

## Translating Khan on Singer: Global Solvent Versus Local Interpretation

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This work focuses on Peter Singer's book, *One World: The Ethics of Globalisation*, and a reading of it recently presented by M. Ali Khan. Khan's response to Singer is acutely critical, but ultimately fails to situate Singer's offering in its proper historical context. In this sense, Khan's response is not sufficient. We demonstrate that Singer's offering is permeated by a universalising discourse marked by asymmetric power relations clearly described by Edward Said in *Orientalism* and, more surprisingly, by Fyodor Dostoyevsky in *The Possessed*. We illustrate how Singer's narrative and the counter-narrative of Khan represent a continuation of a longer historical disputation between the West and the East.

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*...It is a sign of the decay of nations when they begin to have gods in common.*

—Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1872)<sup>1</sup>

*...Political imperialism governs an entire field of study, imagination, and scholarly institutions—in such a way as to make its avoidance an intellectual and historical impossibility.*

—Edward Said (1979)<sup>2</sup>

### I. INTRODUCTION

Communication, translation, domination, and dialogue: these are all different forms of interaction between individuals, each inherently possessing differing amounts of asymmetric power. In a recent essay, “Regional (East-West/North-South) Cooperation and Peter Singer's Ethics of Globalisation” (We will refer to this essay as “KOS,” short for ‘Khan on Singer’),<sup>3</sup> M. Ali Khan interprets and ultimately rejects Peter Singer's

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<sup>1</sup>See Dostoyevsky's chapter entitled “Night,” from *The Possessed*, reprinted in Dostoyevsky (1961).

<sup>2</sup>See part II of Said's *The Edward Said Reader*, entitled “Orientalism and After” from Said (2000).

<sup>3</sup>We utilise this acronym to avoid unnecessary repetitive references to ‘Khan’. However, the nature of this discussion sometimes requires the use of the author's name, especially in later sections.

recent book. KOS focuses on the structural characteristics of national communication, global communication and philosophical communication in today's world by explicating three diverse texts. The first (Hashwani's letter) analyses the "current" state of the modern world from the context of a national perspective—Pakistani, more precisely. The second (Singer's book) emphasises the state of the world from a global or "universal" perspective. The third (Badiou's essay) is neither national nor global in nature but more properly philosophical. KOS examines all three works in great detail—word by word, sentence by sentence. This scrutiny brings to light the importance of language and its essentiality for understanding communication and barriers to this communication. It is at times evident that Khan is not only addressing his readers, but also Singer, Hashwani, and Badiou. While KOS is not without its own shortcomings, its author's trenchant ability to find flaws in each of the pieces he presents, while enjoyable, often make it difficult to discern the real gist of his message: theory needs to admit "values garnered from the past, ethics and therefore texts, local to the collectivity, that make its past come alive" (Abstract). Otherwise, globalisation, as depicted by Singer, much like colonisation before it, is merely the subjugation of the universe or a vast part of it to a certain people's language, customs, ideas and laws before which all are to bow down.

We read KOS essentially as a piece about the exchange of information or ideas in today's "globalised" yet multicultural world. Given that in KOS Khan, an academic, frames his understanding and response to Singer's message as a Pakistani, we feel it especially necessary as examiners of the KOS writing to define who *we* are. In understanding this piece, the fact that we are students and researchers of economics is far less fundamental—perhaps even inconsequential—than the fact that we are both an Easterner and a Westerner, one of us Turkish, one of us American. As coauthors, we do not eschew this significant personal difference and the boundary it presents. Rather, we accept this separation of experience as a necessary foundation from which to proceed with this examination. It is this reality that proved most fruitful in both understanding and misunderstanding KOS.<sup>4</sup> Even as Khan's purpose is to shed light on, interpret, and, if possible, understand three pieces that are at times not altogether clear, our intent is, in part, to do the same in regard to his own—at times puzzling and abstruse—essay. Our other aim is to take the KOS analysis a step further. We believe it fails to develop a critique of Singer's book as an espousal of a "universal" language and an ideology of asymmetric power uncomfortably similar to the Orientalist thought of the 19th century. Because we find this analysis lacking in KOS, we undertake an effort to approach Singer's work from the viewpoint of two seemingly disparate scholars: Said and Dostoyevsky.

