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REINVENTING GLOBAL STUDIES THROUGH TRANSFORMATIVE SCHOLARSHIP

A critical proposition

S. A. Hamed Hosseini and Barry K. Gills

Introduction: the radical implications of impending global catastrophe

Evidence is mounting of an approaching global civilizational crisis, induced by the 'modernity paradigm' and driven by universalized laws of capital, that leads to crossing a set of crucial planetary environmental thresholds and tipping points and thereby jeopardizing the future of human civilization (Hansen et al., 2017; Lewis & Maslin, 2018; Steffen et al., 2018). Declining biodiversity and accelerating species extinctions; deforestation and forest degradation; ocean acidification and pollution; melting polar ice sheets and sea level rise; thawing permafrost and methane releases; desertification; global heating and climate change; rapidly expanding natural resource extraction and global materials consumption, etc.; the list could be extended. We live in unprecedented circumstances, which call for unprecedented action. Nothing less than profoundly radical transformations will be capable of arresting and reversing these trends towards global destruction. Scientists are increasingly warning us that the inter-actions and feedback processes among the many tipping points are insufficiently understood. We face the possibility of a state shift to a 'Hothouse Earth' pathway of irreversible runaway global warming, inducing societal collapse and eventually rendering human civilization as we know it untenable. The urgent task is to establish a new pathway to a 'Stabilized Earth' through a radical shift to a paradigm of 'Earth System Stewardship' in the era of the Anthropocene (Steffen et al., 2018). It is no longer alarmist to state the facts. The reality is that 'this changes everything' (Klein, 2014). Understanding the full implications of this reality and taking the actions needed to seriously address these acute multiple crises is the central historical imperative of our times. We cannot ignore the persistently high aggregate levels of global poverty and mounting evidence of rising inequality in wealth (Piketty & Goldhammer, 2014). For some, the much vaunted and yet chimerical 'global governance' in the post-Global Financial Crisis era should be (re)constructed to move humanity towards a more equitable, just, and sustainable world order, as McKeon (2017) argues. While the most powerful corporate and military elites and nation states in the current world (dis)order are still able to prominently shape the world's direction in response to climate change (Buxton & Hayes, 2015), new political forces are simultaneously arising within and across many nations, drawing on 'anti' and 'alter' globalization perspectives and the lived experiences of (mal)development practices. There is growing interest in and momentum towards reconstituting the solidarity of global forces of resistance (Cox & Nilsen, 2014; Gills & Chase-Dunn, 2019). The voices and praxes of the social forces emanating from the Global South are pivotal to this conjuncture in the history of radical movements for social transformation. This is the view of a growing number of critical scholars and activists around the world. This awakening is conjoined with calls for decoloniality and pluriversality, for recognition and deployment of multiple epistemologies and ontologies (Gudynas, 2016; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018; Santos, 2007).

In the name of the 'urgency of (doing) now and here', the urgency of being ready for what appears to be a chaotic future, one potentially full of revolutionary moments and movements, continues to remain lacking in the Left's imagination and in critical scholarship-activism. This is not to undervalue the rising utopian experimentalism of today's post-capitalist interstitial alternatives that attempt to embody visions of the future in contemporary, concrete, realistic practices within the self-reliant, self-entrenching niches of capitalism (Wright, 2018). Rather, it is to make an urgent call for revitalizing the tradition of transcending capital (Wright, 2018). As we argue later, to help resurrect much-needed historical agency, a 'critical utopianism' is needed to overcome the false dichotomy between the old transcending utopia and the new interstitial utopian impulse. The utopian dimension of 'the ruthless critique of everything existing' (Foster, 2018) needs to be complemented with the critical dimension of utopian collective imagination.

To presently exercise the future change that we want to bring about ('be the change you wish to see') is not enough. We also need to surpass to the future change we are presently struggling to be by challenging the way the ruling systems have shaped the foundations of our imagination and inquiry. To do so, critical global studies (CGS) need to be actively developing and systematically engaging in communities of communal enquiry, where facts/realities and values/ideals are constantly (re)assessed in their contexts, and the emancipatory legacies of the past are put into new dialogue with the radical utopian imaginaries of the future. Efforts for the liberation of our critical transformative imagination—through self-reflection and intellectual-political engagement—will keep pushing our debates beyond the contours of Eurocentric, (post-)modernist, or liberal humanist perspectives (Darian-Smith, 2015). And yet, radical transformative counter-hegemonic discourses and praxis remain in a formative phase and have not yet fully kept historical pace with the acceleration of the forces of global(ized) capital(ism) driving towards catastrophe.

