

How A Dialectic of Problem-Solving Theory and Critical Theory in Globalization Points us Toward a Pluriversal Understanding of the World

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Abstract

Through a review of three books from different ontological and epistemic traditions, I explore the tension between universalism and particularism, critical theory and problem-solving theory. All three books are excellent within their own traditions; however, the strengths and weaknesses of each remain. I undertook this review article in an attempt to understand how these different traditions might be able work together across their differences. I found that the dialectic between problem-solving and critical theories is a solid foundation for a discussion that will move us closer to an understanding of the global as a pluriversal space in which our differences are celebrated.

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Keywords: globalization theory; decolonial option; pluriversality; critical theory; problem-solving theory; dialectic

Résumé

Par le biais d'un examen de trois livres issus de traditions ontologiques et épistémiques différentes, j'explore la tension entre universalisme et particularisme, théorie critique et théorie de la résolution de problèmes. Les trois livres sont excellents au sein de leur propre tradition ; cependant, les forces et les faiblesses de chacun demeurent. J'ai entrepris cet article de synthèse pour tenter de comprendre comment ces différentes traditions pourraient travailler ensemble par-delà leurs différences. J'ai trouvé que la dialectique entre les théories de la résolution de problèmes et les théories critiques constitue une base solide pour une discussion qui nous rapprochera d'une compréhension du monde comme un espace pluriversel dans lequel nos différences sont célébrées.

Mots-clés: théorie de la mondialisation; l'option décoloniale; pluriversalité; théorie critique; théorie de résolution de problème; dialectique

Introduction – Globalization Theory

The global order and globalization are much debated concepts and terms in political science. There is little agreement among theorists about how to approach globalization as a concept or how to theorize about it. Principle among these debates is the question of whether or not a single, unifying theory of globalization is necessary, or even desired. These debates center on epistemological questions of whether to approach globalization as a universal occurrence with universal effects or whether to approach it as an occurrence with particular forms and particular effects from place to place. The tension between universalism and particularism is ongoing; however, it may be possible to draw on the strengths of these different theories, while mitigating their weaknesses, in a way that allows us to understand the global as pluriversal, that is, as constituting “multiple and diverse social orders” (Escobar 2004, p. 219). Hassoun (2014), McWilliams (2012) and Mignolo (2012) provide us with theories of globalization that, when discussed together, demonstrate that ongoing tension. By reviewing and comparing these three works, I will demonstrate not only their differences, but their complementarity.

According to Cox (1981), as we approach international relations (IR) and globalization, we should be careful not to create theory based on theory, but rather on practices and empirical-historical study. In other words, how do facts from the past point us in a possible new direction (p. 128)? Cox (1981) claims that there are two possible purposes to theory: 1) to solve a problem and 2) to ask questions of the dominant perspective on a particular issue and propose a different perspective (p. 128). As such, he terms one *problem-solving theory* and the other *critical theory* respectively (pp. 128-9), which is a false binary that he did not necessarily intend (Davies, 2014; Brincat 2016). The perception of that binary has created a situation in which normative judgements of problem-solving and critical theory are made (Davies, 2014). I make no such judgement here; each approach has value and contributes to the other, as we shall see as the works in this

article are reviewed. In fact, as discrete approaches, they cannot fulfill their purposes.

Cox (1981) explains that *problem-solving theory* accepts the world as it is, including the power relationships, institutions and organization as the framework for action. It assumes stability in the institutions and relationships that it is not addressing and does not question the patterns or interactions between them. It is useful for addressing specific problems in specific situations but does not address systemic issues or perspectives (Cox 1981, pp. 128-9). As such, it is particularly relevant for research about *improving* the system.

On the other hand, *critical theory* “stands apart from the prevailing order of the world and asks how that order came to about” (p. 129). These types of theories take a holistic view of the social and political relationships, asking how they came about, how they may be changing or how it is possible to change them (Cox 1981, p. 129). As such, it is particularly relevant for research about *changing* the system.

Indeed, as demonstrated by Davis (2014) and Brincat (2016), *problem-solving theory* and *critical theory* each seek social equity – though one is practical while the other is transformational. Given the mutual goal of these different approaches, it is interesting to explore how they may complement each other rather than applying them as discrete, competing, binary categories. If they are considered in a dialectic framework that resembles a conversation between two different worldviews in order to find common ground, it may be possible to move toward a deeper understanding of globalization. I will begin by providing an overview of each work and how they interact with problem-solving and critical theory. I will then examine of e each of them individually to explain the theoretical concepts and investigate what critiques may apply from these perspectives outlined by Cox (1981), as well as the work related to concepts evoked in each book. I will the provide an analysis of the dialectic potential of each work before concluding that each different perspective brings important ideas to the discussion of globalization theory. Moreover, through that

dialectic, these perspectives build upon each other. In doing so, they may have the potential to transform the mainstream theoretical framework into a new perspective with new ways of being, doing and knowing.

