

Addressing postmodern concerns on the border: globalization, the nation-state, hybridity, and social change

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ABSTRACT

Many transnational scholars agree that the nation-state is not disappearing because of globalization, but rather is being reorganized, in part, to reflect the interests of a global marketplace. Postmodern perspectives on borders have been critiqued for ignoring, if not obscuring, this point. The idea is that postmodernism's emphasis on hybridity makes the notion of boundaries defunct and leads to the conclusion that the nation-state is irrelevant as a unit of analysis. This is problematic for those who now see any discussion of power and violence regarding the border as impossible to formulate. This paper aims to assuage some deep concerns regarding a postmodern analysis of globalization, the nation-state, and the border. In addition, the shortcomings of both critics and recent "reformers" of hybridity are examined, along with the far reaching value of using a postmodern approach in U.S.-Mexico border studies. Finally, the implications of postmodernism with regards to social change in this era of globalization are discussed.

Key words: postmodernism, borders, nation-state, globalization, hybridity

INTRODUCTION

Since the 1980s, Latin American scholarship has expanded beyond the formerly dominant theories of modernization and dependency to now include perspectives of postcolonial studies, postmodernism, Latin American feminism, and cultural studies. Today these approaches have gained currency within the context of globalization, given that these and other like-minded perspectives reflect a change in social science work to include "new emphases on culture, personal identity, and everyday life" (Best and Kellner 1997, p. 271). Mendieta (2007, p. 103) refers to these as constituting a specific form of "Latinamericanism," based on the type of "postcultural" and type "critical Latinamericanism produced in Latin America since the sixties, and the homegrown (in the U.S.) epistemological and social critique that identity movements developed." In this sense, postmodern concepts of "deconstruction", "fragmentation", "hybridity", "difference" and "discourse" are offered as appropriate lenses through which to see how globalization

engenders new dynamics in transnational "cultural identities and historical affiliations", most notably in the "interconnectedness of social formations across boundaries" (Cabán 1998, p. 210).

The relevance of a postmodern perspective with respect to globalization has only increased for those whose focus is the nation-state and Latino communities. In this case, traditional ideas about migrants as possessing an either/or status—either in migration *or* settled and in the process of assimilation are being challenged. As Cabán (1998) points out, traditional ideas about the nation-state emphasized an unambiguous relationship between borders and migratory peoples, treating

communities [as] static and fixed formations. Migration was thought to be either a temporary movement precipitated by labor market opportunities or, if the migrants settled permanently in the United States, as the beginning of a process of assimilation into the dominant cultural and social system.... This

perspective ... stood in marked contrast to the theorizing and empirical work of scholars in Puerto Rican and Chicano studies. That Puerto Rican, Chicano, and other Latino communities are “simultaneously engaged in a struggle for inclusion and ethnic affirmation within the United States while they seek to maintain some voice in affairs ‘back home,’ has only recently been ‘discovered’ by traditional disciplines that purport to understand the Latino reality” (p. 210).

Indeed, self-identifying labels such as “hybrid”, “mixed”, and “mestizo/a” have become commonplace as globalization reconfigures communities into *transnational* communities that are both “immigrant and homeland communities” and whose experiences are as “colonized, migrant, and marginalized” (Cabán 1998, p. 212).

Recently, however, a concern has been raised about the implications of a postmodern perspective for studying Latino communities and their relationship to borders. At heart, the stress on border porosity as part of the transnational nature of many border communities has been associated with a tendency to minimize the reality of border rigidity and as leading to the assumption that the nation-state is disappearing. In the volume *Globalization On the Line* (2002), for example, the authors critique postmodern theorizing of the U.S.-Mexico border, and border reality in general. Accordingly, postmodern thinking has fostered a view that neglects the importance and strategic use of nation-states in the global expansion of capital markets. In their emphasis on the deconstruction of borders—which ask readers to look *beyond* borders to understand social, political, economic, and cultural processes—postmodernists fail to provide a supplemental framework capable of observing (and critiquing) the role national boundaries still play in the formative processes of globalization, especially in establishing unequal rights to capital (Sadowski-Smith 2002). Importantly, the perceived link between positing hybridity as a dominant mode of social organization and arriving at the conclusion that

the nation-state is declining has been viewed as legitimizing neoliberal discourses about globalization, “which are designed to promote minimal state intervention into the operations of private corporations” (Sadowski-Smith 2002, p. 4).

Although this criticism has developed most recently within the context of border studies, it also stems from longstanding arguments regarding the close association between postmodernism and capitalism. Most notably, Frederic Jameson (1981, 1991) has for some time argued that rather than breaking down structures of power through its discourse of border transgressions, postmodernism actually legitimizes, if not is, the logic of capital domination. Jameson depicts both the cultural and scientific forms of postmodernism as collaborating on this issue. In *Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Jameson (1991, p. 3) argues

Nor should the break in question [modern to postmodern] be thought of as a purely cultural affair: indeed, theories of the postmodern—whether celebratory or couched in the language of moral revulsion and denunciation—bear a strong family resemblance to ... consumer society... (p. 3).

Jameson (1991, p. 3) goes further, attempting to unite the various cultural and academic facets of postmodernism in order show that “*every position* [emphasis added] on postmodernism in culture ... is also at one and the same time, and *necessarily*, an implicitly or explicitly political stance on the nature of multinational capitalism today.”

As will be discussed, the impact of a postmodern analysis of globalization is presently being contested for similar reasons.

In light of the growing tension between the usage of postmodern theory in border studies and mounting concerns about its weakness, this paper seeks to address the types of problems thought to be associated with a postmodern analysis of globalization, the nation-state, and the border. The argument is made that postmodernism’s

hallmark theme of hybridity does not reject the realities of the nation-state (namely exclusion and exploitation) and does not legitimize, de facto, global capital. Indeed, recent work (see Hale 1996; Stutzman 1981; Wade 2005ab) has sought to reconceptualize the notion of hybridity in order to address these concerns. These so-called “reformers” of hybridity, however, have yet to appreciate the larger world-view in which hybrid notions are embedded. To the extent that postmodern hybridity has been approached in a piecemeal fashion, with key assumptions of a theory of hybridity ignored, the scope of discussions by both its critics and reformers has been limited.

While it is not the intention of this paper to present postmodernism or neoliberalism as ideal types or totally unified fields, it is still important to consider their divergent epistemological and ontological images about individuals, social organization, and ethics. For as Mendieta (2007, p. 61) asserts, in certain important ways, postmodernism represents a distinctive “*Weltanschauung*, a mental state, a conceptual...designation of a mental orientation of a particular lifeworld.” As a result, Mendieta (2007, p. 60) highlights that “debates concerning postmodernity and related monikers concern not just a name, a word, even a fashion. Rather, the debates are over the meanings, concepts, and ideas that explain and give coherence to our historical experience.” While a more detailed discussion is forthcoming, a central definition of postmodernism used in this paper is based on Lyotard’s *The Postmodern Condition* (1984, p. xxiii), where he describes postmodernity as a condition of knowledge wherein “master narratives” are fatuous and unavailable to explain the social world. Appreciating the unique social imagery offered by this standpoint aids our understanding of how postmodernism is seen to shape discussions about globalization and related debates.