As our motivating source for this exegesis is KOS, our format for this essay is similar to its format. We divide our work into three main sections, each specifically devoted to the KOS texts of Hashwani, Singer and Badiou respectively. Our approach, and ultimately our goal, in every section is to better understand Khan's composition and thereby develop it in a more precise context. A final section to our essay presents an alternative globalisation narrative (alternative to that of Singer) drawn from our readings of KOS, Said and more importantly, Dostoyevsky.

<sup>4</sup>It is worth mentioning that misunderstanding this piece often proved more revealing. We suspect Khan would find our confusion at least slightly satisfying.

## 2. KHAN ON HASHWANI: LOCAL COMMUNICATION WITH GLOBAL SCOPE

KOS begins with a detailed inspection of a letter written by the Chairman of Pearl Continental Hotels, Sudruddin Hashwani, to guests of his 5-star hotels in Pakistan. We find KOS's treatment of Hashwani and his five-star welcome amusing, perplexing and intriguing all at once. Khan's principle use of this piece is to establish a plane on which to read Singer. Economics, an arena not foreign to Khan (at least not in theoretical training), plays a key role in the development of this plane.

Beginning with Hashwani's text, we deduce certain main characteristics. KOS points out that this piece is a communication between the affluent, a message relayed from the bourgeoisie of Pakistan to certain "haves" from the rest of the world at a luxury hotel. But we see an important point here: the content of the text nearly exclusively concerns Pakistan, and the pledge of allegiance is dedicated to the Pakistani people. Even though the problems the text alludes to are global in nature (today's chaotic world) the solutions Hashwani prescribes are all in relation to the nation-state of Pakistan—the space of nation building with an emphasised local scope.

Khan is painstakingly critical of Hashwani and only more critical of himself as he questions his own worth as an examiner of Hashwani's words. What is the value of Khan's judgment? Khan poses this and other strong questions to none other than himself. We applaud this self-critical examination. He leaves the chore of answering these questions to his readers and demonstrates that he is not unaware of the self-imposed difficulty in his method of explication: "I have got myself stymied by treating the simple as complex, by looking for a theorem, or an empirical regularity, when all that is being offered is a definition...And there really is no end to this" (I(a)). No, there is not an end to this. Shrewdly, KOS reveals that Hashwani, however deeply he may feel about forestalling an impending doom, never intended any reader of his letter to be as critical of its semantic content and its meaning.

But we have already overlooked the essential part of KOS's treatment of Hashwani. It is the enigmatic style of its author to include a fundamental—perhaps even the most salient—point of the Hashwani critique in parenthesis.<sup>5</sup> Khan calls attention to the fact that even if he limits himself to the "economic register" (one in which his training is admittedly "excellent"), as a means of analysis, this only serves to highlight in the strongest way his own "lack of understanding" (I(a)). Strangely, the result (by an economist) of using economics as an instrument to elucidate a simple claim is confusion. Why this result is important in the KOS disquisition is not readily evident at this point of the essay. It might be easy to dismiss this as its author indulging in his self-inflicted confusion—of which we are to see much more. Yet what is this worth?

Perhaps KOS criticises and discredits many of Hashwani's suggestions fairly easily because their aim and style are too familiar to its author. Even after all his games with economics and language, Khan returns to the truth that Hashwani and he "belong to the same community and it is this" that leads Khan to understand his aims (I(c)), not a detailed—albeit very clever—dissection of Hashwani's statements. Does this imply that

<sup>5</sup>This is a point we both overlooked upon our first reading of the essay. It is also curious to Khan's Delphic style to include significant remarks within his footnotes, which might deserve a special consideration all themselves.