Critical scholarship during this 'interregnum' faces numerous challenges on the path to producing new knowledge of Self, Other, and the pluriversal histories of civilizations. The old 'normal' is not yet dead and the new 'normal' not yet born. Seductively intertwined development-globalization discourses have been the pivot around which a Western dominated global capitalist structure has revolved. During the present historic era of the decomposition of this hegemonic project, neo-structuralist and post-structuralist critiques are also in jeopardy, facing the challenge of **now what?** To depart from this historical impasse, we need to radically revise our conceptual lexicons and restructure our political agendas. At the heart of this new struggle lies 'the critical' as a feature that defined several decades of diverse intellectual currents and movements of resistance with respect to modern(ist) globalization (Andrews, 2013). The question now is: What does it mean to be 'critical' in an era of mounting acute contradictions and crises, where de-globalizing social forces are outpacing constructive development, and where criticism runs out of steam as its objects of critique fast approach a historical dead-end? What new directions should, or could, a new radical transformative critical scholarship take?

The first step is to question 'the critical' tradition anew, and the critique of extant forms of power/hegemony and disobedience, rebellion and resistance. The critical now needs to be made conscientiously transformative. Much greater analytical and political attention should be shifted to the radical imagination of utopian practices and visions that bear the potential to

radically refashion human and nonhuman life. Upon that basis we can make increased efforts to explore innovative ways through which the historical, natural, and civilizational capacities for liberation can be realized through radical transformative praxis.

Quite often, power is associated with reality, and the moral truth with ideality. But it is inadequate to concentrate on investigating the contradictions in the domain of dominance and exploitation without simultaneously analyzing opportunities for new kinds of resistance and transformative movements to emerge. A critical analysis should not fall short of acknowledging the existential basis on which the struggles for the realization of moral truth are grounded or treat them as entities that belong to the domain of imaginative or visionary ideals which are deemed merely dependent on the failures, flaws, and crises of the dominant systems-discourses. Rather, it is on the terrain of such collective struggles that real social alternatives are constructed. Where such struggles fall short of their own principles and visions, or devolve into struggles over supremacy, it is our responsibility as scholars to show how this happens and how it can be prevented or reversed.

Without indulging in romanticizing the past and emerging/future alternatives, a radical transformative scholarship should aim to discover the historical, ecological, and civilizational capacities and experiences of human emancipation. A global history of resistance is yet to be written. It is also necessary to facilitate cross-fertilization across context-specific alternatives. Thus, the greatest challenge is to overcome the fragmented and often chaotic nature of pluralism, without succumbing to totalizing narratives of moral truth. This requires endeavors to furnish a common language where dialogical communication and collaboration between different historical projects can fruitfully happen. Such a new agenda in CGS requires a shift in the epistemological underpinning of our theories, i.e. to embrace a 'critical utopianism', and a shift in our ontology from the dualism of humanity vs. nature and of the truth vs. the real, towards a new dialectic of the truth and the real.

We argue that the severity of the present global socio-ecological crises, now accelerating and moving towards possible global catastrophe, demands an urgent focus on radical transformations, profoundly affecting global change in theory and practice. Below, we will discuss features of such a radical transformative paradigm. We start this process by critically reflecting on a globalist tendency within our community of critical thinkers (see the next section). By critically revisiting what identifies CGS as 'critical', we will discuss how a 'ruthlessly critical' appraisal of what it means to be the critical in the current context of civilizational crises requires us to transform the field into a transformative project, fundamentally independent of mainstream discursive lexicons and historical logics. This is particularly acute in the current context of what some call the 'post-globalization' era (Latham, 2016), characterized by the weakening of previous patterns of global and regional integration, on-going economic weakening following the global financial crisis of 2008 and its aftermath (Roberts, 2016), and the widespread resurgence of nationalist/populist politics and ideologies and authoritarianism.

Global studies in the post-globalization era

Global Studies Encyclopedic Dictionary (Chumakov, Mazour, & Gay, 2014, p. 223) defines Global Studies as a multi-disciplinary but integrative field of investigation aimed at analyzing globalization, global problems, and global processes. This definition signifies a routinely accepted perception among scholars in this field that global studies is ultimately

about globalization and its impacts on human beings and the biosphere. A special issue of *Globalizations* in 2013 hosted a debate on global studies between a number of leading scholars in this field. Jan Nederveen Pieterse (2013), in his extensive review of global studies, criticized the field for not being adequately and systematically interdisciplinary, multi-centric, and recognizing the multidimensionality of global change. He never the less recognizes a rather linear progress in the evaluation of the field, which itself indicates an emerging capacity for what he envisions as an analytically different approach to the existing trends.