An Overview of Three Different Worldviews

The three studies in this piece represent three different approaches to thinking about globalization and attempts at theorizing what is occurring on a global scale. Are these theories particular or universal and what do they entail? How are they situated within the dialectic of problem-solving theory and critical theory, as detailed by Cox (1981)? The three works considered here propose encompassing theories of globalization. It is possible, however, that all three works have strengths and weaknesses that provide a stronger and interesting possible perspective on what globalization theory could or should be when their strengths are combined.

Nicole Hassoun (2012) divides her work into two sections. In the first section, from the liberal, neo-institutionalist tradition, she proposes an alternative to the consideration of the positive duties to alleviate poverty of coercive institutions in order to expand consensus on those duties among liberal and libertarian theorists. In doing so, she suggests that this theory is widely applicable to all international and regional institutions. Based in assumptions that international institutions are coercive and that coercive institutions must be legitimate, she argues that such legitimacy “requires coercive institutions to ensure that their subjects secure basic capacities” (p. 9). That is, because they are coercive, they must ensure the capacity of their subjects to consent to the coercion. Her assumption here is that lack of food, water, social status, education, and so on may contribute the lack of sufficient autonomy to consent to coercion, thus rendering these institutions illegitimate (pp. 9-14). This assumption is the foundation of the problem that she is attempting to solve.

In the second section, she applies this perspective to arguments in favour of aid or trade for poverty alleviation, before

proposing a Fair-Trade rating system of biochemical and pharmaceutical companies (pp. 19-21). In the end, she concludes that foreign aid, free trade and fair trade each have their place in poverty alleviation, that they should work together and that "...there is a lot coercive institutions can and must do to help the global poor" (p. 21). Indeed, this practical application of her theory is unique among the three works being evaluated.

As per Cox's (1981) suggestion, her work is based soundly on an empirical-historical analysis, as well as present day practice. That being said, as we will see below, the universal application of her theory and the very narrow ontological framework weaken its ability to effect the changes she is proposing. Furthermore, her lack of recognition of the particular ways of being around the world leave the reader wondering how implementation would occur outside of the larger international institutions she names (the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization). Indeed, I will demonstrate that this particular theory falls squarely into the *problem-solving theory* category outlined by Cox (1981) and in fact requires a dialectic relationship with a more holistic, critical approach to create the changes she is advocating. Specifically, her proposal to would solve a particular issue within the system as it is by increasing the legitimacy of pharmaceutical and biochemical companies; however, there is nothing to suggest *how* such a rating system would allow for consensual coercion within the framework she is using.

Susan McWilliams (2014), on the other hand, offers a starting point for the development of critical theory from within the Western political thought tradition. By drawing on stories of travel as told by philosophers – of their own travels, of the travels of another retold, and of fictional travels – she highlights their lessons in support of her argument that these stories provide "numerous avenues and opportunities for thinking through the questions of global politics and the justice that are so critical for our time" (pp. 20-21). Her assumptions in this work are clear: that a change in our political thinking is necessary in order to adapt to our quickly changing globalized world (p. 14) and that traveling back, looking into the history

of travel in Western thought can illuminate a way forward (pp. 9-14). These assumptions form the basis of her combined use of critical and problem-solving theories.

The concepts of the *other within* and *in-betweenness* are her solutions to the problem and the critique of the world system. For McWilliams (2014), recognizing the *other within* the self allows us to “apprehend that the self/other distinction is faulty [and, thus] to understand, at a fundamental level, the ways of thinking which encourage the hyperactive border construction and securitization so prevalent in our time” (p. 128). In addition, the space of *in-betweenness* is “the contemplation of travel imagery in political theory [that] encourages us to develop a stance that is both wandering and rooted, to occupy what I have called a third position...” (McWilliams 2014, p. 131). For the author, the application of these two concepts give rise to new ways of thinking that will allow us to theorize globalization universally and it is the lack of application of these concepts that prevents us from doing so.

Her argument is compelling. In particular, the nature of her argument is at the same time *problem-solving theory* in that she is attempting to solve the problem of how to think about globalization and *critical theory* in that she approaches the problem from a theoretical perspective that differs from that of dominant actors. Such explicit crossover between theoretical goals is rare. However, as I will discuss in detail below, the temptation to draw only on Western thinkers as a basis for discussion of a universalizing globalization theory is problematic. An additional problem is that it commits the error of theorists outlined by Cox: it is based on theoretical ideas rather than empirical or historical analysis of the spaces to which such theoretical ideas should be applied. Furthermore, the terms she uses to articulate these changes maintain the dichotomous image of us vs. them perpetuated in the dominant world system. This dichotomy may be false, as per the third work discussed in this paper.