Hashwani's text is largely unintelligible to a non-Pakistani? Our own inclination is that because Khan shares the same language, history, and, in a largely uneasy manner, the same community, Khan can interpret and translate the motivations and the urgings of Hashwani. Khan has, in a sense, had the acquaintance of these arguments before. Nothing drives this point home more clearly than Khan's ability to concisely sum up Hashwani's text in Section I(d). Hashwani's canvas is three paragraphs; Khan's is a single sentence. And yet, Khan's summary is in no way incomplete.<sup>6</sup>

### 3. KHAN ON SINGER: TRANSLATION INDETERMINACY, A LANGUAGE OF DOMINATION

While the content and argument of Hashwani's letter is not altogether acceptable from Khan's point of view, it is clearly understandable to Khan. The Singer case, however, presents a more perplexing, even disturbing, scenario for Khan. While we did not fail to see the irony in Hashwani's discussing solutions to poverty in a five-star hotel, we, once more, do not fail to enjoy the irony in a classically trained economist feeling stripped of his own "sense of self" and "basic dignity" by Singer's "appeal to a universal solvent of reason and of rationality" (II). Through our own discussions, as an Easterner and Westerner (Ilhan and Sean respectively) we reached more clarity on what we at first viewed only as ironic. In this interpretation we were much aided by the work of Edward Said.<sup>7</sup>

In contrast to Hashwani's text, Singer's work is not an offering to guests at a Pakistani hotel, rather a bequest to the whole world. Ironically, what Singer proposes, and the language he utilises in doing so, is at one level intelligible and even familiar to Khan, (Singer after all employs terminology widely used in basic economic textbooks). But ultimately, Singer is not speaking Khan's language. So while the concept of rationality and "standard economics models" (II(b)) are not foreign to Khan, the conclusions Singer draws from them certainly are. Khan appears quite put off and puzzled by Singer's deductions because they are not readily translatable or interpretable to him. Like the decrees of universal truth, which by definition and their very nature can be neither reinterpreted nor questioned, we see Khan finding Singer's text impenetrable and untranslatable because the language itself is not local and Singer's work is presented as a global narrative, an eternal truth resting above time and place. If Khan's bewilderment at reading Hashwani's letter seems somehow contrived or manufactured, and thereby less genuine, with Singer's piece his confusion is much more authentic.

KOS depicts an aversion for Singer's global remedy, often reaching the realm of revulsion, causing its author to flaunt and brandish his own economic credentials. "And when all else fails, the text utters the magic words *principle of diminishing marginal utility*. But are there not issues relating to cardinal utility, to the impossibility of an interpersonal comparison of tastes, the pervasiveness of non-convexities" (II(a)).

<sup>6</sup>Mark Twain once claimed, "Few sinners are saved after the first ten minutes of a sermon". Mr Twain, who once rewrote a section of James F. Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*, using less than half the number of words, would no doubt appreciate Khan's effort. See Twain (1962).

<sup>7</sup>We feel obligated to state upfront that while Khan makes only a cryptic footnote reference to Said, we find a discussion of Said's work on "Orientalism" indispensable for analysing the issues KOS raises. This, no doubt, returns to the nature of our separate backgrounds.

Footnotes casually direct readers interested in so enlightening themselves on these concepts of marginal returns and non-convexities to other works by Khan himself and even Eatwell's *Palgrave Dictionary*. KOS's main purpose here is to demonstrate—perhaps to Singer mostly—that Singer employs an instrument (economics) for which he lacks a requisite understanding. Khan might not have needed to react so cholericly in making his point. Yes, Singer—and perhaps even many economists—have little or no understanding of cardinal utility, or implications of non-convex utility functions. As Khan asks: at what level are we then to proceed?

Singer's imaginative examination (referred to as voodoo in KOS) perhaps originates from the idea of European identity as superior to those born out of non-European peoples and cultures. Khan, knowing the dangers and the cost to the East of the Orientalist rhetoric is, we think, quick to identify that Singer presents repackaged Orientalism, where local values and cultures are brushed aside in the name of the abstract shapes of rationality and reason. The Western intellectual already well versed in the art of making his values the values of the whole global community is engaged in another such pursuit. But he is not even aware of it. As a preventive measure KOS includes Hashwani's letter to contrast a global text with a local one, and clearly show that, in terms of language, Hashwani is more open, more sincere, more self-aware and therefore more easily understood than Singer. There are similarities of style in their two pieces but not of discourse. We claim that the Hashwani text communicates in a language, however feeble, whereas the Singer text dictates the truth. With Singer there is no communication between relative equals, only dictation among unequals.

