusions (Tahmasebi, Koohestani, and Sadr in Jahanbegloo 2012). Since then, the Iranian state has continued to rely on a combination of physical control and subtle manipulation to limit the agentic capacities of this sector and maintain a monopoly on power despite domestic and international pressure alike. Aside from steady but scattered demonstrations by small numbers of the citizenry protesting the inaccessibility of basic provisions and equal rights, resistance may seem to have retreated to the private sphere, where the people critique but jadedly endure the regime. A closer look at this sphere, however, can reveal that there is nothing essentially private about these more subtle forms of dissent: they may signal a crucial form of public-oriented, democratic agency.

Poetry has long been a source of self-fashioning and ethical conduct. In figures like Rumi and Hafez, Dante and Machiavelli, Shari’ati and Fanon, it has also been a means of resistance. Though I have examined these examples at length, the claims about the power of poetry in the hands of select thinkers may still seem abstract, or possibly still distanced from the realm of political praxis. Therefore it is worth returning to and rephrasing the questions I asked earlier to ask: how do ordinary people use poetry to rewrite themselves and, by extension, the possibilities of the political? In considering these questions through a political theory lens, we may be well-served by considering how much ethnography and qualitative research into personal narratives

can tell us about the experiences of ordinary people. In this way, we may be better able to appreciate how people construct, maintain, and use poetic narratives to build a vital sense of democratic agency.

Among studies of Iranian culture, religion, and politics, Niloofar Haeri's recent (2020) ethnographic narrative already stands as an indispensable and illuminating contribution on how gendered exclusions and inequalities are contested. *Say What Your Longing Heart Desires: Women, Prayer, and Poetry in Iran* offers a close and intimate look into the way poetry has weaved its way into the private and public life in the Islamic Republic. It is a fascinating exploration that blends ethnography with insights from anthropology and linguistics to investigate the way women in Iran learn, recite, and give new expression to poetry in probing, rebellious tones. Given the extent of the book's insights for on-the-ground practices and uses of poetry, I rely on it heavily in this final section, while also looking to give it more of a political edge by considering how Haeri's studies reveal sustained forms of democratic dissent rumbling below the surface of everyday life in Iran.¹⁷⁵

The significance of classical Persian poetry on the lives of countless peoples and generations far beyond Iran—in what Shahab Ahmed had called the “*Balkans-to-Bengal complex*”¹⁷⁶—has been mentioned alongside a deeper exploration of particular poets like Rumi and Hafez earlier in this dissertation. What remains to be seen is how exactly the distant verses from the 13th and 14th centuries still resonate and aid in the cultivation of poetic consciousness and dissidence among Iranians today. Haeri's study takes us a good deal of the way there. Her ethnographic work focuses chiefly on a group of women born and raised in Iran, many of whom

¹⁷⁵ Other noteworthy books on this topic include Farzaneh Milani, *Words not Swords: Iranian Women Writers and the Freedom of Movement* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2011); and Nahid Siamdoust, *Soundtrack of the Revolution: The Politics of Music in Iran* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017).

¹⁷⁶ Op. cit. Ahmed 2006, 32.

learned classical poetry before the 1979 revolution and continued to return to it consistently throughout their lives. In particular, Haeri states that she chose this particular group in order to show the links between the quotidian and the extraordinary, and the ways they reveal the entanglements between the private and the public: “My interlocutors are not isolated individuals avoiding interaction with others. They talk to their friends and to people they meet in their weekly classes, participate in larger gatherings, read, have Facebook accounts, and send each other digital files featuring their favorite cleric, author, satirist, and politician.” Despite the strictures and regulations the Islamic Republic attempts to impose, there are already hints that groups like the one Haeri studies reveal significant religious and political undercurrents: “There is little about their deliberations, ideas, and practices that is ‘private.’ Agentive deliberation has become widespread. Their changing religiosity is a subject of complex interactions between the self and a community of believers” (2020, 3). Practicing the “right” version of Islam and observing moral and political guidelines have been norms the Islamic Republic has attempted to enforce since its founding; the women Haeri studies show what it means to use poetry to write themselves otherwise.

In the discursive and phenomenological spaces of Persian poetry recital, self-fashioning and political consciousness involve a complex interplay of agentic articulation and revision. There are the poets’ words—those of Rumi, Hafez, Saadi, and popular modern poets like Parvin Etesami—and then there is what their readers make of them when they come to sing and reorient them. The auditory and performative aspects of the experience cannot be overemphasised: reading poetry is very much an embodied experience among many Iranians who rely on the ecstatic feeling that washes over them when the familiar words of distant bards leave their lips.

This feeling is so common and well-known among Iranians that a particular word—*hal*—has been used to describe its significance, neatly summarised by Haeri:

The concept of *hal* has been central to continuing debates over piety, religiosity, sincerity in worship, and the unmediated relationship between the worshipper and God. *Hal* is a major contribution of Islamic mysticism to the understanding of metaphysical experience and divine presence. It characterizes experiences that cannot be placed into binary categories of ‘religious’ and ‘secular,’ or easily articulated discursively. An example of the occurrence of *hal* would be when, on a bright and sunny spring day, one is walking in a park and suddenly is filled with an unexpected and overwhelming joy—a sense of a connection to something larger than oneself. *Hal* is uncontrollable, unforeseeable, and cannot be honed. . . . the concept has, on the one hand, spawned a vast discursive tradition most eloquently expressed in poetry and also has, on the other hand, been a thorn in the side of official, legalistic religion, because *hal*, by definition, cannot be mediated by those who claim to possess more piety or a closer relationship to God. As Rumi makes clear in his story [of Moses and the Shepherd from the *Masnavī*], even a prophet cannot mediate it (15-6).

How does this feeling arise, and what are its implications for the formation of personal and political consciousness? The experience of a particular poem from Rumi may illustrate this best.

One of Haeri’s interlocutors, a woman named “Pari,” describes her childhood exposure to the world of poetry as an introduction to a new realm inhabited by her mother—the spatial metaphor is significant because it implies being brought into a discursive space where the words of a distant poet can be felt profoundly in the present. Recalling her exposure to one of Rumi’s best-known poems, the opening to the *Masnavī* (1:1-4) which sings of the reed-flute’s lamentation of being separated from its reed-bed, Pari “said that the verses ‘sat on my soul,’ as they spoke of the pain of the reed that had been torn off” (29). Early exposure begins a long process of world-building, not fully understood or appreciated at first but sensed intuitively at a deep level: “Although at that age she found much of Rumi difficult to understand, her entry into his poetry began with just a few lines of this poem. The intellectual and emotional bonds that children make with poetry that is meant for adults often begin with a few lines whose rhymes and rhythms they find attractive.” The activity then expands, imbued with greater intensity and

delight: “They hear the poem frequently, make a connection to it, and memorize and recite it, to the enchantment of themselves and the grown-ups around them” (Ibid.). Over time, the experience of poetry entails an education in myriad facets of life. Rumi’s work is prototypical of the intertwinements of Sufi poetry, involving discourses not only about epistemology and religion, but also ethics and politics. Therefore, when readers of his poems immerse themselves in the stories he tells, they gradually become more well-versed in each of these matters, approaching them critically and in so doing expanding their social consciousness. Using examples like that of “Pari” and many others whom she interviewed, Haeri maintains that “it is crucial to take note of classical poetry when seeking to understand contemporary Iranian culture.... More specifically, it is in part through this poetry that religion comes to be discovered, reflected on, and practiced. Given the dominance of mysticism in classical poetry, that approach to life becomes widely assimilated, to various degrees and depths” (30). Beyond a critical approach to religious education and piety, there is a sense of aesthetic and ethical refinement cultivated by engagement with classical Persian poetry, captured by the term *adab*, which I have also discussed earlier in expounding the literary tradition from which it springs.¹⁷⁷ Reading and reciting someone like Rumi consistently throughout life can nurture a wealth of such critical capacities.

Another example from Haeri’s conversations serves to round out the analysis in relation to the question “what do Iranians do with poetry?” Her summary provides an intriguing initial answer: “they learn to think about certain ethical values, ways of being and conducting themselves; they become literate through it; they build friendships; they acquire performance skills and quick wittedness; they hone their skills in memorization; they use it to express their

¹⁷⁷ Op. cit. chapter 2, n74.

feelings; and... they learn to think about religion in imaginative and paradoxical ways” (45). To show how all these social transformations are made possible by poetry, she closely considers the example of an interlocutor named “Mina,” who tells a number of stories about her parents’ experiences with poetry—reciting classical verses from memory in playful back-and-forth exchanges at the dinner table—and her own uses of the same poetry for self-exploration. Based on her conversations with “Mina,” Haeri comes to conclude that poetic pedagogy “offers a stream of ideas with which one can grapple over a lifetime. It encourages the learner and the reciter to undertake, at one point or another, explorations of the self and of the various collectivities she interacts with” (48). “Mina” best illustrates this in the line quoted as an epigraph to this chapter: even though the poetry she is reciting is not her own, it helps her to express herself through the very act of speaking the words, adding her own textures and intonations to fit the situation in which she draws upon it. “So,” Haeri determines,

in the moment of recitation, the reciter is in a sense also the author. This is one of the major pleasures of poetry—one can feel able to express oneself with the most beautiful phrases and with the deepest, wisest, and most eternal of ideas. The term *vasf-ol-hal* captures this momentary authorship. *Vasf-ol-hal* means, literally, ‘description of state [of feeling].’ It is applied to poems (stories, sayings, and the like) that capture in an uncanny way one’s life experiences, or exactly how one feels about something. People often seem stunned at just how precisely some poet has captured what they thought was unique to their life experiences. They seem almost ecstatic that someone like Hafez, for example, with his status, wisdom, and perceptiveness, has felt the way they do (49).

Hence the state of *hal* described earlier becomes a crucial linkage between classical poets and contemporary reciters of their words: it instills in the latter a sense of critical consciousness about the social world they inhabit. By extension, I maintain, it provides a means through which contemporary users of poetry come to question religious and political authorities by reflecting the dissident spirit of the earlier poets.

The final link between individual self-expression and dissident poetic consciousness is illustrated by Haeri's account through the compelling example of one of her most vocal interlocutors, "Parvin." Speaking of Saadi, "Parvin" expresses the irrelevance of religious denominations and legal schools, emphasising instead his universal appeal based on the content of the ethical teachings in his poetry: "no one cares whether he was Shafe'i, Hanbali, Hanafi [legal schools].... His entire language is made of pearls [dorr]: human beings are the limbs of one body ['bani ādam a'zāyeh yekdigarand']. He tells you what to watch out for in life." Extrapolating from this account, Haeri notes that most Shi'i Iranians could care less whether many of the classical poets they commemorate were Sunnis—in contrast to the ideological approach of Shari'ati, who sought to instill political commitment based on the teachings of the former sect. It may be the case that more hardline members of the current theocracy continue to insist on such divisions, but the perception according to "Parvin" is that they are gradually being overshadowed by the force of the poets' more universal appeal: "There are some clerics... who have not read Masnavi or Hafez, or they think that because Saadi was Sunni . . . or . . . whatever, they ought to look at him with prejudice . . . but the new [generation] of mullahs are more likely to be familiar with Mowlavi and you see them on television sometimes talking about him and relating his stories" (52). These contentions over "true" religion in political life, long seething since the theological mandates instituted since the 1979 revolution, have continually flared up in the form of contestations over poetry. This, again, is because poems of the past continue to resonate and enable bold comportment in the present through their own tangibly felt presence: "We tend to be touched by certain voices, intonations, and pronunciations for one reason or another, and these stay with us" (65). Quoting the Iranian philosopher Dariush Shayegan, Haeri reminds us that classical poets are very much present in the lives of contemporary Iranians:

“these poets do not belong to the past, but are ‘eternal interlocutors’” (68). They come to exemplify ways to understand and imagine religion and politics anew—just as they had questioned these matters in their own time, they enable those reciting their words to do the same in a new setting. Hence the vivid insight from “Parvin” gains new meaning in light of the present political context: when she asks of the current regime “Are we to just say yes, right, to whatever they tell us is our true religion?” and responds with a resounding *no* (161), she comes to embody a spirit of resistance preserved and recited across ages, keeping a vital form of democratic agency alive.

Resistance to exclusion in politics has taken on numerous shapes and iterations across time and place. In the Martinique and Algeria of Fanon’s time, it manifested itself in powerful poetic and anticolonial tones, insisting on *a right to be what one is* unapologetically against the dehumanising and compartmentalising forces of colonialism. Under Shari’ati’s appropriation in pre-revolutionary Iran, it transformed into a spiritual language that demanded the implementation of a new social scheme in which injustice and inequality would be challenged by the force of a “rightful” religion. And most recently in Iran, resistance has undergone another change in the form of a return to the dissidence of a deeper past, captured in the resonance and powerful rhetorical force of classical poetry that yet again confronts the authority of those who have imposed their own exclusionary structures. This last current of dissidence is emblematic of a form of individual critical consciousness that expands to the political sphere, cultivating democratic agency to combat exclusion without resorting to the language of insurrectionary violence and social revolution. It is a current that continues to maintain a different kind of revolution, keeping the spirit of poetic dissidence alive by preserving *voice*: the voice of the past resonating in new tones, resistant as ever, in the present.

Chapter Five: Locke, Kant, and the Unfulfilled Promise of Inclusion

The promises and bargains for truck, &c. between the two men in the desert island, mentioned by *Garcilasso de la Vega*, in his *History of Peru*; or between a *Swiss* and an *Indian*, in the woods of *America*, are binding to them, though they are perfectly in a state of nature, in reference to one another: for truth and keeping of faith belongs to men, as men, and not as members of society.... I moreover affirm, that all men are naturally in that state, and remain so, till by their own consents they make themselves members of some politic society.

—Locke, *Second Treatise*¹⁷⁸

servants who are not employed by the state, minors (*naturaliter vel civiliter*), women in general and all those who are obliged to depend for their living (i.e. for food and protection) on the offices of others (excluding the state)—all of these people have no civil personality, and their existence is, so to speak, purely inherent.... they are all mere auxiliaries to the commonwealth, for they have to receive orders or protection from other individuals, so that they do not possess civil independence.

—Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*¹⁷⁹

The time has come, God knows, for us to examine ourselves, but we can only do this if we are willing to free ourselves of the myth of America and try to find out what is really happening here. Every society is really governed by hidden laws, by unspoken but profound assumptions on the part of the people, and ours is no exception. It is up to the American writer to find out what these laws and assumptions are. In a society much given to smashing taboos without thereby managing to be liberated from them, it will be no easy matter.

—James Baldwin, “The Discovery of What It Means to Be an American”¹⁸⁰

I. The Body Politic and its Others

Inclusion remains haunted by its exclusions. Any body politic that has constituted a “people” has managed, by the same token, to leave others out. Or it has incorporated—introduced into the same existing body—those others, only to subsume them under its established hierarchies and mechanisms of control. Modern liberal democracies of the West are

¹⁷⁸ John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980), 13-4; hereafter cited as ST.

¹⁷⁹ In Immanuel Kant, *Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 139-40; hereafter cited as MM.

¹⁸⁰ In James Baldwin, *Collected Essays*, ed. Toni Morrison (New York: Library of America, 1998), 142.

far from being the exception to this rule: they stand, as James Baldwin insisted, in need of perpetual critique and reinvention.

At the beginning of my dissertation, I identified the problem of exclusion, and the shortcomings of its supposed antidote inclusion, as equally pressing matters with which diverse societies must grapple. In the chapters that followed, I traced the way the excluded have cultivated their own sources of agency and dissent against exclusion in both Islamic and Western experiences. In this chapter, I return to the problem of inclusion in the Western tradition to trace some of the most prominent instances of its uses and abuses, focusing not only who has been left out of the category of “the people” but also how the formerly excluded have been subjected to conditional acceptance by those writing the dominant scripts of political order. Against these narratives, I draw attention once more to the counternarratives of those working in exilic, self-determined spaces to enact agency and power to reimagine and reconstitute the political realm. On the one hand, I identify John Locke and Immanuel Kant as central canonical thinkers who have contributed immensely to discourses of inclusion in the modern West, delving into their conceptions of who truly constitutes a political society by revisiting the metaphor of the body politic and the material basis of the commonwealths these thinkers conceptualised. On the other hand, I look to the struggles of the excluded as sites of the vital work of exilic thinking that seeks to challenge and *refashion* the political realms circumscribed by those earlier theorists,¹⁸¹ stressing counternarratives and newly forced conceptions of democratic agency as sources of empowerment and creative reimagination.

In the picture I portray in this chapter, Locke and Kant’s limited narratives fall short of constructing a complete solution for the problem of exclusion in their own times, leaving a

¹⁸¹ This is to echo Adom Getachew’s compelling term *worldmaking*, moving from the domestic to the transnational level. See *Worldmaking after Empire: The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination*, 2-4.

troubled legacy for contemporary political theorists taking up their ideas to advance discourses of inclusion. The dilemma of inclusion derived from these two thinkers is rooted in the restricted, developmental framework that either explicitly excludes on the basis of gender and race or seeks to guide and “lift up” the formerly excluded, “lesser,” people by showing them how to use their resources and their capacity for reason. The fragile condition of inclusion rests on Locke and Kant’s presuppositions: “they” have not learned to use their resources or their reason yet, therefore they cannot be included until they have been guided toward the right path and shown the light.

As many political theorists insist, such shortcomings are not reasons to abandon or diminish the worth of other aspects of these thinkers’ projects: just as Western modernity as a whole is rife with racist, exclusionary scripts, so too it contains an invaluable and enduring source of emancipatory potential.¹⁸² In particular, Habermas has strongly defended Kantian republicanism as a way to bring “others”—those outside the bounds and self-understandings of Europeans for instance—*into* the established political realm where existing norms allow for the enactment of public autonomy and mutual recognition: “solidarity with the other *as one of us* refers to the flexible ‘we’ of a community that resists all substantive determinations and extends its permeable boundaries even further” (1998, xxxv-vi, original emphasis). One major problem, to which I have already alluded, is that the usages of “we” and “*one of us*” betray the predetermined status of an existing community which, through the language of inclusion, looks to integrate and assimilate its others rather than understand and treat them on their own terms.

¹⁸² Notable iterations of this defence include Arendt’s allusions to the “treasure” of the Western tradition (op. cit. *Between Past and Future*, 5-6); Habermas’s reconstruction of the value of rights discourse in contemporary Western legal orders (*Between Facts and Norms*, 82-131); and Forst’s move from the origins of individual human rights discourse in Western culture to a broader view of the universal validity of human rights across cultures (*The Right to Justification*, 203-228).

Another major problem I develop in this chapter is that the supposedly permeable boundaries of communities, especially in the settler-colonial nations of North America, are much more rigid than what the cosmopolitan thinking inspired by Kant would claim. This is because these boundaries were established by and for particular groups constituting an original “people” as a body politic under the auspices of colonialism, leaving out women, non-white races, and those without property or supposed independence. Modern Western democracies are plagued by the spectre of those members who were left out of what constituted the body of the people. The Others of the body politic were excluded from the beginning on a material basis, shut out or confined within the bounds of property; and despite their gradual inclusion over time, they have continued to be perceived as Other, ostensibly part of the body politic but not really there.¹⁸³ There exists, in short, a long-standing tension between Locke and Kant’s notions of rights and the legacies of colonialism with which they have come into contact; and this tension will take more work to get past. For my part, as I have been aiming to show in my dissertation, reaching anything like the emancipation envisioned by canonical thinkers like Locke and Kant would have to come from further engagement with the narratives of those they failed to acknowledge or even imagine—those who were left out and who have used their agency not only to contest the exclusions they were subjected to but even more profoundly to make a new world, new spaces of their own that ought to be understood on their own terms.

¹⁸³ In one iteration of this idea, the novelist Tommy Orange focuses on the image of “thereness”—the state of being present in a place and feeling that you belong in it—by comparing the famous quote from Gertrude Stein about Oakland (“there is no there there”) to the experience of Indigenous people as felt by one of his characters, Dene: “The quote is important to Dene. This there there. He hadn’t read Gertrude Stein beyond the quote. But for Native people in this country, all over the Americas, it’s been developed over, buried ancestral land, glass and concrete and steel, unreturnable covered memory. There is no there there.” See *There There* (New York: McClelland & Stewart, 2019), 39. Anyone revisiting Locke, Kant, and their modern interpreters in liberal democratic states today would do well to attend to Indigenous voices critiquing and challenging such forms of erasure through resurgence.

Looking beyond Locke and Kant’s frameworks, numerous examples are available to help challenge and rethink the discourse of inclusion. By the end of this chapter, I will briefly focus on the work of James Baldwin as one among many prominent examples of critical approaches to inclusion across North America to illustrate the vitality of such challenges from the outside. Baldwin is especially notable in contributing to an intersectional approach through which exclusions on the basis of race and sexuality are contested alongside other discussions of gender, cultural identity, and Indigeneity. But he is one among many in the wider global community of exilic thinkers and agents looking to reshape the world from peripheries and border-zones. Just as the acts of reconstitution—understood as the people rewriting themselves outside formal political institutions—have played out in the United States among exilic writers from the civil rights era to the contemporary Black Lives Matter movement, so too in Canada Indigenous resurgence has made a powerful space for those pushed to the periphery to stake their case and their demands as they see fit. Considering these examples together and applying them to contemporary debates, the imperative worth highlighting for political theorists will be to take note of the demands and, rather than insist on inclusion within existing norms and institutions, seek to change those norms and institutions meaningfully to empower those whose voices have long been stifled. This imperative, again, demands attention to narratives born from exilic thinking and the agency of those insisting on refashioning the political realm together.

II. Locke and the Limitations of Liberal Rights

Locke wrote often that the way to exit the state of nature and make a legitimate political society happens by entering into “one community” so as to “make one body politic” (ST 13). Aside from being acknowledged as a key social contract theorist whose ideas have directly influenced liberal democratic states up to the present, Locke is also particularly significant for

my purposes due to his ostensibly inclusive language. The questions worth posing against the foundational views of Locke on the matter of inclusion are: Who is being included in the political society envisioned by his liberal ethos? What are the criteria for inclusion? And what does inclusion look like in this arrangement? The answers I will develop to challenge inclusionary language up to and beyond Kant can be anticipated as follows: modern liberal nation-states across Europe and North America have, since their inception, been grounded in the idea of making a secure home for those “deserving” of a home, through the use of reason and the exploitation of resources, making inclusion an arrangement of rights gradually given out to the “less deserving.” Locke’s version of the story crucially plays out through a retelling and reconfiguration of the Biblical book of Exodus, which in turn creates new exiles out of those who for centuries would be branded as less deserving of a home. Before critiquing this narrative and considering the responses to it, I begin with a review of indispensable scholarly work to retrace the analysis of Locke’s circumscribed political order and proceed to revisit his key texts to consider their significance for the problem of inclusion today.

Narrative is again crucial in the analysis of canonical theorists like Locke. As Joshua Dienstag has put it, the study of narratives like Locke’s can help illuminate how political theory tells a story to answer fundamental questions like “Where do we come from, What are we, [and] Where are we going [?]” (1997, 1) by examining the theorist’s *sense of time*. “That sense of time,” Dienstag maintains, “persuades not only by logic but also by giving readers a more convincing account of history and of the particular roles they are to play” (3). While I agree with Dienstag’s approach in general, I think his *application* of this approach to Locke turns out to be misplaced. Dienstag claims that Locke is “the most important liberal theorist of revolution” and that “unmistakably, he counseled the men of his time to rise up against unjust authority and

renew the rights of the people” (25). While it is doubtless true that Locke bolstered the foundations of liberty and resistance in and beyond his time, the narrative that Dienstag selects hardly tells “the whole story,” as it were. The narrative of “the rights of the people” cannot be understood or appreciated unless the more foundational story of “who is supposed to constitute the people” is brought into focus first. That earlier story, I believe, retains greater significance because it foregrounds all that follows: in this version, the “rights of the people” ends up meaning the rights of those who count as people in the commonwealth Locke described as worth founding and being part of. The “promise of redemption” (25) in Locke is intended for European, property-owning men, and the story he tells—even if outstripped later by his reliance on reason rather than Christianity (49)—remains a Judaeo-Christian one at its core because it is meant to provide the inheritors of that particular tradition with a home.

Locke’s narratives about the defence of property can hardly be overstated, as they form the backbone of his entire theory of the constitution of society and of rights. As far back as the early 1990s, James Tully has critiqued Locke’s conception of political society as essentially exclusionary, founded as it was on a discourse of property that bracketed out Indigenous people from “legitimate” government:

First, Locke defines political society in such a way that Amerindian government does not qualify as a legitimate form of political society. Rather, it is construed as a historically less developed form of European political organization located in the later stages of the 'state of nature' and thus not on a par with modern European political formations. Second, Locke defines property in such a way that Amerindian customary land use is not a legitimate type of property. Rather, it is construed as individual labour-based possession and assimilated to an earlier stage of European development in the state of nature, and thus not on equal footing with European property. Amerindian political formations and property are thereby subjected to the sovereignty of European concepts of politics and property (1993, 139).

Tully explains that Locke’s use of earlier natural right thinkers like Suarez, Grotius, and Pufendorf served as justification for the rights of war in the context of the state of nature, such

that Indigenous people could be engaged by force as a form of self-defence by Europeans who encountered them in that state (143). Coming out of the state of nature entailed an even more important step for Locke, as in his vision it was Europeans who emerged from that condition to establish a political society while Indigenous people remained behind. On this point, property becomes crucial because it serves as the means through which European settlers in North America establish boundaries—what Locke tellingly calls “inclosures”—to delimit their home as a realm of reason and rights.

Tully contributes another significant analysis in applying the delimitations of property to constitutionalism more widely. In *Strange Multiplicity*, he goes on to consider how the tradition of modern constitutionalism arising out of the innovations of Hobbes, Pufendorf and Locke, and taken further by Kant, turned out exclusionary. To do this, he considers the various iterations of constitutions and in particular the dominant conventions it used to suppress *cultural diversity*. I would connect these observations to my analysis by emphasising that beyond suppressing cultural diversity, such constitutional foundations delimit the scope of “the people” and create conditions wherein inclusion allows for assimilation and domination. Tully identifies several features of the language of modern constitutionalism. To focus on a few that are most relevant to my analysis of exclusion and assimilation, they include: concepts of popular sovereignty that establish the people as a homogeneous whole coming out of a state of nature, representing modern development and bound together by a particular set of (European) institutions and customs (62-4); and constitution-making as an activity defined as modern insofar as it distinguishes itself from ancient constitutions and the customs of “earlier” and “lower” stages of human development (64). The “stages view of human history” is especially important to take note of because according to this story,

all cultures and peoples are mapped hierarchically in accordance with their location on a historical process of progressive development. European constitutional nation states, with their distinctive institutions and cultures of manners and civility, are at the highest and most developed or improved stage. Modern constitutions only come into being as a result of this development, ‘amongst’, as Locke puts it, ‘those who are counted the Civiliz’d part of Mankind’ (64-5).

These observations provide a framework for understanding how the ideas advanced by Locke would serve to justify exclusion and lead to the problematics of inclusion.

As a final introductory note before a close reading of Locke’s own text, there is a further line of investigation that is crucial to open to understand his exclusionary discourses of property and political order: his narrative omissions—that is, the “other” stories he conveniently leaves out in telling his own. Barbara Arneil’s work expands the critical reading of Locke’s views on property significantly by considering the stakes of Locke’s objectives, the ways he sought to bracket out Indigenous people, and what his omissions and exclusions amounted to. While Indigenous people “were the models for Locke’s natural man and he garnered much information from accounts written by explorers in the new world,” Arneil reveals, “Locke was selective in the ‘facts’ he chose to include about them” (1996, 33). He was concerned with “civilized men” and civil (European) government (43) and Indigenous people simply did not fit into his scheme. Moreover, his vision of such government applies—alongside the views of Grotius—to the “new world” as a site of foundation through colonisation (135). In this view, the unclaimed land is “there for the taking,” waiting to be *enclosed*. Arneil’s attention to “enclosure” (138-141) is key because it puts us on to something about inclusion: the demarcated territories under the possession of rational and industrious (148-150) Europeans serve as a home that is constructed, for others to be excluded from or brought in as guests. Enclosure serves as a larger metaphor for the homeland, the site of the body politic. Given his later influence on Jefferson and the

Federalists (168-200),¹⁸⁴ the importance of Locke's ideas for the founding and circumscribed constitution of the United States is undeniable. Building on Tully and Arneil's enduring work, my concern is to further problematise the discourse of inclusion in Locke. To do so, I will revisit some of the discussions on property and reason in the *Two Treatises of Government* and the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* to retrace the story Locke tells of how others are to be left out or assimilated. By extension, the larger narrative of establishing a home for a chosen few proceeds in gradations from Locke to the Federalists to Kant. And it is against these narratives that others have insisted on their own space to enact peoplehood.

