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Abstract

Over the last few decades, relationality has become a buzzword across different disciplines of social and political V F L H Q F H V Z K L F K K D V L Q L W L D W H G W K H W D O N V R I D ³ U H O D W L R Q D O W individualist modes of analysis. The relations within and between individuals, societies, institutions, and human and non-human objects are considered not simply as a mode of interaction between separated and disparate H Q W L W L H V E X W W K H V H H Q W L W L W L V Q D U H Q V K E R L J K J F W Q V E W L W F R W H G E \ ' part. In this paper, I aim to explore relationality and comparison in political theory, especially concerning comparative political theory. Although comparative political theory is an emerging subfield that explores the Z R U N V R : H V Q R P o l i t i c a l t h i n k e r s D V Z H O G : B V W F B Q ' L G H D V D E R X W S R O L W L F V W of comparative political theory is not quite novel. Political theorists have been comparing different ideas from different traditions since the establishment of the field. What is novel about the comparative political theory is U D W K H U L W V J U R Z L Q J L Q I O X H Q F H D Q G S U H F X U V R U \ U R O H L Q ³ G H F F margins. While this is a meaningful and inspiring effort, the subject of analysis, as well as both the author and audience in this attempt, is still Western. Hence, comparative political theory has also been argued to reproduce the dichotomy that it was set to demolish, which is the ~~separ~~ if not the divide, between Western and non-Western intellectual traditions. This paper will rethink this puzzle of comparison as a method for decolonizing political theory concerning relationality and address two main questions: Can relationality be a better normative basis for decolonizing the way we think about political concepts and issues? Should comparative political theory become more relational to respond to the b ed to the b ed to the b ed to the b ed to the b ing the in que

-centric scope, objectives, and modes of inquiry.

First, with the widespread calls for ~~centring~~ political theory beyond the Western canon from both a more global and more localized perspective at the same time, comparative political theory (CPT) has gained considerable attention as an emerging subfield that brings non-Western ideas, thinkers, methods, and questions to the centre of political thinking. In the intersection of comparative politics and political theory, ~~implies~~ that this process can be ameliorated through the use of methods of comparison. Although what comparison entails as

Linares 2019; Qin 2018; Selg and Ventsel 2020). These relational approaches often subsume the broader separationist paradigm of Western liberal thought. By challenging the individualistic assumptions of Western liberal discourses of relationality, they challenge the foundational ideas and thought patterns that are based on binary thinking, including values such as autonomy, agency, subjectivity, and freedom. In contrast, they highlight embedded networks of relations between individuals, groups, communities, institutions, geographical spaces, environment, law, human and non-human actors or actants, etc.

Despite their growing popularity and promises for the future, both relationality and comparative political theory suffer from a similar problem: what they actually mean, in themselves and in relation to one another, including their theoretical/methodological implications and conceptual/historical genealogies, remain largely unclear and undertheorized. As a result, while covering parallel domains, their critique posited against foundational assumptions of Western liberal discourse is the

specific to a very particular geography ~~the~~ place, historicity, and discourse within the boundaries of the EuroAmerican West.

Like relationality, CPT is in an ongoing dialogue with not just Western traditions of political thought, but also other critical traditions within Western thought including postcolonial, decolonial, poststructuralist, postcolonialist, feminist, new materialist theories. The call CPT makes by invoking comparison as a method to challenge overreliance is for political theorists to expand their location of thought through worldtravelling, as Lugones (1987) might call it, which is also in line with Von Vacano's formerly mentioned suggestion. In practice, however, this has led to a quick and reiterated not only an assumed dichotomy between the West and non-West but also a false sense of confidence about the very presupposition that the boundaries that separate the West and non-West are self-evident and universally accepted, along with the boundaries between different non-Western traditions of thought being falsely assumed to be distinct and clear (Idris 2016, 2). Despite its promise, therefore, CPT has also been argued to reproduce the dichotomy that it was set to demolish, which is the idea, if not the separation, between the Western and non-Western intellectual traditions (Idris 2016; Amine 2016). There might be different reasons why this has happened, but given the focus of this paper I will focus on the assumed necessity of distinct and separate knowledges for the comparison method to be successful (Dallmayr 2004, March 2009).