The very essence of translation is to take something foreign and make it one's own, something existing in a particular time and place. But Singer's religion or narrative tries to transcend both time and place. In this sense, it represents more of what Said calls a one-sided translation or even an instruction (for its own benefit) seeking to transmute, divide, deploy, schematise, tabulate, index, and displace living reality.<sup>8</sup> A narrative like this that resists translation, one that strives to become a global text and works to undo spatial, religious and cultural limitations will, of course, fail to communicate. It will, as every religion does, put forth universal maxims and ask that people, for their own self-benefit, obey and believe in them. In other words, in the name of rationality or reason (the modern gods) it will dominate over the populations of the world, bringing them together forcefully in the name of self-interest.

It is here that we call special attention to the Dostoyevsky citation with which we began this essay and which we continue below. In our reading of KOS we never intended or anticipated delving into the literary realm—least of all, Russian literature. However, as if dictated by serendipity, if not fate, we recently found ourselves discussing *The Possessed* and the following passage in particular. Its relevance and appropriateness to the specific criticism found in KOS struck us at once. For this reason we feel it warrants inclusion in this work and a few brief comments.

When gods begin to be common to several nations the gods are dying and the faith in them, together with the nation themselves. The stronger a people the more individual their god. There never has been a nation without a religion,

<sup>8</sup>See Said (2000, pp. 106-107).

that is, without an idea of good and evil, and its own good and evil. When the same conceptions of good and evil become prevalent in several nations, then these nations are dying, and then the very distinction between good and evil is beginning to disappear. Reason has never had the power to define good and evil, or even to distinguish between good and evil, even approximately; on the contrary, it has always mixed them up in a disgraceful and pitiful way; science has even given the solution by the fist. This is particularly characteristic of the half-truths of science, the most terrible scourge of humanity, unknown till this century, and worse than plague, famine, or war. A half-truth is a despot such as has never been in the world before. A despot that has its priests and its slaves, a despot to whom all do homage with love and superstition hitherto inconceivable, before which science itself trembles and cringes in a shameful way.<sup>9</sup>

This brings to light a truth that scholars are often loath to admit: our ideas, in whose uniqueness and newness we frequently delight, are sometimes new manifestations of older mental conceptions expounded long ago by others, often more brilliant than ourselves. We do not, however, see this as diminishing the value of Khan's thought. Quite the contrary is true: Khan and Dostoyevsky, scholars of different fields and separated by over 100 years, reach strikingly similar—if not exact—conclusions as they carry on a dialog to which there is no end.<sup>10</sup> In this we find great value supporting Mikhail Bakhtin's claim:

There is neither a first nor a last word and there are no limits to the dialogic context (it extends into the boundless past and the boundless future). Even past meanings, that is, those born in the dialogue of past centuries, can never be stable (finalised, ended once and for all)—they will always change (be renewed) in the process of subsequent development of the dialogue.<sup>11</sup>

In *The Possessed*, Dostoyevsky speaks out against the nihilist and insidious influences he saw invading Russian life, language, and culture from Europe.<sup>12</sup> Dostoyevsky viewed the incipient revolutionary movement in his country as a result of the divorce of the educated classes from the masses. The book represents a prophetic anticipation of the evolutionary events there in 1917. Even a casual reader of this fictional novel is aware that it is a vehicle of the author's political and philosophical beliefs and opinions. There is little of the scholarly and objective in *The Possessed*. Rather, as Avrahm Yarmolinsky claims, it is a book begotten of fear and wrath whose author was alarmed, most of all, that the individual, whose needs are of a spiritual and irrational order, must be degraded in a Socialist society—one organised according to a reasoned scheme in the interest of the group.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>9</sup>See Dostoyevsky (1961, p. 268).

