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Chakkarath, Pradeep

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Stereotypes in Social Psychology: The “West-East” Differentiation as a Reflection of Western Traditions of Thought

Pradeep Chakkarath

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Notwithstanding the fact that stereotypes and ethnocentrism constitute central topics of social psychology a cultural psychological question has almost been completely neglected in the discipline’s reflections on its own scientific endeavors: How has Western psychology’s construction of the “Indian” and the “Eastern psyche” been influenced by stereotypes that are embedded in culture-specific traditions of European scholarly and non-scholarly thinking? The problems tackled in this article are related to current social and cross-cultural psychological perspectives on the Indian context. In addition, they are related to social and cross-cultural psychological contributions to the well-established differentiation between the “West” and the “East,” which many psychologists have become used to and which are the foundation of current psychological theories about so-called “West-East differences.”

Keywords: Colonialism, Cross-cultural psychology, Cultural psychology, Ethnocentrism, Indigenous psychology, Stereotypes, West-East differences

Psychologists define *stereotype* as a preconceived or oversimplified generalization about an entire group of objects or people (i.e. a *prejudice*) without regard for individual differences. Stereotypes are based on some idea of *ideal type* or abstract *familiarity*. They can be closely related to each other and develop into hierarchical systems with broad categories being the general types and specific categories being subtypes. As such, they can even serve as (more or less unreflected) frameworks of scientific theories where they are used as *heuristics* in order to arrive at scientific conclusions.

The process of stereotyping involves the mental categorizing and labelling of objects, people and events

by using poor or little information, which results in false conclusions about the individual elements within broader or specific groups and in misleading assessments of their relationships. Of course, this is also true for social scientific theories that (more or less unreflectedly) use certain categories and patterns of thought and then show up in the hypotheses the researchers start with, the methods they think of as adequately related to their research, and their interpretation of the data they collect. According to an ideal understanding of the scientific process, learning from the results of our studies might in the end help to identify the lasting effects of mere stereotypes and develop refinements that help to overcome them. Thus, as often said, stereotypes are conceptual schemes that seem necessary and even inevitable within the research process where they function as initial prejudices that, through the process of scientific investigation, lead to adequate judgments. One of the main obstacles that must be overcome when doing social psychology in cross-cultural comparison is a very specific bundle of stereotypes: *ethnocentrism*.

Pradeep Chakkarath
Ruhr-University Bochum,
Social Theory and Social Psychology,
Universitätsstr. 150, GB – 03 – 41,
D-44801 Bochum, Germany

e-mail: Pradeep.Chakkarath@ruhr-uni-bochum.de

In the so-called culturally informed branches of psychology, namely in cross-cultural, cultural and indigenous psychology, researchers might be more aware than those in other fields of psychology of the problem of ethnocentrism that is closely related to the problem of stereotypes. According to W. G. Sumner who is said to have coined the term, ethnocentrism refers to the tendency to interpret or evaluate other cultures in terms of one's own, based on thinking patterns and attitudes in which one's own group is the center of everything, and all others are scaled and rated in reference to it. In a more dramatic comment on this seemingly harmless psychological description, he put ethnocentrism at the center of intergroup and intercultural conflicts: "loyalty to the group, sacrifice for it, hatred and contempt for outsiders, brotherhood within, warlikeness without" (Sumner 1906, pp 12). Thus, the vast range of social scientific domains in which ethnocentrism became a key concept for understanding interpersonal and intergroup relations as well as aspects of identity development became clear and emphasized the need to understand the development and social function of ethnocentrism and stereotypes embedded within. This can be clearly seen in some of modern social psychology's most prominent representatives (e.g. in the foundational works of Allport, Sherif and Tajfel).