In my reading of Locke, the biblical story of Exodus plays a central role in establishing a narrative of who deserves to be part of a rights-bearing community. As with Dante and Machiavelli, who had sought to write a way out of the desert, relating personal exile to that of the people, Locke seeks a way to write the people as founders and legislators of a new political community. But his vision, redirected by colonialism, posits a founding—out of the state of nature, intended for rational and industrious holders of rights—that in turn provides a circumscribed understanding of who “the people” are. Coming out of the desert, the home to be constructed is built by and intended for this group of people, while others are left to wander in an earlier state until they can at some point be brought under the auspices of benevolent givers of rights. In seeking to provide justifications for such a vision, Locke needs a powerful set of earlier stories to operate in the background of his own narrative; and for this, there are few stories as powerful as that of Exodus.¹⁸⁵ The story of the Jewish people's plight, their growth from a family

¹⁸⁴ Cf. Terence Ball's Introduction to Hamilton, Madison, and Jay, *The Federalist with Letters of 'Brutus'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2003), xiii.

¹⁸⁵ Not only is this important for Locke, but for settlers and “founders” of the United States in waves to come. In introducing the book of Exodus, biblical scholar Jeffrey H. Tigay notes how “The exodus has reverberated down through world history. Many early American settlers understood their flight from Europe and settlement in America as a new exodus, and later, Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson recommended that the great seal of the United

into a nation, their flight from slavery in Egypt and their founding of a new land through a covenant with God giving way to a new set of laws—all of these themes have reverberated more widely in the Western tradition, having been taken up by Christians in Europe and America alike.

Locke's crucial reformulation of biblical storytelling rests on a refutation of certain Christian interpretations in favour of a modernised one adapted to newly forming norms of rights and liberties in and beyond Europe. This shift is first perceptible in the *First Treatise of Government*, a prolonged invective against Robert Filmer, the author of *Patriarcha* whom Locke characterises as a defender of absolute monarchy and advocate for the slavery of all men.¹⁸⁶ Interestingly, some editions of his *Two Treatises* open with a quote from Livy to anticipate the repudiation of paternal authority, divine right, and the absolute authority of tyrants.¹⁸⁷ The original, written in the ninth book of Livy's *History of Rome*, reads:

But if no common justice is left to the weak when dealing with the powerful, I can still turn to the gods who exact vengeance for intolerable pride, and beg them to direct their wrath against those who are satisfied neither by the restoration of their own property nor by its increase from what belongs to other men; who savage fury will not be sated by the death of the guilty, and surrender of their lifeless bodies, nor by the owners' property following on that surrender, unless we give them our blood to drink and our vitals to tear (1982, 215-216).

Considering the context, some elements of this quote are clearly out of place in relation to Locke's purposes, while others prefigure his well-known discussions of the rights of war, conquest, and the protection of property. The speaker in the passage from Livy is Gaius Pontius, leader of the Samnites who enjoyed a temporary victory against the Romans in the 4th century

States depict Moses leading the Israelites across the parted sea as a symbol of the American experience." See *The Jewish Study Bible*, eds. Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 107.

¹⁸⁶ John Locke, Book I of *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 141-2; hereafter cited as FT.

¹⁸⁷ See the reprinted title page and explanatory note by Peter Laslett in *Two Treatises of Government*, 136.

BCE. In his speech, Pontius has chosen the path of restitution, seeking to pay reparations to the Romans after having seized their property; but his gesture has been rejected by the Romans, who refuse to make peace. Against this, his “turn to the gods” signifies a call for higher authority to somehow intervene where human laws and customs of war and peace have come up short. The injustice and “savage fury” of the Romans, according to Pontius, knows no bounds. In juxtaposing this depiction with the one Locke puts forward, the most obvious disparities reveal themselves when we consider the later thinker’s reliance on republican principles of the separation of powers and the legislative authority of the people. Locke inverts Livy’s depiction to direct criticism toward “despotic power” which infringes on the people’s rights to property and liberty; thus the language of savagery is attributed to the figure of a king who seeks to wield absolute, arbitrary power, akin to a “wild beast, or noxious brute” (ST 90). Beyond this critique begun in the *First Treatise*, and in another move away from Livy’s quote where higher authority is called upon, Locke turns to the legislative authority of the people to entrench their rights of property and liberty.

Despite his critique of biblical interpretations like that of Filmer, Locke nevertheless relies on a Judaeo-Christian framework in demarcating the realm of rights and deciding who constitutes the people. While the story of the paternal rights of kings descended from the authority of Adam “will signify nothing to the present Governments and Societies in the World,” (FT 203) another story is needed to justify the authority of legislators who enter into society with one another and in so doing protect their rights. The “one body politic” formed by these people serves as the grounds for inclusion: it is a realm founded on reason and consent, and only those who enter into it willingly can be considered a part of society (ST 13-14).

Crucially, the establishment of Locke's reasonable society comes about through "inclosure" and claims to ownership of land and resources. This requirement is notable from the outset of Locke's pivotal chapter on property. Locke proceeds to the need for "inclosure"—as a basis for property, society, and rights—in two steps. First, he avers that while the fruits of the earth belong to mankind in common and "no body has originally a private dominion, exclusive of the rest mankind... [nevertheless] being given for the use of men, there must of necessity be *a means to appropriate* them some way or other, before they can be of any use, or at all beneficial to any particular man" (ST 18-9, original emphasis). The purpose of this first move is to establish the ways that the resources of the earth may be used before giving his view of how they are *best used*. His binary of the "savage" and the "civilised" is part and parcel of this set-up for establishing proprietary boundaries. "The fruit or venison, which nourishes the wild *Indian* [sic]," he writes, "*who knows no inclosure*, and is still a tenant in common, must be his, and so his, i.e. a part of him, that another can no longer have any right to it, before it can do him any good for the support of his life" (19, my emphasis). In his oft-repeated formulation, the labour of one's hands mixes something more into the state of nature and allows for a right of property to be established. This mixing of labour "excludes the common right of other men" to what the earth provides (Ibid.). And while such acts of appropriation are valid in the state of nature, Locke's move toward the establishment of society further entrenches his archetypes of the game-hunting Indigenous person and the industrious European: "amongst those who are counted the civilized part of mankind, who have made and multiplied positive laws to determine property, this original law of nature, for the *beginning of property*, in what was before common, still takes place" (20, original emphasis). To complete his second move and affirm the ascendance of this second group as the best users of the land, Locke focuses further on the language of enclosure:

“As much land as a man tills, plants, improves, cultivates, and can use the product of, so much is his *property*. He by his labour does, as it were, inclose it from the common” (21, original emphasis). “God,” Locke claims, gave the world “to the use of the industrious and rational,” (Ibid.) so that through their labour they would have the opportunity to make the best use of it. The right to appropriate by labour and industry would not apply to places with existing laws and claims to land like England: there, “no one can inclose or appropriate any part, without the consent of all his fellow-commoners” (Ibid.). In the “vacant places of *America*,” however, such appropriation can be undertaken freely, supposedly because there is so much land for the taking that others would have no “reason to complain, or think themselves injured by [the appropriator’s] incroachment, though the race of men have now spread themselves to all the corners of the world” (23). The corner of the world Locke becomes increasingly concerned with is America, where “inclosure” of “vacant” land signals the foundation of a new society and forms the basis of its exclusions.

To fence in America and claim it for a chosen few, Locke modifies the story of Exodus by adding layers of narrative and rhetorical strategies. The story he tells makes use of biblical characters and archetypes, emplotment to guide his readers toward a vision of a society to come and a phenomenological connection to the lands that are to constitute a new home. The imagery he uses is meant to stir the emotions of his readers and lead them to a conclusion about their place in history, juxtaposing depictions of wastelands and developed lands: “I ask, whether in the wild woods and uncultivated waste of *America*, left to nature, without any improvement, tillage or husbandry, a thousand acres yield the needy and wretched inhabitants as many conveniences of life, as ten acres of equally fertile land do in *Devonshire*, where they are well cultivated?” (24). Again, repetition and rhetorical questions work to mask his omissions about Indigenous

ways of life. And all along, the biblical subplot works to direct his readers—whether they are conscious of it or not—toward the idea that the land is there for Europeans to claim.

While biblical references are strewn all throughout the *Two Treatises*, the sequence of events depicted in chapter 5 of the *Second Treatise* is curiously coherent, such that this section on property—while part of a greater whole—constitutes a self-contained story that can be taken to encapsulate the whole. It is safe to assume that Locke kept a copy of the Bible close at hand while composing his *Two Treatises*, and the retelling of the Old Testament is particularly salient in this fifth chapter. After ending chapter 4 with a reference to Exodus, he circles back to retrace the larger story. Chapter 5 again begins with Genesis to recall how God gave the world to Adam and “men in common” (18), moving to Cain and Abel (24) and “Abraham’s time” (25). At this point Locke pauses to survey where the world stands and what the next step must be. As he focuses further on America, the language of enclosure and industry expands through repetition (25-6) until the home he imagines comes into view out of the seemingly deserted landscape, and the purpose of society becomes clear: “the increase of lands, and the right employing of them, is the great art of government” (26). In the story of Exodus, as the “children of Israel” look to escape the bonds of slavery in Egypt, God speaks to Moses and promises his people “to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey” (*Exod.* 3:8).¹⁸⁸ It is after delivering them from bondage into the “wilderness” of the desert that God proceeds to make the famous covenant with Moses and his people, including not only the ten commandments and sanctions on property, but also the imperative of a particular kind of labour. The description of the assembly of the tabernacle that God demands toward the end of Exodus is notably long and specific, from its base measurements including exact cubits and types

¹⁸⁸ See *The Holy Bible: King James Version* (New York: Meridian, 1974).

of wood to be used (*Exod.* 25:10-40) down to the final touches on its door (*Exod.* 40: 2-28). The emphasis, in short, turns to *labour* as a form of devotion and showing the people's faith in keeping their covenant with God. It is through this devoted labour that the chosen people receive and secure the land promised to them. Likewise in Locke, it is labour that, "in the beginning, gave a right of property" to those constituting a society (ST 27, original emphasis). Of course Locke updates the foundation of society with modern constitutional arrangements, where the people "by laws within themselves regulated the properties of the private men of their society, and so, by compact and agreement, settled the property which labour and industry began" (Ibid.); but the fundamental point remains that in his narrative, the new founders—like the tribe of Moses—are gifted the land because of their devotion to work and their willingness to keep a covenant. Chapter 5 of the *Second Treatise* repeats this story of Exodus to claim that European founders deserve a home in the land they are claiming for themselves, to the exclusion of its earlier inhabitants.

The Christian appropriation of the story of Exodus is not the only justification for colonisation in Locke's thinking. The use of "reason" figures prominently in his narrative as well. But the framing idea of whom the land is intended for provides an impetus for colonial, exclusionary thinking. Against this reading, Jeremy Waldron has analysed the Christian foundations of Locke to conclude that its principles lead him to ideals of equality and respect for other ways of life. Against Tully's critique of Locke's colonialism in the *Second Treatise*, Waldron brings up Locke's *Letter Concerning Toleration* to try to illustrate that Locke was not only tolerant of difference but "actually quite hostile to colonial or missionary imposition" (2002, 167). Waldron mentions Locke's assertion that "Not even Americans, subjected unto a Christian prince, are to be punished either in body or goods, for not embracing our faith and

worship. If they are persuaded that they please God in observing the rites of their own country, and that they shall obtain happiness by that means, they are to be left unto God and themselves.”¹⁸⁹ The rest of the “remarkable passage” that Waldron thinks is “hardly the epitome of colonial insensitivity” is worth considering. Locke goes on to relate the seemingly damning account against colonialism as follows:

an inconsiderable and weak number of Christians, destitute of every thing, arrive in a pagan country; these foreigners beseech the inhabitants, by the bowels of humanity, that they would succour them with the necessaries of life; those necessaries are given them, habitations are granted, and they all join together, and grow up into one body of people. The Christian religion by this means takes root in that country, and spreads itself; but does not suddenly grow the strongest. While things are in this condition, peace, friendship, faith, and equal justice, are preserved amongst them. At length the magistrate becomes a Christian, and by that means their party becomes the most powerful. Then immediately all compacts are to be broken, all civil rights to be violated, that idolatry may be extirpated: and unless these innocent pagans, strict observers of the rules of equity and the law of nature, and no ways offending against the laws of the society, I say unless they will forsake their ancient religion, and embrace a new and strange one, they are to be turned out of the lands and possessions of their forefathers, and perhaps deprived of life itself.¹⁹⁰

How can Locke be seen as an insensitive coloniser when in his later work he advanced such a critical view of Christian intolerance? Waldron goes on to say that there is no dehumanisation at work here, and still further to declare that “Even in his assertion that America is an unappropriated wilderness, Locke does not rest on European prejudice” (2002, 168). Instead, he claims, Locke “offers an extensive *argument* for this assertion” (Ibid., original emphasis). The argument rests on the observation that Europeans are more industrious and make better use of the land, so Indigenous people can either “withdraw to some vacant inland place or even co-exist side-by-side with European agriculture” (Ibid.). Finally, Waldron concedes by tempering his reading: “I am not saying that we – or the native Americans – should be convinced by this

¹⁸⁹ John Locke, *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, ed. James Tully (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983), 43.