<sup>10</sup>And in all fairness to Khan, he never makes a claim to the uniqueness of his ideas.

<sup>11</sup>See Bakhtin (2001, front cover).

<sup>12</sup>In fact, Dostoyevsky, who spent four years in penal exile in Siberia, began writing this novel years later while living in Dresden but could not bring himself to finish it there, finding Europe a second and worse exile. He eventually returned to Russia to complete the work.

<sup>13</sup>See Yarmolinsky's Forward to the Modern Library's 1936 edition of *The Possessed*.

KOS reacts with great alarm to similar nefarious encroachments from the Occidental once more. Singer's "universal solvent" is an example of such an encroachment. "What precisely does this text want to dissolve with its magic solution?" he asks (II(c)). In this light, it is not surprising that there is a familiar ring to the ideas of Khan, a Pakistani mathematical economist, and Dostoyevsky, a Russian fictional author.<sup>14</sup> There is an uncanny correspondence to their renunciations. In the KOS analysis, Singer might be thought of as Dostoyevsky's character, Stephan Verhovensky, the idealised intellectual Westerner fond of clever French phrases who fancies himself endowed with profound wisdom and eventually accedes to the "religion of the masses".

This unilateral translation offered to the masses as a singular solution can only be sustained, however, if one demonstrates that this new language (the language Singer implies and Dostoyevsky's characters faithfully employ) is of an incomparably higher order than the language of every individual. This is Singer's goal when he attempts to bring into focus the dichotomy between the *local* and the *global*, between the *particular* and the *universal*. Of course these grand claims of rationality and reason create certain problems of communication between different cultures; but this is not the worst of it. Khan is dumbfounded with Singer not only because he evokes fallacious claims regarding universality, making a mere mention of required assumptions, but more importantly because he, in his ethics theory, conveniently omits (if he is even aware of their existence) the limitations of economic thought. It is a curious and undeniable fact of economic theory that its theorems require assumptions in order to be proven. Not without significance, these assumptions are also referred to as *constraints*, and are often more important than the theorems they support. Ignoring this verity, Singer overreaches his conclusions. What reach for the Universal has not fallen short? We are left once more with the irony that a distinguished professor in economics has to remind Singer, who is after all classically trained in ethics, of the limitations of economic thought. Singer, like an undergraduate economics student, has understood much of the economic theory but none of its limitations. We largely attribute this irony to a diametrical difference in thinking between the two scholars stemming from an idea put forward by Said that no one has ever devised a method for detaching the scholar from the circumstances of life, from the fact of his involvement (conscious or otherwise) with a class, a set of beliefs, a social position, or from the mere activity of being a member of a society.<sup>15</sup>

The language of domination, the overreaching of the Western intellectual who tries to establish his version of rationality and reason as universal principles, the alteration of the meaning of sentences, the economics of unilateral communication (which usually is a language of cognitive or physical violence) is, of course, no stranger to the Oriental subject. Khan, as an Easterner, is quite familiar with Said's outlook on the relationship between Occident and Orient as one of power, domination, and varying degrees of hegemony. Said himself is conscious of the spirit of Orientalism, the spirit of a dominant ideology destroying the remnants of every local difference in an effort to rule more absolutely, one day returning to Western Universities. If one carefully reads *Orientalism*,

<sup>14</sup>We are reminded here that by the time Dostoyevsky had graduated from a military engineering school (to which he was sent), he had decided upon literature as a career. For more on Dostoyevsky's history see E. Simmons' introduction to *The Possessed* (1961).

<sup>15</sup>See Said (2000, p. 76).