In order to foster clarity, this paper will be organized as follows. First, the current role of the nation-state with regards to transnational processes is discussed within the context of the U.S.-Mexico border. In addition, critics’

argument for why postmodernism is unable to recognize the new role of the nation-state in globalization is examined. Second, a closer look at neoliberalism’s philosophical heritage is provided, as well as some reasons why postmodernism has been associated with this viewpoint. Third, an argument is made for why postmodernism opposes neoliberalism through the adoption of alternative social imagery. Fourth, it is shown that postmodernism does not undermine researchers’ ability to study power relations on the border. In this case, the limitations of both critics and reformers of hybridity are exposed, along with the benefits of utilizing a postmodern analysis for U.S.-Mexico border studies. And last, the implications of postmodernism for social change with respect to globalization are discussed.

GLOBALIZATION, THE NATION-STATE, AND HYBRIDITY: LESSONS FROM THE U.S.-MEXICO BORDER

U.S. borders have changed dramatically over the past few decades. Border regions have been characterized, for example, by increased immigration and the relocation of industries since the implementation of the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994. Under NAFTA, trade tariffs between Mexico, the United States, and Canada have been eliminated, which has made North American borders more open to the free flow of goods, services, and capital. But while border regions are more porous and facilitate the movement of capital, NAFTA does not offer similar terms for the free passage of people. That is, a proposal is not present for reducing the continued reinforcement of the U.S.-Mexico border. According to Sadowski-Smith (2002), this reveals a basic, dual reality of globalization, one that is maybe most visible on the border:

Giving primacy to unfettered movements of goods and investment capital, NAFTA has thus been working to create a common North American territory where goods and services can move more freely but where borders continue to

intrude on the everyday lives of various groups of people (p. 1).

The central point here is national boundaries have not been eliminated because of globalization, but rather have been reorganized to reflect the interests of a global marketplace. Far from establishing a so-called "global village", global capitalism employs exclusionary tactics (manifested most dramatically on the border) that facilitate the efficacy of capital but not necessarily that of actual individuals. At the same time, Sadowski-Smith asserts a postmodern theory of hybridity makes the notion of boundaries defunct and thus inevitably leads to the conclusion that the nation-state (along with its power relations) is no longer available for critical inquiry. This presents researchers with an impasse that obscures how the border continues to impact the everyday lives of persons.

This deficiency has been tied to how postmodernists theoretically conceptualize and empirically talk about border experiences. In part, the problem is thought to be that postmodernists too often ask researchers to look beyond national boundaries when trying to understand the construction of identity. Rather than looking only at how identities are forged within the boundaries of state-sponsored activities, symbols, and meanings, postmodernists regularly seek to reveal how persons' sense of self is not exhausted by the border. The work of Arturo Escobar (1995) and Néstor García Canclini (1995), for example, argues border identity as culturally "hybrid," while others use the term "mestizaje" (Hale 1997), to convey the idea that identity formation is not limited to the distinctions presupposed by national or other demarcations.

Similarly, attention is also paid to how writers such as José David Saldívar (1997) and Emily Hicks (1991) empirically talk about the U.S.-Mexico border region. These writers describe the Southwestern U.S. border as a site where diverse cultures and histories meet and influence one another. An emphasis is

placed on cultural mixing and border fluidity because, with the advent of globalization, individuals should no longer be understood as isolated within national boundaries but as deeply and globally interrelated. The actions of persons in different parts of the world have a serious (and often direct) impact on the lives of others. Saldívar uses the term "U.S.-Mexico transfronterra zone" to express the fact that "U.S. racialized groups [are linked] to their Third World countries or areas of origin," in that they often exhibit "multiple loyalties, move between regions, and often become themselves conduits for the increased flow of money, goods, information, images, and ideas across national boundaries" (Sadowski-Smith 2002, p. 3). Accordingly, the identities of persons should be recognized as being constructed within a larger context. As Córdoba (1995-1996, p. 154) notes, postmodernist portrayals of the U.S. Chicano/a identities are of "a multicultural space in the United States [which] . . . erases geographical boundaries." The Tohono O'odham present a particularly stark example of the ambiguities of border lives. The 1853 Gadsden Purchase (which gave the U.S. what is today southern Arizona and New Mexico) did not give this aboriginal group dual U.S.-Mexico citizenship when a border was drawn on their lands. Still many move across the border to work, attend religious celebrations, visit relatives, and live as "one people-two countries."

This view of identity, however, is thought by some to simultaneously mean that the role and power of state-lines is defunct altogether. Postmodernism is seen as positing an unfounded antagonism between transnational processes and the nation-state. For if the focus is always on identities that are constituted on *more than* state-sponsored forms of meanings and structures, postmodernists lose site of the impact nation-states have in organizing social life and activities. This viewpoint is argued in the following manner:

[the] literal or symbolic forms of transborder movement undermine state-based nationalist ideologies and oppressive nation-state structures by

defying a central aspect of state power—to define, discipline, control, and regulate all kinds of populations, whether in movement or in residence (Sadowski-Smith 2002, p. 3).

Viewing globalization and nation-states as mutually exclusive is problematic because these two entities are not separate and distinct, but rather co-constitute each other. Globalization entails the process of reconfiguring the nation-state in conjunction with the needs of modern global capitalism. According to Sassen (1998), globalization refers to the process wherein a worldwide infrastructure is being created that allows corporations and financial, cultural, consumer, and labor markets to function internationally. Moreover, the global conditions necessary for this endeavor are created by the cooperation of corporations and nation-states, among other actors. Rather than disappearing, “states act as authors of a regime which defines and guarantees through international treaties with constitutional effect the global and domestic rights of capital” (Panitch 1994, p. 64).

What must be remembered, argues Hendrickson (1995), is that the standard neoliberal mantra of “minimal state intervention” masks the fact that capitalism has historically employed nation-states to aid in its maintenance, growth, and, now, global expansion. Currently, institutions such as the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and NAFTA function in a variety of nations to promote domestic and international policies of deregulation, privatization, and economic restructuring which allow corporations to operate in concert with the state. Again, the state is not absent; state policies exist but are ones that allow buyers and sellers to clearly see market signals and to compete properly with one another. The role of government, in other words, is not to intervene but to prepare the way for persons to enter the local and global marketplace.

This suggests that postmodernists commit a grave analytical sin if they fail to see the central role nation-states play in

transnational processes. After all, the idea behind positing cultural hybridity was meant to stand “as a major challenge to structures of colonialism, neocolonialism, and imperialism” (Sadowski-Smith 2002, p. 3) by “break[ing] open colonial and neo-colonial categories of ethnicity and race” and rejecting “the need to belong as defined by those in power” (Mallon 1996, p. 171). In other words, the idea of hybridity was meant to show that the state, for example, does not hold a complete monopoly on defining persons, thus opening spaces for alternative expressions and actions to be forged. Yet an emphasis on “borderless borders” appears to undermine postmodernists’ ability to examine and critique how globalization seriously impacts people’s lives via the border. Indeed, it is well documented how corporations use treaties such as NAFTA to manipulate national boundaries to regularly relocate aspects of production into Mexican territory in order to receive the (international) leeway and (military) protection to pay workers subsistent wages without facing any legal ramifications from the US or host country. National boundaries are clear resources and elements used in the exploitation of workers as they provide multinational companies the political and legal infrastructure to establish the devastating *maquiladora* (assembly) factories, which, for example, disproportionately endanger the dignity and lives of women of color (Arriola 2000).

