Using the case study of Sikhism, Arvindpal Singh Mandair claims that a certain repetition of the colonial event seems to haunt the very manner in which different politics of humanity have attempted, or indeed have been permitted to engage with what has come to be called 'the political' (KSRW 1). Taking his cue from Derrida's insight into the untranslatability of the Judeo-Christian concept of religion, Mandair convincingly shows how the spectre of colonialism, and the 'ontology of the matrix' upon which it and western conceptions of liberal, secular modernity are founded, continues to haunt subjectivity in South Asia and the Diaspora today. Whereas others have focused on the nation as the main trope through which 'Sikh' identity has been constructed and articulated (Axe 2001; Shan 2007), Mandair examines the concept of religion, which he argues may have been alien to the cultural traditions of South Asia but exists as if it had been an indigenous concept all along (KSRW 43).

As such, it may be seen as a 'dividing practice' which links the discourse of development permits a 'biopolitical' (Foucault 2008) bifurcation of humanity along (neo)colonial lines into 'civilized' and 'barbarian', 'developed' and 'underdeveloped', and 'fundamentalist' and 'secular'. The exclusion of the turbaned Sikh male body from the domain of the 'political' simultaneously permits the construction of a distinct Sikh 'religious' tradition and a 'secular' public sphere in India and the West. However, whereas the Western public sphere is 'self-referential', defined in terms of its own historically specific cultural traditions which encompass the Reformation, Western nation-state, settlement and enlightenment, the Indian public sphere is—despite the best attempts of Gaddhi and his followers to redefine secularism in indigenous terms as Sarve Jeevan Samvedna (let all religions flourish)—'derivative' of western discourses (see Chatterjee 1986) and therefore reproduces colonial domination of the postcolonial imaginary.

How then, given the impossibility of translation, can the subalterns be made to speak or must, as Spivak famously suggested, the subaltern be permanently silenced by the colonizer's discourse? Colonial power, Edward said persuasively argued, has been made possible by the development of Orientalist scholarship which had the effect not only of distorting but of constructing indigenous narratives about their own societies. In Orientalism, Said claimed that Orientalism is a discourse premised upon exteriors, on the fact that the Orientalist poet or scholar, makes the Orient 'speak', describes the Orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the West (1978: 21, emphasis mine). The purpose of Orientalist scholarship, 'iden' to the case of South Asia (Inden 1990), was to render the Orient an object of colonial knowledge and Orientalism in turn deepened the self-perception and identity formation of indigenous elites.

In Part I of the book, entitled 'Indian Religions and Western Thought', Mandair traces a genealogy of religion within the colonial discourse of indology and the neo-colonial discourses of the various reform movements during the nineteenth century. Religion comes to be enshrined by native elites as the result of their emergence into the dominant symbolic order, the language of the colonizers. However, this language is not fixed, and subject to fluctuations. Mandair here distinguishes between two forms of Orientalism: the mainly sympathetic knowledge claims produced by scholars of Asian languages which were used to criticize the excesses of European modernity, and the negative representations of Asia by modernizing colonial elites who sought to westernize Oriental societies through instruction in the English conceptual medium. Tracing the reversal in the nature of indology during the first half of the nineteenth century, Mandair illustrates, through a painstaking examination of his often overlooked Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion, how Hegel succeeds in establishing a firm theoretical framework for religion, thus enabling a classification of Oriental cultures on an ontological ground. Collectively, Hegelian-influenced indology succeeds in portraying India as an unchanging, mythic and inherently religious civilization in distinction from the modern, rational West. As Torkel Madsen has noted, when religion came to be identified, it came to be recognized as something that, in the opinion of many 'self-consciously modern Europeans, was in the process of disappearing from their midst. The category of 'world religions' provided a way to 'preserve European universality in the language of pluralism' (Madsen 2005: 19–20). Mandair credits Hegel with this transformation from ethnic/national to universal/world religion while retaining a Euro-Christian hegemony. He subsequently shows how the category of 'world religion' was appropriated by neo-colonial elites in South Asia as the particular property of racially defined 'civilizations'.