Although there is no doubt that the psychological relevance of stereotypes and the role that stereotyping plays in ethnocentric attitudes has been an important topic in social psychology, the question concerning if and how stereotypes and ethnocentrism influence psychology as an academic endeavor is rarely raised in the discipline itself. That kind of reflection about socio-historical and cultural influences on the endeavor called "science" owes most to disciplines like philosophy of science, sociology of knowledge, and literary and postcolonial studies (for a short overview see Arnason 2003). These disciplines have made it clear that ethnocentrism also has an impact on our assessment of stereotypes and our willingness to reflect on them. In addition, they might influence how successful we are in detecting, minimizing or even overcoming rigid conceptual schemes that do no justice to the "others" and no justice to ourselves when we as scientists try to identify universals and specifics in the realm of psychology.

In the following, I will elaborate on this topic by giving examples for the stereotypical construction of the "West" and the "East" in mainstream cross-cultural social psychology and by showing how current influential theories in the discipline still carry on stereotypical assumptions about "Indians" and other "others" who, from a Western point of view, are "Easterners."

The Construction of India and the "East" in "Western" Thinking

A region of contradictions, monstrosities and deficits

According to Edward Said, the moral and the social sciences, as they were institutionalized at European and American universities in the 19th century, were the breeding ground of what he and others call "Orientalism." The concept of "Orientalism" aims at characterizing Western scholars' more or less deliberate efforts to construct the "East" as a mirror image of what is alien and inferior (i.e. the "Other") to the supposedly superior West. Since Said's examples of these Western efforts were mainly taken from the moral sciences, especially from philology, philosophy, literature and art, the empirically oriented social sciences do not seem to have felt challenged by his criticism. However, the impact that "Orientalist" perspectives might have in disciplines like cross-cultural social psychology or cultural psychology should be clear since the problem under discussion is closely related to the problem of ethnocentrism (see above). Some of the questions raised and repeated in the discussion of Orientalism are central to some of the most eminent scholars in the field of social theory (e.g. Gramsci, Foucault and Chomsky) and can be paraphrased thus (cf. Foucault 1970; Said 1978): What are the regularities that can be found in our attempts to scientifically deal with so-called "foreign" or "different" cultures? How did they enter the history of sciences and how deep is our current thinking and research still rooted in the specific history of thoughts that are part of our cultural heritage? How do these culturally shaped regularities produce specifically structured discourses about the "other" and how much reflection do social scientists invest in order to control for the damaging effects of stereotypes that become central cognitive schemes within institutionalized academic thinking? It should be self-evident that these questions need to be addressed and answered by social psychologists, too, for these two reasons especially: First, stereotypes as well as functions and processes of stereotyping rank high among their discipline's most important topics; second, by the discipline's self-understanding, the goal of social psychology is to understand and explain how the thoughts, feelings and behaviors of individuals and groups are influenced by the actual, imagined or implied presence of others. This, of course, although not being a central issue in current social psychology, includes the question in how far our theories about the relevance of social context and our imaginations about the "others" influence our scientific research. In the following, I will present a short sketch of a tradition of stereotyping India and the Indians in Western thinking. Then

I will try to show how some of these stereotypes are still effective in the construction of “West-East differences” and the theories that are meant to give scientific plausibility to this construction.

The earliest written accounts of India and its inhabitants by “Westerners” can be found in the works of Greek and Roman authors, for example, in Ctesias’ *Indica* (5th century BC) Herodotus’ *Histories* (also 5th century BC) and Pliny’s *Natural History* (1st century AD). According to most of these authors, India is the country in the farthest Eastern corner on earth and a country of astonishing contrasts and contradictions where elysian regions border on large deserts, where wealth meets poverty, where people with stoic attitudes live next to immoral tribes, and where various life forms can be found, ranging from dark skinned humans, a plenitude of strange animals (e.g. unicorns) and even “monsters,” i.e. creatures that bridge the gap between animals and humans without belonging to any of the two groups, e.g. the Cynocephali (“dog-headed men”). Though some of the ethnographic details about India seem to be based on reliable ethnographic information, in general and from early on, these accounts introduce India and the South Asian region as a “land of miracles and wonders.” Though this is not necessarily a pejorative, it has been frequently accompanied by xenophobic aspects as documented, for example, in the ancient Greek play “The Persians,” in which Aeschylus (5th century BC) described Athens’ enemies in the East using a delicate blend of admiration, fascination and fear. These themes survived the centuries of the European Middle Ages, were reflected in the reports of European travelers like Ludovico di Varthema (who in the 16th century interpreted sculptures of Indian deities as images of monsters) and even flourished in the Romantic Era. The Age of Enlightenment, rooted in the philosophical ideas of 17th century rationalism and empiricism and considered the ideological foundation of the scientific revolution and industrialization of the 18th and 19th century, did not completely abandon all the notional and historically grown stereotypical imaginations about India.