From their early stages, social scientific studies of globalization have been aware of the multiplicity of global transformations and of the serious structural contradictions promoted by globalization (Amoore et al., 2000; Steger, 2013). This trend is, however, not satisfactorily mature and thus still requires us to become more reflective of the implications of the growing contradictions for the metatheoretical assumptions that underpin our theories in global studies. What remains puzzling is the situation whereby the more CGS has acknowledged the existing complexities, the more is added to our confusion(s); mostly as the result of addressing so many contradictory processes under a totalizing framing. CGS can no longer be exclusively about globalization, since the notion itself, whether in the sense of time–space compression in all major aspects of life across the globe, or as an expansionist economic (neo)liberalization trend, has exhausted its capacity to play the role of the ‘theory of everything’. In fact, it has already started to lose its conceptual centrality, reflecting the way recent major social transitions are now transpiring (for more debates on this, see Hosseini & Gills, 2018).

Many studies show that processes through which social relations have crossed their traditionally established boundaries have actually been asymmetrical, partial, and directed by sources of power (Held & Kaya, 2007; Scholte, 2000). These processes have resulted in responses such as the World Social Forum, that attempt to connect transformative social forces from across the world, but also in fragmentations, e.g. in regional entities such as the European Union (recently manifested by the Brexit referendum result in the UK) or mobilization of right-wing movements and national-populism, as well as a broad range of various reformist, hybridizing, and radically transformative alternative movements across the globe. The acknowledgment of the partiality of globalization processes is a step forward (Scholte, 2008). However, such a moderation by changing the ‘G word’ to a ‘g word’ still fails to recognize that there are similarly important processes that need to be analyzed in their interactive relation to one another, rather than separately, as is the case today in much of existing global studies. This includes processes such as: localization, internationalization, polarization, Americanization, McDonaldization, creolization, hybridization, and Balkanization (O’Byrne & Hensby, 2011). These are multiple processes in interaction with one another, rather than simply being the multiform of one mega-phenomenon called globalization.

The more such processes infiltrate into our analysis, the more the analytical autonomy of ‘globalization’ weakens. Pieterse’s (2013) proposed reformation, by maintaining commitment to the centrality of globalization in his ideal value-added global studies, however, leaves the current paradigm mainly unchallenged. A profound shift is needed towards giving primacy to studies of existing, emerging, and potential alternatives to the dominant paradigms of globalization as led by global capital. This requires a radical change

in our conception of reality. The reality of most contemporary global developments is an ever-increasing accumulation of failure, destruction, and discontent. Thus, to consider 'what is to be done' as a secondary or utopian task is now 'unrealist(ic)'. If the aim of a radical transformative scholarship is to overcome the dystopian and unjust reality of the present and contribute to the construction of realistic utopian futures, then exploring the critical truth of a viable utopia is arguably the most important feature of the radical imagination in this common struggle. To be perpetually locked into elaborating criticism of capital and its contradictions can unintentionally lead to reinforcement of its perceived supremacy (El Khoury, 2015). It is in fact radical change that is now the realistic; not a fantasy or illusion.

A transformative approach must thus start from exploring the alternative ways of living that are extant or that are now arising and move forward to examine the methods of empowering them. The aim should be to critically advance our ontologies, axiologies, epistemologies, and praxeologies by centrally integrating the transformative mind and human agency (Stetsenko, 2017). While the number of studies of context-specific alternatives has been growing in recent years, concrete projects to explore the potential for integrating these into macro-scale models of national, regional, and global transformations are still relatively absent (Kothari, 2020).

Demanding the impossible: the core features of a radical transformative scholarship

We have argued for the necessity of a more systematic development of an action-oriented transformative scholarship as a project to transform CGS in response to contemporary global eco-sociological urgency. The primacy of truth (i.e. what ought to be ethically rightful and existentially sustainable and independent of subjective constructions), over reality (i.e. these sense of beings as they are constructed epistemologically and institutionally) is the guiding principle in this common scholarly struggle. However, accepting that there is no universal truth but 'the plurality of truths' does not mean that we should accept total incommensurability in the multiverse of truth-making narratives. A different universality is needed. This implies a 'post-imperialist' 'cosmopolitics' of many cosmopolitan particularisms (i.e. contextualized discourses that address global issues and tend to intrinsically consider or incorporate others) in Ribeiro's words (2011), or what we have elsewhere called 'transversalism' (Gills, Hosseini, & Goodman, 2017; Hosseini, Gills, & Goodman, 2017).

To be radically transformative, the common critical base now needs to be profoundly rethought in terms of at least five features which must be pursued more profoundly than before: (I) epistemologically existentialist and axiologically judgmental; (II) analytically mindful of socio-ecological complexities and contingencies; (III) inter-contextually transversalist; (IV) critically utopian(ist) and pragmatically imaginative; and finally (V) ontologically dialectical.