Thus, in this paper, I will rethink this puzzle of comparison as a method for decolonizing political theory from a relational perspective with respect to two broad guiding questions: If we think comparison and relationality together, would that provide a better normative basis than comparison alone for decolonizing political theory? Should CPT become more relational to respond to the current broader decolonial challenges and not just the challenges it has set for itself since Roxanne Euben has used the term for the first time in her 1997 paper, after providing a brief overview of the key historical processes that have led to the need for establishing a comparative subjection in political theory, I aim to think through these questions by exploring relationality in key works of CPT by focusing on (1) subjectivity and autonomy and (2) otherness and difference.

According to El Amine, for example, modernity (and not modernization theory) is a shared phenomenon that interlinks the East and the West. The institutional, bureaucratic, and paradigmatic structures modernity has set might have emerged in the West, but since it transformed how different countries operated on a global level, the rest of the world had to follow, albeit in their own ways. For this reason, El Amine argues that if political theorists genuinely aim to take political theory beyond East and West without reproducing mutual essentializations of the East and the West, they should take into account modernity as a global paradigmatic condition shared by the East and the West, the North and South, First World and Third World (El Amine 2016, 106). Along with the advent of the modern, therefore, the second historical factor that has motivated political theorists to engage with Western traditions is globalization. CPT, in many ways, developed as a response to the challenges that culminated in the urgent need to reconceptualize a more globally situated but at the same time more localized forms of political theory to include non-Western ideas, questions, texts, thinkers, and methods through comparison.

While reflecting on the historical conditions that have guided political theorists toward an intercultural dialogue between different traditions of thought, Fred Dallmayr references Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1969, vii; Uehara 2015, 467). While unpredictable times signalling that the world is in the verge of paradigm-shifting socio-political and institutional transformation that is long overdue

Dallmayr unsurprisingly observes that the current epoch we are started with the advent of modern after a long period of unrest and successive inter-religious wars in Europe putting an end to the religious empires. This new epoch of the modern age created based on two main pillars that were held in unresolved tension: individual autonomy and the sovereignty of the modern nation-state. The first one, the individualistic conception of the modern human subject, is based on

away from stability, that is away from the stable identities and stable structures that

greater detail (1) the limits of critique in crosscultural comparison, and (2) the reliance of distinction as a prerequisite for comparison.

The first ones about the rigor of critique while engaging with non-Western texts is critique a Western value? Is disagreement with a Western value? If we engage critically with non-Western political theories (as we do with the Western thought), would that automatically contribute to Western-centric hegemony? Should non-Western political theorizing be fully affirmative? It is observed that when political theorists engage with non-Western texts, the level of criticism they place against the text is less ambitious than when they engage with Western texts. According to El Amine (W K H T X H V W L R Q W R D y o n i t i c a l t h e o r y c o n c e r n e d w i t h t h e E a s t s h o u l d l o o k m o r e l i k e a n t h r o p o l o g y t h a n p o l i t i c a l t h e o r y c o n c e r n e d w i t h t h e W e s t : H V W E I ' A m i n e 2 0 1 6 , 1 0 4) This is coupled with the assertion that disagreement emerging from a non-Western text about, say Western liberalism, or a more specific Western liberal value, is sufficient in itself. As a result, the level of critical engagement with the Western texts remains limited. Thus, in CPT, although scholars argue that Western texts should be in dialogue with the Western texts but at the same time non-Western texts are assumed to be treated fully on their own terms, which does not leave much room for crosscultural engagement (March 2009, 545). \$ V 0 D U F K S R V L W V 3 & R P S D U D W L Y H S R must leave space for political theorists to critique and even reject some of the Western views and theories that we are trying to bring in without fear of necessarily reinforcing K H J H P R Q \ ' 0 D U F. KEI Amine agrees March (2009) on both the philosophic significance of this practice as well as the assumed contributions this makes to decolonizing the Western F H Q W U L F U R R W V R I S R O L W L F D O W K H R U \ 3 V L Q F H S F L W V K L V W R U L F D O P H W K R G V D E U A m i n e 2 0 1 6 , 1 0 4 \ V H Q V L W L Y H W R

These second puzzles about the assumption of distinction as a prerequisite for comparison. CPT relies on a distinct ontological separation between Western and non-Western knowledges, which might lead to a false assumption that: H V W H U Q L G H D V D U H 3 D O L H Q ' (Although CPT has emerged as an effort to respond to the globalization and move toward a more global political thought that aims to decolonize Western hegemony in political theory, as El Amine argues, one of the greatest puzzles of CPT is that fails to take the debate beyond the East-West dichotomy (El Amine 2016, 102). According to El Amine, this is because of the over-emphasis of divergences and differences between assumed distinct and disparate traditions of thought, without accounting for the shared normative and conceptual convergences, such as the shared institutional condition of modernity and the sovereign state.