In his lectures on the philosophy of history, G. W. F. Hegel differentiated between China and India as the two most important cradles of “Asian thinking.” Although, he conceived of both civilizations as backward societies, as many scholars before and after him, he contrasted the prosaic mind of China (that has its expression in the stable Chinese state) with the dreamy and tumbling fantasy of the Indian spirit which has its correspondence in the uninhibited Indian society (Hegel 1832–1848/1986). To a large extent, Hegel had nothing but contempt for India and the Indians. The basic character of the Indian, he maintained, consists of malice, trickiness, stealing,

robbing and murder. Hegel also identified the philosophical and psychological sources of such weakness of character: It is the almost complete lack of any proper science and the boundless and erratic mode of abstract Indian thinking from which no concept of individuality or personality could arise because within this thinking the subject-object difference is declared an illusion which needs to be overcome. Against this philosophical and psychological background (that was co-constituted by influential European thinkers like Hobbes, Hume, Locke, Smith, Bentham, Mill and others) Hegel concluded that there was also no possibility for a historical consciousness or for a conceptualization of individuals as historical persons to develop. Moreover, in the same line of thought, Hegel justified the British colonization of India as a logical stage (a “fatal destiny”) in the process of societal evolution that resulted in bestowing the idea of a stable self and a stable nation on India and the Indians. In other words, Hegel’s account of Indian culture and Indians is a diagnosis of psychological and sociological deficits and it is especially these deficits that allow one to differentiate between the West and the East.

Though the writings of Karl Marx show a somewhat greater degree of sympathy for the detrimental effects of British colonization in India (see Chakkarath 2010), in the end he agrees that India had no sense of history and that British colonialism was therefore a necessary step in India’s development into a nation state with a national identity. India, he states, could not avoid the “fate of being conquered,” and the whole of the country’s past history, if anything, was the history of the series of conquests it has undergone (Marx 1853/1981).

It is worth mentioning that within this tradition of thought, which stretches from the Era of Enlightenment to the early 20th century, even the ancient European theme of Indian monsters reappears. For example, in his assessment of Indian art, John Ruskin, the British art critic, echoed Hegel’s and many others’ conviction that so-called Indian art is proof of the childlike backwardness of Indian culture and its members as it consists of nothing but ugly forms and monstrosities with numerous arms and heads (for a detailed account, see Mitter 1992; Beal 2002).

Many elements that show up in this very brief sketch of a powerful European tradition of thought about non-Westerners show up again in later classical works of the social sciences, though in modified and more refined versions. Perhaps the most influential modern work of that kind that has ever helped establish some of the ethnocentric assessments of the “East” by Western scholars is Max Weber’s cross-cultural comparison of religion and worldviews and their functional role for the psychological, social and economic development

of Western and Eastern societies (e.g. Weber 1905/2002). Drawing on the theme of “deficiency” already stressed by Hegel, he states that the civilizations of the Orient were not able to develop the kind of rationalism that led to steady disenchantment in the occidental world and was the central condition for the scientific revolution that could only take place in the West. However, being the cautious intellectual he was and although he contributed largely to establishing the “West-East” dichotomy in the modern social sciences, he frequently adds the notion that this at least is what Europeans “like to think.”