¹⁹⁰ *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, 43.

argument. (Tully may be right to reproach Locke for his failure to see that the native Americans also used land in efficient and ecologically benign ways.) Often when Locke sees the need for an argument he produces a bad argument” (169).

There are at least two problems with Waldron’s reading of Locke’s colonialism, moving from the passage from his *Letter Concerning Toleration* to the claims about the *Second Treatise*. Firstly, even if Locke was against one particular iteration of the mistreatment and marginalisation of Indigenous people, this does not mean he was exempt from other, more subtle aspects of colonial thinking. This point is made by Barbara Arneil who responds to Waldron by stating: “while Locke was opposed to religious intolerance, his belief in ‘reason’ and the more improved Englishman in opposition to the ‘customs’ of indigenous peoples is in some ways more insidious, as it requires that the former transcend the latter culturally if the Indians are to progress or improve. In other words, Locke is not making a colonial argument in the name of Christianity but in the name of ‘reason’, as is necessary to be a ‘freeman’ in his political theory—this is what makes him a liberal rather than missionary colonialist” (2017, 114-5, n3). The language of the rational and industrious European retains a central place in Locke’s narrative. But more than this, I would raise a second point against Waldron’s reading: in the *Second Treatise*, Locke was not merely producing an argument, but an intentionally exclusionary story. The option of leaving Indigenous people to withdraw to vacant lands or exist alongside Europeans is already problematic; but the further claim that Locke intended to respect equality is altogether negated by the story he tells in the *Second Treatise*. This narrative, again, brings together the biblical account of attaining land with the language of “inclosure” by the rational and industrious who by their consent enter into a political society. Likewise, limits to rights are demarcated by territorial possessions. Those who are not capable of working the land are left out

of this society, and by extension, all the benefits of government that Locke would lay out and for which he would become celebrated.

One other way in which Locke excludes non-Europeans is through omission and selective reading. Here, a final turn to his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* will serve to round off the larger story of Locke's exclusionary thinking and set up the problematics of inclusion to be extended through a reading of Kant's work. Locke's readings of travel books about the Americas already provide a telling view of the hierarchical distinctions he made between Europeans and peoples of the "new world" (Arneil 1996, 30-43). Aside from Cristobal de Acuña's *New Discovery of the Great River of the Amazons* and José de Acosta's *Natural and Moral History of the Indies*, a third source from which Locke quotes selectively is Garcilaso de la Vega's *Royal Commentary* about the history of Peru. In the quote mentioned above as an epigraph of this chapter, Locke alludes to de la Vega's account of two men encountering one another on a desert island in order to differentiate promises made in the state of nature from compacts made by those entering society. But in effect, he also sets up the view that Indigenous forms of social organisation do not constitute government in the same way that European systems do. In fact, the account provided by de la Vega is that of Pedro Serrano, a legendary—and hence very likely fictional—Spanish sailor who became shipwrecked on an island in the Caribbean and came to serve as an early representative figure of colonialism in the Americas.¹⁹¹ Locke never mentions who de la Vega is to contextualise his account or to elaborate on the scope and intentions of the

¹⁹¹ See Garcilaso de la Vega, *Comentarios Reales y Otros Textos* (Lima: Penguin Clásicos, 2016), 161 n8, where the editor Ricardo González Vigil asks us to note how "Garcilaso has recourse to the technique of creative expectation and suspense... [as] the reader of books about distant lands surrounded by legends and marvels—East India, Marco Polo's China, the recently discovered and little explored West Indies or the New World—was searching especially for never-heard facts and events" (my translation). As such, in opening with the story of Pedro Serrano, de la Vega was not yet describing the actual conditions of government among the Incas—his main intention throughout the *Comentarios* and the details that Locke conveniently left out.

Peruvian writer's work.¹⁹² Instead he chooses selectively from his *Comentarios Reales* to highlight the supposed lack of government and "savage" nature of life in Peru. In a striking reference from his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, he singles out the barbarity of cannibalism apparently drawn from the same work: "Garcilasso de la Vega tells us of a people in Peru, which were wont to fat and eat the children they got on their female captives, whom they kept as concubines for that purpose; and when they were past breeding, the mothers themselves were killed too and eaten."¹⁹³ As another interpreter of Locke's readings notes, such selective inclusions "would seem to entirely substantiate the suggestion that Locke derived a negative view of Native Americans from his reading of travel books. Here is Garcilaso denigrating the inhabitants of Peru.... But... Garcilaso did not have a negative view of Native Americans. Quite the opposite, he wished to prove the Incas the equals or even superiors of the Spanish" (Talbot 2010, 91). Looking more closely at Garcilaso's text reveals that he was in fact alluding to pre-Inca customs that were abolished by the Incas when they instituted a system of government (Zamora 1988, 111-2). Garcilaso furnished not only an account of the systems of government in the Incas, but systems of farming and cultivation which would have entirely contradicted Locke's blanket claims about Indigenous relations to the land: "populating cities together, our Incan leaders taught the local men the offices of 'manly labour' [los oficios pertenecientes a varón] such as tilling and cultivating the land and sowing crops, seeds and legumes" (Garcilaso 2016, 180). In short, the "argument" Locke makes in the *Second Treatise* and repeats in the *Essay*¹⁹⁴ holds no weight once his omissions are brought to light. Instead, what is clear is a

¹⁹² For an interesting line of questioning on this matter, see Benhabib, *Claims of Culture*, 22-3.

¹⁹³ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), 79; hereafter cited as ECHU. The version of the text that Locke cites is a French translation from 1663 titled *Histoire des Incas du Peru* (see note 12 in ECHU 752).

¹⁹⁴ See, his claim in book IV, paragraph 10 where he speaks again of how "the whole great continent of America is a convincing instance" of "ignorance in useful arts, and want of the greatest part of the conveniences of life, in a country that abounded with all sorts of natural plenty" (ECHU 570).

selective story that is exclusionary to the core, forming a basis for circumscribed constitutions of peoplehood and rights. More than that, his story inscribes a deeper narrative that not only excludes but “incloses” the rights of a chosen few in a bounded political community. And if Locke establishes this exclusive commonwealth as a prototype for a modern liberal nation-state, Kant would go on to leave behind an even more complicated legacy for the ideal of inclusion at the transnational level of universal lawmaking.

III. Kant and the Tensions of Enlightenment Inclusion

Immanuel Kant arguably stands as the representative *par excellence* of Enlightenment reason. Kant’s political philosophy, as an extension of the Enlightenment project, was an attempt to solve some of the central problems of the social contract tradition going back to Hobbes—particularly the problem of order. His project constituted a continuous movement: from the state of nature to the state, and from there to international law to cosmopolitan right. This attempt to solve the problem of order was continuous with the project of the Enlightenment to which he helped give shape. Thus, to read Kant critically without disposing of his theoretical and practical prescriptions, some remarks need to be made at the outset about Enlightenment thinking and its limits. There is a well-known and oft-noted *tension* between the exclusionary tendencies and the emancipatory possibilities unleashed by the Enlightenment, many of which are encapsulated in Kant. Before delving into Kant’s own work to probe these tendencies and consider their legacy, it is necessary to consider how the tension residing in them has been interpreted and why it continues to be relevant for discourses of democratic inclusion in the present.

The more oppressive, exclusionary tendencies of the *Aufklärung* have remained a problem for political theorists at least as far back as Adorno and Horkheimer’s publication of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (originally published in 1947 and revived in the 1960s). In that work,

the early representatives of the Frankfurt School famously declared that while the Enlightenment has aimed to emancipate human beings and give them a sense of control, “the wholly enlightened earth is radiant with triumphant calamity” (1). Beyond their memorable excursus on Homer’s *Odyssey* as one of the earliest encapsulations of “Western man’s” use of reason to dominate and distance the self from nature and other human beings (35-62), their focus on Kant as one of the figures responsible for spurring an increasingly dangerous instrumental rationality would create a serious challenge for those defending the tradition of the Enlightenment. The problem they find in Kant’s thinking is a kind of ambiguity on reason, which on the one hand signifies “the transcendental, supraindividual self” that allows for social organisation and “true universality”; and on the other hand reason as “the agency of calculating thought, which arranges the world for the purposes of self-preservation and recognizes no function other than that of working on the object as mere sense material in order to make it the material of subjugation” (65). This latter, “instrumental” reason, signals a descent from enlightened civilisation to a kind of “barbarism” reflected in anti-Semitism and its accompanying dehumanisation of others. Following this appraisal, the legacy of the Enlightenment has been continually contested among political theorists.

On the back of other critical readers of Kant—notably Foucault and Derrida—waves of theorists have questioned the Enlightenment championing of reason and universalistic aspirations to truth by insisting on otherness and contestability as the lifeblood of a genuinely pluralistic model of democracy. Against the “objectivism” rooted in Kant and levelled at philosophical inheritors like Rawls and Habermas, Chantal Mouffe has maintained that “any social objectivity is ultimately political and has to show the traces of the acts of exclusion that govern its constitution—what, following Derrida, can be referred to as its ‘constitutive outside’” (in

Benhabib 1996, 247). For Mouffe and likeminded agonists since, contestation is the essence of the political because, far from espousing incommensurability and complete relativism, it engenders solidarity and togetherness in the fight against repression and exclusion. Thinkers like Rawls, influenced by Kant, have instantiated a kind of “closure” in democratic thinking by insisting on the hegemony of reason and rational citizens; and according to Mouffe: “To avoid such a closure, we should relinquish the very idea that there could be such a thing as a ‘rational’ political consensus—that is, one that would not be based on any form of exclusion” (Ibid., 254). Yet, arguably, other thinkers influenced by Kant have often been at pains to avoid such closures and forms of exclusion, insisting on a critical approach that resists domination while refusing to completely dispense with Enlightenment reason. As a response to the above critics and further anticipation of the critique of Kant, Habermas’s abiding defence of public reason is worth revisiting here.

Habermas would insist that we salvage parts of Kant’s ideas insofar as they relate to pragmatic concerns of judging between right and wrong in the public sphere. Starting with the ideas he lays out in “What is Universal Pragmatics?” and continuing through the *The Theory of Communicative Action*, his approach can be characterised mainly by the preoccupation with the competence of communicating agents and the way to mutual understanding. “The goal of coming to an understanding,” Habermas states, “is to bring about an agreement that terminates in the intersubjective mutuality of reciprocal understanding, shared knowledge, mutual trust, and accord with one another.”¹⁹⁵ He wants, through his project, to specify and enable effective communication between different agents. To do so, he begins with the validity basis of speech, stating that validity claims are based on truth, truthfulness and normative rightness. In other

¹⁹⁵ Jürgen Habermas, “What is Universal Pragmatics?” in *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979), 3.

words, we have to agree on a background consensus before we can understand one another, presupposing that our words give us something to understand and are coming from a speaker who intends to be understood.¹⁹⁶ This is all dependent on our *know-how* with respect to words. Habermas is interested in “*the evaluative accomplishment of rule consciousness*”¹⁹⁷ or how it is that we know what constitutes correct rule following. By knowing and following the rules of language—a capacity that ultimately requires the use of reason—Habermas’s speakers can challenge the validity of various structures, be they linguistic, institutional or of other kinds. In Habermas’s thinking, such use of reason evades the potentially dominating strain in Kant pointed out by Adorno, Horkheimer and others. Habermas refuses to see his own social theory as one that is fixed and unquestionable, aspiring to objectivity or absolute truth through Kantian metaphysical presuppositions. Critically evaluating Kant’s transcendental analysis from the *Critique of Pure Reason*, he illustrates the problem with positing a categorical network that exists a priori and thus “gives up all claim to a proof of the objective validity of our concepts of objects of possible experience in general.”¹⁹⁸ In other words, he abandons metaphysical truth claims and instead relies on validity claims built through the communication of agents: “In place of a priori demonstration, we have transcendental investigation of the conditions for argumentatively redeeming validity claims that are at least implicitly related to discursive vindication.”¹⁹⁹ Finally, his serious engagement with Adorno and Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1984, 378-391) and his reassertion of rationality as a way for agents to reach understanding together (392) serve as a defence of what is most valuable in Enlightenment reason in general, and Kant’s legacy in particular. Through these efforts, Habermas has sought to

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 2-3.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 13-14.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 21.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 23.

demonstrate that Kant's insights can be taken up to challenge social norms in a way that remains conducive to deliberation and contestation, potentially transforming conceptions of selfhood as well as democratic institutions (Warren 1992, 14, 21). Other interpreters like Seyla Benhabib (1992, 3-8) and Rainer Forst (2002, 4-5) have continued to rely on the Kantian tradition for a non-metaphysical, "post-Enlightenment" defence of universalism that emphasises reason-giving and respect for the autonomy of others as central pillars for not only the constitution but also the continual *reconstitution* of a just political order. Kant's use of practical reason in the public sphere has thus remained a vital resource for contemporary democratic theories emphasising deliberation and contestation of unjust laws and norms.

Despite the indispensability of Kant's most productive ideas, however, a serious challenge must be restated and foregrounded before it can be tackled through a close reading of his texts. This challenge is rooted in the limitations of the principal story that Kant tells about humanity in articulating a universalist vision that would influence modern discourses of cosmopolitanism. His story is an elaboration of the developmental narrative established earlier by Locke; but as Kant departs from Locke in important ways, it is necessary to situate him in the larger web of Western discourses wherein exclusion and inclusion become entangled.