I Epistemologically existentialist and axiologically judgmental

Many inquiries in CGS draw upon the legacy of 'critical social theory', mainly underpinned by the German idealism and abstract Kantian universalism, the critique of instrumental rationality, and the rejection of positivism. This post-empiricist tradition has widened its scope by incorporating a broader range of analytical approaches, including historical

materialist, dialogical, and post-structuralist analyses. The sufficiency of this critical tradition in dealing with non-Western experiences has, however, been questioned (El-Ojeili & Hayden, 2006; Roach, 2008).

Rejection of orthodox positivism is not enough. Both positivist and counter-positivist constructionist approaches share what we call 'epistemological essentialism' which considers that truth can only be achieved through a particular mode of knowing. The neo/positivist paradigm in social sciences takes a foundationalist stand, by arguing that objectivity, and thereby truth, are achievable when the distorting qualities of our subjectivity as cognizant value bounded observers are cancelled out by the application of value free methods. Objectivism of such a foundationalist stance is of course rejected by CGS. However, critical theorists in CGS, except for some critical realists, share the epistemological essentialism that underlies positivism, i.e. the epistemic account of truth as the only possible account. They reject the possibility of reaching truth since they believe it is not possible to free our epistemes from values that distort our understanding of reality.

According to this post-empiricism, we can never know the object in and of itself but only our epistemic constructions of it. The object of knowledge tends to differ from one observer/observation/experience/cultural context to another. Thus, reality multiplies as (if) it only exists in multiple human experience. This epistemology is essentialist in the sense that it is based on the primacy of the essence of the object (grasped only through our cognitive capacity) over the being/existence of the object of our knowledge. However, this universal denial of the possibility of realizing the truth remains itself a totalizing assertion. Moreover, despite being open to the use of critical reflexivity and inter-subjectivity to expose the impact of values, no systematic engagement in judgmental discussions of the moral rightfulness of reality is pursued. Therefore, the ethical obligation of the researcher to challenge injustices is reduced to critical descriptions of the reality of such injustices (normally using sophisticated jargon inaccessible to the subjects of the research) and to the (supposedly honest) self-reflexive exposure of the axiological assumptions that underpin these descriptions.

Radical transformative scholarship cannot rely on such an epistemic account of reality with an axiological reflexivity that leads to, and ends in, relativism, with its totalizing denial of the truth. To be radically transformative, one must hold the view that the 'real world' exists relatively independent of human experiences and consciousness, but also that human practices and subjective constructions (including critical scholarship) have consequences that can be evaluated in terms of their moral implications. Otherwise, every conception of social change will be as equally 'true' as others, and the persuasion of change in a specific direction becomes morally senseless. To overcome this performative contradiction and move beyond relativism, we therefore need to acknowledge and draw on our capacity to judge between different interpretations of reality and the moral implications of believing and applying them in practice. Bhaskar's 'Judgmental rationalism' (Porpora, 2015) needs to be complemented with what we may call 'judgmental axiology'. In other words, to be radically transformative, the critical ought to be morally judgmental.

Axiological assumptions that influence inquiry in CGS often remain un-examined. This is partly because many critical researchers in practice give precedence to their axiological assumptions (see Guba & Lincoln, 2005). There is a principal axiological question that informs our critical inquiry (Heron & Reason, 1997): i.e. what is essentially 'valuable' in

human life and what sort of knowledge is intrinsically 'valuable'? Our approach to answering this question influences our epistemological attempts to evaluate the credibility of our knowledge. Therefore, axiology mediates between knowledge (theory) and life (practice). Axiological differences thus make theorization difficult across paradigms, which requires us to draw on our abilities for making moral/aesthetical judgments.

Our inability to epistemologically grasp social reality in its totality creates a gap between the existential aspect of reality and its subjective constructions, making the former relatively independent of the latter. This gap may be unbridgeable epistemologically. However, existentialist meta-theories of knowledge argue that we can intuitively apprehend social entities by proactively experiencing them and placing our 'beings' in their context; engagement in reconstructing the self/world and thereby in the reproduction of in-praxis-knowledge (Hosseini, 2010). We suggest that a project needs to be pursued more systematically to address the challenges posed by epistemological relativism. If the ontological objectivity of reality (truth) is incomprehensible, we will then be left with two options to assure ourselves that our critical communal inquiry is justified: (1) assessing the technical applicability of our findings in achieving what is perceived as progress (a technocratic, pragmatist path to truth); and (2) assessing how convincing the findings are found by others who may not share our points of view (a never-ending dialogical path to truth). There is, however, a way out of this dilemma if we give up the Western dualism of object–subject. It is possible to draw on our faculties for judgmental and moral reasoning (see subsections IV and V for more debate).