Said's 1978 critical perspective of the hidden ways in which power operates through the culture of empire, one sees that what he criticises most wholly in the Orientalist discourse is that this kind of discourse arrests it—the Oriental subject—at a certain time and place in the past, and does not allow the Oriental subject to modernise and to find for itself its position in the modern world.<sup>16</sup> It also sums up and collects the Oriental subject under a single unit, a single description, choosing to forget the individual and the local characteristics of the Oriental subject. These properties of the Orientalist discourse are not randomly assigned, however; they all have something to do with the fact that Orientalism was the intellectual appendage, the ideology par excellence of the colonialist period. Any flaws in scientific approach or mistakes in data analysis were not errors but rather necessary negative externalities caused by the fact that Orientalism was not a science but an ideology—one most useful to the colonialist rulers when they administered and controlled local populations.

The Orientalist discourse helped the colonialist to subject the local to his rule in two main ways. First, it arrested the local culture in scientific analysis, making it mute, objectifying it and making it part of the dead objects that science examines. This dehumanising side of Orientalism was found repugnant by Said because it assumed away the fact that the Oriental subject could actually talk for himself and was not dead but in constant flux and full of life. But in order for the asymmetric exchange and relation between the colonialist and the locals to continue, the relation required a simplification to one between an active omnipotent subject and a passive mute object. According to Said, the oriental discourse, in effect, waged this war on an intellectual level, objectifying the local population.

A second manner of subjugation, according to Said, is also related to the colonialist dream of ruling over a passive race. By overlooking local differences, by failing to respect the local cultures and their unique value, the Orientalist created a passive and muted population, uniform and undifferentiated in the eyes of the colonial powers, valueless by themselves, only valuable for the functions they performed for the imperial powers.<sup>17</sup> Starting from Rome, no empire has ruled by diversifying; all have ruled by aggregating and homogenising under the yoke of a single master whom all must obey. This, what we might term *ideological science*, was also very effective for taking the ground from underneath local resistances to imperialism. The colonialist, who was supposedly deciding the well being of the whole empire, was acting rationally; the local, who often found the policies against his individual benefit, was, of course, acting irrationally. But, if the population was one and the same, the policy was either just for everybody or unjust for everybody. Said gives a cold example of the self-confidence of the colonialist strengthened by Orientalist propaganda when he says that his outlook was: "How could even the Eastern people object to such grand benefits for all?"<sup>18</sup> A strong disdain for the individual rationality of the local, a strong unspoken assumption of perfect information about what is best for the common people, and a hatred for democracy for the other were the main properties of this asymmetric power relationship between the imperialist and the lands it ruled.

<sup>16</sup>See Said (1979, p. 105).

<sup>17</sup>See Said (1979, pp. 94-95).

<sup>18</sup>See Said (2000, p. 122).

Said was a member of the repressed and muted Oriental population. He witnessed the discriminatory side of Western powers, and lived through the dehumanising side of the Western crusade of modernisation of the non-European. Taking into account the fact that Orientalism did change Said's life (and all those coming from the Orient to the Western World) by directly influencing how he would be perceived and classified, is not to emphasise the personal side of Orientalism. In fact, for all the personal animosity Said harbored against Orientalism, he was not criticising the Orientalism from the perspective of a personally damaged Oriental subject, but from the viewpoint of a world-renowned thinker. This point might seem arbitrary, but it is not. Simply by authoring a book challenging the basic tenets of Orientalism, by competing with the Orientalist discourse on an equal intellectual plane in an esteemed Western university, by exposing the mystifications and power games that were the essence of Orientalist science, Said rejected the Orientalist discourse not only in theory but also in practice. By refusing to be tied down, by refusing to be silenced, by showing that an Oriental subject could have its independent voice in the academic universe, Said was falsifying the main assumptions of the Orientalist ideology.

In this manner, Khan, entering the intellectual debate on globalisation, also takes a similar approach to the ethics of Singer. As an economist, Khan strives to prove that Singer's economic tools are not only wrongly applied in an economic sense, but that Singer, attempting to create objective knowledge (much like the Orientalists) creates a subjective method more in the light of global imperialism or social engineering. This cannot be overstated, especially since it is exactly what Singer claims to stay safely clear of when he says: "But one cannot argue that the religious faith of people of a different culture is false, while upholding a religious faith of one's own that rests on no firmer ground. That really would be cultural imperialism". Khan, once again, deals with this important reference to what "*really*" is cultural imperialism only in a footnote, claiming—perhaps not dishonestly—that he cannot summon the requisite "self-reflexivity" to tackle such an issue.<sup>19</sup> Singer displays a commitment to what economist John K. Galbraith called technical and institutional imperialism—believing that what works brilliantly in one country must surely work in others.<sup>20</sup>