Walter Dignolo (2011) proposes a critical theory that is based on empirical and historical analysis, as well as current practice. What

he calls the decolonial option is a complex way of seeing the world. He sees this option of one of five trajectories toward global futures that are taking place in the world: rewesternization, dewesternization, the reorientation of the Left, decolonial, and spiritual. For him, each trajectory is occurring simultaneously within different historico-structural nodes worldwide.

I will highlight the main points of the theory below; however, it is important to understand that the decolonial option acknowledges and celebrates the experiences of the observer in their understanding of the world. This theory repositions the concept of Eurocentrism as a way of thinking (epistemology) rather than a place (geographic) (Mignolo 2011, pp. 53-54). Indeed, decolonial thinkers believe that modernity cannot exist without coloniality, which is “the underlying logic of foundation and unfolding of Western civilization ... of which historical colonialisms have been constituted” (Mignolo 2011, p. 2). The decolonial option calls on those who agree with the premise to delink from the logic of coloniality and reject globalized, Westernized modernity/coloniality.

Mignolo’s (2011) argument is well articulated and based in empirical/historical evidence while being applied to the world system as it exists. However, his disdain for Western ways of being make the application of such a theory impractical, if not impossible and also contradicts his argument that universal connectors of pluriversity exist among and between societies, based on which we can learn to work together across difference (Mignolo 2011, p. 320). However, there may be a solution to this issue by building a dialectic between his concepts and the proposals put forward by the previous two authors.

The following three sections offer in-depth, analytic reviews of the works by Hassoun (2014), McWilliams (2012) and Mignolo (2011) in that order. Following those reviews, I conclude with and exercise in what Mignolo (2011) calls border thinking – an approach that, put simply, allows us to think at the edge of Western tradition and incorporate ways of being, knowing and doing that are not centered on

the West. In doing so, I describe how we might consider the interaction of these theories through a dialectic in order to build upon their strengths and include particularities in a universal understanding of globalization.

Hassoun: Problem-Solving Theory for Liberal and Libertarian Thinkers – A Fair Trade Proposal

Hassoun (2014) attempts to solve the problem of poverty alleviation by assuring basic resources through coercive international institutions *because* of their coercive elements. Within the scope of the negative duties of non-interference with human rights, a person cannot be legitimately coerced unless they consent to that coercion. Hassoun, therefore, argues that coercive international institutions must ensure that each of their subjects has sufficient autonomy to consent to be coerced because coercive institutions must be legitimate. As such, if their subjects do not have the capacity to consent, the international institutions must provide the means by which those subjects can develop that capacity, otherwise they are illegitimate institutions (Hassoun 2014, pp. 45). She calls this argument the Autonomy Argument when addressing liberals, as individual freedom is their primary concern in the discussion of institutional positive and negative duties (Hassoun 2014, pp. 12; 45). She refers to this same argument as the Legitimacy Argument when addressing libertarians whose primary concern is upholding negative duties (p. 92). Interestingly, it is the same argument understood from different theoretical approaches.

She defines the concepts at play in her argument. Specifically, she understands an institution to be “an organization that creates, enforces, and/or arbitrates between rules that regulate interaction between individuals or groups” (Hassoun 2014, p. 50). For such an institution to be considered coercive, “individuals or groups violating its rules must be likely to face sanctions – [punishments or penalties] – for the violation” (Hassoun 2014, p. 50). Furthermore, legitimacy, as it relates to institutions, “requires that subjects be free to determine their actions and shape the nature of their relationships to coercive institutions” (Hassoun 2014, p. 59). However, subjects

cannot do so unless they are “able to reason about, make and carry out some significant plans on the basis of their commitments [to that institution]. Subjects must not be constrained to making plans only to satisfy their immediate needs” (Hassoun 2014, p. 63). Indeed, the definitions and understandings she applies to her arguments support her thesis.

Her conclusion is that “coercive international institutions owe their subjects whatever resources and assistance they need to secure sufficient autonomy” (Hassoun 2014, p. 68). What is left is the definition of coercion, which for Hassoun (2014) is based on the ability to carry out threats or force against individuals or groups (states): the IMF, the WB and the WTO are all international institutions with this ability (pp. 68-76). What is important to remember, is that coercive institutions must be justified in their exercise of threat or force that violates rights and “it is reasonable to hold that it can only be justified *if the relationship between the rulers and the ruled remains free*” (Hassoun 2014, p. 76). Indeed, from a liberal perspective, a free relationship between the rulers and the ruled is tantamount to the success of the coercive institutions.

With regard to libertarians, the arguments and definitions remain true, but the reasoning changes slightly. In their case, it is the legitimacy of the coercion/interference, and not the free relationship that is at issue. As such, “rights-respecting subjects must secure sufficient autonomy to consent to their coercive institution(s) rule for their institution(s) to be legitimate” (p. 103). Should these rights-respecting subjects be unable to secure what is necessary for sufficient autonomy, then “libertarians must agree that coercive institutions have positive obligations to their rights respecting subjects” (Houssan 2014, p. 107). For libertarians, coercive institutions are legitimate only if the rights-respective subjects are able to give *uncoerced* consent to those institutions.