Part II of the book looks at this process of 'religion-making' in the colonial and neo-colonial context as an effect of imperialism by providing a detailed genealogy of a Sikh 'theology' which can be traced to the commissioning of an official translation of the Adi Granth by the colonial administration in the Punjab. Although the subsequent translation by the German indologist Ernst Troumpy was widely criticized by the emerging Sikh reformist elites produced by the Anglo-Vernacular schools and associated with the Singh Sabha movement, their response was to work within the narrative of 'world religion' and thus legitimate the colonial task of cultural translation (premised on the acceptance of the equivalence between the colonial idiom and indigenous concepts), in the process unwittingly becoming 'native informants' for the colonial authorities. In order for a 'Sikh theology' to emerge, indigenous concepts of time and language had to be de-catalyzed and imposed structures of transcendence in the Sikh scriptures. Mandair reveals how this process of transcatalyzing pivotal concepts of the Sikh tradition such as guru, aulaha and nam took place through a critical examination of successive commentaries by prominent Sikh reformers, Gobind Singh Ji, Charan Singh Ji, and Jodh Singh Ji.

Central to this process was the privileging of a static, immutable Being which came to define the nature of God's unity and closely corresponded to
Trump's personal Protestant God which he found lacking in the Sikh tradition. The efforts by the Singh Sabha scholars to overcome this 'lack' did not cause violence to the orthodox Sikhs to silence but stimulated a search for an 'indigenous' modernity: a modernity which could speak for and on behalf of the colonized. This took the form of, first, colonial movements which sought to construct religious boundaries (Gobin 1996) and 'sanitize' the various religious traditions of South Asia, and, subsequently, a territorialized secular nationalism which attempted to suppress the spiritual dimensions of South Asian life. However, to claim that there were no 'indigenous' elements to the religious reform movements or 'secular' nationalism is to reproduce the most pernicious conceit of colonial (and modernist) discourse: that the colonized were effectively 'people without history' (Wolf 1982) in need of (western) civilization. Rather, as I have argued elsewhere, both colonial as well as 'indigenous' modernities arose as a result of a dialectical relationship between pre-existing religious-political traditions and the colonial state (Shami 2007: 17-40).

Sikh, as well as Hindu and Buddhist, traditions pre-dated the colonial encounter and were modes of religious communication that were themselves in a constant process of dialogue and transformation. The fact that the Sikh tradition today has acquired homogeneity, fixity and, arguably, identity is as a result of colonization and the rise of the 'Sikhisation' movement does not mean that it is merely a colonial construction, a mirror image of British Protestantism (Ballantyne 2006), which should in a (secular) post-colonial world be regarded as anachronistic and not a suitable cultural resource from which to construct a critique of western modernity and neo-imperialism.

Rather, as Mandair convincingly argues, the problem of representation emerges from the translation of 'indigenous' terms into a western conceptual vocabulary. The logic and articulation of Sikh identity itself is altered in the colonial period:

The articulation of a Sikh identity does not begin in the colonial period. A Sikh identity, however ambiguous it might have been, had already emerged in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Rather, what changes in the colonial period is the way in which identity was constructed. It is the logic of identity that changes in the colonial period. In the colonial period the articulation of a Sikh identity was never articulated in terms of a dualistic logic of either/or (e.g., A-B, B-A, but not both), the logic of Sikh identity (that of the individual) prior to colonialism, and as far back as the sixteenth century, was articulated in terms of a complex relational logic, according to which it would be perfectly valid to suggest A-B, the implication of which would be the existence of relatively fixed social and individual boundaries (Shami 2007: 17-40).

The failure of the Sikh insurgency following the storming of the Golden Temple complex by Indian troops in 1984, however, paradoxically opens up space for a radical re-articulation of the Sikh tradition and the place of the political within it. This new understanding of the political within Sikhism...
is 'dependent on releasing the notion of gurmukh from an ideology that had become both its defense mechanism and its jail'. This requires 'not too much rejection' but a 'thoroughly re-examination' of the Sikh tradition and particularly the term gurmukh teachings of the Sikh Gurus and the (process of learning that is necessary to becoming a Sikh). Mandar argues that this can only be done by engaging with the central texts of the Sikh tradition, such as the Guru Granth Sahib, and opening up the tradition from within as a 'ceaseless contestation' (p. 26). Such a 'ceaseless contestation' will undoubtedly not be welcomed by the guardians of the Sikh 'theology' in Amritsar who continue to define what constitutes the Sikh 'faith' from the confines of the Golden Temple complex almost a century after the Gurdwara Reform Movement wrested control of Sikh Temples from the colonial state.