To recapitulate the story of development and consider Kant's place in it, we have to keep sight of the gradations of exclusion as they expand in accordance with historical movements and circumstances. In Locke, as has been shown, exclusion is predicated on the establishment of property and enclosure, delimiting the political order as the realm of rights for a chosen group of industrious and rational men. His developmental view relates to sovereignty in settler-colonial states like America. In the century after Locke's treatises—more specifically by the 1780s—the very constitution of circumscribed political realms like the United States would come to be based

directly on the presuppositions of a select group (“We the People”) seeking to establish a delimited and a self-professedly more developed society representing “a more perfect Union.”²⁰⁰ In working to frame the U.S. constitution, Alexander Hamilton claimed that the society the Federalists aimed to establish would serve as a model of good government for the rest of mankind.²⁰¹ John Jay claimed that “This country and this people seem to have been made for each other, and it appears as if it was the design of Providence, that an inheritance so proper and convenient for a band of brethren, united to each other by the strongest ties, should never be split into a number of unsocial, jealous and alien sovereignties.”²⁰² And James Madison would famously identify the danger of faction as one of the most dangerous threats to the integrity of the union and its principles of good government, whereby to control its effects the solution put forward was to “refine and enlarge the public views, by passing them through the medium of a chosen body of citizens, whose wisdom may best discern the true interest of their country.”²⁰³ Thus discourses of rationality and development mingled with republican principles of mixed government to bestow a sense of unity and harmony to the fledgling nation, writing it into existence by stating who is excluded and what the conditions for inclusion would be. In the *Federalist Papers*, Indigenous people would be mentioned exclusively in relation to attributed acts of aggression and hostility (11, 113) or the possibilities of regulated interaction through commerce (114, 190, 205), always at a distance due to the ambiguous relation of remaining “not members of a State, yet residing within its legislative jurisdiction” (206). Though the importation of slaves was to be halted by 1808 and celebrated for freeing “unfortunate Africans” from “the oppressions of their European brethren!” (204), the question of slaves who had already arrived in

²⁰⁰ See “The Constitution of the United States” in *The Federalist*, 545.

²⁰¹ *Federalist* 1-2.

²⁰² *Federalist* 6.

²⁰³ *Federalist* 44.

the United States remained unresolved. To allot their place in the republic, they came to be viewed “in some respects, as persons, and in other respects, as property” (265); in the infamous mathematical formulation, they were “divested of two fifth of the *man*” (267, original emphasis).²⁰⁴ These historical movements in America—delimitations of territories and peoplehood with aspirations of a harmonious and purified social order alongside increasingly precise and “scientific” racial classifications—were coetaneous with the racial discourses that Kant was building through his earlier work.²⁰⁵

Before turning to analyse these works anew and consider them in relation to his other—especially later—works, I should note again that my aim is not to provide a singular interpretation of Kant through a selective reading of his works. Numerous critical readings of Kant have been put forward over the past decades, problematising his contributions to philosophy and politics (Mills 1997, 14-17, 69-72; Bernasconi 2003; McCarthy 2009; Baum

²⁰⁴ Tocqueville’s later commentary on this problem is also revealing. Notably, he devoted the longest chapter in the whole of his *Democracy in America* to “Considerations on the Present State and the Probable Future of the Three Races that Inhabit the Territory of the United States,” mixing observation with his own developmental prejudices, by this time (the 1830s) inflected by increasingly developed racial theories. “The men spread over [the territory of the United States] do not form, as in Europe, so many offshoots of the same family,” Tocqueville wrote. “From the first one finds in them three naturally distinct and, I could almost say, inimical races. Education, law, origin, and even the external form of their features have raised an almost insurmountable barrier between them; fortune has gathered them on the same soil, but it has mixed them without being able to intermingle them, and each pursues its destiny separately.” See *Democracy in America*, trans. and ed. Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 303. After detailing with horror the destruction and forced migration of numerous Indigenous peoples, Tocqueville would lay out a prediction about the new forms that erasure was to take: “tranquilly, legally, philanthropically, without spilling blood, without violating a single one of the great principles of morality in the eyes of the world,” settlers in America would continue to find new ways to exclude them (325). Black Americans, in Tocqueville’s view, would sooner or later enter into conflict with those who had formerly enslaved them and sought new ways to exclude or subjugate them through inclusion: “having joined the number of free men, they will soon become indignant at being deprived of almost all the rights of citizens; and not being able to become the equals of the whites, they will not be slow to show themselves their enemies” (345-6). Of course Tocqueville would not be around to see the struggles of Indigenous people and Black Americans to rewrite the republic, and the predictions he made remained coloured by his prejudices. But the discourse of development through which he envisioned the superiority and unstoppable march of “civilisation” carried forward by the settlers is notable.

²⁰⁵ These include his “Observations on the feeling of the beautiful and sublime” (1764); “Of the different races of human beings” (1775); and “Idea for a universal history with a cosmopolitan aim” (1784)—all of which I will be focusing on in the pages to follow.

2006, 70-73; Kleingeld, 2007, 2019). Out of these readings of Kant, Thomas McCarthy has raised one of the questions most closely related to my analysis: the “question of how putatively universalistic, inclusive, moral doctrines could so readily countenance particularistic, exclusionary practices – and, as it seems, with surprisingly little cognitive dissonance” (42). McCarthy argues that because of the universalistic aspirations of his later writings—including his three critiques of pure reason (1781), practical reason (1788), and judgment (1790), as well as his *Perpetual Peace* (1795) and *Metaphysics of Morals* (1797)—Kant’s moral vision is still open to reconstruction and adaptation for concerns of democratic inclusion at the turn of the 21st century (68). More recently, Pauline Kleingeld has gone further to try to rescue Kant’s philosophy by insisting that the last set of his published works—those coming after his “Critical” period—show that he changed his mind on race altogether and moved toward a “genuinely egalitarian and cosmopolitan view” (2007, 573-5). My reading follows this timeline, but ultimately I take issue with the claims of “genuine” egalitarianism and cosmopolitanism in Kant. This reading, in keeping with the more generous interpretations above, by no means adopts a wholesale rejection of Kant’s contributions to political philosophy in the present; but it demands that we continue to approach him critically with regard to his conceptualisations of exclusion and inclusion. The problem is not simply that Kant evinced racist views in his anthropological writings—as so many other Enlightenment thinkers did—but that his developmental discourse and principles of government further entrenched hierarchies that served to justify dispossession and exclusion on the one hand, and conditional inclusion on the other. Thinking about the discourse of inclusion in democratic theory today requires that we acknowledge and appreciate the rigidity of such structures of domination while refusing to accept their permanence. There is, I suggest in my reading, a way to read Kant *against himself* in order not to dispense with what is

most useful in his thinking—but there are also vital resources to look for in the work of Kant’s exiles, outside the purview of what he would have us consider as worthy contributors to the cause of human liberation.

Proceeding chronologically to closely consider the tensions in Kant’s thinking, it is clear that his earlier writings manifested a far more explicit and problematic account of human classification. His *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1764) exhibit some of the most blatant and extreme forms of his racism toward non-Europeans. Citing David Hume’s comments, he writes:

The Negroes of Africa have by nature no feeling that rises above the ridiculous. Mr. Hume challenges anyone to adduce a single example where a Negro has demonstrated talents, and asserts that among the hundreds of thousands of blacks who have been transported elsewhere from their countries, although very many of them have been set free, nevertheless not a single one has ever been found who has accomplished something great in art or science or shown any other praiseworthy quality (Kant 2011b, 58).

Compared to their white counterparts, Kant goes on to say, Africans are never able to rise up from conditions that bind them, and the difference in their capacities of mind is as marked as that between their skin colour. Nor does Kant bestow on this “other race” any possibility of the growth and maturity that is the supposed end of all mankind. Members of this particular group can only be managed by being “driven apart from each other by blows” (59). While Kant’s comments on other non-Europeans are also unsavoury, it is this set of judgements about the people of Africa that best exemplifies the extreme limits of the exclusionary strain in his thinking.

Kant’s earlier works continued to rely on strict divisions between human beings as he further systematised and specified their supposedly essential differences. He developed his hierarchical classifications of race at least as early as 1775, drawing on materials from his

lectures on anthropology at the University of Königsberg.²⁰⁶ While intended to be “objective” and grounded in observable phenomena, his categorisations were largely speculative, based in part on the pseudo-scientific classifications developed by Carolus Linnaeus and Comte de Buffon, and at other points purely on assumptions (Baum 2006, 71-2). Maintaining that human beings undeniably belong to one species, Kant would nevertheless insist on essential differences based on the distinctive character of races within this larger family (Kant 2007, 85). The races that he considered included: “1) the race of the *whites*, 2) the *Negro race*, 3) the *Hunnish* (Mongolian or Kalmuckian) race, 4) the Hindu or *Hindustani* race” (87). Kant would assume that the reason for essential differences between the races—particularly the black and white races—is “in itself clear” (88). Connecting “natural predispositions” to geographical and climatic conditions, he would confine himself in this essay to physical features and adaptive traits of different races, from skin and hair colour to bodily fluids and facial characteristics (89-96). And while this work contains no explicit expressions of cognitive capacity and mental superiority, it would nonetheless serve as an important piece in his larger system by which peoples and cultures could be known and classified racially—which is to say demarcated and controlled within an existing global power structure (Said 1978, 119; cf. Foucault 2003 [1976], 80-83). As Kant would say at the end of his lecture-turned-essay,

The physical geography which I am announcing hereby belongs to an idea which I make myself of a useful academic instruction and which I may call the preliminary exercise in the *knowledge of the world*. This knowledge of the world serves to procure the pragmatic element for all otherwise acquired sciences and skills, by means of which they become useful not merely for the *school* but rather for *life* and through which the accomplished apprentice is introduced to the stage of his destiny, namely, the *world*. Here a two-fold field lies before him, of which he requires a preliminary outline so that he can order in it all future experiences according to rules, namely, *nature* and the *human being* (2007, 97, original emphases).

²⁰⁶ Immanuel Kant, “Of the different races of human beings” in *Anthropology, History, and Education*, eds. Gunter Zöllner and Robert B. Lauden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 82-97.

In Kant's self-professed systematic project, I believe we can locate a clear set of intentions and ambitions about the unfolding of world history, with crucial consequences for notions of *who* is to be included in the global human community, and *how* they are to be included. That is, with Kant we can identify a move from Locke's sovereign nation-state with distinct hierarchical orders and territorial demarcations to a more *global* mission of order and progress wherein hierarchies continue to operate in tension with cosmopolitan aims. In the 1780s, Kant would increasingly shift his sights toward a worldwide vision of growing intellectual freedom ("What is Enlightenment?") and political emancipation ("Idea for a Universal History"); and by the 1790s, his political writings on international rights (*Perpetual Peace*) further grounded in public rights (*Metaphysics of Morals*) would seemingly cement his legacy as a theorist of universal human rights and "liberal international sovereignty" (Benhabib 2006, 23). It is largely on the back of these works, and the intervening contributions of his Critical period, that many Kantian scholars like the aforementioned have sought to maintain the preponderant relevance of his universal principles over his racist, exclusionary views. Yet, while conceding that some elements of this later thinking are undeniably worth salvaging, I maintain that the exclusions are present all the way through Kant's oeuvre, and that the legacy he leaves behind for democratic inclusion today remains a troubled one. Whether at the level of the nation-state or the human community writ large, borders and hierarchies would continue to manifest themselves in all of Kant's thinking: those in the upper ranks would continue to draw up the borders and the laws, and the perpetual Others would either be left out or lifted up by the more rational and independent, if they were to be so lucky.

Kant's "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose," a touchstone for many modern interpreters of cosmopolitanism to date, reveals the tensions between his

universalism and his exclusions as clearly as any of his other texts. Beginning by proclaiming the primacy of viewing human actions as “determined in accordance with natural laws,” Kant identifies “a regular progression” of the whole species’ development. He then proceeds to lay out his teleology in rather speculative terms: “It seems as if nature had intended that man, once he had finally worked his way up from the uttermost barbarism to the highest degree of skill... should be able to take for himself the entire credit for doing so” (Kant 2011a, 43); and natural impulses and rational capacities in human beings “seem to indicate the design of a wise creator” (45); therefore, “*the history of the human race as a whole can be regarded as the realization of a hidden plan of nature to bring about an internally—and for this purpose externally—perfect political constitution*” (50, original emphasis). Yet this “*perfect political constitution*” and the view of “a universal *cosmopolitan existence*” (51, original emphasis) are ultimately the product of a particular tradition. Kant’s sources, his presuppositions, and the accompanying imperial baggage are neatly laid out by him on the following page:

For if we start out from *Greek* history as that in which all other earlier or contemporary histories are preserved or at least authenticated, if we next trace the influence of the Greeks upon the sharing and mis-shaping of the body politic of *Rome*, which engulfed the Greek state, and follow down to our own times the influence of Rome upon the *Barbarians* who in turn destroyed it, and if we finally add the political history of other peoples *episodically*, in so far as knowledge of them has gradually come down to us through these enlightened nations, we shall discover a regular process of improvement in the political constitutions of our continent (which will probably legislate eventually for all other continents) (52, original emphasis).

Kant’s own emphases highlight his biases and the implications of his cosmopolitan legacy. It is the Greeks and the Romans who serve as the rightful predecessors to what will eventually become a perfect political order conceived in Europe; all other peoples of the globe figure episodically in this narrative; it is up to the Europeans to create a perfect constitution and impose it on those others. As Kant would write in his other famous complementary essay of 1784, “If it

is now asked whether we at present live in an enlightened age, the answer is: No, but we do live in an age of enlightenment. As things are at present, we still have a long way to go before men as a whole can be in a position... of using their own understanding” (2011, 58). This demarcated “we” applied initially to men in particular European states like Kant’s own Prussia under Frederick the Great, and was meant to be extended: “This spirit of freedom is also spreading abroad, even where it has to struggle with outward obstacles imposed by governments which misunderstand their own function” (59). But even as he elaborated this project at the domestic and international levels, the main narrative he recounted remained one of exclusionary developmental discourse.

At the international level, the federation of free states that Kant outlines in his *Perpetual Peace* would be based on exclusively republican conceptions of government derived from European traditions and experience (99-105). Read alongside his “Idea for a Universal History,” the *cultural* aspects of Kant’s idea for the progression and proposed end of all mankind lay bare the “stages idea of world-historical development” (Tully 2008b, 25). The problem with Kant’s central narrative is that it ignores or downplays the experiences and contributions of other, non-European cultures toward what could potentially be seen as a more genuine cosmopolitan vision. Meanwhile, in his schema of states as outlined in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, boundaries would continue to exist between those who count as free, equal, and independent citizens, with important consequences for civic rights of representation. Kant’s later writings on politics, despite their valuable elaborations of the universal principle of right, remained weighed down by a form of exclusionary thinking that limited their practical applications. This exclusionary thinking in part stemmed from his hierarchical racial constructs and its concomitant developmental discourse, as detailed above. And it would manifest itself in the Eurocentric script

about which political and legal structures were to be worth preserving and propagating, which kinds of people were considered civilised, and which among them were fit to participate in politics by virtue of their “civil personality.” In concluding this section and my analysis of Kant, I undertake a final consideration of his exclusions and the consequences they carry for rethinking the principle of democratic inclusion today.