At this point, it appears that Hassoun’s (2014) work is, in fact, wholly based in critical theory as it appears to present a new perception of positive duties to extend consensus among liberals and

libertarians. However, the narrow-intended audience calls this appearance into question. In her discussion of the Autonomy Argument, Hassoun (2014) claims that her concept of autonomy is not simply Western, and that it is “compatible with concern for community and care” (p. 31). As such, she argues that there is “little reason to suppose the relevant kind of autonomy is inappropriate for evaluating non-Western institutions” (p. 31). She then uses an example of a Muslim choosing not to drink because of his faith as how this autonomous choice would manifest in non-Western situation (p. 31). This example is inappropriate for the sweeping conclusion that is being made.

First of all, Hassoun (2014) references many liberal, coercive international institutions through her work: the IMF, the WTO, the UN, the WB. At no point does she reference a Western, religious institution. Thus, comparing the liberal institutions to Islam is a false comparison. Furthermore, a society such as that of the Zapatistas maintains its own institutions within its motto “mandar obedeciendo” (to rule and obey at the same time) (Mignolo 2011, p. 229). (I will return to how these two works interact further on). As such, ruling and obeying happen simultaneously and through each other. This institution may be coercive; however, simply by participating in this institution autonomous consent is given and the understanding of autonomy as outlined by Hassoun (2014) is irrelevant. Indeed, oversimplification of all non-Western institutions into the undefined concepts of “community and care” is a significant weakness in Hassoun’s (2014) argument.

In addition, Hassoun (2014) oversimplifies globalization. In her discussion of globalization, she references only international institutions as globalizing forces (Hassoun 2014, p. 7). At no point does she reference cyberspace, deterritorialization, social movements or any other global phenomena that are widely accepted as part of the globalizing force (Appadurai 2001; Escobar 2004; Belton 2010). As such, it is difficult to understand this theory as a global, critical theory, as it addresses only liberal, Western coercive institutions and ignores many phenomena of globalization.

That being said, Hassoun's (2014) work is incredibly thorough in that context. She makes her argument while explicitly addressing her assumptions, intents, audiences, and strengths and (other) weaknesses. As such, her argument is convincing within the narrow parameters that she has set. She states that the arguments in the second section of the book require that we accept the following premise: "Because there are significant obligations to the global poor, there is reason to take seriously policy proposals that can help these people secure things like food, water, and shelter" (p. 115). As such the theoretical argument she makes in the first section is applied to her policy proposal in the second section.

The second section and its conclusion are evidence of her success in applying these concepts within the framework that she has set out. Her empirical discussions of aid and trade each conclude that each method can contribute to poverty alleviation, though it does not always occur (Hassoun 2014, pp. 142; 153). As such, Hassoun (2014) proposes different ways in which WTO rules may be altered in order to improve the access of the poor to the resources gained through trade (pp. 153-8). However, she recognizes that due to objections and the laws as they stand, the proposed restructuring of the WTO system may be impossible (pp. 158-64). Therefore, in her final chapter, she proposes that a Fair-Trade output-based rating and labeling system be created for biotechnology and pharmaceutical (Bio) companies that would incentivize such companies to "improve access to existing drugs and technologies; [and] do more research on, and development of, new drugs and technologies that address the diseases of the poor" (p. 184). Indeed, such a system may increase access to appropriate medications among the people who need them the most.

Overall, the argument provided in Hassoun's (2014) is excellent from within the liberal, neo-institutionalist perspective. It addresses the lack of consensus among liberals and libertarians, based on this shift in thinking, is able to propose a policy solution to address access to medications by the global poor. However, in her attempt to apply her argument to Southern institutions and thus claim global relevance, she weakens her argument. In conjunction with the

arguments of the following works that I will consider, a dialectic that broadens the scope of her argument may be possible and it could be applied to a wider spectrum of global (or regional) institutions.

McWilliams: Looking Backward to Move Forward – Reintegrating the Past

McWilliams' (2012) work is based on an interesting idea: that the travel stories of the past, from within the Western tradition, can point us in a new direction for theorizing globalization. Her goal, in this work, is to travel "back through the history of Western political thought with a mind to the questions and problems attending cotemporary globalization" (McWilliams 2012, p. 5). Indeed, she is seeking a global political theory in the historical work of the vaguely defined 'Western tradition' (McWilliams 2012, pp. 2-5). Without limiting herself to a particular ontology, she draws on a variety of travel stories from various historical, political philosophers. She demonstrates how these stories support a new perspective on how to approach these global times: through acknowledging the *other within* and approaching theory from a state of *in-betweenness* (McWilliams 2012, pp. 5-23). McWilliams thus presents the reader with a new way of thinking about the self.