The central question, of course, is whether postmodernism really has to make this analytical mistake? Does simply highlighting the idea that identities are not constructed in isolation or wholly circumscribed to the boundaries of nations, especially in this era of globalization, mean that postmodernists view the nation-state as ancillary or declining in its effect to shape (or even exploit) persons’ lives? As will be argued, the answer to these questions can be No. Postmodernism need not posit that the nation-state is vanishing or that it is antagonistic to globalization. In point of fact, Lyotard (1984, p. 5-6) explicitly notes in *The Postmodern Condition* that the nation-state is not disappearing, but rather is being reoriented

to suit the needs of modern-day capitalism. In his words, the nation-state now functions to reduce any “noise” that would disrupt the operations of multinational corporations stationed in nations across the globe (1984, p. 5). He goes on to add that globalization refers to “new forms of [capital] circulation [which] imply that investment decisions have, at least in part, passed beyond the control of the nation-states” (1984, p. 5). This portrayal sounds strikingly similar to those made by Spivak (1996) and other global feminists who describe the “transnational” as “a world in which it is impossible for states and nations to escape the constraints of a ‘neo-liberal’ economic system. Consequently, any possibility for social redistribution is severely undermined” (Kim-Puri 2005, p. 142).

What is important to mention at this juncture is problems associated with a postmodern analysis of globalization go much deeper, in that they are rooted fundamentally in philosophical concerns. Simply put, postmodernism is seen as compatible with neoliberalism at the *theoretical and even moral level*. A primary contribution of this paper is a more in-depth and nuanced discussion of this philosophical dimension. The supposed connection between these two philosophies must first be unraveled so that a more comprehensive appreciation for why the idea of a “transnational subject” (Biemann 2002, p. 103) has been “caught in some of the neo-liberal hyperboles” (Sadowski-Smith 2002, p. 10) that depicts individuals as void of national difference and thus subsumed within a global marketplace.

NEOLIBERALISM AND POSTMODERNISM: HOW CLOSE ARE THEY?

Neoliberalism is an outgrowth of classical liberalism, which is based on a variety of schools of thought such as utilitarianism, natural rights theory, and empiricism. With respect to conceptions of the subject, liberals claim that individuals exist *prior* to the development of any sort of community or organization. As Ramsay (1997, p. 6-10) indicates, neoliberalism posits that society can

only be understood by focusing to a large extent on the individuals that make up this phenomenon.

At least initially, neoliberals appear to fall within the philosophical tradition known as nominalism, which assumes that only individuals are real and society is fictitious (Stark 1963, p. 2). Social life is atomized, as individuals are imagined to be significantly free from one another. This is certainly a specific understanding of individualism, wherein persons are primarily discrete, motivated almost exclusively by personal concerns, and potentially unrestricted. Here freedom is defined overwhelmingly as the absence of any impediments to the natural proclivity to act on the basis of personal interest (Conway 1995).

Neoliberals, however, are not complete nominalists, since they eventually make reference to something larger than the individual to maintain social order. After all, an atomized world is anything but orderly and instead seems to court disorganization. Neoliberals, therefore, additionally invoke the notion of the marketplace to avert chaos. Persons are still understood as atoms who act primarily in their own interest, but these individualized activities are ultimately coordinated by the market into a meaningful whole that promotes the commonweal. Persons are still discrete entities but their individualized pursuits *indirectly* establish society (Assmann 1997, p. 89-90). The so-called magic of the market is that social order emerges from self-interested desires. As Adam Smith once said, a person “intends only his own gain, and he is in this, as in so many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was not part of his intention” (Noble 2000, p. 37). Because social organization seems to come from nowhere (i.e., without an overarching intended plan to speak of), Frederick Hayek describes market order as “spontaneous.”

This style of social imagery is a cornerstone of neoliberal economics, which contends that the uninhibited competition of persons for valued resources results in the

creation of a free, rational, and prosperous society. Furthermore, this scenario is ensured by the apolitical laws of the market, such as those associated with supply and demand. This is to say, inequalities in power, social status, wealth, or other indicators are justified so long as these disparities emerged out of free competition. Social stratification, ideally, is the outcome of differences in an individual's merit, ability, and contribution which are fairly evaluated at the marketplace. Neoliberals assume that unless tampering has occurred market forces promote the common good, since the logic of the market transcends any one individual yet represents the (self)interest of all. This is the magic of the market, translating exclusive self-interest into the common good.

The market is capable of this task due to its presumed self-correcting and thus unbiased capacities. Neoliberals have tended to advocate that technical features make the market value-free. By following certain techniques—"calculation, preferences, costs, profits, prices, and utility"—the political nature of economic order can be overcome and market outcomes legitimized (Smith 1998, p. 127). Minimizing the role of human interpretation characteristic in other economic models occurs by reinforcing strict observation and proceeding in terms of step-by-step guidelines. The quantitative laws (e.g., supply and demand) of capitalism are esteemed here because mathematics is assumed to use pure and precise symbolism in the form of axioms and number. Objectivity is thus achieved within the marketplace by *constricting* judgments through stringent methodological rubrics (i.e., business operations).

Not surprisingly, a key assumption neoliberals make is that the more technological the market becomes, the less likely human error will influence economic activities. Lyotard (1984, p. 44), for example, refers to this view of techniques as "prosthetic aids", since the idea is conveyed that technical instruments are allegedly sterile, correctives for human shortcomings, and a neutral way to equitably manage reality (in this case, a scarce

material world). Language that is more formalized and scientific, after all, is usually viewed to be less biased and provide a clearer depiction of reality than everyday speech (Newmeyer 1986, p. 31-62). For this reason, Barbara Herrnstein Smith (1998, p. 126) indicates the value and legitimacy of the market stems, first and foremost, from its alleged ability to "escape or transcend economy altogether."

In this context, various Latin American writers have argued that what exists today is a "Total Market" (Serrano Caldera 1995). The market is totalizing in two senses: its attendant body of values is not only spreading across the globe but they are elevated above all other ones. Neoliberals assign the market an obligatory status, in that any nation seeking "rational" development should incorporate this entity into its economy and culture. In modern rhetoric, nations are asked to make the necessary "structural adjustments" (e.g., policies geared toward deregulation) that would enable the growth and use of capital to occur properly (Hinkelammert 1995). In more sociological terms, the market is perceived as a "reality *sui generis*" (Durkheim 1982, p. 54-55) and assumed to require no legitimation outside of its own logic. To a significant degree, a reliance on claims of universality and value-freedom has afforded capitalists the latitude to spread (now globally) their ideas and practices in spite of possible and real limitations.