In *Perpetual Peace*, Kant declares that the civil constitution of every state should be *republican* for many of the same reasons that European and American adherents had been defending through the 1700s: the system’s guarantees of freedom, its dependence on common legislation, and the principle of equality. All of these features, he and other republican thinkers would maintain, guarantee that political decisions are not made arbitrarily by one group because through balance they serve the interests of all (2011, 99-101). In the service of international norms, the republican system of government is proposed as a universal regime because it is most likely to prevent states from going to war with one another: the citizens of each republican state will be loath to bring the miseries of war on their own heads. These long-celebrated prescriptions have of course had immeasurable influence and staying power in the international arena. At the same time, however, they have worked to occlude and marginalise non-European governments by dismissing them as undeveloped and inadequate. “There is only one rational way in which states coexisting with other states can emerge from the lawless condition of pure warfare,” Kant states: “they must renounce their savage and lawless freedom, adapt themselves to public coercive laws, and thus form an international state (*civitas gentium*), which would necessarily continue to grow until it embraced all the peoples of the earth” (105). Again the developmental nature of this “growth” is notable: European states are posited as the highest exemplars, closest

to full development, while other peoples of the world lagging behind must be carried up by them and their laws.

Admittedly, the more mature Kant of *Perpetual Peace* fame is critical of the conduct of European states though colonialism and imperialism, considering the “*inhospitable* conduct of the civilised states of our continent” and “the injustice which they display in *visiting* foreign countries and peoples” (106, original emphasis). He notes that America and the “new world” were “looked upon at the time of their discovery as ownerless territories; for the native inhabitants were counted as nothing” while in other places like India occupation by foreign troops and traders led to oppression of local peoples and a “whole litany of evils” (Ibid.). As Sankar Muthu has argued, Kant’s philosophy of history was ultimately a “narrative of hope” for all humankind to undertake against the injustices of the world (Muthu 2003, 162-3). While such a reading continues to merit close consideration, I think there are still compelling reasons for reading Kant critically and not losing sight of the fact that his most consistent narrative was one of uplift by Europeans and their laws, rather than a concerted effort that took account of the pluriverse constituted by diverse worldviews and forms of government. Even if Kant aimed to build “a ‘guiding principle’ of human history,” using an agentic narrative “to persuade his readers that they must not give up hope for a better future,” (165), it is impossible to ignore that he constructed this narrative on the foundation of European philosophy and laws, with the bricks and mortars of a particular tradition that ostensibly remained superior because enlightened. In his supplements to the guarantee of perpetual peace, Kant reaffirms the agency of human beings to bring about just and egalitarian conditions at the global level, but also restates that “the *republican* constitution is the only one which does complete justice to the rights of man” (2011, 112, original emphasis). He enjoins again a course of action that is not merely meant to

“*prophesy* the future theoretically,” but to bring about a just international order through practical guidance (114). The “knowledge of the world” elaborated in his earlier lectures on anthropology (Kant 2007, 97) would continue to serve as the basis for such a scheme, as would the discourse of development. As races, cultures, and forms of government could be known and classified by the European political theorist, they could be ranked such that their proper ordering would ensure a better world through universal norms and rights at the international level. But this scheme does epistemic injustice to other lifeworlds and political systems. It establishes a basis for a hierarchical world order that would distinctively find expression in international organisations like the League of Nations and the UN, with their accompanying tendency to enable “unequal integration” and “the burdened and racialized membership it produced.”²⁰⁷ And it ignores other stories—cultural narratives and complex systems of law alike—that envision relations among peoples to be guided by mutuality and reciprocity.²⁰⁸ Thus, at the international level, Kant’s *Perpetual Peace* illustrates the parochiality of his universalistic narrative, excluding other worldviews by omission or by virtue of underdevelopment.²⁰⁹ Turning, finally, to his *Metaphysics of Morals*, it remains to be seen how such exclusions are reflected within nation-states, and how they also continue to make inclusion a problematic ideal.

Kant’s *Metaphysics of Morals* stands as a powerful account of human beings’ moral duties to themselves and others, and an elaboration of the political and legal frameworks that best enable and sustain public right. It is, as is well known about Kant, part of a system undergirded

²⁰⁷ See Getachew, *Worldmaking After Empire*, 40.

²⁰⁸ There are myriad articulations of this need to think beyond the parochial confines of European philosophies and laws, several of which I have mentioned in my introduction and return to further toward the end of this chapter; but to mention just one example in passing, John Borrows’ account in *Recovering Canada: The Resurgence of Indigenous Law* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002) stands as an authoritative testament to the vitality and durability of Indigenous worldviews in relation to rights and legal norms.

²⁰⁹ See Murad Idris, *War for Peace: Genealogies of a Violent Ideal in Western and Islamic Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 275-7.

by his epistemology and metaphysics—which posit truth-claims about human beings’ ability to reason and make judgments about the world—leading to a normative ethical theory that serves to guide human action with regard to justice and rights. Specifically, his philosophical foundations in the first (Kant 1998, A798-800)²¹⁰ and second (Kant 2015, 5:42)²¹¹ critiques establish how we use reason to make the world intelligible, and how we can thus govern ourselves. Autonomy enables us to give laws to ourselves and bind ourselves to commands like the categorical imperative.²¹² Beyond the principles outlined in the *Grounding*, the political applications require a theory of public right to sustain a situation in which all free individuals can act in accordance with the universal laws that bind them. It is at this juncture that Kant’s exclusions within the commonwealth become palpable. The public right that Kant wants to maintain requires a particular *constitution* (MM 136). To define this perfect constitution, Kant works through the social contract literature (137) to consider how a state comes into being and what form it definitively must take: “the form of the state will be that of a state in the absolute sense, i.e. as the idea of what a state ought to be according to pure principles of right. This idea can serve as an internal guide (*norma*) for every actual state where men unite to form a commonwealth” (138). Unsurprisingly, following the same line of reasoning that he pursued in *Perpetual Peace*, Kant outlines a republican constitution, with a separation of three powers—ruling power, executive power, and judicial power—as the universal mode of government (Ibid.). Particularly important in his formulation is his demarcation of “the people” to determine who holds sovereignty and, with it, the power to legislate (139).

²¹⁰ See Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 673-4.

²¹¹ See Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 37.

²¹² See Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1981), 44-5.

Kant's conception of "the people" becomes increasingly narrow as he proceeds through his outline of political right in the *Metaphysics of Morals*. Soon boundaries similar to the ones established by Locke come into sharper relief. Those "who unite for the purpose of legislating" are known as "*citizens (cives)*," according to Kant (Ibid.). These select individuals constitute "the united will of the people." Citizens have rights and freedoms, but in order to exercise their power to judge, they must be fit to vote. The key necessary attribute constituting an active citizen is "civil independence": a quality that "allows him [sic.] to owe his existence and sustenance not to the arbitrary will of anyone else among the people, but purely to his own rights and powers as a member of the commonwealth" (Ibid.). Note the tension between Kant's usages of "the people" throughout this section: there are those who reside in the commonwealth, subject to its provisions and laws, and then there are those who act as sovereigns because they are fit to vote and legislate. The problem may be seen as one of exclusion, with far-reaching consequences, as shown by the noted dismissal of women and all those who occupy lower socioeconomic positions as "mere auxiliaries to the commonwealth" (140).²¹³ Seyla Benhabib, acknowledging this problem in Kant, further notes that it was of course not exclusive to him and preceded his theoretical formulations: "Women, Slaves, and servants (many of whom were women as well), propertyless white males, non-Christians, and nonwhite races historically were excluded from membership in the sovereign body and from the project of citizenship" (2006, 34). I believe the distinction between exclusion and inclusion is crucial. It isn't that Kant excluded certain kinds of people unconditionally from the commonwealth but that, troublingly, he included them conditionally. The "dependence upon the will of others and consequent inequality," he would

²¹³ The pre-eminent critique of this problematic line in Hobbes, Locke, and Kant—and its foregrounding of exclusionary thinking in liberal political theory—remains Teresa Brennan and Carole Pateman's "‘Mere Auxiliaries to the Commonwealth’: Women and the Origin of Liberalism," *Political Studies* 27 (1979), 183-200.

claim, does not “in any way conflict with the freedom and equality of all men as *human beings* who together constitute a people. On the contrary, it is only by accepting these conditions that such a people can become a state and enter into a civil constitution.” Herein lies the catch: “But all who are not equally qualified within this constitution to possess the right to vote, i.e. to be citizens and not just subjects among other subjects. For from the fact that as passive members of the state, they can demand to be treated by all others in accordance with laws of natural freedom and equality, it does not follow that they also have a right to influence or organize the state itself as active members, or to co-operate in introducing particular laws” (MM 140). The difficulty that Kant presents, then, is that he admits people into the commonwealth, but strips the vast majority of them of the right to actively participate as full members.

Viewed in light of these Kantian elaborations, the problem of inclusion is seen to present a serious challenge over and above that of exclusion. The difficulty with which liberal democratic societies must grapple today is the task of constituting a demos with fuller rights to participation and capabilities for self-governance. As Benhabib frames it, “there has never been a perfect overlap between the circle of those who stand under the law’s authority and those recognized as full members of the demos.... Territorial sovereignty and democratic voice have never matched completely” (2006, 35). Through her lens, “The new politics of cosmopolitan membership is about negotiating this complex relationship between rights of full membership, democratic voice and territorial residence. Although the demos, as the popular sovereign, must assert control over a specific territorial domain, it also can engage in reflexive acts of self-constitution, whereby the boundaries of the demos can be readjusted” (35-6). This assessment remains apt and timely in many ways; but it is worth asking, in the end, how far Kant’s thinking can take us, not only for redrawing boundaries but especially considering just how much can be

done within them. Members of marginalised communities are not only concerned with having full membership and having access to state-centric mechanisms of voting, or simply being included in deliberative systems. A key consideration, which I point to in the following section, is that they often express themselves—in their own narratives—as desiring to rewrite the political realm together; and these expressions are often framed as coming from the outside, beyond the confines of existing state mechanisms and institutions, taking the form of resistance and democratic agency. Kant does not provide sufficient room for these democratic practices. Appearing more Hobbesian than Lockean, he would hold up the supreme authority of the state as an absolute, incontrovertible power:

since the people must already be considered as united under a general legislative will before they can pass rightful judgment upon the highest power within the state (*summum imperium*), they cannot and may not pass any judgement other than that which is willed by the current head of state (*summus imperans*). Whether in fact an actual contract originally preceded their submission to the state's authority (*pactum subiectionis civilis*), whether the power came first and the law only appeared after it, or whether they ought to have followed this order—these are completely futile arguments for a people which is already subject to civil law, and they constitute a menace to the state. For if the subject, having delved out the ultimate origin, were then to offer resistance to the authority currently in power, he might by the laws of this authority (i.e. with complete justice) be punished, eliminated or banished as an outlaw (*exlex*) (MM 143).

Kant remained suspicious of the capacities and rights of many people in the commonwealth he ultimately proposed. As acknowledged near the beginning of this section, there is plenty in Kant worth salvaging as far as the use of public reason and universal respect and dignity are concerned. Like Locke, he retains a commitment to autonomy, critical reflection, and self-transformation, as recognised by Foucault in his later work.²¹⁴ Another part of his enduring value lies in the notion of the “enlarged mentality” drawn from Arendt’s generative reading of his *Critique of Judgment* (BPF, 219-20). But the political system Kant envisioned remained in

²¹⁴ See “What is Enlightenment?” in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984), 34-50.

tension with those aims, perpetuating an enclosed category of the people with hierarchical structures and subtle forms of domination that continue to persist to this day. With these limitations of Kant's influential political project fully laid out, I turn one last time to the group he derided—his *exlex*, the exiled—for resources of a more vibrant democratic resurgence, perpetually contesting the rigid structures of state power and domination.

IV. Baldwin: From Inclusion to Empowerment

Looking beyond Locke and Kant to critiques of exclusion and domination from the twentieth century to the present reveals an important but often overlooked fact: some of the most powerful critiques of this kind come *from the outside*, and demand *more than inclusion*. To illustrate this point, I discuss in this final section a few prominent iterations of what could be called exilic narratives of resistance, focusing briefly on the example of James Baldwin as a representative thinker of political reimagining and reconstitution of the people with an eye to new democratic futures.

In recent decades, political theorists attuned to the problem of “the people” and its limited scope in modern liberal democracies have been working to conceptualise and consider the ways the “outsiders” of political societies contribute vitally to the reconstitution of those same societies through contestation (Honig 2001; Smith 2003; Frank 2010). In the context of Canada, Indigenous scholars have advocated a variety of ways to reimagine peoplehood, whether with an emphasis on reconciliation (Poelzer and Coates 2015) or resurgence and resistance (Coulthard 2014; Simpson 2017), noting the vitality of Indigenous social structures in relation to those imposed by settler-colonial legal systems (Borrows 2002). How those left out of the making of modern settler-colonial states contest the prevailing norms of those societies is far from a settled matter; nor is it anything for the writers of the governing scripts of those societies to dictate.

There is plenty of disagreement and contestation within communities, deliberating on their own terms and articulating their visions of how best to overcome domination built into unjust sociopolitical arrangements. Considerations of exclusion and inclusion regarding race in the United States remain widely debated. Questions of Black American identity and struggles against reductive characterisations—against racist exclusions, and against confining forms of inclusion alike—have prompted consistent scholarly efforts to examine how American peoplehood must be re-examined and rewritten time and again (West 1999; Lebron 2013; Glaude 2016). Among these, the presence of James Baldwin as a provocative and illuminating guide has been consistent and continually growing (Balfour 2001; Baum and Harris 2009; Zamalin 2015; Glaude 2020). I believe the powerful and nuanced interpretations of identity and action Baldwin put forward also have much to add for wider considerations of exclusion and inclusion, and the power of exilic agency in democratic societies today.