II Analytically mindful of socio-ecological complexities and contingencies

Attempts are being made in CGS to theorize the complexities of global transformations, such as the contradictory associations between global integrations and fragmentations, order and disorder, and how the multidimensionality and the multi-spatiality of global change should be grasped. These efforts can be differentiated between those who draw directly on complexity or chaos theory, and those who use a broader theoretical framing (Hosseini, 2009; Urry, 2003; Walby, 2009).

In the post-GFC context, the required ontological shift in CGS necessitates an equal, if not greater, scrutiny of the upsurge of the local and the national (in the forms of resistance and sources of future transitions) from *within* the global (Hosseini, 2013b). Another aspect of the ontological complexity is related to the relations between human and nonhuman beings. The two are mutually constituted beings that coevolve through the dynamic socio-ecological webs of life. Analysis of pluriversal worlds, where cross-species sociality, cohabitation, and co-evolution happen, needs to be incorporated into our critical theories. Capacity of things to produce effects that exceed human intentionality, i.e. nonhuman vitality and *thing power* should be considered, especially when human activities guided under the regimes of capital violate this vitality and result in chaotic and destructive contingencies such as climate change. The reductionist divide between culture and nature in modern ontology is closely associated with the divide between us (the moderns) and the Other (the primitives).

Overcoming nature–culture dualism requires us to engage with and learn from the non-modern, from Indigenous epistemes, with their sophisticated relationships with nature. The aim should be to forge new approaches to studying how socio-ecological collectives come to being and evolve. Moreover, in practice, struggles to protect Indigenous sovereignty are

normally linked to the protection of nature in many places. Post-humanist ontological assumptions can then be decolonized through the localization of struggles and engagements. However, provincialization of knowledge must not lead to ignoring the fact of the planet's biogeographical and geohistorical totality. The planetary ecosystem has a locality as large as its globality. In other words, the multiplicity of all eco-social beings should not blind us to the totality of their shared experiences, the vitality of their common existence, and shared destinies shaped through interactions and power relations. The central message of contemporary global climate change and the sciences that analyze this is a realization that the ecosystems of the planet are deeply interconnected. All life on this planet is profoundly interrelated. There are no ecosystems safe from the effects of climate change.

III Inter-contextually transversalist

More recent developments in CGS strongly argue for going beyond the Eurocentric legacy and 'metropole-centered logic' that still exists even among critical theorists, by incorporating Southern and subaltern perspectives and by reflecting on the experiences of the solidarity networks and internationalist coalitions in the so-called Global South. The wider implications of new approaches to studying Southern experiences in globalization/development studies certainly need to be discussed. However, many such promises have yet remained either unfulfilled or excessively idealized (Amar, 2014; Gray & Gills, 2016; Santos, 2014).

Neoliberalist discourses affect communities in multiple ways as they translate into local experiences and contextualize their agendas in different cultural settings. Practices of transformative research require engagement with communities to learn from their rich array of procreative knowledge, while taking the impacts of Eurocentric modes of mal-modernization on the traditional thoughts and habitus into account. The aim, however, should be to enhance (and not just simply to enlarge) our repertoire of cognitive modes of dealing with diverse experiences of civilizational changes by incorporating non-Western thoughts.

There are a number of dilemmas in this process of moving beyond Eurocentrism that need to be embedded into transformative scholarship. (1) Passive acknowledgment of non-Western traditions of thought and practice cannot simply lead to a progressive shift in our theoretical agenda setting (Kerner, 2018). We need to engage in the critique of both past and present forms of global asymmetries of power relations and consider a critical assessment of how such global power structures have shaped mainstream Eurocentric scholarly traditions and the modernized scholarships in the Global South. (2) What we may brand as Eurocentric knowledge has **not** been advanced in a geohistorical vacuum isolated from, or through a totally submissive relationship with, the Rest. Thus, it should not be categorically demonized. Western scholarship is heterogeneous, and it contains many elements of critical thinking and emancipatory thought that have been germinated through interactions with non-Western modes of resistance (Nandy, 1988).

Moreover, the Eastern roots of Western civilization(s) are not limited only to natural and mathematical sciences. A deconstruction of Western humanities reveals these emancipatory potentials that are shared across the West vs. the Rest divide. Falling into a reactionary Occidentalism is counterintuitive. (3) Occidentalism (a reactionary third worldist, counter-Orientalist backlash) has significant overlaps with Orientalism; both being instrumental instabilizing hierarchies within their regions, though the former can be seen as a regressive response to, and therefore an effect of, the latter by mimicking its logic. In both Western and

non-Western traditions of thought, in addition to emancipatory potentials, one can also find ideological modes of legitimizing patriarchal, hierarchical, and ecologically unsustainable relations as well as intentional attempts to monopolize authenticity. Therefore, uncritical incorporation of non-Western, Southern, or Indigenous perspectives would not allow us to truly overcome the limits of Eurocentrism.