But what does postmodernism have anything in common with the account of neoliberalism outlined above? For Jameson (1991), postmodernism is unequivocally the "cultural logic of late capitalism." According to Jameson, the reason for their similarity is based on the fact that postmodernism restores respect to subjectivity. The individual is given an important status in that postmodernists claim reality is the outgrowth of subjectivity. The centrality of the subject is understood to be consistent with the individualism associated with the neoliberal outlook. It is instructive to quote Amariglio and Ruccio (1995, p. 16-17) at length here, because they remind us just how

important the notion of individualism is to the logic of neoliberalism:

[Neo-liberalism envisions society as] fractured into a plethora of individuated and competing human atoms. These “atoms” take actions on their own behalf without knowing in advance either the actions of others or, for that matter, the potential consequences of their own actions. Of course, the initial ferment and disorder that are suggested by the interaction of the teeming mass of individual actors is shown to converge toward a well-ordered, “general equilibrium” solution—in which all individuals, maximize their utility, and economy-wide optimality is achieved—by virtue of decentralized markets. Thus, the modernist paradox is solved by first positing a new, human centering (self-interested, rational, subjects) and then showing how the intentional actions of such individuals have the unintended consequences of achieving social order—since market transactions are shown to be mostly orderly processes—and eliminating uncertainty as agents come to “know” the consequences of their self-directed, rational actions.

To the extent that subjectivity is a central focus, postmodernists are allegedly sanctioning a discrete but also unlimited subject. From this standpoint, uninhibited consumption and a commodity fetish are promoted since reality is reduced to what individuals *want* it to be. This state of affairs is most often characterized as postmodern relativism, since an “anything goes” policy appears forthcoming in a world without personal or social constraints. What becomes quite apparent is that this outlook is all too compatible with today’s consumer culture. As Jameson (1983) argues, capitalism demands that everything be commodified to satisfy increased levels of consumption. Shared values and social commitments are never safe, in that they may be changed at any moment to increase profit margins. Postmodernism allegedly constructs a subject capable of adopting any set of principles and, thus, eager

to purchase pre-packed realities that satisfy an unending assortment of “false needs”, to borrow a phrase from Marcuse.

But is there a difference between postmodern subjective-relativism and capricious consumption? Jameson fails to see any clear difference. Postmodern relativism is understood to parallel a capitalist morality defined strictly in private terms: egoism and the pursuit of personal gain. Indeed, if morality is defined as finite (i.e., relative and not universal), then just about any kind of behavior seems justified. An employer who maximizes profit, even if it means exploiting workers, cannot be seen as immoral, since no one should presume to have the knowledge necessary to tell others how to behave. “To each their own” is the supposed maxim that emerges from the postmodern project. For this reason Terry Eagleton (1981) concludes that a postmodern world encourages, if anything at all, injustice by not delineating any ethical standards.

Many who study the U.S.-Mexico border arrive at a similar conclusion. In this case, postmodern hybridity similarly reinforces the type of self-interest characteristic of marketplace capitalism. Specifically, what unites postmodernism and capitalism is that “both approaches are centered on the notion of a universalist [read: unlimited] subject, whose ‘hybridity’—devoid of any national difference—is wholly in the service of global market expansionism” (Sadowski-Smith 2002, p. 11). Put differently, the idea of an unrestricted subject suggests that social life is a state of *natural transgressions*. Existence is best characterized as individuals’ potential to expand and presumably intrude upon the Other.

Hybridity, in this scenario, implies that important differences (e.g., power and other life-impacting differentials) become obscured through an emphasis on free movement and interconnectedness. Simply put, the general theme of interconnection, or inclusion, found in hybridity disguises people’s everyday experience of exploitation, hierarchy and segregation on the border, which is predicated

on lines of division. The so-called “deconstruction of the discourse of boundaries” (Saldívar 1997, p. 24-25) is therefore viewed as problematic on two levels: (1) subjects without borders/limits are boundless and ultimately free to do whatever they please, irrespective of how their actions affect others, and (2) an inability to recognize boundaries or difference neglects “the exploitation and constraint of the border itself” on certain populations (Martinez 2002, p. 54).

Clearly, if postmodernists were to advance a view of the subject that is unlimited and basically self-interested, then it could mean that it is simply an extension of neoliberal individualism. Furthermore, if in talking about hybrid identities, postmodernists cannot articulate, as others have, the role the border plays in globalization, then it too is an accomplice in the exploitation of those on the border. For as Shohat (1992, p. 109-10) points out, “a celebration of syncretism and hybridity per se, if not articulated in conjunction with questions of hegemony and neo-colonial power relations, runs the risk of appearing to sanctify the *fait accompli* of colonial violence.” The central argument of this paper, however, is that postmodern hybridity offers distinctive social imagery to that of neoliberalism and provides a way to critically analyze the power relations endemic to global capital and its use of nation-states. It is the purpose of the following sections to explore these points.

POSTMODERN HYBRIDITY: AN ANTI-NEOLIBERAL PROPOSAL AND MORE

If there is anything that postmodernism and neoliberalism share it is the idea that the individual is not completely ancillary to the formation of (economic) order. Nevertheless, these two philosophies differ in at least three crucial ways. First, postmodernists do not focus exclusively on the individual, but rather on the *relationship between subjects*. Second, order does not emerge spontaneously through efforts of the market; order is created, maintained, and changed through dialogue/discourse. And third, postmodernists

are quite clear of what counts as repressive and liberating discourse.

Postmodernists are in complete disagreement with the neoliberal assumption that individuals are naturally isolated and that a community comes about from uniting these disparate parts. While neoliberals invoke the market to accomplish the important task of sustaining order, postmodernists find this scenario very troublesome because it implies that interpersonal commitments are optional. Indeed, neoliberals abhor purposeful and planned social intervention because this sort of interaction distorts pure market signals and the market’s ability to self-regulate. Relationships in the marketplace, instead, are conceived as based on a contract established between parties who “merge” their separate concerns into an integrated vision. Union is established because persons’ self-interests overlap, at least temporarily, in what Marx calls the “cash nexus”. The important issue for postmodernists, however, is that contractual theory assumes that before the contract persons did not have an inherent obligation to one another. Indeed, according to neoliberals, it is the contract that supposedly unites and preserves what would otherwise be disparate ventures.

Unlike neoliberals, postmodernists argue that it is erroneous to conceptualize persons as first atoms or isolated points that are later brought together by a contract. Instead, persons must be understood as *always already relational*. This is what Lyotard (1984, p. 15) means when he says that “no self is an island,” since “each exists in a fabric of relations.” His argument is an “I” presupposes an “Other,” and the two are not first isolated and then united. Deleuze and Guattari (1977, p. 280) make a similar claim when they write that everything is collective. Persons are not brought together and forced to be social, since separateness already assumes a form of relation. Put differently, a foreground (the individual) is unintelligible without a background (the Other) and vice versa. This is why postmodernists claim a basic “We” exists before persons are divided into “I” and “Other.”