Colonialism, Colonial Education, and the Import of Western Psychology

As we have seen, European assessments of Indian culture and the Indian “psyche” as well as the teleological and evolutionary explanations for the plenitude of social and psychological deficits within the “childlike” Indians not only served scientific, but also political goals. The deficits were primarily used to justify Western imperialism and colonialism and to interpret both as a giant endeavor aimed at taking care of those regions and societies in the world that otherwise would not develop at all. Of course, the concept of “development” employed in this endeavor was one developed in Europe, bearing all the stereotypical and ethnocentric assumptions of what needs to be developed, how it should be developed, and for what purpose. Logically, only those who possessed an historical consciousness and had already reached the peak of history would know the answers to these questions. Those who were to be developed appeared as savages that needed to be civilized, a motive that survived in Western social sciences until the 20th century (see Jahoda 1999).

It is against this background that Western scientific concepts were introduced and aimed at replacing anything that, according to these concepts, was unscientific, irrational, obscure, and therefore impedimental to progress (Bhatia 2002). It was Thomas B. Macaulay, historian and politician serving on the Supreme Council of India, who famously assessed that it was “no exaggeration to say that all the historical information which has been collected from all the books written in the Sanskrit language is less valuable than what may be found in the most paltry abridgments used at preparatory schools in England” (Macaulay 1835/1972 pp 241). He concluded that it was the British mission “to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and color, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in

intellect.” It would then be the task of this new class to enrich the Indian languages “with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population” (Macaulay 1835/1972, pp 241).

Of course, in the line of thinkers like Hegel, it was presupposed that the Indians had never come up with anything by themselves that could be considered of scientific or developmental value. This, however, is a false assumption, derived from the hierarchical systems of stereotypes and schemes according to which there cannot be any scientific development where there is no historical development and also there cannot be any development at all where there is no Western rationalism and Western individuality to carry it.

From its early beginnings and for many centuries, some of the scientific and technological knowledge produced in India was trendsetting and influenced the development of science in many regions of the world, including the West (cf. Arnold 2000; Baber 1996; Chakkarath 2010). Though for the ethnocentric reasons mentioned above, ancient and medieval Western scholars quite rarely acknowledged the quality of Indian intellectuality and scientific merits, Chinese and Arab scholars did so readily (Sen 2005). Even when European Romanticists began admiring Indian knowledge, most of them appreciated it as “Indian wisdom,” embedded more in Indian philosophy and spirituality than in science (Halbfass 1988). Thus, even the various and rich contributions of Indian scholars to the field that we nowadays call “psychology” were seen as speculative, theological, and metaphysical accounts about the human soul. In addition, Western scholars failed to recognize that many of these theories were based on well refined methods of controlled introspection and resulted in various insightful conceptualizations of psychological phenomena, processes and functioning. Theories about self, subjectivity, personality and identity have always been at the center of Indian psychological theories. Topics like cognition, motivation, emotion, attachment and detachment, consciousness, and memory are frequently discussed in classical and other texts that were written before British colonization and education began (Bharati 1985; Chakkarath 2005; Paranjpe 1998). It is worth mentioning that among the psychological interests of Indian scholars, even theories of human development, including a lifespan perspective, played an important role from early on, as did the development of various therapeutic techniques (Chakkarath in press).

Western scholars’ assessment of Indian and other non-Western scientific achievements has been largely

ethnocentric as can be seen in most Western historiographies of psychology, which are also the main sources of historical information for most Indian psychologists. In addition, by representing itself as a discipline with an experimental orientation adopted from the natural sciences, Western psychology has made it even more difficult for the first generations of Indian scholars trained in Western psychology to relate it to older, indigenous traditions of psychological thought. In other words: At least in the field of academic psychology and the social sciences in general, Indians suddenly and ironically had no sense of their own history. Stereotyping, as we know from social psychological research, can result in making the stereotyped individuals believe in the accuracy of the stereotypes themselves (Chakkarath 2007). To put it more provocatively and to paraphrase the thoughts of Hegel and Marx: The country's entire history of psychology, if anything, was now the history of a series of concepts translated by Macaulay's children.