The final part of the book—post-colonial exists—discusses the possibility of decolonizing post-secular theory and, in so doing, reconstituting postcolonial theory. I share the author's own theoretical-political position that the very enunciation of the term 'Sikh' not only does violence to the pre-colonial multiplicity of traditions and practices which are subsumed under the category of Sikh but also reproduces the original violent act of colonialism every time the term is enunciated. I am similarly very much in agreement with the author on his belief, illustrated by the opening quotation from Nanak Jaisi, that it is 'impossible to undo the consequences of the history of imperialism no matter how desperately one wishes that imperialism had never been effectuated' (p. 3). Unlike Jaisi, however, I believe there is a 'decolonization of the mind' to be indeed possible through a redisclosure of the universality implicit in particularized 'otherness' in its various ethnic and religious guises. Mandar provides a glimpse into how this could be achieved by questioning whether the subject of South Asia, normally regarded as a particular, can be seen as actively co-constituting the universal. This would go some way to 'provisionally' Western claims to universality and, in so doing, de-sacralizing Hegel by attempting to undo his legacy in the humanities and social sciences.

Moreover, Mandar focuses on the adal-panth—the belief that the Guru exists at Word, that the Guru is Word, and that the Word is revealed by the Guru—as a concept which can be rehabilitated from the distorting effects of colonialism arguing in a systematic, sophisticated and convincing manner in Chapters 5 and 6 that as an 'empty signifier' it has the potential to disrupt the 'subjective' technology that perpetuates the effects of imperialism: native informers, identity politics, the enunciation of culture as religion, and its installation within the discourse of humanisms' (p. 26). I have argued elsewhere that more explicitly political concepts such as nexus, Sikh and mini-pint also speak to new generations of globalized Sikhs as long as attempts are made to resist definition and thus inscription in a western conceptual lexicon. In particular, the disenchantment of sovereignty through the institutional of the Khals at Amandpur Sahib in 1699, despite the attendant christianized mythology which surrounds it, is of particular importance to attempts made to 'move beyond the West' in International Relations theory (Sahib 2004). By contesting the hegemonic narratives of the Westphalian order of territorialized nation-states, the Khalsa Pannah offers an alternative conception of sovereignty which is more attuned to the needs of de-territorialized peoples living under conditions of globality: a conception of sovereignty, in short, which cannot escape the long shadow of territoriality cast on South Asia by partition but also the spectre of West which continues to haunt it.
Decolonizing the Study of Religion

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ABSTRACT: This review discusses Arvind-Pal Mandair’s Religion and the Specter of the West: Hindu, India, Postcoloniality, and the Politics of Translation (Zerocalero; UWIN), published in 2009 by Columbia University Press.

In the introduction to Religion and the Specter of the West, Arvind-Pal Mandair raises a fundamental question facing the postcolonial project: “Despite the proliferation of postcolonial critiques, why is it that the humanities and social sciences continue to reconstitute the hegemony of theory as specifically Western?” The various “post-movements” appear to have kept theory on what is considered to be its home ground, namely, the West (RJW: 40–41). In the last chapter, he returns to this issue while reflecting on Dipesh Chakrabarty’s remark that “Western and European thinkers are treated both as historical figures and as our contemporaries, who continue to provide intellectual guidance, whereas Indian thinkers from the past are approached purely as data for historical research.” Indeed, barring the occasional attempt to call dharma as an ‘indigenous term’ for the study of religion, few theorists in the field would turn to Indian intellectual traditions as resources for contemporary theory formation. Yet, as Chakrabarty says, “past Western thinkers and their categories are never quite dead for us in the same way.” This brings Mandair to restating his question: “What prevents non-Western traditions of thought and practice (gurmas, bhakti, etc.) from being used as resources for conceptual thinking/theory rather than being regarded as living relics?” (RJW: 392–94). This is a central issue, not least because it points to a paradox at the heart of

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Mandair's own project: in order to theorize and address the need for decolonizing the study of religion, he turns to Western postmodern philosophy. Mandair's concern is the dominance of the conceptual framework that views India as a country of many different religions (Hinduism, Sikhs, Jews, Muslims... and that, correspondingly, carves up Indian society into distinct communities of believers or practitioners (Hindus, Sikhs, Jews, Muslims...). This framework reflects the Western cultural experience of India. When one speaks of 'the religions of South Asia' and studies 'Hinduism', 'Jainism' or 'Sikhism' as instances of religion, one is invoking a conceptual apparatus that results from the way in which Europe has come to terms with India. No semantic equivalence exists for the term 'religion' and its cognates in the Indian languages (RSIW. 5). Yet this way of talking has become common in India also, particularly in English, but also through the creation of neologisms in Indian languages.