According to Derrida (1978, p. 61), this initial “We” “makes possible the reduction of the empirical ego and the emergence of the *eidōs* ‘ego’.” Simply put, togetherness and divergence are simultaneously co-determined. The basic point is persons are never completely alone. In the end, persons are *fundamentally social* as their identities are formed. The private and public sphere can only be differentiated analytically—but not ontologically. The implication is all acts occur in the presence of others and are consequently public in nature.

This is important for this discussion because the neoliberal rendition of individualism is not part of the postmodern proposal. Postmodernists do not recognize the possibility of a discrete subject since the private domain is always socially constituted. Postmodernists show that no action is entirely private, in that individual behavior is always conducted from *within interaction* and thus inescapably social in nature. It is in this way that postmodernist claim existence is hybrid because I and Other are ontologically implicated together. In Lyotard’s (1984, p. 15) words, the crude notion of individualism proposed by neoliberalism is actually theoretically untenable, as there is “already the social bond.”

The second way postmodernism and neoliberalism differ relates to their conceptions of order. Specifically, postmodernists do not adopt the idea that social, and in this case economic, order emerges miraculously or spontaneously because the market regulates interaction and trading. Neoliberals believe that the rational logic of the marketplace is what ultimately underpins and coordinates interaction and prevents chaos. If the market *is* impartial and self-correcting, it stands to reason that this economic mechanism transcends the traditional problems of bias or politics found in other (i.e., planned) economic proposals. Fromm (1955, p. 88) clearly explains neoliberals’ opinion of the market: the “modern market is a self-regulating mechanism of distribution, which makes it unnecessary to divide the social product according to an

intended or traditional plan, and thus does away with the necessity of the use of force within society.” Thus, as the saying goes, persons should impose minimal constraints and “let the market reign free!” The maintenance of social order, after all, no longer rests in human hands but rather in the so-called “invisible hand.”

Postmodern social imagery, on the other hand, rejects any conception of social life that ignores how all affairs are undertaken from within interaction and are thus subject to the human exigencies endemic to these relationships. A postmodern rendition of order is based on intersubjectivity, also known as linguistic pragmatics (Lyotard 1984, p. 9-10). To gain an appreciation of what this means, two central issues are important to grasp at this juncture. First, the postmodern condition refers to the relationship between language and reality. Language use, or interpretation, institutes the set of rules that differentiate objectivity from illusion. Linguistic signification conditions knowledge about the world. What this means is at no time can persons escape the assumptions, or “language games,” they use to organize social reality. Order originates, to a large extent, from the linguistically constituted assumptions that give coherence to this phenomenon. And second, because individuals cannot be viewed as isolated atoms, social organization emerges through dialogue or discourse of these assumptions. In more modern parlance, an established order is truly nothing more than a *social construction*.

From the perspective of postmodernism, therefore, the market is an abstraction (Hinkelammert 1995, p. 238-39). In this case, proponents of the market ignore how this economic regulator is fundamentally a cultural endeavor. For postmodernists the market represents a special type of social construction, one that tries to hide the human facet of its origin by advertising itself as unbiased, autonomous, and transcendent of discourse. This chimera is achieved, as was mentioned earlier, with the use of particular assumptions and resources—such as through

the guide of technique—that give this mechanism the patina of objectivity.

Nevertheless, Hinkelammert argues that social discourse and its implied power relations—not an abstract market—is the base of economic interaction. The marketplace is simply the name given to one particular mode of thinking about and acting out social relations. Given the linguistic constitution of reality proposed by postmodernist, the existence, effect, and legitimacy of the market are now traceable to the historical and present efforts of persons to more deeply reinforce and invest in this social arrangement over other formations. The magic of the “invisible hand” is thus the product of real working human hands, in that serious time and energy has been spent socializing the public, building infrastructure, and rejecting alternatives in order to facilitate the capitalist enterprise and make it appear smooth, self-regulating, and inevitable.

In this vein, Lyotard introduces the idea of “libinial economics” (Lingis 1986). He argues that using ahistorical equilibrium models—such as those related to supply and demand—are insufficient to understand economic activity. Rather, economics should be understood as corporeal, whereby decisions to buy and sell, for example, reflect the mundane (corporeal) contexts and social relations in which actors are situated. How individuals interpret and experience power, reason, and, what Max Weber calls, their “life chances” inform and shape the economic opportunities and choices they will make. Neoliberals, however, neglect these important elements in shaping persons’ social position, since the market is said to transcend these issues when allocating goods and services.

Finally, postmodernism does not advocate a neoliberal ethics based primarily on self-interest, irrespective of the Other. Jameson and Eagleton are certainly hesitant to believe this, especially given postmodernism’s view of language. The worry is that once language and interpretation are understood to mediate everything that is known, there no longer exists an inviolable truth to distinguish

between “good” and “bad.” In such a scenario, no one occupies a position to claim that one interpretation is better or more hazardous than any other. For this reason postmodernism is assumed to advocate an extreme form of relativism, where distinctions between justice and oppression become dangerously blurred.

It is simply untrue that postmodernism undermines morality; they simply reconceptualize how ethics is constituted. To the extent that interpretation mediates all knowledge, postmodernists argue a neutral referent is unavailable to judge behavior. As a result, any set of principles established are a reflection of personal and collective assumptions that are finite and without inherent validity. What postmodernists reject is an ahistorical morality, but this does not necessarily make ethics impossible. Because postmodernists recognize that social existence is predicated on intersubjective pragmatics (discourse of assumptions), a context is available through which to judge behavior.

A postmodern ethic is based on interpersonal respect. In accordance with the root of the word (*respicere* or, to look at), respect entails the ability to see a person. Ethical action implies the preservation of the Other’s integrity. Since the linguistic nature of reality undermines a universal referent upon which to judge behavior, ethical evaluations must be determined *between persons*. A horizontal, rather than vertical, morality is what postmodernists propose. In a postmodern world, justice is initiated when the presence of the Other is kept intact so that safe encounters are fostered. This is what postmodernists mean by a respect for *difference*, in that behavior should attempt to enhance the uniqueness and individuality of each human being.

In this context, an irresponsible and illegitimate proposal is one that does not consider how others can be included, how they will be affected, what their needs are, or how to “[preserve] the purity of each [language] game” (Lyotard and Thébaud 1985, p. 96). Given that the self and Other are implicated in

an unending union, this relationship must take central importance within all plans of action. The welfare of others must always be considered, or else their integrity may be jeopardized. Consideration for the well-being of persons cannot be an afterthought and handed over to some abstract entity to manage. For in the absence of an absolute universal (such as the market), there is nothing but the “in-between” (intersubjective region) available to preserve social life. According to postmodernism, it is simply irresponsible to invoke so-called abstract market forces to account for successes and failures in the economy, since these trajectories reflect the historical context of social relations that persons find themselves in, such as gender, race, and class arrangements, to name a few. Sounding like a postmodernist, Marx makes a similar point with regards to workers’ sense of alienation in capitalism:

If the product of labor does not belong to the worker, if it confronts him as an alien power, this can only be because it belongs to some *other man than the worker*. If the worker’s activity is a torment to him, to another it must be *delight* and his life’s joy. Not the gods, not nature, but only man himself can be this alien power over man (Tucker 1978, p. 78).