The Construction of the Eastern “Other” in Western Psychology

As we saw above, the self concept embedded in Western thinking about the self and the other focuses on the idea of an independent and stable individual who has a clear historical consciousness and a clear sense of responsibility for his actions. In a striking consequence, within the historically rooted individual centered theories of Western provenance, entire cultures and nations also became virtual individuals. One of the best known examples of the effect this perspective had on personality and culture research is Ruth Benedict's “The Chrysanthemum and the Sword.” In her study, Benedict (1946) draws upon the deeply rooted stereotypical West-East differentiation and uses well-established dichotomous dimensions in order to show that the Japanese are psychologically and therefore anthropologically different from the Westerners. Her most famous account of the Japanese psyche is what she calls the Japanese “shame culture,” which she contrasts with the American and (more generally) the Christian “guilt culture.” According to Benedict, when it comes to questions of moral conduct, the Japanese especially evaluate how one's conduct appears to outsiders and feel shame instead of guilt. Thus, the feeling of responsibility merely shows up at the surface of their psychological costume and only if (and as long as) the community condemns the individual for his/her behavior. In contrast, Westerners experience guilt (i.e. a deep conviction of personal moral responsibility in which the emphasis is on the individual's internal conscience). Benedict's description

of the Japanese has often been criticized for its ethnocentric elements and the implication that the value and belief systems in Western culture result in superior morality as compared to the moral attitudes of the Japanese and other East Asians. However, as we saw above, her theory does not employ a completely new perspective on the West's “understanding” of Easterners. It just transports elements of centuries-old stereotypes into the social sciences of the 20th century. A more recent example of their influence on even more influential psychological concepts is Kohlberg's theory of socio-moral development that has frequently been criticized for its cultural bias. Though Kohlberg's idea was to prove the universal validity of the assumption that all people in all cultures go through the same stages of moral development in the same order, his understanding of higher expressions of morality was as clearly shaped by Western concepts as was Benedict's theory: by emphasising the individual, the ideals of modern Western democracy, and related concepts of justice and responsibility, which were developed by scholars of European Enlightenment. Studies conducted in India and other Asian regions have shown that, with regard to moral attitudes, the attempt to understand morality mainly in terms of cognitive development can lead to an underestimation of the cultural socialization context and the role of social interactions (for an overview, see Miller 2006). In other words, psychological research in cultural or cross-cultural psychology should always include broad social psychological perspectives, but it often does not. However, even many of the theories that at first glance seem to be culture-informed and equipped with insights from social psychology bear many elements that are reminiscent of ethnocentric patterns of thought.

In line with the efforts of many cultural anthropologists like Benedict, Geert Hofstede (2000) also tries to differentiate between cultures by using uni- and bipolar scales on which the respective cultures can be positioned according to the intensity or presence of five attributes, or “cultural dimensions”: low vs. high power distance, low vs. high uncertainty avoidance, masculinity vs. femininity, individualism vs. collectivism, and long- vs. short-term orientation (a dimension originally called “Confucian Dynamism” when it was introduced by M. H. Bond and his colleagues to describe especially East Asian samples). The most influential among these dimensions – and probably the most influential concept in cross-cultural psychology – is the concept of “individualism” as compared to “collectivism.” The roots of this differentiation can easily be traced back to the social philosophies of ancient Greece (Kagitçibasi 1996). Individualism started serving as one of the central cultural “identity markers” of the West during the Renaissance before it became the stereotypical