As stated above, the *other within* refers primarily to the *other within* ourselves. However, McWilliams (2012) also refers to it as an indication of the "attention to 'otherness' – to the foreign and the marginal – within Western political thought" as well as the "diversity within what at first may see to homogenous communities and regimes" (p. 8). What is particularly problematic with this conception is that, while well-intentioned, the discourse betrays a consideration of what may be uncomfortable for, or new to, the traveler as the *other*. In doing so, the author is 'othering' anything that is different from the lived experiences of the traveler from the West (Seider & Hillman 2011, pp. 2-3). In other words, the perception of difference from what these people in a privileged position see as normal remains outside of themselves, whether or not they recognize certain similarities in their own way of being. Furthermore, it is dichotomous and recognizes only

two categories of being: the other and the self (McWilliams 2012, p. 128). Such a dichotomy poses a risk in that any similarity between the two categories will be overlooked in favour of focusing on difference and as seen with problem-solving and critical theory, creating tension between the two.

In-betweenness creates a similar issue. While this concept speaks to an intellectual positionality, a way of considering the world, it is again dichotomous: wandering vs. rooted; imagination vs. reality; creative vs. limited; universal vs. particular (McWilliams 2012, p. 7). While the concept was created as 'a third space' between these ideas, the ideas themselves are presented as linear, as though they exist on a continuum. Such thinking may help to conceptualize a global theory from a Western perspective; however, it would be impossible to conceive of the Zapatista "mandar obedeciendo" as "to rule and obey at the same time" (Mignolo 2011, p. 229) without first accepting that ruling and obeying do not exist at opposite ends of a continuum. As such, the *in-betweenness* discussed by McWilliams (2012) is useful to those in the Western tradition who view the world as dichotomous and have a way of being and knowing the world that is couched in that dichotomy; however, it cannot speak to a global theory without negating the ways of being, knowing and doing that exist in parallel with the Western tradition.

While I critique these ideas as the basis for global political theory, I do believe that McWilliams' (2012) is incredibly useful and that this work is at the very least an attempt a dialectic between the practicality of *problem-solving* theory and the transformational potential of critical theory. Indeed, she is practically addressing the lack of (Western) global political theory that grows out of the Western tradition and while simultaneously suggesting new ways to conceive of concepts in this thought tradition.

McWilliams' (2012) creativity in the presentation of her work is also of note. She divided her work into three sections: instructions for how to travel (how to travel and be respectful while opening your mind to difference); reflections on travelling (learning that has occurred

through travel experiences); and, imagined travels (fictional accounts of travel that highlight political and power relationships). Each section teaches us something about the conception of travel in the Western tradition and how it can be applied to a (Western) global political theory today.

In the first chapter, we learn that the instructions for travel are also instructions for how to theorize: “The theorist must endeavor to engage rather than escape, overlook, or discount the diversity of the world; the theorist should seek to imaginatively inhabit as many perspectives and points of view as possible, with an eye toward joining them into a more comprehensive view of the human condition” (McWilliams 2012, p. 46). This conclusion is based on the analysis of multiple texts about travelling (understood as a surrogate for theorizing) and explains the foundation of her thought on how to approach theorizing in the globalized world.

In the second chapter, she draws on different reflections about travelling from multiple Western thinkers to demonstrate how thinking and theorizing must be based in particularity. She states that “Reflections on travel in the history of Western political thought insist that global political theorizing must be done in a self-conscious and careful way... to preserve the fact that the plurality of the world will always eclipse any totalizing claim about it” (McWilliams 2012, pp. 88-9). The clarity with which particularism is evoked in her suggestions for (Western) global political theorizing demonstrates how the *other within* conception came to be. Because of the particularities of different cultures of the world, empathy for those differences, figuratively putting oneself in the place of another person may lead that person to better understand their similarities and differences. However, the conceptualization of the term remains lost in dichotomous thinking and othering.

In her final chapter, McWilliams (2012) draws on fictional, or imagined, travel stories to demonstrate how we need to approach theorizing: “It is easy to fall into a hubristic mode of theorizing, one that also rationalizes conquest and dominion even when it seems to aim at

contemplation and deliberation” (p. 121). The different fictional tales upon which she draws to arrive at this conclusion are often stories being told by a traveler *about* travelling. That is, they are also *reflections* on (fictional) travel that allow for self-discovery and acquiring wisdom. Such reflections are useful in theorizing as well.

It is not the conclusions of these sections that are problematic. In fact, I believe that they are an excellent guide for approaching theorizing of the (Western) global, political world. However, the assumptions, the dichotomy and the othering in the conceptualizations of the *other within* and *in-betweenness* seem to suggest that the author is coming from a place where westerners have a monopoly on political thought as it will be applied to the world. There is little to no recognition of different thought processes that may come into contact with the ones being developed here. That said, she does not leave space for a dialectic. I will return to this issue in the conclusion, as I discuss the three works together.