Baldwin's enduring testimonies about the psychological perils of exclusion in self-avowedly democratic societies like the United States stand among the reasons scholars, activists, and ordinary citizens continue to look back to him for insight and inspiration in the ongoing struggle against racial violence, injustice, and inequality. More than this, Baldwin was a prescient and incisive critic of inclusion as a potentially limiting alternative in that same struggle, especially insofar as he was attentive to internal exclusions due to race and sexuality. As such, he remains an important interlocutor prompting intersectional considerations on various forms of exclusion. Whether in the mode of an essayist, novelist, or public intellectual, Baldwin was always and above all an observer: with a keen eye he perceived the damaging effects of exclusion on himself and other Black Americans, seeking to write back against the scripts that continually sought to diminish their standing. The overarching ethos of Baldwin's work

remained one of resistance—a refusal to be belittled or branded in such a way. In speaking and writing, he often wrote about American society from a distance, and always as a self-described outsider. It is for these reasons that I note him as an exemplary exilic critic of both exclusion and inclusion. As his writing and life’s work reveal, Baldwin was not fighting to be included in a minimally reformed version of the confining structures advocated by Locke and Kant. Writing from the margins, he envisioned and pled for the creation of a new world where the formerly excluded could be heard and understood on their own terms.

To reread Baldwin as a visionary critic of inclusion, I will briefly trace the most relevant aspects of his legacy in a series of movements bookended by two revealing interviews in which he defined and maintained his vision. From 1961, when he held an eminent presence in American culture and letters, to 1987 as he reflected on his legacy shortly before his passing, Baldwin combined perceptive critique and an exilic disposition to imagine a world beyond the one he witnessed and lamented. Between these moments in time, the most illuminating expression of Baldwin’s legacy arguably came in the wake of his self-imposed exile following the assassinations of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. Considering his searing social critique and autobiographical reflections together, it becomes clear that Baldwin consistently demanded more than mere inclusion.

By 1961, Baldwin had come to be widely recognised as a notable writer and eloquent orator who, in writings, television and radio interviews, perceptively diagnosed an illness at the heart of American society. This “malignity” was America’s neglect or unwillingness to recognise and come to terms with the Others it had created and sustained through its founding. In his radio interview with Studs Terkel for WFMT Chicago, Baldwin portrays the situation with characteristic acuity. For Black Americans, living in the United States carried tremendous

“psychological hazards” because the feeling of unbelonging imposed on them persisted through the very fabric of the nation: “One is born in a white country, a white Protestant Puritan country, where one was once a slave, where all standards and all the images... when you open your eyes on the world, everything you see: none of it applies to you” (2014, 6). The awareness of exclusion is revealed not only through institutional limitations such as disenfranchisement and the like, but also—or for Baldwin, *especially*—through cultural expressions and motifs that try to render society’s Others as inferior people to be kept down or eliminated: “You go to white movies and, like everybody else, you fall in love with Joan Crawford, and you root for the Good Guys who are killing off the Indians. It comes as a great psychological collision when you realize all of these things are really metaphors for your oppression, and will lead into a kind of psychological warfare in which you may perish” (Ibid.). Baldwin spoke and wrote often of the fear of perishing, whether through physical violence or psychological damage that renders the downtrodden incapable of self-understanding or actualisation. But against these forces, he steadfastly cultivated and sought to publicise a disposition and a willingness to self-create without adherence to the status quo:

All you are ever told in this country about being black is that it is a terrible, terrible thing to be. Now, in order to survive this, you have to really dig down into yourself and re-create yourself, really, according to no image which yet exists in America. You have to impose, in fact—this may sound very strange—you have to *decide* who you are, and force the world to deal with you, not with its *idea* of you (7).

Baldwin’s imperative is in clear opposition to the structures of belonging and obedience propounded by the likes of Locke and Kant. More than that, as he developed his ideas, his observations would evolve into a perceptive and necessary critique of inclusion.

Baldwin’s confrontation with the discourse of inclusion stemmed from his own feelings of ambivalence—a tension between estrangement and a sense of responsibility—in relation to

American society. The assassination of Martin Luther King in April 1968 would play a pivotal role in the shift that would occur in Baldwin's thinking. In his well-known speeches, King had in some ways set himself up as a representative of inclusionary thinking, perhaps best captured by his integrationist lines in which he envisioned the "sons of former slaves and sons of former slave-owners [being] able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood" (King 1992 [1963], 104). As noted by Eddie Glaude, however, reassessing King's legacy on closer examination reveals a more radical but all-too-often obscured call for revolutionary transformation (Glaude 2016, 101). King avowedly believed in the promise of inclusion inscribed in the American constitution—as he famously said, he believed in the "promissory note" that had yet to be extended to Black Americans so that they too could take part in the guarantees of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness (King 1992 [1963], 102). But it is also clear that he believed in the importance of cultivating power in spaces of self-affirmation and community revival. Though critical of some aspects of the Black Power Movement on the rise through the mid-1960s, he agreed that empowerment and critique from outside formal political institutions was vital to the shared goal of overcoming domination and racial stigmatisation: "Power is not the white man's birthright: it will not be legislated for us and delivered in neat government packages. It is a social force any group can utilize by accumulating its elements in a planned, deliberate campaign to organize it under its own control" (King 1992 [1967], 165). Moreover, in the last book he published before his assassination, he wrote about his understanding of the frustrations of many Black Americans disenchanted with political and institutional mechanisms for social change: "The gap between promise and fulfillment is distressingly wide. Millions of Negroes are frustrated and angered because extravagant promises made little more than a year ago are a mockery today... the old way of life—economic coercion, terrorism, murder and inhuman

contempt—has continued unabated” (King 2010 [1968], 35). His own assassination served as one of the most conspicuous and damning pieces of evidence for his claims. It hurled Baldwin into depression. But the disappointment and exile that it led him to turned out as the catalyst for a new beginning as he became more wary of the promises of inclusion.

Baldwin’s experience and articulation of exile holds a key both to his thinking and to better understanding the significance of democratic critique “from the margins.” A noteworthy point of entry is Eddie Glaude Jr.’s biographical study of Baldwin’s significance for the problem of race in American democracy, *Begin Again*. Glaude writes compellingly about Baldwin’s search for an “elsewhere,” as opposed to exile, claiming the former term “better captures the nuances of his position in places like Istanbul and Paris. Exile carries with it the idea of living in between a home to which you perhaps cannot return and another place that can never quite be home. This is not what Baldwin meant or what he experienced. Instead, he repeatedly sought out places that allowed him to reorient himself toward America” (2020, 133). This claim jars somewhat against Baldwin’s own use of the term exile, worth recounting in his words:

being an American is a very special condition, really by definition. Born already in a kind of exile. That ocean is terrifying. An American is born miles and miles and miles away from his real frame of reference. The American’s real frame of reference is Europe. He has at the same time to make the world center on him. And the only way he can do that is to prove he is not a savage like me and the Red Indian. The price of being American is my flesh. My exile pays for this (quoted in Glaude 2020, 132).

Glaude acknowledges that an element of exilic thinking marked Baldwin’s experience: estranged from Europe due to colonisation and from the United States due to white supremacy, he was always unsettled and on the move. But while Glaude’s preferred term “elsewhere” is thought-provoking, it isn’t entirely clear that it differs in essence from exile. Expanding on Edward Said’s generative exploration of the idea may be instructive.

Said's understanding of exile, serving as part of the methodological orientation guiding my dissertation, carries important insights for understanding the condition of Baldwin and his many marginalised allies. As discussed in my first chapter, Said did not confine exilic thinking to an actual or literal condition but considered its *metaphorical* meaning. In this second sense, to think as an exile is not to be completely banished from a place, but to have a new point of reference by virtue of one's marginal positionality in relation to society (1996, 52). No matter how that break is instantiated, in the modern world, it is never a complete or clean one:

There is a popular but wholly mistaken assumption that being exiled is to be totally cut off, isolated, hopelessly separated from your place of origin. Would that surgically clean separation were true, because then at least you could have the consolation of knowing that what you have left behind is, in a sense, unthinkable and completely irrecoverable. The fact is that for most exiles the difficulty consists not simply in being forced to live away from home, but rather given today's world, in living with the many reminders that you are in exile, that your home is not in fact so far away, and that the normal traffic of everyday contemporary life keeps you in constant but tantalizing and unfulfilled touch with the old place (48-9).

In Said's poignant portrayal, exile is by turns sad and uplifting: even if it keeps one at a distance from the place that used to be home, it engenders new possibilities for thinking through the unsettling energies of unceasing movement. Regarded this way, "The exile therefore exists in a median state, neither completely at one with the new setting nor fully disencumbered of the old, beset with half-involvements and half-detachments, nostalgic and sentimental on one level, an adept mimic or a secret outcast on another." Movement and creativity thus take precedence over comfort and acceptance, making the exilic thinker a critical presence in relation to the society to which he or she never fully conforms (49).²¹⁵ More than that, this figure may even be seen to have an advantage through such an orientation:

²¹⁵ Consider further Said's elaboration on "comfort," which is particularly relevant to Baldwin's status: "Exile is a model for the intellectual who is tempted, and even best and overwhelmed, by the rewards of accommodation, yeasaying, settling in. Even if one is not an actual immigrant or expatriate, it is still possible to think as one, to imagine and investigate in spite of barriers, and always to move away from the centralizing authorities towards the margins,

Because the exile sees things both in terms of what has been left behind and what is actual here and now, there is a double perspective that never sees things in isolation. Every scene or situation in the new country necessarily draws on its counterpart in the old country. Intellectually this means that an idea or experience is always counterposed with another, therefore making them both appear in a sometimes new and unpredictable light: from that juxtaposition one gets a better, perhaps even more universal idea of how to think, say, about a human rights issue in one situation by comparison with another (60).

This last observation is especially apt. The “double perspective” Said discusses takes the Kantian idea of the “enlarged mentality” celebrated by Arendt (BPF 219-20) to a new level by expanding it to other contexts and cultures. In this view, the “other perspectives” that Arendt claims are needed for judgment become specified as cultural others, viewed in the panorama of international politics. Interestingly, through his peregrinations, Baldwin too gained a sense of the international toward the end of his life, critiquing “Western hegemony” on the world stage (2014, 116-7). And in keeping with Said’s exilic disposition, he was never afraid to travel outside comfort: his whole life was marked by movement and unsettlement.

Baldwin’s travels provided him with a unique perspective. As witnessed in his “Stranger in the Village” and “The Discovery of What It Means To Be an American,” it was through assessment from outside the United States that he gained perspective on his and Black Americans’ disappointments with the false promises that had been made to them. And it was through his trips abroad that he recovered and re-evaluated the situation in the United States after King’s assassination, now with a sharpened view of inclusion. *No Name in the Street*, his first major work written years after that event, signalled a new, sobered take on politics and power:

It is true that political freedom is a matter of power and has nothing to do with morality; and if one had ever hoped to find a way around this principle, the performance of power at bay, which is the situation of the Western nations, and the very definition of the American crisis, has dashed this hope to pieces. Moreover, as habits of thought reinforce and sustain the habits of power, it is not even remotely

where you see things that are usually lost on the minds that have never traveled beyond the conventional and the comfortable” (1996, 63).

possible for the excluded to become included, for this inclusion means, precisely the end of the *status quo* (1998, 405-6).

It would turn out that this “end of the *status quo*” was precisely what Baldwin was after in this and future works. This end, and the shape of a new world he envisioned growing out of it, would come through *empowerment* and *contestation* against the existing power structures in America: “for power truly to feel itself menaced, it must somehow sense itself in the presence of another power—or more accurately, an energy—which is has not known how to define and therefore does not really know how to control” (406). The discussion of America’s prosperity at the expense of those trampled underfoot or excluded sets the stage for a Fanonian description of revolt. In Baldwin’s narrative, it is only a matter of time before the dispossessed rise up and imagine the world otherwise: “the excluded begin to realize, having endured everything, that they can endure everything. They do not know the precise shape of the future, but they know that the future belongs to them. They realize this—paradoxically—by the failure of the moral energy of their oppressors and begin, almost instinctively, to forge a new morality, to create the principles on which a new world will be built” (407). Baldwin’s engagement with and appropriation of Fanon’s language takes the form of negotiation, with a particular vision for the realisation of a new America. Ultimately, his seemingly harsh views on America were grounded in love, and the belief that the society that had treated him like an outcast could still be born anew:

To be an Afro-American, or an American black, is to be in the situation, intolerably exaggerated, of all those who have ever found themselves part of a civilization which they could in no wise honorably defend—which they were compelled, indeed, endlessly to attack and condemn—and who yet spoke out of the most passionate love, hoping to make the kingdom new, to make it honorable and worthy of life. Whoever is part of whatever civilization helplessly loves some aspects of it, and some of the people in it. A person does not lightly elect to oppose his society (1998, 474).

There was much to oppose in an America founded on exclusionary principles. In addition to anti-Black sentiments, Baldwin noted explicit and unstated laws concerning gender and sexuality haunting American life. In a rare but candid discussion titled “Freaks and the American Ideal of Manhood,” he spoke of the “paralytically infantile” ideal of masculinity that assigned specific roles to men and women, heterosexuals and homosexuals, whites and non-whites (1998, 815). Thus he acknowledged domination and oppression as problems that had to be approached intersectionally, with multiple dimensions of violence and asymmetrical power to contend against. But even as he was continually excluded due to his blackness and his sexual orientation, Baldwin’s oppositions to the American ideals of race-thinking and sexuality came in the form of reproach and reimagining from the outside. The desire was not merely to reform the status quo, but to seek to make it anew through a deep transformation at the level of consciousness.