Persons are recognized as fundamentally interpersonal. The point being that all facets of social life represent *human* projects, and thus factors such as power and social class—which shape the trajectories of actors—must be taken into account or else people’s lived experiences will be misrecognized and mishandled.

Therefore, postmodernists do not give persons leeway to do whatever they want, since such thoughtless behavior could threaten the livelihood of themselves, others, and even nature. Enrique Dussel (1977, p. 110-11) points out that only when the “I” is severed from everything else, is it given the opportunity to extend indefinitely without concern because others can never be approached directly. But this scenario results more from a neoliberal

paradigm that sees individuals as alone and thus bereft of responsibility for others. According to postmodernists, however, this view of relating is too insensitive and fails to recognize that existence unfolds intersubjectively—not in isolation.

Theoretically speaking, the finiteness endemic to every language game *constrains* the realm of its own legitimacy and thus *requires* proponents of a position to seriously consult others with care before projects are implemented to ensure everyone’s well-being. To do otherwise—namely to think of one’s view as *inherently* universal and unrestricted—is theoretically ungrounded and represents an illegitimate proposal. Indeed, only a position that is ahistorical has the epistemological right to expand uncompromisingly. For as Lyotard (1984, p. 46) proclaims, when interactions are “derived from a ‘Say or do this, or else you’ll never speak again,’ [standpoint] then we are in the realm of terror, and the social bond is destroyed.” Murphy (1989, p. 73-74) explains clearly what postmodern ethics can be imagined as:

[b]ecause language games are finite, no game can legitimately dominate others. In fact, according to postmodernism, repression results from the belief that select games are infinite, and thus can rob others of their identity. Franz Fanon, for example, explains that this is exactly how colonization is enforced. Specifically, the linguistic or cultural game of those who are oppressed is disallowed. In this way, social control is maintained. What can justify this sort of “symbolic violence”? With all forms of knowledge originating from interpretation, domination such as this is not legitimate. Persons, instead, must approach one another as “I” and “Thou.” Because others are not necessarily ancillary to a person’s actions, and there simply to be manipulated, their desires must be considered when the impact of a behavior is evaluated.

The type of capriciousness, egocentricity, and indifference that motivates persons at the

marketplace is not sanctioned by postmodernism. Only actions that are interpersonally responsible—or that are based on a response to preserve and promote the Other—are considered legitimate by postmodernists. In this way, Derrida's (1976, p. 139-40) assertion that "there is no ethics without the presence of the other" gains sensibility.

POSTMODERNISM AND RESPONSIBILITY TO THOSE ON THE BORDER: ADDRESSING BOTH CRITICS AND REFORMERS OF HYBRIDITY

Now that the presumed philosophical association between postmodernism and capitalism has been reviewed, a better understanding may be gained about more recent formulations claiming similarities between these two outlooks. As was mentioned earlier, the presumed philosophical limitations of postmodernism have now been extended to postmodern analyses of the U.S.-Mexico border. A principle argument being that postmodernism's emphasis on hybrid identities on the border erodes the impact of national boundaries in the structuring of global capitalism and processes of marginalization. Take for example Anzaldúa's (1987, p. 3) work on the plurality of identities that are present on the U.S.-Mexico border. As she writes in *Borderlands/La Frontera*,

[a] borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. . . . The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. Los *atravesados* live here: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, the half dead; in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the "normal."

According to Martinez (2002, p.54),

[t]he most damaging aspect of this post-national work...is its dismissal of the importance of 'place' and 'citizenship' in a nationally defined entity that permanently denies especially the (undocumented)

migrant arrival.... [T]he hybrid subject participates in a form of what I would describe as 'movement discourse,' a discourse that articulates the American faith in 'mobility' as being ultimately redemptive and progressive."

Of concern here is when identities are assumed to be fluid, the border is no longer something that actually shapes person's lives. After all, if persons' identities are hybrid (i.e., without boundaries), then one might assume that persons' lives are not constrained by the demarcation of the border anymore. Given this apparent realm of freedom to break the "confines of the normal", it becomes difficult, if not ludicrous, to argue that boundaries are in use to control and even exploit persons. In this respect, Martinez (2002, p. 54) goes on to argue that "movement discourse similarly participates in the reproduction of the American mythos of mobility, thus reaffirming ideologies of neo-individualism that act in the service of late capitalist consumer decisionism" In praising a sense of "rootedness" over "rootedness," a hybrid subject legitimizes "neo-imperialist exploitation of migrants; in both practices the immigrants' arrival is always deferred and the ways in which they might insist on arrival are pushed aside" (Martinez 2002, p. 54)

Addressing the concerns of border critics

This conclusion reflects, however, a very narrow understanding of postmodernism's view of hybridity. It must be remembered that postmodernists see persons as always open to the world. To a significant extent, hybridity characterizes the very nature of social existence, since at no time are persons completely cut off from one another, but rather the "I" and "Other" are co-constituted. The only idea postmodernists seek to push is there are no *inherent* boundaries or divisions between persons, in that existence always occurs socially—not privately.

This does not mean that two persons automatically understand each other. There is a difference between norms and togetherness. Postmodernists point out that persons are

always already together and united because the self implies its complement—the Other. But certainly, togetherness does not automatically lead to mutual appreciation, for persons may adopt and follow different norms. Nevertheless, just because there may be a different sense of normativeness operating between persons should not be extended to mean that individuals are born isolated. According to postmodernists, persons are ontologically connected, and this basic relationship can never be fully destroyed, no matter how hard persons try. Lucien Goldmann refers to human relations as fundamentally “intrasubjective,” for at no time can persons escape their own sociality (Murphy 1984, p. 121). Hybridity is something non-negotiable or, more accurately stated, I and Other possess an ontological intimacy that cannot be broken.

But in revealing this fundamental connection, postmodernist by no means (must) assume that this union is lived out in the actions of persons. Metaphorically speaking, just because we may be born with mouths to feed does not mean that food will automatically be supplied for the body’s nourishment. Similarly, postmodernists do not mistake ontological bonds to mean that the conditions necessary to foster mutual respect and equality are in practice. It is at this juncture that a postmodern ethics comes into focus. Given that no language game is infinite and can command automatic allegiance, at no time is it legitimate for a select game (e.g., nation-state) to undermine the livelihood of another (e.g., exclusion of citizenship and other human rights). Not to promote the integrity of the Other represents an illegitimate act, according to postmodern theory. Indeed, postmodernists are quite capable of pointing out that an authentic recognition of unity entails interpersonal concern, since only through care can communion be safeguarded. A postmodern “discourse of movement” (ontological connectedness) already assumes, contrary to critics, that people are responsible for one another. Importantly, while persons may or may not live up to this responsibility, a postmodern theory of hybridity can be seen as a rationale as to why we should.