Similarly, according to March, comparison in political theory rests on two main assumptions: (1) A specific common object of inquiry (2) Distinction (March 2009, 537). March argues F R P S D U L V R Q U H T X L U H V Q R W R Q O \ G L V W L Q F W X Q L W V R I D enduring and generative of knowledge or insights greater than what is derived from treating W K H P L Q Q R Q F R P S D U D W L Y H Z D \ V ' 0 D U F. F o r k i n g d i f f e r e n c e % X W mean and signify? How do we draw distinct boundaries between ideas, concepts, and norms, values across different traditions? What makes the difference between such ideas, concepts,

norms, and values enduring? In so doing, are comparative political theorists helping to fixate non-Western traditions the eternally enduring ontological Others of the Western canon?

According to El Amine, CPT, by definition, relies on the premise that the traditions, practices, values of the East are necessarily distinct and different from that of the West, so that the choice, but it has an epistemic value to claim universal. This foundation assumption of distinction, according to El Amine, unintentionally serves to fix and fixate the boundaries between the West and non-West. In this regard, this presumption of founding difference that neglects the similarities between the East and the West, as well as the fact that the difference between what is considered to be the East and the West is decided by the West, ignored a very important shared condition between the two sides of the world: Modernity. El Amine

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a better approach

therefore, ren (as it appears in historical texts, affirmed by its Confucianist readings) can be considered as a system of obligation based on respect for close relationships and requiring the extension of human behaviour toward those beyond immediate relationships. Coupled with a positive understanding of human nature, Ackerly thinks ren can guide social criticism in a Confucian democracy (Ackerly 2005, 554).

essentially good without implications of an assumed hierarchy attached to it. Following Mengzi, Ackerly therefore () and toward enhancing the essentially good human potential, that of toward suppressing an innately bad human nature. Consequently, a Confucian democracy must foster a Confucian way of life through which, in cultivating ren in a way that is directed toward perfecting the essentially good human nature with a sense of social responsibility that includes politics for all people () (Ackerly 2005, 554).

Third, following Kongzi, Ackerly argues that Confucian democracy should be coupled with the obligation to criticize political authority as a foundation of democracy by offering an institutional space for contestation. This space of contestation will offer every citizen an opportunity to self-reflect on their own practices upon receiving external criticism or criticism

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the realization that relationships the very possibility of independent persons emerge what does this mean for comparative analysis in political theory? (Gergen 2009, 38) If we go back to the puzzle of comparison regarding the requirement of distinction from a CPT D Q G U H W K L Q N L W I U R P perspective this might mean that the very assumption of the necessity of distinction upon a dualistic model of subjectivity, which has its roots on Freudian drive theory. That is, the very assumption of separation of selfhood and otherhood and with it, the need for distinction for comparison is ultimately enrooted in the Western tradition itself. The problem with this reliance is that it locks the relationship at one point in time at a single matrix and determines the borders between West and non-West accordingly. By the time we pick and choose distinct and separate traits of comparison, we limit the relationship. According to Gergen, we should switch to order. We should look at the relationship where the boundaries between different traditions are always negotiated, interfused, and submerged into one another. Until we start our theorizing from that in-between space, between no longer and not yet the relationship itself that determines the subject and the object, we reproduce the dichotomies we were set to dismantle.

Difference and Otherness

Following my discussion on subjectivity, autonomy, and relationality in CPT, in this section will devote closer attention to otherness and difference in CPT and revisit its internal puzzle of critique by bringing in the discussion on the power of evaluating and giving a set of values.

condition of the modern state structure. Due to this immanent interconnection Western political theories share key themes with the Western liberal thought, such as the role of social welfare (Latin American model), good life (East Asian model), or religion (the Middle Eastern model) (El Amine 2016, 107-108).

By presupposing that the non-Western traditions necessarily present us a critique against Western tradition without continuities and similarities accordingly El Amine, we mistakenly reduce the complex relationship between the East and the West to differences and inadequate differences to mean critique. From this understanding, the beginning and the end of comparative political theory becomes the extent to which it challenges the foundational Western assumptions with the limited room allocated to internal discussions of critique within those particular non-Western theories. The very assumption of a complete separation between the Western and the Eastern tradition of thought strategically denies the relationality of the development of ideas. Europe was never distinct and separate from Asia and the ideas always travelled. Thus, the presupposition that equates modernity with Westernization, according to El Amine, denies the option of being modern without being Western.