Feeling a threat to his cherished values of ethics and religious diversity by Singer's espoused Universal Solvent and Universal Ethics, Khan demonstrates the intellectual and scientific bankruptcy of the universality that Singer gives so much importance to. But, like Said, he does so as a scholar. By answering Singer here as an economist rather than a Muslim, by utilising familiar economic references, Khan refutes the Singer text. He refutes it not only in theory but also in practice.

The fact that the Orientalist discourse always answers more questions than it asks is both a cause and a symptom of its unilateral manner of engaging non-European antiquity. In this manner, it is not like the student—ever curious—but like a teacher—ever impatient with its pupils. KOS, in its quizzical fashion, turns this traditional Orientalist mode upside-down, refusing to follow the same formula. Asking more questions than it answers, it represents the antithesis of Orientalist one-way exchange.

<sup>19</sup>See KOS Footnote 73.

<sup>20</sup>It is worth noting that Galbraith developed this idea while serving as US Ambassador to India during the Kennedy administration. See Galbraith (1977).

#### 4. KHAN ON BADIOU: A PHILOSOPHICAL DIALOGUE

We begin this section with a confession: it is not entirely clear to us what purpose the Badiou text serves for KOS or even exactly how it significantly contributes to the piece other than to perplex and confuse—our own ignorance provided some problems at this point that no amount of discussion was able to relieve. This, to us, is the most ambiguous part of KOS. Khan’s aim (if we might call it that) is to show that philosophy, were it able to “awake and do its duty, fulfil what is required of it, deliver on its promise, redeem its desire” (III(b)), is also not the global solvent nor will it supplant its “foul potency”. There is not a single answer, a single solution to the “current chaos” in our globalised world. There are many ways, which cannot and will not be supplanted by rational economic thought (whatever one’s interpretation of such a phrase), philosophy finding itself, or any other candidates. If anything, KOS is not critical enough of Badiou also creating or invoking philosophy to universally interrupt or retard the globe from themes of “liberal economy” and “representative democracy.”

With Badiou, KOS maintains its critical emphasis on the importance of language as the site on which battles of meaning are fought. “How am I to translate these words, Badiou’s words, so that I can understand to some extent, if not precisely, what it is that he is saying,” Khan asks himself and his readers once more (III(a)). But ultimately, KOS does not develop a strong position for or against Badiou’s work. Our interpretation of this essay—and of translation—attributes heavy emphasis to local versus global and East versus West. It is for this reason that Footnote 87 of KOS practically jumps from its sequestered place of insignificance at the bottom of the page: “In any case, the question remains as to how Badiou looks on the origins of his thoughts. Does he think of himself, for example, as a ‘man of the East’?”<sup>21</sup>

We find more value in the “singular,” artistic creation, which Badiou mentions, than in his espoused uber-philosophy. We focus singularly, if we might borrow from Badiou, on Dostoyevsky’s own artistic conceptions that demonstrate two or more converging tales and multiple voices that reinforce one another by means of contrast, much like the musical principle of polyphony. In this way, Dostoyevsky presented a new form of the European novel. Valuing truth in art, he created characters so rich, so separate, so individual and all possessing trembling voices ablaze with the fire of fanaticism (be it religious, atheist, socialist, or otherwise). His heroes, his fools, and his panting fiends, with mania for destruction, lie side by side on a plane of interaction and coexistence. They are so fully fleshed out and independent that they passionately believe in totally incongruent and irreconcilable views. (Take for example Alyosha and Ivan from *The Brothers Karamazov*, or Pyotr Stepanovitch and his father Stepan from *The Possessed*.) Bakhtin points out that this incongruity was not an accident of Dostoyevsky but rather a natural end result based on the novelist’s life-view.<sup>22</sup>

Dostoyevsky gave particular importance to interaction, interdependence, and coexistence of characters on multiple social levels. Bakhtin also states that for Dostoyevsky the “importance of dialogue, the form of a conversation or a quarrel where various points of view can dominate in turn and reflect the diverse nuances of

<sup>21</sup>Footnotes like this are easy to miss, even significant ones.