foil against which the “West” distinguished itself from the “East” (see above). As in the case of the exemplary theories of Benedict and Kohlberg, again, one must realize that by using these simplistic dichotomies, which willingly or unwillingly parallel the traditional dichotomy of “East” and “West,” one transmits the old ethnocentric assumption of the West’s superiority into modern social and cross-cultural psychology. This can be seen in mainstream psychology’s well-established tendency to conceive of nations as cultures and to perceive them as almost crystallized individual entities that somehow reflect their cultural members’ psychological makeup. Taking this assumption as a starting point, many scholars like Hofstede have argued that it is no coincidence that the modernized and technologically advanced societies are those that have fostered and encouraged individualistic ideals (e.g. through corresponding education goals and parenting styles). Although Hofstede himself failed to explain how the ambiguous results for countries like Japan and India support this general hypothesis, this did not harm the success of his dimensions of which the individualism dimension is often treated like an overarching concept to the other four dimensions. Taken together, these so-called culture dimensions reflect many of the elements that the critics of “Orientalism” have identified as key stereotypes in the Western view of the Eastern world and that can be found in many current theories that also employ dichotomous conceptualizations and elaborate on the theme of West-East differentiations: Easterners do not have a stable self, they therefore require powerful and assertive authority figures as well as very rigid societal norms and tight social networks that allow them to cope with their uncertainties that arise from their comparative lack of internal control which is often rooted in metaphysical beliefs which frequently arise from irrational worldviews. Moreover, their own distrust in their individual capabilities leads to a limitation of Easterners’ creativity, an assumption by the way that can be connected to Lewin’s classic social psychological studies on leadership styles, where creativity was most effectively stimulated by what Lewin preferred to call “democratic” leadership style as compared to a less effective style that he called “autocratic” and that would fit the descriptions that Hofstede and others give for collectivistic East Asian nations. Similar to Hegel’s account of the Easterner’s psyche, in these theories again Eastern societies appear static and more interested in personal as well as abstract long-term orientations than in the idea of societal development and progress. In addition, even the Orientalists’ theme of depicting the Easterners as feminine (as opposed to the assertive and risk-loving “masculinity” of the advanced West) reappears in these modern versions of traditional European thought patterns. There is also a subtle

reappearance of the idea that Western values and belief systems that foster the development of individualism and autonomy are more desirable than others (Sampson 1993).

Due to space restrictions, I am not able to discuss in detail in how far additional theories in social, cross-cultural, and cultural psychology also reflect and transport these established thought patterns. I can just call to the reader’s attention the fact that Triandis’ differentiation between *ideocentric* and *allocentric* tendencies in individuals or Markus and Kitayama’s contrasting of the *independent* and *interdependent* self are other influential theories that also draw upon dichotomies like autonomy vs. relatedness, separation vs. connectedness, high vs. low self monitoring, high vs. low context dependence, stability vs. instability, individual orientation vs. group orientation, etc. that in most cases were developed within the more general dichotomy of West-East differences.

The same is true for more recent studies conducted on the topics of social cognition and cognitive styles across cultures (e.g. Nisbett 2003; Nisbett, Peng, Choi and Norenzanan 2001). Based on empirical studies and drawing from philosophical traditions, ancient worldviews, social structures and educational practices, Peng and Nisbett have introduced a theory about culturally dependent modes of thinking, including perception, interpreting, reasoning, dealing with contradictions, etc. According to this theory which leaves no doubt about its West-East perspective (in Nisbett’s book, they are even highlighted as the two essential poles within the “geography of thought”), East Asian thought is “holistic” (or as the authors sometimes prefer to call it, “dialectic”). Easterners are said to perceive the perceptual field as a whole and therefore try to find relations between objects and events within that field. Moreover, when confronted with contradictions, they seek a “middle road” in order to resolve them. Westerners, on the other hand, are said to have an “analytic” mode of thinking, i.e. they rely far more on the use of categories or on formal logic. Instead of looking for relations between individual elements, they prefer to separate them from contexts and treat them as individual objects or persons.

It is clear that this theory can be considered the cognitive foundation for many of the other theories and concepts mentioned above. As it seems, it is for certain culturally preferred thinking styles that many of these differences between Westerners and Easterners and the historical development of their societies arise. The theory has been heavily and justifiably criticized for its inadequate description of European and Asian sociocultural development and philosophical traditions (including the unconventional use

of terms like “holistic,” “analytic” and “dialectic”; see for example Ratner and Lumei 2003). Within the context of my considerations, however, the theory can be seen as a contribution for the benefit of the argument that there are culturally grown patterns of Western thinking that do not only affect the cognitive styles of Western participants in psychological laboratories, but also of Western psychologists. Ironically, the theory proposed by Nisbett and Peng, of which the latter was not socialized in the “West” from the beginning but in the “East,” has plenty of the ingredients of what they call the “analytic” style of Western thinking, especially the dichotomy between East and West as well as the bipolar nature of their key concepts. It seems that the Westernization of psychology makes it hardly possible to come up with theories that represent “holistic” approaches and accounts. Or do we simply have to accept that Hegel and all the other Western representatives of the “analytic” thinking style were correct in their assessment that the “Easterners” were incapable of developing a sense of their own traditions and a sense of rational science and therefore had no other choice but to learn it from the developed West?