Mandair examines how this translation of 'the concept of religion' has come about and how it gave rise to the dominant way of conceiving 'Sikhism' as a religion with its own theology and the Sikhs as a religious community with a distinct identity. One could recommend his book for this specific focus on Sikhism, for it certainly contributes intriguing analyses here. But this would misread its theoretical ambitions, since Mandair intends to reveal general epistemic and political implications of the process of translation. Throughout his book, Mandair makes the case that the work of translation that occurred during the encounter between India and the West was not an innocent or transparent as is still presumed. For several decades now, scholars have noted that there is something distinctly Western about the conceptual language of 'religion' and its creation of specific 'religions' in all cultures. Nevertheless, during the colonial era, educated classes all over the world adopted this way of talking. This has created a peculiar situation, Mandair points out: once Indians appropriated and internalized the term 'religion', as if it had always been part of their traditions, one could now call upon them to bear witness to the historical fact that 'Indian religions' have existed (RSIW. 52). 'Religion' now exists as though it were an indigenous concept (RSIW. 52).

One assumes that when Indians adopt this term and enactuate a religious identity ('I am a Hindu/Hinduism is my religion'), they refer to the same universal referent as Europeans and have mastered the meaning of the word 'religion' through normal acquisition of English. However, drawing on Laza, Mandair suggests that this is not the case, but that the constitution of the Indian subject through the enunciation of 'religion' during the colonial encounter does not reflect the operation of a culturally universal meaning, but the site of a trauma that marks the nature of Indian engagement with European conceptuality (RSIW 11). Speaking to the language of religion both repares and expresses the fact that one's experiential world rests the very concept of religion.

There is an important point here, which I would like to restate in simple terms: even though Indians adopted the term 'religion' and its cognates from Europeans, there is no certainty that they use such terms in the same way. They may be referring to a different kind of phenomenon in their experiential world. Rather than mastering the meaning of the word 'religion' through normal acquisition of English, they mapped such English words onto terms from the Indian languages. Or they adopted them through the pedagogical mechanism of the Anglo-Vernacular schools that Mandair discusses: 'Thus through dictation the learner of English imitates, memorizes, and attempts to reproduce utterances not in order to say what he means, but to say what one is expected to say without meaning it' (RSIW. 96-97). In that case, the way in which Indians have appropriated this terminology would reflect how different their experience is from that of the Europeans, rather than establishing any equivalence. Still, the Europeans assume that he is referring to the same object as the Indian, when he uses the term, and vice versa. There is no warrant for these mutual assumptions, as Mandair points out, since 'religion' does not constitute the same 'reality' for South Asians as it does for those who identify themselves with the formation called the 'West' (RSIW 11).

Importantly, this allows the author to challenge a new orthodoxy in the study of religion in India: the argument that the modern construction of religion in India was not the work of European Orientalists and colonial officials alone, but rather occurred through a process of dialogal exchange between colonizers and colonized, Mandair argues that we cannot just give 'dialogical status' to this interaction, for 'this particular understanding of colonial interaction depends on an implicit model of communication in which both partners are assumed to be capable of speaking and thinking freely with each other' (RSIW 78). As he suggests, the process of transformation that resulted from the interaction between Britons and Indians has not yet been adequately conceptualized (RSIW 81).

At a first level, the power relations of colonialism coerced Indians into adopting particular ways of talking and representing themselves. Mandair's account of Sikh reform shows this in a striking way. Originally, the British had characterized the Sikh traditions positively as a 'moralizing despot' opposed to the morally depraved pantheism they saw in Hinduism (RSIW. 178-79). In response, the Orientalist scholar Ernest Troupp gave a completely different sketch of the Religion of the Sikhs (1877), which transformed it into a sub-branch of Hinduism, showing the same unhealthy mix of pantheism and atheism, without any room for a system of moral duties. The fact that Troupp wrote this in the introductory essay to a translation of the Adi Granth commissioned by the colonial administration of Punjab gave great weight to his re-statement of 'Sikh theology'. It presented Sikh authors with a clearly defined task, namely 'to prove their commitment to the ideas of God's existence, which meant a commitment to prove that their central texts could provide a suitable
concept of God, if they hoped to receive political recognition and patronage
from Europeans as a 'visible and useful religion' (KSW 159).