Thus, critics have yet to acknowledge that a theory of hybridity, or intersubjectivity, has two levels. First, there is always hybridity, since persons are not atoms. Difference is the result of togetherness, since uniqueness requires a distinguishable counterpoint. This is what postmodernists mean when they say that there is “unity *within* diversity.” Even Marx ([1844] 1978, p. 86) makes a similar point: “What is to be avoided above all is the re-establishing of ‘Society’ as an abstraction *vis-à-vis* the individual. The individual *is the social being*. His life...is therefore an expression and confirmation of *social life*.” And second, while order is characterized as hybrid (beings together), not all versions of social integration are legitimate. Specifically, those modalities of togetherness that violate the integrity of social actors are considered illegitimate since there is no theoretical justification for this act. To undermine the existence of an Other actually begins to violate, in principle, the underlying *togetherness* of social life. Any perspective and activity that injures another person is an unhybrid expression of hybridity, which makes it self-contradictory, socially destructive, and thus unsound. And while it is true that postmodernists emphasize “routedness” over “rootedness”, they equally announce that we are in route together and should foster a safe journey for all.

Benefits of a postmodern analysis for U.S.-Mexico border studies

Martinez (2002, p. 54) and similar critics of postmodernism argue, however, that rather than expanding a hybrid view of borders, scholars should “be focusing on the exploitation and constraint of the border itself, which has acted as the literal and figurative marker of nation-state exclusion.” A theory of hybridity cautions against this sharp focus because boundaries are a social construction and not natural. This is an important maneuver because it challenges the imposition of the border at its theoretical roots. For instance, only revealing how the border constrains persons may have a paradoxical effect. Emphasizing just how “real” the border is can do a lot more than just disclose how real its consequences are for persons. This strategy

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may at the same time reify the border in the minds of the public who has long been socialized by capitalists and their social infrastructure to believe in the “reality” of borders. In this case, the public may now see national boundaries (and its by-products: citizenship, etc.) as the natural by-product of different humans coming into contact with one another and trying to forge their respective existences. In this scenario, power is certainly visible in the efforts of different groups implementing their own interests, but borders are also naturalized, as they are associated with evolutionary processes of group protectionism.

With this naturalistic backdrop in place, power relations attendant to border-building are neutralized and their historical effects on certain populations more easily forgivable since alternative explanations are unavailable or undeveloped. Once borders attain this type of brute sedimentation, it may be more difficult to enact social change, even if exploitation is exposed. After all, without a language that ontologically critiques borders, persons are left with a base materialist perspective that ultimately reifies the border and encourages persons to interpret the deleterious effects of the border as the natural outcome of intergroup dynamics. The conceptual distinction made by Martinez (2002, p.54) between real “borders” and fluid “borderlands” is an example of the inability of some border scholarship to critique the border without relying on “realistic pretensions” of this phenomenon (Lyotard 1984, p.12). To borrow from Canclini (1995), a robust theory of hybridity is therefore essential, because it provides persons the theoretical means for “leaving modernity” and its naturalized conception of boundaries by offering new social imagery—an intersubjective image of order.

Simply refocusing the public’s attention to the border by enumerating the ways exploitation takes place in the hopes that this revelation will somehow trigger change is inadequate. Emphasizing the material side of exploitation (while admirable and necessary)

does not automatically equate with the development of a critical consciousness. The reason is that stratification becomes too closely associated with economic laws and processes, rather than tied to building of infrastructure that serves the ideological ploys of certain persons (i.e., capitalists) and the. Postmodernists argue that liberation does not stem from a simple mechanical-materialistic causal sequence. Instead, the elimination of exploitation requires, at heart, a critique of the *metaphysics* of exclusion. The point is not to draw attention away from discriminatory activities with a discussion of philosophy, but rather to show that specific philosophical principles (e.g., atomism, natural boundaries) have been put into service to legitimize exclusion.

Without resorting to realistic imagery, postmodern hybridity shows that in the absence of natural boundaries, social life may still be organized in ways that treat borders as *if* they are real and produce the practical effects of real boundaries. Remember, inherent borders are artificial given the intersubjective constitution of existence. According to postmodernists, boundaries can be described as the effort to construct difference in a “world without opposites.” At the same time, the nation-state refers to a specific linguistic formation that can construct *difference for the purposes of exclusion*. The nation-state, in short, is a helpful framework for deadening persons’ larger sense of human communion so that (now global) practices of exclusion (e.g., citizenship, property, language, etc.) may be more easily legitimized and pursued. Because boundaries have no ontological ground, using them to establish exploitive relationships is consequently indefensible. The use of national boundaries to improve the growth and efficacy of international capital at the expense of actual living persons represents historical projects in play and interested players positioning themselves within its framework. Postmodern theory, therefore, has a novel way to appreciate which type of border construction leads to the creation of difference for the purpose of interpersonal respect or hostility.

Limitations of “reformers” of hybridity

Wade (2005a, p. 256) takes this point to mean that there is an “inescapable interweaving of inclusion and exclusion in processes of mixture.” This is the way many have sought to reform the concept of hybridity to include a discussion of power—namely, by exploring the exclusionary dimension of hybridity. As Stutzman (1981) makes clear, even persons who self-identify as mestizo/a often times still marginalize and de-value other identities, such as blackness or indigenoussness, in favor of whiteness. This exposes, however, a problem in the way some have decided to reconceptualize hybridity in light of recent concerns that this concept fails to account for exclusion (such as on the border) due to its emphasis on inclusion. What is being missed here is a deeper philosophical point and thus a different way of addressing the issue of power. To borrow Nietzsche’s imagery, postmodernists go beyond the idea that hybridity has a simple light and dark side. Specifically, hybridity represents the ontological rupture of all binaries and dualisms. In this sense, reformers of hybridity miss this viewpoint’s far reaching ontological-ethical implication by diluting hybridity’s hallmark theme of “kinship,” or connection (Wade 2005b). What postmodernists add to the discussion is this: Hybridity is always connectedness, yet some versions of relating (or connectedness) try to create the *appearance* of inherent distance so as to foster its practical (often very profitable) outcomes. Any forms of relatedness that is based on the de-valuing and exclusion of any human life are insincere hybridities, in that they obscure and threaten the thrust of hybridity—the equal communion between *all* persons. But the fact that some mestizo/as engage in the devaluing of black and indigenous identities seems to speak less to the exclusion implied in their being hybrid and more to the imposition of white racism and its essentialist discourse of hierarchical racial boundaries.

A consequence of approaching the concept of hybridity in a philosophically superficial manner is that a new and more subtle style of essentialism has been fostered.