<sup>22</sup>See Bakhtin (1984) for more on this discussion.

contradictory nuances is especially important.”<sup>23</sup> But what Dostoyevsky does not offer is a universal panacea; the plurality of consciousness he constructs cannot be reduced to a single and dominant ideological common denominator. The great novelist himself saw human exchanges and human dialog as an integral part of his contribution to the canon of European literature. He accepted the essential divergence and incompatibility of different local views as a natural consequence of separate historical experiences of people of different nations. In rejecting the domination of one view or ideology over others, he worked in what we call the artistic space, one orthogonal to the space of both Badiou and Singer.

## 5. CONCLUDING COMMENT

As KOS finally returns to the motivations for its own abstract and speaks of “regional cooperation” and the “ethics of globalisation” (IV), we return to the main issue of sustainable coexistence in a world of many religions and many ideologies. Is this coexistence possible? It is only here that Khan reminds his readers of a religious—Muslim to be more specific—belief that reflects the Pakistani way. We identify with the Dostoyevskian view of the modern world that a peaceful and sustainable existence cannot be found via a universal solvent to remove, cut through or somehow transcend all our differences. This is because these differences cannot be ignored. Indeed, our differences, regional independence, and conflict of view will not dissipate with globalisation. They are here to stay; and many will indeed become more pronounced.

Our analysis has shown how traces of Orientalism, and its essential dehumanising aspect, remain even in contemporary intellectual discourses and Western thought. The language employed today might have changed to incorporate newer aphorisms (like global economics) but the basic stance is still the same. This is not by accident and raises a larger proposition for future research depicting how the Orientalist discourse has adapted to the world of the 21st century, and especially contemporary events, specifically via economic notions and maxims. Such an examination would necessarily involve going beyond the texts to events, putting oneself more appropriately into the stream of “current chaos.” Amit Chaudhuri, in an essay in the *London Review of Books*, recently underscored this same idea. He notes that the Orientalist culture of power “is now so familiar that it’s easily taken for granted. This would be foolish—Eurocentrism is alive and well, and takes new and unexpected forms in every political epoch.”<sup>24</sup>

This idea is inextricably linked to the fact that the times in which an individual lives influence his writings. As authors, we are no less immune to this effect. Our paper, connecting the “Orientalisms” of today to the imperialists discourse from 200 years ago, reminds us that there is benefit to keeping open a conversation with the great thinkers of the past (Dostoyevsky, Said) because their theories are often still applicable today, perhaps even more applicable. Just as historical discourses never completely end, Dostoyevsky was always wary of finishing his own novels because as long as a work

<sup>23</sup>See Bakhtin (1984, p. 16).

<sup>24</sup>See Chaudhuri (2006, p. 1).

remained multi-leveled and multi-voiced, as long as the people in it were still arguing, then the despair over the absence of a solution would not set in.<sup>25</sup>

We conclude by saying that, following in the footsteps of Said, and even Khan, during the writing of this paper we tried to practice the kind of global communication we advocate. That is to say, one where differences are acknowledged, not smashed, one by the other. Both of us tried to work out what we found engaging in the texts. This resulted in individual or local interpretations. When there was a rift between the authors (and there were, of course, many, given our divergent backgrounds and separate skills) we did not seek to impose a single narrative, but accepted the separation between our unmerged realities. The task was a reconciliation of separate interests and imperatives, not a dismissal of them. By not overplaying our differences, and by not overlooking them either, we reached an understanding between admittedly biased equals. Thus we present the product of constant dialogue and intellectual conversation between a Muslim and a Christian, between a former US Naval officer and a Turk. And the differences do not end there.

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<sup>25</sup>See Bakhtin (1984, p. 39).