Why is comparative political theory, and its reliance on comparison as a method that dwells on differences and distinctions, has failed to account for lines of continuities (El Amine 2016, 110).

to the questions and methodologies in the Western thought. For this reason, she examines the works of two Chinese classicists (Jenco 2007, 747-743). Jenco affirms that the Western and non-Western approaches should be distinct, and she believes it is possible to situate and re-ground theory on difference alone.

- H Q F R ¶ V D Q D O a n d W a n g i n t r o d u c e s u s t o a d y n a m i c l e g a c y o f e x e g e s i s a n d i n t e r p r e t a t i o n t h e s e C h i n e s e s c h o l a r s d e v e l o p d e m o n s t r a t e h o w i t i s s t i l l p o s s i b l e f o r a n y o n e t o t h i n k w i t h i n C h i n e s e t h o u g h t i n a p r o c e s s p e r h a p s c o m p l e m e n t e d b u t n o t c o n s t i t u t e d b y E u r o p e a n c a t e g o r i e s o f e x p e r i e n c e b u t w i t h i n t h e v o c a b u l a r i e s a n d c o n t e x t s t h e y r e s i d e (J e n c o 2 0 0 7 , 7 4 1 + H U H - H Q F R ¶ V Z R U G V D U H G L U H F W H G D J D C h a k r a b a t y , w h o h a s s u g g e s t e d t h a t w e c a n n o t a v o i d c e r t a i n c a t e g o r i e s , c o n c e p t s , a n d g e n e a l o g i e s o f t h o u g h t e n r o o t e d i n t h e i n t e l l e c t u a l t r a d i t i o n s o f E u r o p e . A l t h o u g h t h e t a s k - H Q F R ¶ V S U R S R V L o n s i d e r i n g B e i n g a R e s p o n s e t o C h a k r a b a t y a i m s t o t h e c o n t r a r y i t b e g s y e t a n o t h e r T X H V W L R Q & D Q W K H I D F W W K D W Z H F D Q Q o f t h o u g h t b e t r a n s l a t e d t o a c l a i m t h a t s u g g e s t s w e c a n n o t t h i n k w i t h i n d i f f e r e n t t r a d i t i o n s o f t h o u g h t , l i k e w i t h i n C h i n e s e p o l i t i c a l t h o u g h t , o r I s l

thoughts, ideas, and opinion

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For Nedelsky (2011), the most practical purpose of a relational analysis is to clarify the nature of substantive disagreements and antagonisms. This is due to the relational and the reciprocal nature of judgment and autonomy that enables us to better understand and think of better ways to rethink, transform, or transcend the actual sources of our disagreements. This is not to say that a relational methodology makes disagreements and prejudices magically disappear. On the contrary, it might just shed a better light on the reasons why we disagree or help us to identify what is really at stake in these disagreements, especially radical political disagreements when the original cause of disagreement may long be forgotten or no longer valid. Relations of radical political dissent continue to dominate the relational arena in a way that restricts any other. Our existent relations are not always fair, kind, and affective in themselves just because WKH \ DUH ³ UHODWLRQDOLW \ ´ 5 H O P D S W L R Q D O p p o r t u n i t e s J X L G H but relationality does not always imply positive outcomes. Hence, reflective critique and choice matter. According to Nedelsky, there is a foundational difference between relationality and Western liberalism that treats individuals as radically independent rational agents. However, HU 1 H G H O V N \ ¶ V D S S U R D A m e r i c a n W e h a v e n o t b e l i e v e d t h e K \$ Q J O R equal worth for HYHU \ L Q G L Y L G X D O 1 H G H O V N \ Y D O X H V H D F K L Q G be subsumed under a particular wider identity including family, community, the nation. Nedelsky is, therefore, critical of the universal values of liberalism, but she also finds it crucial to re-ground some of those values such as equality (central to feminism and other emancipatory movements) and impartiality (central to law and justice) from a relationship-oriented perspective so that they can capture and respond better to the reality of human interactions.

Relationality is not just about existing relations. It does not require us to accept, confirm, and affirm our existent relations as they are without critique and evaluation. It does not require us to accept hierarchal relations of domination of which we are participants that are harmful to us. According to Nedelsky, relationality is about knowing the transformative power of our relations, and when possible, making our choices under the guidance of this relational awareness. Critique plays an important role in relationality, especially in setting the necessary conditions to avoid the problem of reducing our complex, embedded, multilevel relationships to a single relationship. From this light, LI ZH UHGXFH WKH UHODWLRQDOLW ,ca^f •, ,f

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