The above three dilemmas require global studies to engage in a mutual criticism of both Northern and Southern epistemes, through deconstructing their underlying power–knowledge nexuses, as well as an exploration of their emancipatory experiences and utopian potential. The outcome will be far richer than affirmative supplementations and inter-contextual dialogues. Instead, a critical autonomous position is needed to orchestrate liberation between the criticisms of the so-called Western and the non-Western, while taking global asymmetries and colonialist relations between the two into account and attempting to cross-fertilize between their capacities for liberation (Hosseini, 2013a). We call this process **CROSS-contextual transversalization**; a translation of problem-solving experiences and utopian imagineering in each side of the global divide (theorized in their own terms and right) to the other side for the sake of reciprocal learning rather than imitating or imposing. The aim in Sundberg's (2014, p. 33) terms is 'to foster engagements open to conversing with and walking alongside other epistemic [and ontological] worlds'.

Cross-contextual transversalization entails questioning our naïve stigmatization of non-modern inquiries driven by axiological concerns around beauty, love, or spirituality; an arrogance rooted in the universalization of a geohistorically idiosyncratic experience that continues to underpin CGS theories, even post-humanist critical theories. The ontological dualism of human (culture) vs. nonhuman (nature) questioned by post-humanism would still not be adequately dealt with if we continue to devalue non-Western knowledge schemes as superstitious belief systems for being engaged with queries about the non-physical (as 'transmaterial'). There have been myriad ways through which a multiplicity of active beings, cast as human and nonhuman, engage in the co-production of socio-ecological webs of life (Campbell, 1968–76). Having said that, we wish to emphasize that neglecting the effects of the pre-colonial knowledge-power systems of exploitation of labor and nature on the formation of the local/Indigenous/traditional epistemes in both the West and the East is as risky as neglecting the effects of colonialist and imperialist histories.

Inter-contextual dialogues and praxes in our transformative scholarships must cast light on the possibilities of intra-contextual dialogues to avoid regenerating the monological representations of each context. The requirement for any functioning cross-contextual transversalization is the reflexive recognition of reciprocal weaknesses and normative potentials for emancipation. However, in agreement with Halvorsen (2018), we need to be mindful of the fact that the process of learning from the South runs the risk of exacerbating the existing epistemic expropriations and thereby sustaining Anglophone hegemony in global studies.

IV Critically utopianist and pragmatically imaginative

CGS goes beyond mere criticism of corporate modes of production and reproduction and seeks to systematically and conscientiously pave the way for understanding forces of resistance, transformative movements, and post-imperialist, post-globalist, and post-capitalist futures. There are many ways through which the relationship between capital and its

counter/alter forces have evolved. Pursuing a systemic understanding of the multiplicity of these relationships (which are more complex than Gramscian antagonism) needs to be shifted to the center of our transformative scholarship. Questions like the following can then be raised: How do spaces of alterity—where the post-capitalist modes of life are experienced—gain momentum, resist capital's domineering power, reform or challenge totalizing singularity of global capital? How are they being appropriated, oppressed, or coopted by capital? In what conditions do they coexist with capital without being a serious threat to its principles, and in what conditions do they grow strong enough to subvert or replace the hegemonic capitalist relations?

It would be inadequate to primarily explore and empower the increasingly shaped informal/infra-political possibilities of liberation and in parallel try to reform and reclaim the formal order (e.g. democratization of the public sector and the regulation of markets). Dichotomic analyses along binaries like formal vs. informal and revolutionary vs. reformist are misleading. The formal vs. informal division is problematic. The link between the two is more complex and multifaceted. The real challenge is to explore the overlap between the two arenas and bring their transformative forces together into a more concerted project. Reforming the formal is inadequate since the state is more than a potential facilitator for the realization of informal capacities. The state (representing the public sector as a social commons) needs to be reclaimed, (re)occupied, and rescued from the control of capital, as another alternative and as a potentially commoning space, to achieve a full-fledged transition to post-capital worlds. Therefore, the (re)imagineering of utopian futures must include the invention of the state and its relocation.

Investigating emancipatory movements and moments for the realization of utopian visions should not simply provide materials for understanding their social subjectivity ('agential ingenuity'). It must also pave the way to an understanding of the existing 'non-actualized possibilities inherent' in every situation as well as the structural constraints that impinge/enable the actualization of such utopian potentials (Archer, 2019; Bhaskar, 2016). Establishing joint projects between active academics, committed to radical democratic aspirations, and grassroots activists with utopian visions is necessary as part of the transformative methodology. This is an endless process that cannot be finalized in any singular research program. It requires economic independence of educational/scholarly systems from the state and market requirements. The idea behind this ambition is that the engine of social change is neither objective **social facts** per se, nor merely social agents' intentions, wills, imaginations, and actions. Rather, it is located somewhere between facts and values, between norms and praxes, between what we qualify as true **reality** and what we define as moral truth.