Mignolo: Modernity, Coloniality, Pluriversality – A Different Perspective

Due to the complexity of the argument and the introduction of what is an almost entirely different perspective, this section will be particularly long compared with the others. Mignolo’s (2011) argument is no more or less important than those previously discussed; however, the intricacies of his assumptions and the “new” concepts that he introduces call for more attention.

As previously stated, Mignolo (2011) sees globalization as being divided between five different trajectories toward global futures (rewesternization, dewesternization, the reorientation of the Left, decolonial and spiritual). Each of these nodes exist in relation to the “colonial matrix of power.” This matrix, also referred to as the logic of coloniality, is the foundational control of different societal aspects that make up modernity: “it operates in a series of interconnected heterogenous historico-structural nodes crossed by colonial and imperial differences and by the underlying logic that secures those

connections: the logic of coloniality..." (Mignolo 2011, p. 17). The matrix consists of "four interrelated domains: control of the economy, of authority, of gender and sexuality, and of knowledge and subjectivity" (Mignolo 2011, p. 8), which are supported by "the racial and patriarchal foundation of knowledge (the enunciation in which the world order is legitimized)" (Mignolo 2011, p. 8). This epistemology created a zero point that is "always in the present of time and the center of space, it hides its own local knowledge universally projected" (Mignolo 2011, p. 80). This projection of universality is how modernity/coloniality took root around the world.

Within this matrix, each trajectory touches on at least two of the four domains and their differences arise from how they perceive their relationship with, and attitude toward those domains (Mignolo 2011, p. 35). In particular, these perceptions occur through either 'objectivity and truth without parentheses' (which, based on the work of Humberto Maturana, accepts that objects are observer-independent; is couched in universally valid knowledge; and believes that objects that exist do so independently of the observer's personality and actions) or through 'objectivity and truth with parentheses' (which is based on constituted ontologies, essentially that multiple realities are possible because understandings of objects are based on the experiences of the observer and that there are numerous possible realities) (Mignolo pp. 35; 70-71). In essence, objectivity and truth without parenthesis does not acknowledge the subjective reality of the observer, while the objectivity and truth with parenthesis celebrates it.

Mignolo (2011) believes that a new world order is emerging through a struggle between the five different trajectories and that there will be no winner other than the possible "...agreement that global futures shall be polycentric and noncapitalist. Which means that a struggle for world domination that was based on wealth accumulation, military power, and the pursuit of a form of supremacy that could impose its own notion of universality would yield to pluriversality as a universal project" (p. 33). As such, there would no longer be a dominant global power. Therefore, the dominant global order would

shift and develop into a hegemony of difference in which all ways of being, that is, all five trajectories, would co-exist

This assumption contains a contradiction that is not readily apparent: that the rewesternization, dewesternization and reorientation of the Left trajectories may be capitalist trajectories. As such, how can they coexist in a polycentric noncapitalist world, that is, a world with multiple social orders that is based on an economic system other than capitalism? I will continue by outlining the details of each of the trajectories before addressing this issue.

Rewesternization is the attempt of Western powers to promote modernity/coloniality and “rebuild the confidence the world had in the United States” (Mignolo 2011, p. 36). In all domains of the colonial matrix of power, this approach adopts an approach of objectivity and truth without parentheses (Mignolo p. 33). The goal of this trajectory is to save capitalism and to gain “knowledge for development” (Mignolo 2011, pp. 35-37). Indeed, according to Mignolo (2011), rewesternization is a project of the United States to maintain its authority and leadership in international relations and to promote consumerism to subjects whose reality is that they “live and work to consume instead of working and consuming to live” (Mignolo 2011, p. 36). The dewesternization trajectory has thwarted attempts to rewesternize on a global scale (Mignolo 2011, p. 37) Indeed, rewesternization has not occurred on a global scale. As such, based on Mignolo’s argument, the United States is no longer the sole leader in the global order.

Dewesternization originated in East and Southeast Asia and is “clearly a response to Western modernity” (Mignolo 2011, p. 44). Unlike rewesternization, it adopts an approach of objectivity in parentheses in the domains of knowledge, subjectivity, and authority, though it maintains objectivity without parentheses in the economic domain (Mignolo 2011, p. 35). Because “the constitution and configuration of modern epistemology [...] were a business conducted by white men and continue to be managed accordingly, dewesternization is calling into question not just the content of Western epistemology but its very foundation: the structure of enunciation”

(Mignolo 2011, p. 45). Thus, it is a “project of conflictive coexistence between forces that share common economic principles [- capitalism – while confronting Westernization] at other levels of the colonial matrix of power: the sphere of authority, of knowledge, of subjectivity” (Mignolo 2011, p. 47). The breakdown of the Doha round talks demonstrates the traction that the dewesternization trajectory has gained in recent years and, for Mignolo (2011), this means that the era of unquestioning acceptance of Western epistemology is coming to an end (p. 49). Thus, the global order is moving toward pluriversalism; however, there are three more trajectories to explore