Conclusions

It is difficult to answer the preceding question. Whatever the answer might be, however, within the context of considerations I presented above, the question cannot be adequately answered without answering it from a psychological perspective, too.

As I tried to show, Western social, cross-cultural, and cultural psychology have not convincingly shown that their culturally inherited bias with respect to other cultures has already been overcome. Provocatively, one might say that within the constructions of current developmental and social psychology, Indians and other “Easterners” are still somehow reminiscent of the ancient European reports about fabulous creatures that supposedly lived in the East and are significantly different from Westerners. Though it is too easy to deal with this fact by simply accusing modern Western psychology of cultural arrogance based in its current international hegemony, it still is worth considering and acknowledging that more and more social psychologists in non-Western countries and an increasing number of critical psychologists in the Western sphere have become dissatisfied with the current situation in our field. In India and other “Eastern” countries like China, Indonesia, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, and Taiwan, one can observe a growing interest in so-called indigenous psychology, a theoretical and empirical approach that aims to

overcome the stereotypical, mainly Eurocentric, assessments that were in most cases introduced by colonialism and its theoretical justifications that reflect ethnocentrism and even the racism of times past. Ethnocentrism, mainly in the form of Eurocentrism, and the stereotypes that are still effective, have a large impact on social and cultural psychological descriptions and explanations about the thinking, feeling and behavior of non-Western people in non-Western regions of the world. This by the way includes the African continent, which has been neglected by most social psychologists in many regards, for which undoubtedly one of the reasons is the almost notorious focus on the “West-East” dichotomy without adequately, i.e. practically, acknowledging that there is a “North” and a “South” to this world, too.

The dissatisfaction with the current state of psychology, especially with social and cross-cultural psychology, can be strongly felt in the so-called “Pondicherry Manifesto of Indian Psychology” (2002) issued by 160 participants at the “National Conference on Yoga and Indian Approaches to Psychology” in Pondicherry, South India. It begins with the following assessment:

“We believe that the state of psychology in India is none too flattering. In fact, we find psychology in India unable to play its necessary role in our national development. It is widely believed that this unfortunate state of affairs is largely due to the fact that psychology in India is essentially a western transplant, unable to connect with the Indian ethos and concurrent community conditions. Therefore, it has been said repeatedly that psychological studies in India are by and large imitative and replicative of western studies, lacking in originality and unable to cover or break any new ground” (Pondicherry Manifesto of Indian Psychology 2002, pp 168)

And as if the authors wanted to expose their former colonizers’ fiction according to which India and the Indians had no sense of history and therefore no sense of rational science, they continue:

“Our culture has given rise to a variety of practices that have relevance all the way from stress-reduction to self-realization. Rich in content, sophisticated in its methods and valuable in its applied aspects, Indian psychology is pregnant with possibilities for the birth of new models in psychology that would have relevance not only to India but also to psychology in general.”

What one can sense here is the turning away from conceiving of Western psychological concepts as the only valid scientific concepts available. At the same time, the authors make clear that psychology as a discipline can only profit from an indigenous approach since it can

introduce traditions of thought and alternative theoretical and empirical approaches into the discussion that do not necessarily challenge the discipline's universalistic orientation but might also contribute to it. Interestingly enough, one can recognize a possibility to improve social science as it has come to us from the 19th century and from European scholars whose theories according to Immanuel Wallerstein's notable book "Unthinking social science" (2001) still dominate our current scientific discussions and views. There is no doubt that this still unfamiliar cognitive approach is of utmost importance for dealing with stereotypes, including stereotypes in social psychology: Unthink them.

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