Baldwin’s exilic reimagining of the polity relied heavily on aesthetic appeal, or more appropriately a kind of *counter*-aesthetics: narratives representing agency and self-understanding on the part of the excluded and holding the power to convey experience in a transformative way. Baldwin continued to believe—like Toni Morrison, whom he regarded as an ally²¹⁶—in a sense of responsibility for the creation of a new world through narratives of self-transformation. This transformation of the self occurs through displacement and the movement of time. There is a sense of time in Baldwin’s narratives—a sense of history and his place in it—and it is furnished by his movements, as seen in the sign-off to his epilogue to *No Name in the Street*: “New York, San Francisco, Hollywood, London, Istanbul and St. Paul de Vence, 1967-1971” (475). Baldwin refused to disappear, and endlessly wrote himself against American society’s attempted erasures:

²¹⁶ See *The Last Interview*, 104; and, for incisive analyses of narrative and self-transformation alongside Baldwin, Toni Morrison, *The Origin of Others* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2017) and *The Source of Self-Regard: Selected Essays, Speeches, and Meditations* (New York: Vintage Books, 2019).

“The whole American optic in terms of reality is based on the necessity of keeping black people out of it. We are nonexistent. Except according to their terms, and their terms are unacceptable” (2014, 114). Because those terms are unacceptable, he insisted, those left out write their own narratives to create a new world. This is “the only hope the world has,” Baldwin predicted before his departure from the world (117). According to biographer David Leeming, toward the end of his life, Baldwin had sensed that “Western civilization was in deep trouble. His mission was to work towards a new way. He realized, he said, that he must sound like the ‘witness as prophet.’ That was probably the result of his religious upbringing. But his mission was centred in his being above all a ‘lover’ and the idea that lovers recognize the need of human beings for ‘each other’” (Leeming 1994, 321). He wrote in and through exile, with love, against exclusion; not simply to fit into the world as he knew it, but to imagine it anew.

Like Rumi and Hafez, Dante and Machiavelli, Fanon and Shari’ati, and countless ordinary people mobilising against exclusion, Baldwin is another, closer, exilic voice who represents transformation and new beginnings. Recognised canonical thinkers like Locke and Kant have garnered endless attention for their theories of liberty, sovereignty, autonomy and emancipation. Considering their shortcomings on questions of exclusion and inclusion, we can only benefit by looking elsewhere—to the margins, the periphery of the West, the places where the excluded cultivate their own sense of agency and visions for just, non-exclusionary political orders. It is in these spaces that new scripts of collective governance and self-determination are authored, pointing the way toward new norms and political arrangements. By entering and engaging with exilic spaces, we learn to rewrite and reconstitute the meaning of the people together.

Chapter Six: Conclusion: Aesthetics and the Reimagined Polity

This dissertation has sought to revisit the perennial problem of exclusion and demonstrate the ways it can be resisted without relying on a limited version of the democratic ideal of inclusion. To illustrate an alternative vision to inclusion, I have suggested that political theorists engage more attentively with the narratives of the excluded in order to receive them on their own terms, rather than simply advocating that they be brought in under the auspices and norms of existing regimes. Broadly, I have examined the kinds of narratives that those left out of different societies use to assert their agency and challenge the dominant structures that either continue to prevent their membership or conditionally include them within set hierarchies. More specifically, I have focused on both Western and non-Western iterations of resistant, exilic thinking to highlight the ubiquity of democratic agency and anti-exclusionary thinking across time and place.

The contributions of this study are primarily directed toward deliberative democratic theory and comparative political thought. Scholars of contemporary democratic theory have been grappling with challenges to the norm of inclusion for years, and I contend it would be worthwhile for them to consider reorienting the concept by looking outside the bounds of the Western theories from which they predominantly draw. Likewise, the burgeoning field of comparative political theory can benefit by considering agency and resistance in new settings and readings such as the Persian/Iranian contexts examined in this work. In the case of both fields, the narratological method that I have drawn from Arendt and Said and used throughout the dissertation may serve as a fruitful complement to genealogy, hermeneutics, and other approaches in wide use. Among the insights to have emerged from the uses of narratology in my

dissertation, three are particularly noteworthy for highlighting what the study of narratives in comparative contexts reveals about the ways in which resistance unfolds. First, resistance to exclusion manifesting democratic agency is more than the product of the Western tradition, as it plays out in multiple iterations across non-Western contexts. Second, resistance often aims at self-recognition rather than acceptance by oppressive, colonial, exclusionary regimes. And third, resistance is expressed through many forms, notably literature and poetry, which continue to receive relatively little attention in political theory. We miss much about the powerful ways through which nonconformists express democratic agency if we ignore aesthetic, literary appeals.

This final point leads me to a broader consideration of the potential future contributions and practical applications of my project through an engagement with aesthetics. Shifting toward praxis, here I consider the efficacy of sharing aesthetic, literary, and exilic narratives in enabling common world-building in contexts characterised by deep diversity. Beyond recognising and upholding such narratives across cultures, a praxis-oriented approach would require attentiveness to different spheres of influence that shape the ways people in diverse contexts perceive and interact with one another. By briefly elaborating these forms of influence, I will build on the theoretical insights of my dissertation and reflect on how they could be applied to further cultivate democratic imagination and practices against domination across time and place.

The theoretical and historical components of my dissertation show that the reality of cross-cultural misunderstanding is far from a recent development brought about by increased migration and multiplicity. Rather, the problem finds its roots in deeply entrenched structures of governance that have marginalised and disempowered different societies' "others" for centuries. Those excluded have long challenged these exclusionary systems and sought to rewrite the

political realm together. In the face of marginalisation, they have relied on agency and creativity to carry arguments and emotional appeals to change the hearts and minds of their fellow citizens. A key takeaway from this point is the indispensability of narratives as a resource for reaching across social and political cleavages. It is through narratives that citizens understand themselves and their relation to the political order they inhabit or are left out of. And it is also through narratives that they assert agency and insistence on rebuilding the polity in accordance with their self-understanding and lived experience.

One of the possible extensions of this dissertation would be to apply the theoretical knowledge of the political significance of narratives and suggest ways to implement this learning practically in societies like Canada and the United States. This work would entail reassessing the effects of aesthetic expressions on our consciousness and rethinking the conduits by which they can be put to work on our collective democratic imagination. What do stories of the lives of others carry when they enter our minds? What particular effect do they produce when they engage us through artistic means? How do we hold them? And how can we nurture those narratives that enlarge our understanding of cultural others and develop them further in our institutions? Such questions could be answered by drawing on the theories presented in this dissertation and combining them with practical recommendations.

To anticipate a praxis-oriented approach growing out of this dissertation, I would propose a brief rubric. The taxonomy I sketch out to help guide thinking on the practical work of aesthetics identifies three overlapping spheres of influence for engaging cultural difference: *exposure*, *education*, and *interaction*. Exposure is about seeing, hearing, feeling otherness through various mediums, including visual, auditory, and textual representation. Education involves active learning, being guided to try to understand others. And interaction, the rarest but

arguably most effective form of engagement, involves physical co-presence and proximity, being with cultural others to get a sense of the narratives that give meaning to their lives. Given that the three spheres of engagement are overlapping, the most effective approach for reaching understanding across difference would be to leverage the available means of communication as much as possible. This is where the aesthetic dimension is especially germane to the task. The experience of art provides a space of transformation that demands we see ourselves and those whose narratives we engage with as multidimensional, complex beings whose beliefs, vulnerabilities and identities matter. Literature is not only one of the most widely available but also among the most effective ways to enter such a space. To explain why I arrive at literature as a particularly suitable medium for communicating the lived experiences and demands of the marginalised, I will elaborate on the three spheres of influence I have mentioned to consider their limitations and potential advantages.

If we aim to allow the narratives of the excluded to come to light and change the perspectives of other members of diverse societies, we have to begin by identifying the many ways in which people generally come to know about one another. Exposure is the first and most fundamental of these processes as it forms the basic knowledge about others through virtual representations, whether pictorial, symbolic or narrative-based. A cursory glance at the whole gamut of ways these representations are conveyed reveals an initially daunting task for the purposes of organizing and harnessing their communicative potential. But once the processes are identified, the aim should not—in fact could not conceivably—be to get a handle on all of it; rather we should then focus on the processes we can best control and cultivate through the processes to follow.

Exposure to others often involves an interrelated dynamic of visual, symbolic, and narratological representations—in actuality, one is rarely if ever exposed to merely one aspect. Even the simplest visual representation, like a photograph, is always presented against a symbolic backdrop that is bound to influence the reaction, or intentionality, of those encountering it. Many of these forms of exposure are ephemeral and barely acknowledged consciously through the flow of day-to-day experience. Yet together—through the interwoven forces of image, symbol, and narrative—they constitute an agent’s knowledge and perceptions of others. What then are the forms of exposure by which we construct our views of others? Here a cursory list could be made: photographs, paintings, clothing, artifacts, monuments, or any other objects that explicitly depict or represent people or cultures; all forms of fiction, non-fiction, children’s books, school textbooks, newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, placards and other methods mainly involving text; films, documentaries, television news reports and programs, sports broadcasts, music videos, and music in general whether or not accompanied by lyrics; and various internet-based forms of communication from blogs and websites to social media platforms. Even a brief consideration like this reveals that exposure comes in many forms: our encounters with others are multifaceted, dynamic, and overlapping. Therefore, rather than aiming to delve into and try to leverage each medium, the ideal normative goal would be to identify those channels of communication that can speak powerfully across difference and harness their communicative potential through education and interaction.

As a broadly construed category, education consists in the myriad ways we come to learn about others through more guided mechanisms to promote understanding. This structuring process can occur either through the regulation of knowledge and discourse in public conduct and quotidian practices, or more explicitly defined and coordinated institutional forms of societal

organization (Giddens 1986, 36). As many of the forms of exposure I outline above can be difficult to grasp or manage through informal processes, I would point to the institutional and state-sponsored routes in seeking to leverage education to enhance understanding in contexts of diversity. Educational institutions and their curricula, cultural and heritage ministries, and organizations and associations composed of artists and educators all play important roles in this regard.

My conceptualisation of interaction takes up, and looks to further apply, existing sociological and deliberative democratic accounts with regard to proximity, publicity and association. Differentiating it from exposure, I would use interaction in a literal, physical sense. To give a simplified definition of this via Anthony Giddens, “The routines of day-to-day life are fundamental to even the most elaborate forms of societal organization. In the course of their daily activities individuals encounter each other in situation contexts of interaction - interaction with others who are physically co-present” (1986, 64). Physical co-presence and proximity have significant effects on associational life (Young 2000, 125-8). The extent to which association can be leveraged beyond political parties and social, religious and volunteer groups toward the restructuring of neighbourhoods, public spaces, and community and city events increases the potentialities of dialogue. In short, the normative goal would be to facilitate the means of exchange so that people of different cultures can be *among* each other as much as possible, creating and structuring more opportunities for dialogue and mutual understanding. Public spaces provide conditions of possibility for transformation through proximity.

Taken together, exposure, education and interaction would not guarantee positive social outcomes or cooperation; they could, however, be seen as constituting necessary not sufficient conditions for allowing those excluded from or marginalised within existing polities to exhibit

presence and voice. The point would then be to expand these channels with the right set of conditions in place, namely those we can reliably agree are prosocial. Narratives taking the form of poetry and literature stand among the most effective ways to bring the experiences of others to light and amplify political voice.

Scholars across disciplines have made valuable contributions worth combining to help understand why narratives are necessary for marginalised others to stake their claims; how such narratives transform and enlarge the minds of fellow citizens; and what pathways are most effectual for propagating the work of literary narratives on our imagination. Democratic theorists attune us to the value of aesthetic narratives as a form of political action. As shown in this dissertation, and supported by political theorists across the years, narrative and rhetorical modes of expression among citizens are held together by stories and the things we collectively give meaning to so as to expand our democratic imagination (Arendt 1958, 50-58; Young 2000, 52-80; Honig 2017, 37-57). Further sources of support for the value of such narratives include evidence provided by moral psychologists who highlight the centrality of empathy as a basis for understanding (Hoffman 2000; de Waal 2010; Decety and Wheatley 2015); and work in communication studies underscoring the power of stories (Bruner 1986; Green et al 2002) and particularly the power of fiction reading to transform readers through engagement with other worldviews (Busselle and Bilandzic 2008; Johnson 2012; Bal and Veltkamp 2013). Lastly, philosophers of aesthetics and education have long made the case that art can provide an especially potent experience when it carries us along a movement that “runs its course to fulfilment,” as in a narrative plot (Dewey 1934, 35). This kind of experience has the potential to make all people “aware of their human union with one another in origin and destiny” (271) and is crucial to the development of imagination (272-5) and moral education (347). Theories like

John Dewey's have remained generative in considerations of the role of aesthetics in democracy (Rancière 2004; 2009, 44-60) and advocacy for the greater incorporation of art through education (Nussbaum 1997, 2013; Coulter and Wiens 2008). All these considerations can be fruitfully combined to inform the practical framework I propose.

In relation to these final connections to existing work in various fields, the goal of my proposed future research is twofold: to significantly expand my theoretical framework by engaging more deeply with literature across disciplines; and to prepare the prescriptive work of applying learned outcomes practically. Insights about resistance to exclusion therefore would not be confined to purely theoretical considerations in academic circles but rather retain a real-world relevance for societies where exclusionary practices persist. In the spirit of the practical anti-oppressive aims of deliberative democracy and the much-needed exilic thinking to complement and correct it, I would summarise the work to be done through reference to two figures who have bookended the previous chapters of my dissertation and served as guides alongside the figures from the different traditions on which I have focused. On one side, Iris Marion Young reminds us that "Public communication in civil society is often not unified and orderly, but messy, many-levelled, playful, emotional" (2000, 168). And on the other, James Baldwin reaffirms the enduring value of aesthetics for helping to make sense of it all: "One writes out of one thing only—one's own experience. Everything depends on how relentlessly one can force from this experience the last drop, sweet or bitter, it can possibly give. This is the only real concern of the artist, to recreate out of the disorder of life that order which is art" (1998 [1955], 8).

Exclusion tells some they have no place in the political realm, shutting its doors; inclusion invites some in, only to confine them under new forms of domination. Seeing through both, the exiled and the marginalised insist on rewriting themselves and the political order

altogether. Each time they pick up the pen, they rely on their agency to begin anew, continue the work of freedom, and blaze a new path through resistance. Those thinking through the perpetual problems of politics would have a world to gain by further tuning in to the narratives of these exilic minds, resonating through artistic endeavours to imagine the political realm otherwise.

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