The Reorientation of the Left is a trajectory that contains multiple trajectories of its own. In particular, there are four leftist internal trajectories: the European Left, the Theological Left (Christianity and Islam in particular), the World Social Forum/Global Left, and the modern/colonial (Marxist) Left (Mignolo 2011, pp. 37-44). Each of these reorientations shifts somewhat based on location; however, the details of each are unnecessary for the purposes of this analysis. In each case, whether Western or non-Western, the reorientation of the left shares in rewesternization’s attitude of objectivity without parentheses in all spheres of the colonial matrix of power. Therefore, those who follow the beliefs of these leftist orientations consider their approaches to be universally applicable and, therefore, exist within the same ontological framework as rewesternization. The differences lie only in the solutions that are to be implemented universally and globally, thus it remains hegemonic, though the hegemony is different (Mignolo 2011, pp. 37-44). Indeed, while this trajectory is different from rewesternization in that it is focused on social equity over economic success, the Western epistemic assumptions remain dominant.

The spiritual option “operates mainly at the level of knowledge and subjectivity [...] but it is fundamental to the decolonization of economy and politics, since both – political theory and political economy – have become imperial tools in the formation of the subjectivity of consumers and voters that nourish and support imperial actors and institutions in the states and corporations” (Mignolo

2011, p. 62). As such, it is mostly concerned with decolonizing religion to liberate spirituality and works from objectivity within parentheses to do so. This option often works in tandem with the decolonial option in terms of political approaches and environmental considerations (Mignolo 2011, p. 34). The spiritual option is thus an important, non-economic trajectory that allows space for understanding spirituality and religion differently from the dominant global order.

The decolonial option, already discussed in the introduction, is the final trajectory outlined by Mignolo (2011). Decoloniality “makes clear that any act and project of decolonization refers to the colonial matrix of power, rather than to any indeterminate domain of ‘reality’... Decolonial doing and thinking (doing while thinking, thinking while doing) means to address the four spheres and the many layers in which the colonial matrix operates” (Mignolo 2011, p. 54). Indeed, the decolonial options operates from a perspective of objectivity and truth within parentheses, which, as previously mentioned, makes space for multiple realities that are borne of individual and collective experiences and worldviews, in all four domains of the colonial matrix of power.

For Mignolo (2011), the consequences of coloniality make the need for the decolonial option even more imperative: At the same time that capitalism became the new type of economy in Europe and that the scientific revolution took place, “a hidden dimension to [these] events was [also taking place], both in the sphere of economy and in the sphere of knowledge: the *dispensability* (or expendability) of human life and of life in general from the Industrial Revolution into the twenty-first century” (p. 6). In essence, as capitalism, science and industry gained popularity in Europe, it became acceptable to trade human life for the success of those goals. This expendability of human life in exchange for profit is of particular issue throughout Mignolo’s (2011) work. With this cursory understanding of the five trajectories, my concern with contradiction in Mignolo’s (2011) theory is evident. If all five trajectories are to coexist in a non-capitalist world that embraces pluriversality, how can the three economically-based trajectories – rewesternization, dewesternization, and the reorientation of the Left – exist as they are alongside the decolonial and spiritual

options? Furthermore, the understanding of modern/colonial capitalism – that is, capitalism and economic advancement at the expense of human life – means additional misgivings toward the capitalist system. However, by deepening our understanding of the concepts outlined by Mignolo (2011) that pertain to the decolonial option, it may be possible to create a dialectic and forge a path to harmonization.

Each of the five trajectories is mediated before approaching each sphere of the colonial matrix of power. By mediated, I am referring to a process by which the “complex of knowledge made [is understood], but also the basic principles by which knowledge is made” (Mignolo 2011, p. 65). In the case of the decolonial option (and dewesternization) “they have to build on what Westernization disavowed by in-corporating Western contributions to human civilization into [their] projects” (Mignolo 2011, p. 65), but also, they must delink from the colonial matrix of power to determine what was disavowed and how to approach this incorporation of reality. Doing so is called border thinking, that is, “diatopical thinking [thinking informed predominantly by the space occupied by the thinker] ...and its hermeneutics articulate the particular version of experience that operates on the awareness and power differential” (Mignolo 2011, p. 61). Border thinking is thus thinking that is based on where one is located; the space occupied by the thinker. As such, it can give rise to epistemic disobedience, that is, drawing on non-Western or location-based epistemology and combining it with or completely rejecting Western epistemic assumptions to understand and inform different ways of being, knowing and doing.