Much is said about the power and importance of imagination (Graeber, 2016). That how today we are so short of it when it comes to use it to think up better worlds or effective solutions to the macro crises that pose existential threats to planetary life. But today's moral deficit goes hand in hand with the deficit in imagination. That imagination is either suppressed or reduced to technocratic and managerial flights of fancy. Utopian imaginations are even demoralized and demonized by those who constantly remind us of the failed socialist systems in the last century, while disguising their own idealistic utopia of a trickle-down economy with endless growth under pseudo-scientific technical terms and jargonistic theories. To liberate society from the myths of modernity and capital, we need to liberate and

radicalize the imagination. Global studies needs to go beyond regulative ideas like justice and freedom and focus on rekindling the radical imagination (Chrostowska, 2019).

A society incapable of actualizing such an ultimately human faculty will decline into retrotopian tendencies of worshiping idealized and homogenized images of the past. This dystopian devolution is unfolding right in front of our eyes and offers nothing but confused and confusing explanations! However, the utopian imagination, when deprived of empathy and morality, can easily devolve into the construction of new modes of domination, administration, and discipline. This leads us to conclude that a radical transformative scholarship needs to be constructively critical of utopian imaginaries and systematically seekout their pathological flaws. A critical utopianism thus must be added to our transformative scholarship; i.e. reflexive analyses of past and present utopian endeavors through critical reflections on their historical failures and flaws.

A transformative scholarship is not isolated from the context of research. To minimize the bias and prejudice in our theorizations of society, praxis-oriented critical dialogues among transformative scholars with their subjects of study are necessary. In a transformative critical approach to studying social change, what is essential is to provide such a dialogue in a regenerative form to enhance social knowledge about the social and ideational construction of utopian visions and their related structural-causal factors (Bhaskar, 2016). This can be a vicious circle—as it has been mostly so far—without demolishing the wall between theory and practice.

An organic connection between the field of transformative investigation and the field of political action is secured by keeping distance and at the same time being close to transformative actions. It is uncritical to be passively sympathetic with the values and goals of transformative movements. Also, there is no need to define a missionary task on the part of a researcher to provide actors with a consciousness that they are apparently not able to produce for themselves. The dialogical relationship between researchers and social actors is itself an experience for both sides to participate in constructing an intense, plural, and sometimes contradictory system of meanings that constitutes the collective in-praxis cognition.

V Ontologically dialectical

What are the implications of such a radical transformative scholarship for our social ontology? Transformative global studies must reject the homogenizing conceptions of global change based on which a single model subsumes all other possibilities and realities into its self-conceived purview. Capital remains hegemonic as it continues to characterize our civilizations, reorders societies (Nitzan & Bichler, 2009), and flows through and shapes our web of life (Moore, 2017). This however, as El Khoury warns, must not colonize our imaginations and/or ability to conceive and practice meaningful alternatives to capital (El Khoury, 2015, p. 5). Understanding ‘the being behind beings’ and the truth behind multiple manifestations of reality is what an emancipatory ontology basically seeks by investigating the didactical relation between totality and particularity. In Brincat and Gerber’s (2015, p. 872) words:

Central to dialectics is its account of totality...Dialectical analysis, then, requires the utmost precision to ensure its ontological postulates

(interconnectivity, contradiction, negation, sublation and flux, amongst others) are directly reflected in how it accounts for the temporal, spatial and cultural context in which transformations take place.

When translated to methodology, a dialectic stance affords meaningful engagement with difference to generate more inclusive insights of totality (Greene & Hall, 2010).

Moreover, a transformative scholarship is expected to take part in (re)imagining and proclaiming new spaces of hope outside the control of capital (formal or informal), if it is supposed to break us free from subordination to the rules of capital. Sites and networks of transformation are ontologically important in their own right and not just simply as oppositions to the systems of subordination that are perceived as **the real**. Many post-capital alternatives (such as commoning or cooperative-communal economies) consist of strong elements of pre-capitalist modes of livelihood and have deep historical roots in millennia of past human existence as part of that 'nature' that has shaped the nature of humanity.