This has been that case with respect to how hybridity is captured empirically. Hybridity is increasingly being studied as and reduced to mean biological, cultural, or other styles of mixing (Wade 2005a; De La Cadena 2005). It is important, however, to define what postmodernists mean by reductionism. Reductionism is not simply a quantitative consideration and solved when researchers parsimoniously increase the number of factors that explain a phenomenon. Reductionism, instead, is first and foremost a *qualitative* issue, referring to the process of explaining a phenomenon at a level lower than that which it actually emerges. In this vein, postmodernists argue that hybridity implies something much more significant and ethically consequential than people merely having a greater number of mixed biological (e.g., racial) or cultural (e.g., traditions) traits. People, in this case, are hybrid at the fundamental level of *being*. Hybridity is a metaphor for the intersubjective constitution of existence and is not reducible to the integration of material or cultural components. Put differently, people *are already* hybrid and are not made hybrid ad hoc after mixing has occurred. Reformers of hybridity, therefore, subtly undermine Sartre’s anti-essentialist claim that existence precedes essence. In this case, reformers depict essence (the mixture of specific traits) as causing existence (being hybrid). For postmodernists, no one is any more or less hybrid, except to the extent that certain modalities of hybridity have gained recognition over others (sometimes to their benefit and sometimes not).

CONCLUSION: POSTMODERNISM AND SOCIAL CHANGE

With all due respect, Jameson (1981, p. 54) is incorrect when he says that “Alliance Politics” is no longer possible subsequent to the postmodern turn. His point is that collective action against global capital injustice, for example, is undermined since postmodernists place so much importance on subjectivity. But again, postmodernism does not collapse into solipsism. An intersubjective order avoids this scenario. As Lyotard (1984, p.15) says, “even

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before he is born, the human child is already positioned as the referent in the story recounted by those around him, in relation to which he will inevitably chart his course." Subjectivity is simultaneously intersubjectivity, according to postmodernists. Just like any game, language games are not self-contained but rather interactive, whereby each person's moves influence those of other persons. In this case, pursuing one's own goals without recognizing other players, as neoliberalism does, is a way of ignoring the sociality of gaming and how particular moves can place others in a life-threatening disadvantage. Thus, according to postmodernists, a planned collective counter-move is possible, legitimate, and necessary in order to avert haphazard play. Moreover, an intersubjective order and ethic can be a useful platform on which to organize such a protest and guide change.

Postmodernists do not jeopardize collective action; instead, they rethink the lines on which activists stand. Specifically, postmodernists argue that systems of class, or any other type, are not what ultimately repress persons, but rather discursive formations that are treated as ahistorical and thus absolute. Hegemonic power is born through discourse between persons, whereby one group is allowed to dominate another. This happens when one style of gaming (e.g., capitalism) is accepted and allowed to distinguish normal (e.g., private property ownership) from abnormal (collective ownership) social relations. To use Guattari's (1984, p. 168) words, "dominant signifiers" are employed to subvert critique and alternative ways of thinking, speaking, and acting. Thus the origin of social control does not first result from a particular class. Domination stems from persons who use a world-view (a way of relating to one another) that appears universal so that select persons can begin to monopolize reality in such a manner as to make their social position and their exploitation of persons and the earth appear justified and even required. Is this not what Marx and Engels ([1846] 1978, p. 173-74) meant when they said: "For each new class before, it is compelled, merely in order to carry

through its aim, to...give its ideas the form of universality, and represent them as the only rational, universally valid ones."

Private property relations, therefore, are embodied discourses. For without couching private property in the language of objectivity, rationality, and naturalness, on what grounds would the capitalist have the right to possess a disproportionate amount of the social product while a growing number of the world's population sinks deeper into poverty? Sustaining this level of social control over time requires much more than brute force. As Foucault (1979) suggests, overt manipulation can antagonize the public. A more sophisticated means of managing the polity is to convince them that they are part of a comprehensive, fair system that is rational, while all challenges to it are irrational, if not impossible. Once the members of a class (e.g., capitalist) or group (e.g., men) are allowed to use symbolism in this manner, efforts to undercut hegemony of any kind are severely curtailed.

Postmodernists, therefore, point out that it is not enough to eliminate unjust property ownership; agents of social change must also expose the limits of language so that symbolism can no longer be used to create the absolutism that is at the heart of authoritarianism and marginalization. In short, emancipation occurs not only when capitalism or any other exploitive system ends, but when persons cannot be intimidated by the use of totalizing discourses which aim to oppress. Postmodernists, of course, refer to these types of oppressive discourses as "metanarratives." As an alternative, postmodernists introduce the notion of *petit récit*, or "little narratives," which refer to those discourses that recognize their historical and finite (epistemologically limited) validity, and in this way serve to guard against the terror of absolutes (Lyotard 1984, p. 60).

In this light, it is somewhat perplexing why postmodernism has been so readily associated with neoliberalism. Given their adoption of a hybrid ontology, or social order, postmodernists fail to recognize as legitimate any mode of behavior that neglects the

intersubjective dimension of existence. National boundaries, for example, reflect the arbitrary appropriation of lands, properties, resources, and cultural symbols by particular groups to achieve their aims. Border construction, simply put, is the way some people have tried to legitimize claims to private property ownership, which depend on lines of *natural* distinction. International companies, to be sure, use treaties such as NAFTA that rely on the notion of borders for the very purpose of guaranteeing the private accumulation of capital and the protection of certain persons' ownership over this wealth. Not surprisingly, Lyotard, Derrida, Guattari, and Deleuze are decidedly anti-capitalist and against private property, because this way of organizing the social product ignores the reality that all goods and services are *communally* produced. While this does not mean that everyone contributed to the making of every product, it does mean that the labor of each worker was the result of its relationship with the labor of all workers. Thus, no one has the inherent right to lay claim as being the sole owner, but rather we are all proprietors of the collective fruits of our labor. Envisioning a new rationale for democracy, Hannah Arendt makes a similar point: "If men wish to be free, it is precisely sovereignty they must renounce" (Purnell 2000, p. 49). In other words, when democracy is understood to be based on *personal* (private) independence, *social* (human) emancipation loses weight and a democratic undertaking is made appreciably difficult to forge.

It thus would therefore please Puri (2004, p. 5) to know that postmodernists do in fact adopt a "conjuncturalist methodology," that brings together both an analysis of hybridity and of hegemonic power. Postmodernists do not undermine the ability of scholars to explore how global capitalism makes use of the border rules (language game) of the nation-state in order to play out its strategic plan to protect certain persons' right to capital and other interested resources at the expense of others. In all, postmodernists do not simply point out that hybridity exists; they also, more importantly, inquire as to how the constitutive actors are being treated in this relationship.

Postmodernism and its theory of hybridity is a philosophy that is responsible to those on the border because their well-being is never an afterthought. Because the self and Other are intimately related, a postmodern plan of action is one that aims for the preservation and actualization of all members. Postmodernism clearly shows that the neoliberal version of globalization, in failing to account for and encourage intersubjectivity, endangers the livelihood of others. In the end, postmodernism is different from neoliberalism in at least one crucial way: it recognizes that persons not only have access to others, but also this connection implies a basic responsibility of persons to love one another. To borrow from Laing (1973, p. 110-11) and the anti-psychiatry movement,

Love and violence, properly speaking, are polar opposites. Love lets the other be, but with affection and concern. Violence attempts to constrain the other's freedom, to force him [or her] to act in the way we desire, but with ultimate lack of concern, with indifference to the other's own existence or destiny.

Postmodernism can provide a framework well-suited to promote relatedness grounded in love. In this regard, critics might have less to fear from postmodernism and reformers more to learn from this philosophy.

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