While engaging in border thinking and accepting the contributions of the West, decolonial thinkers nonetheless “accept the interconnection between geo-history and epistemology, between biography and epistemology that has been kept hidden by linear global thinking and the hubris of the zero point...” (Mignolo 2011, p. 91) as a first step to shifting the way in which knowledge is made. Indeed, decolonial thinking accomplishes two things: “it anchors new epistemic and ontological sites; and contextualizes Descartes [(‘I think, therefore

I am) into] I am where I do and think” (Mignolo 2011, p. 91). As such, for Mignolo (2011), decolonial thinking means “that thinking derives from doing in the same proportion that doing derives from thinking” (pp. 91-92). He refers to this as ‘being where one thinks,’ which “implies, first and foremost, recognizing and confronting both imperial categorizations of being and universal principles of knowing; it means engaging in epistemic disobedience, in independent thoughts, in decolonial thinking” (Mignolo 2011, p. 97).

As Mignolo states: “...the task of decolonial thinking and the enactment of the decolonial option in the twenty-first century starts from epistemic delinking: from acts of epistemic disobedience” (p. 139). Delinking epistemically, therefore, is an act of border thinking: of being where you think. In addition, “being where you think means, first and foremost, to delink from the epistemic mirage that you can only be if you think as someone else...told you..., directly or indirectly, that you should think and therefore what you should be” (Mignolo 2011, p. 94-5). Border thinking, decolonial thinking, epistemic disobedience and epistemic delinking are overlapping concepts that complement each other: some are ways of being, others are ways of doing, but they are all ways of knowing.

In sum, the ways of knowing in decolonial thinking are incredibly important. The ways of being, knowing and doing are subjective, as is the knowledge gained. Furthermore, these subjective understandings allow for merging ways of knowing that are created through objectivity without parentheses into ways of knowing that are created through objectivity with parentheses. This recognition engenders “a shift in the geo- and body-politics of knowledge that focuses on changing the rules of the game rather than its content” (Mignolo 2011, p. 92). Therefore, to solve the issue related whether or not rewesternization (and dewesternization and the decolonial option (and spiritual option) can coexist, we must engage in border thinking. The rules of the game may need to shift even further than what Mignolo has proposed. In the conclusion that follows, I will discuss how an exercise in border thinking (and, yes, epistemic disobedience/delinking) creates a dialectic between the three works

that may allow them to work together. In so doing, they point a stronger way forward that builds on their strengths and reduces their weaknesses.

Conclusion – A Dialectic Toward the Pluriversal?

The three works discussed above all have strengths and weaknesses. Hassoun's (2014) policy proposal is an excellent proposal that may help save lives in the near future by providing immediate solutions for improving access to basic resources necessary for survival, should it be implemented. McWilliams' (2012) approach to theorizing in the Western tradition may point a way forward in Western political thought that is inclusive and empathetic. Mignolo's (2011) theoretical approach to modernity/coloniality has the potential to shift perspectives and allow us to understand the world differently. However, these theories all have weaknesses: both Hassoun (2014) and McWilliams (2012) take on an element of dictation and universalization of perspectives (though Hassoun does so far more explicitly than McWilliams), while Mignolo (2011) is contradictory in his theorizing. However, if we draw on the concept of border thinking, perhaps there is a way forward that combines the strengths of these theories while addressing their weaknesses.

The problem-solving approach of the Hassoun (2014) and McWilliams' (2012) theories point to the idea the Western global political thought and action is lacking. Those who use this approach are trying to solve the problems from within the (predominantly liberal) tradition. However, the solutions are often incremental, as in the case of Hassoun (2014) or monopolized/universally applied, as with McWilliams (2012). Furthermore, the critical nature of both McWilliams' (2012) and Mignolo's (2011) theories demonstrate that it is not simply of a matter of details within the system needing to be fixed, but that there is a fundamental, epistemic problem with the system itself.

In light of these observations, perhaps it is possible to apply the trajectory-based epistemic approach posited by Mignolo (2011) to

the westernized theories of Hassoun and McWilliams in a dialectic. What I mean is that within the rewesternization (and perhaps dewesternization and reorientation of the Left) trajectory, Hassoun's (2014) proposal is excellent and there is little to contradict her conclusions. Furthermore, the application of McWilliams' (2012) suggested approaches to global political thought would not be remiss and may contribute to an improved Western, consumer, capitalist society. If people choose to live that way, then so be it.

However, Mignolo's point – that Western society only exists because of coloniality – must also be considered and a dialectic built from that understanding. Firstly, Western theories need to be adapted so that they are *not* universally applied and Western actors would need to accept different ways of being, knowing and doing.

For example, a dialectical outcome of such an approach would allow for the understanding that international institutions are coercive and, in the case that there is not consent from the people being coerced even though they have sufficient autonomy to do so, those institutions need to remove themselves due to the recognition of the *other within*. The non-capitalist communities would therefore be allowed to exist outside of modernity/coloniality and follow their own trajectories, whether they are dewesternized, decolonial or spiritual, forging relationships of respect.

Furthermore, should this occur, Mignolo's contradictory approach to Western modernity/coloniality could be resolved and a pluriversal global society may be possible: one that celebrates and works across difference

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