This is what the Singh Sabha reformers set out to do; when they adopted
the conceptual language of religion. They felt compelled to argue for a radical
distinction between their 'monotheistic and scriptural religion' and the
pantheistic 'Hinduism'. When discussing Guru Nanak and other Sikh gurus, for
instance, they systematically avoided translating the word 'guru' as 'god',
instead translating it as the 'Prophet' to whom God spoke and revealed his
Word (KSW 206–11). In this way, Trump and other Orientalists had basically
succeeded in making the vocabulary of Christian theology into the frame of
reference for future discussions on Sikh traditions and texts. Within this
framework, it has become obvious that 'Hinduism' and 'Sikhism' were two
distinct religions whose doctrinal relationship had to be decided upon.

Second, the competition was also conceptual. Europeans had already set
the framework within which the 'dialogue' could take place. Here, Mandair
reveals the difficulty of understanding the construction of religion as a pro-
cess of interaction between colonial and native agency. Once the basic con-
ceptual framework and mechanisms of translation had been put in place, the
contributions of the 'native' could count only in so far as they fitted within
this framework. Even where Sikh authors meant completely different things
with 'religion', 'God' or 'divine' than the Orientalists, such differences were
eradicated accordingly as the latter interpreted what the former said within
the dominant conceptual framework, namely, that of the Western cultural
experience.

Third, this inevitably gave a privileged status to the Western scholar of
religion, who seems to understand the doctrinal issues of Indian religious
issues much better than 'natives' ever can. Mandair gives the eye-opening
example of the great scholar of Sikhism, W. H. McLeod (KSW 240–304). Building
on the work of Singh Sabha authors, McLeod formulated the classical summary
of 'Sikh Theology'. Next, he noted the fundamental question that the Sikh
reformers seemed to have missed, namely, 'in what way is the divine word so
presented to the human understanding that it can be recognized, accepted,
and followed?' (KSW 241–61).

What happened here? Let me add a few of my own reflections. By construct-
ing a theological system out of the many aphorisms, sayings and instructions
in the Guru Granth Sahib and translating this into an English language infused
with Christian theological vocabulary, one comes to the point where 'Sikh
theology' appears to be a deficient variant of its Christian counterpart.
Christianity states clearly that God has revealed himself in Christ; and how
human beings are to recognize and follow his will. After the exercise of transla-
tion, Sikh theology appears to discuss the same elements ('divine word',
'God's will', 'Prophet'), but never succeeds in fully clarifying the India between
these concepts. In contrast, McLeod is able to articulate clear and fundamen-
tal theological questions that appeal to follow the Sikh formulations.

Even though the Singh Sabha authors originally made the statements about
'God's will' and 'word', they remain unable to raise the fundamental question
as to how we can understand and follow God's will, from the Sikh perspec-
tive, it is as though they do not see such implications and their significance,
while McLeod is able to do so and thus reveals the questions that need to be
answered to lay the foundations of Sikhism.

How could this be the case? It is unlikely that Sikh reformists lacked the
cognitive capacities necessary to make these basic inferences. I would like to
propose another possibility: they used words like 'God', 'the divine word', and
'Prophet' in different ways, which prevent one from making the inferences
and connecting these concepts in the way that McLeod does. Even though the
Sikh reformers aimed to make Sikhism look like Christianity, in order to dis-
cuss it from 'Hindu pantheism', they did not understand the theological
terms and usages in the same way. They mapped such terms onto Punjabi
and other Indian languages. Thus, they 'distorted' the meaning of the English
terminology in such a way that the inferences that seem obvious to McLeod
are not at all obvious to the original producers of Sikh theology. This way of
formulating the problem, I think, generates further questions provoked by
Mandair's arguments on the problem of translation. In order to understand
Sikh thinkers and the way they discuss 'religion', 'God', 'Prophet', we should
trace the systematically in their 'distinctive' use of such terms.

One of the strengths of Mandair's work lies in its exploration of the Euro-
pean background that shaped the dominant conceptions of religion in India.
What was at stake in the nineteenth-century theological and philosophical
debates in Europe and which role did India and its 'Oriental religions' play?
Unlike most of the postcolonial analyses, Mandair goes beyond the Brit-
ish sources to answer such questions and stresses the centrality of German
indology in that century. Interestingly, he shows how some of the chief
concerns in the study of Indian religions had emerged from a controversy
on pantheism, the so-called Pantheistenschriften, which divided the German
intellectual world in the late eighteenth century.