A dialectical ontology would not only theorize how to take advantage of the contradictions of capitalist power relations, but also and more importantly, draw on the power of imagineering alternatives to capital that ontologically need not be dependent on the utilization of the system's contradictions. To explore and theorize the existing tendencies towards a totalizing singularity (of capital above all) and the contradictory multiplicity of these tendencies, as well as the plurality of resisting and transforming forces, are the most challenging tasks for our active scholarship. It is not adequate to prevent our imaginations from being colonized by the supremacy of totalizing systems (grasped in our criticism of power) but rather we must liberate our visions from being overwhelmed by the chaotic plurality of alternatives (Bookchin, 1990; Brincat & Gerber, 2015). Without being trapped into the business of replacing the totalizing world-ecology of the Capitalocene with another totalizing system or a subsuming narrative, radical transformative scholarship can develop new dialectical frameworks to promote creolization, cooperation, and alliance among the present and imminent utopian praxes/visions.

Conclusions

We now face severe planetary and civilizational crises, interrelated and mutually constitutive of one another at unprecedented scales caused by the 'globalization' of a hegemonic mode of civilizational '(mal-)development' (Figueroa Helland & Lindgren, 2016; Gills & Chase-Dunn, 2019). These crises pose existential threats to planetary life and thus present profound challenges to the meta-theoretical and meta-ethical bases of mainstream (including Westerncritical) social scholarship. It is now time to bravely explore the realm of 'impossibility' by (re)imagineering alternative lifeways beyond capital, beyond carbon, and beyond commodity-oriented cumulative growth and their associated narrow rationalities. In other words, critiquing neoliberal, capitalist, developmentalist, and global(ization)ist forms of modernity should now be informed by our critical engagement with real emancipatory communal struggles.

Borrowing from Bauman (2017), in today's liquid modernity, we are witnessing an increasing dissolution of old structures, institutions, and modes of modern sociality. In such a critical historical conjuncture, ironically, even capital can no longer rely on crises and disruptions to save the system. Widely used reparative measures like austerity policies and quantitative

easing are clearly meant to save the capitalists and not the system in its entirety. The ongoing decoupling of political power from a morally responsible management of crises faced by the entire planetary ecosystem (including human civilizations) has made the institutions of democratic accountability too dysfunctional to rest upon merely the self-regulating mechanisms of capital, regardless of how effective those mechanisms are celebrated to be in today's conditions. This has led to the moment of evident irreparable systemic collapse (the interregnum) fueled by moral impulse and empathic imagination (Kociatkiewicz & Kostera, 2018). While still being ambitious, societies seem to run out of faith in the power of utopian imaginations and hope.

The dominion of truths (what 'right'-fully ought to be and what 'truly' is) is occupied by the realm of what is sold to us as the real. An ontological recognition of the truth turns our critical scholarship to a transformative one by setting an action-oriented agenda to explore the potentials for liberation which starts from the liberation of critical knowledge from the imperatives of asymmetrical power relations between subject and object, Southern and Northern, modern and primitive. This requires us to more proactively engage in emancipatory projects defined and implemented together with grassroots social movements and communities, harvesting existing and actualizing potential collective agency and solidarity in the socio-ecological nexuses of life.

Recent pluralistic endeavors to seek utopia should be the guiding context for criticizing the illusionary constructions of reality, not the other way around (Chrostowska, 2019). The 'ought' cannot be simply inferred from the 'is' and the 'ought' must not determine the 'is'. The former (inference) leads to naïve realism and the latter (determination) directs naïve idealism. Rather, a radical transformative agenda in global studies puts the 'ought' and the 'is' into a critical dialectical interaction.

And last but not least, it is no longer enough to criticize power for obscuring reality. Power undermines human potentials for liberation by stripping historical agency off the social subjects, turning them into submissive creatures. Empowering democracy requires democratizing the processes of knowledge construction and publicizing resources of information through cooperative education. Radical transformative scholarship should therefore be critical of its own institutional infrastructures and take part in resisting the growing trend of the corporatization of (higher) education and push for institutional transformations toward creating cooperative academia and knowledge commons.

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Note

1 An intellectual excursion into a post-Eurocentric world of philosophy can be insightful here. Of a great importance is an alternative existentialism, originally articulated by the towering but rebellious philosopher of the references result of a radical turn in his intellectual career, Mulla Sadra argued against the 'primacy of essence' over 'existence' which was prominent throughout the history of late Antiquity, Hellenistic, Medieval Christian, and Islamic philosophical traditions up until his time and

beyond. Sadrian ontology allows us to see singularity behind multiplicity of social process without reducing the latter to the former in a totalizing manner. It replaces the 'primacy of essence' (epistemological essentialism) that leads to the epistemological dualism of objectivity vs. subjectivity with the 'primacy of being' (ontological existentialism) that promotes ontological independence of the truth-making being from our epistemological constructions of reality (Kamal, 2016).

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