The conceptions of India and its 'Oriental religion' had been pre-
determined by different positions in this controversy. While the participants
differed in their assessment, the impetus behind the debate was a common
concern, namely the individual thinkers' relationship to the Christian
foundations of the European conceptual framework and identity' (KSW:
126). This same concern also shaped the philosophy of religion developed
by the most influential thinkers of the period: Hegel. In a close reading of
the Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion, Mandair shows that Hegel often
had Schelling's philosophy in mind when he discussed Hindu religion and
its conception of God. In other words, the difference between the Indian
traditions and those of Europe was reduced to an internal difference within
the European framework: the opposition between Hinduism and the
pantheism that had emerged in the work of Spinoza.

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At the same time, Mandair attributes a somewhat bizarre role to what he calls Hegel's 'epistemography' (RSW: 159-60). It is supposed to return implicitly in all kinds of writings and determine the human sciences; it is presented as the precondition for the emergence of the world religions discourse. In his introduction, he does explain that 'Hegel's role is better perceived as a spectral presence rather than a literal agent. Hegel's ideological influence functions like a cipher', but this does not do much to clarify the kind of role attributed to Hegel (RSW: 12). There is no doubt that Hegel's philosophy of religion is structured around a set of conceptual schemes that would return in later ideological writings and in the world religions discourse. However, this is not because of his 'spectral presence', but because his philosophy reflects upon deep problems that lay at the heart of European culture. It is the structure of these deep problems that one has to identify. Mandair goes some way in relating the pantheism controversy to the concerns about the Christian identity of Europe and the tendency critical towards Christianity in Enlightenment thought and German Romanticism. Yet, instead of pursuing the deeper structures of this problem in the European intellectual tradition, he gives a mysterious omniscience to Hegel's 'epistemography'.

Throughout this work, Mandair draws upon postmodern philosophy to explore his insights. At times, however, this postmodern turn gives rise to imprecise and even impenetrable statements. To give just one example, while discussing the fact that European languages continue to be privileged in theory formation, he raises the following question: 'What would it mean for thinking to become a thinking between, in which concepts are allowed to compete before they are accepted as universal?' (RSW: 42). We cannot have a clue what this would mean, because it does not make sense to talk of competition between concepts, which then leads to the acceptance of some concepts as universal. In the growth of human knowledge, it is not concepts that compete, but rather theories or even larger sets of theories that belong to specific research programmes. The concept of evolution by natural selection never competed with, say, the concept of divine creation. There is competition between two theories or research traditions. Similarly, it does not make sense to have, say, the concept of religion compete with that of shams. What we need are several competing theories about the phenomenon of religion (not just the concept). If today's theories of religion reflect only the Western cultural experience, then we should reflect upon the experiences of Asian cultures to develop alternative theories that will challenge the dominant ones.

In this context, Mandair's turn to postmodern philosophy is understandable: the postmodern interrogation of dominant conceptions of religion, nation and language has helped loosen their grip on our thinking. The philosophy of Jacques Derrida or Martin Heidegger appears to possess emancipatory potential for non-Western thinkers here, since it breaks the spell of a conceptual framework that has prevented them from making sense of their experiential world. Still, as Mandair suggests, postmodernism remains a self-critical shift internal to Western thought (RSW: 380). 'Therefore, it is unlikely that this theoretical framework will allow us to decolonize the study of religion.' It never approached the intellectual tradition of non-Western cultures as potential resources for our contemporary thinking about humanity. It never elucidated the experience of cultures where the Western intellectual tradition was installed as the dominant framework during colonialism. How then could it ever provide the conceptual apparatus necessary to access the traditions of the non-Western world for alternative theory formation in the social sciences and humanities? In other words: How does Derrida fare any better in this regard than a Derrida here? Why is a Heidegger superior to a Hegel here?

Mandair clearly deplores the current conditions in the study of religion, where non-Western cultures are denied access to theory itself. Yet, it is to Western postmodern theory that he turns to conceptualize the related issues and potential ways out. While I think this 'paradox' indicates a weakness in his work, it also shows its urgency and significance: we do not currently possess the kind of theories required to access non-Western intellectual traditions as genuine alternatives and to grasp what has happened in these traditions during colonialism and its project of 'universalization'. As long as we do not succeed in developing such theories, these traditions of thought will remain living relics to us.