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A CRITIQUE OF THE WHITE REASON. ANTONIA DARDER: THE FEARLESS ROARING OF A SUBLIME *FREIREAN-NEOGRAMSCIAN* VOICE

UNA CRÍTICA DE LA RAZÓN BLANCA. ANTONIA DARDER: EL BRAMIDO VALIENTE DE UNA SUBLIME VOZ FREIREANA-NEOGRAMSCIANA

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ABSTRACT

This article exfoliates Antonia Darder's critical excavations on cultural democracy and schooling. The article unfolds her arguments in the context of our contemporary epoch, an epoch paced by an absurd. In doing so, the paper scrutinizes eugenics and the curriculum epistemicide as the real colors of such absurdity in our field. The paper situates such absurdity within the matrix of Modern Western Eurocentric reason – a Prosperous reason – and examines its non-derivative abyssal nature. The article also unpacks Darder's call to challenge such eugenic reason, through a commitment to decolonize our cultural forms, the very praxis of democracy as well as our educational institutions, educational policy, curriculum, and teacher preparation programs. The article flags categories such as race and language as quite dear to a *Freirean* scholar with a strong *Neogramscian* footprint such as

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Antonia Darder. The article ends by examining not only, how the notion of cultural democracy in schooling and pedagogies speaks volumes to what I have called itinerant educational and curriculum theories, but also how the piece is a clear call to some of the challenges we face within the critical and post critical territories.

KEYWORDS: subaltern, emancipatory democracy, participatory education, curriculum epistemicides, itinerant curriculum theory

RESUMEN

Este artículo deshoja las indagaciones críticas de Antonia Darder sobre la democracia cultural y la escolarización. El trabajo desarrolla los argumentos de Darder en el contexto de nuestra época contemporánea, época marcada por un absurdo. Al hacerlo, el trabajo analiza la eugenesia y el epistemicidio del currículum como las plasmaciones colores reales de tal absurdo en nuestro ámbito. El artículo sitúa ese absurdo en la base de la razón eurocéntrica occidental moderna – una razón opulenta – y examina su naturaleza abisal no derivativa. El trabajo también desentraña el llamamiento de Darder a desafiar esa razón eugenésica, mediante un compromiso de descolonizar nuestras formas culturales, la propia praxis de la democracia y también nuestras instituciones educativas, la política educativa, el currículum y los programas de formación del profesorado. El artículo señala que categorías como raza y lenguaje son muy apreciadas para una académica *freireana* con un fuerte sello *neogramsciano* como es Antonia Darder. Finaliza examinando no solo cómo la noción de democracia cultural en la escolarización y en las pedagogías revela mucho sobre lo que he denominado como teorías educativas y curriculares itinerantes, sino también cómo el artículo de Antonia representa un claro

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llamamiento a algunos de los desafíos a los que nos enfrentamos dentro de los dominios crítico y postcrítico.

Palabras clave: subalterno, democracia emancipadora, educación participativa, epistemicidios curriculares, teoría curricular itinerante

1. THE ABSURD

If the heart could think it would have stopped
Pessoa (2002)

In some of my latest work, I have been arguing that we are experiencing an era of the absurd (Paraskeva, 2022). While the absurd was always historically a crucial factor in the lives of billions of individuals throughout this world – slavery, exploitation, poverty, starvation, eugenics, racism, genderism, classism, ethnic cleansing, sterilization, inequality – and reprehensibly either grossly sidelined or grotesquely addressed, in too many political and academic hemispheres, the truth is that today, ‘absurdity’ spreads on a global scale like never before, showing unimaginable contours.

In the last five years alone, humanity – built on a bloodthirsty sub-humanity (Santos, 2018) – has seen the planet in danger of destruction, a massive wave of migration, the aggressive resurgence of xenophobic impulses in so-called advanced democratic societies, the outbreak of a pandemic that has paralyzed the world, and the beginning of an armed conflict on the European continent, with the Russian ‘military intervention’ in Ukraine. As the great Portuguese existentialist, Fernando Pessoa argued ‘if the heart could think it would have stopped’.

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Capitalism comes with a tag price. Absurdity has always been the final item of such invoice, a kind of cognitive and conceptual ‘vat’ – value-added tax – that needed to be paid by a captive (sub)humanity regardless of the brutality of the nature of such system. Absurdity thus becomes normalized in a world that fosters an overt paradox. That is, while on one hand, “our current time is marked by huge developments and thespian changes, an era that is referred to as the electronic revolution of communications, information, genetics and the biotechnological, on the other hand, it is a time of disquieting regressions, a return of the social evils that appeared to have been or about to be overcome” (Santos, 2005, p. vii).

Countless voices have been throughout the centuries warning of the dangers of a capitalist society, and particularly, the destructive nature of what has been defined as a coloniality power matrix (Quijano, 1991; Mignolo, 2008). As history documents (Kliebard, 1995; Paraskeva, 2011; Watkins, 1993; Schubert *et al.*, 1980), most of the time such voices – within and beyond the field of education – have rashly discredited, marginalized, silenced, and labeled as the heralds of doom. Hence, it comes as no surprise that before the normalization of the absurd, political treatises such as those written by Martin Esslin (1960), Antonin Artaud (1958), and Albert Camus (2005) among others dealt with the theory of the absurd never managed to have the proper centrality on the board of hot topic of the ‘so-called western epistemological monumentality’ as Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2018) would have phrased – despite Camus being awarded a Nobel in 1957. Camus’ speech at the Nobel ceremony should have been taken more seriously. He deserves to be quoted in length.

Each generation doubtless feels called upon to reform the world. Mine knows that it will not reform it, but its task is perhaps even greater. It consists in preventing the world from destroying itself. Heir to a corrupt history, in which

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are mingled fallen revolutions, technology has gone mad, dead gods, and worn-out ideologies, where mediocre powers can destroy all yet no longer know how to convince, where intelligence has debased itself to become the servant of hatred and oppression, this generation starting from its negations has had to re-establish, both within and without, a little of that which constitutes the dignity of life and death. In a world threatened by disintegration, in which our grand inquisitors run the risk of establishing forever the kingdom of death, it knows that it should, in an insane race against the clock, restore among the nations a peace that is not servitude, reconcile anew labour and culture, and remake with all men the Ark of the Covenant. It is not certain that this generation will ever be able to accomplish this immense task, but already it is rising everywhere in the world to the double challenge of truth and liberty and, if necessary, knows how to die for it without hate.

In the “Myth of Sisyphus”, Albert Camus (2005) argues that while the “world in itself is not rational, what is absurd is the confrontation of this irrationality and of this desperate desire for clarity whose cry resounds in the innermost depths of man”. The absurd, he adds, “depends as much on man as on the world, and it is for the time being their only bond”. Despite Camus – and others – disquiet though, the phenomena of the absurd – as a theoretical and existentialist field – has always been brushed under the rug. The absurd is indeed a visible example of the egregious arrogance of Modern Western Eurocentric reason that notarizes what is important to know and what does not add anything ‘valuable’ to a society framed in Eurocentric terms.

To think that our educational institutions are not related to the complex and multifarious mechanisms to rationalize such absurdity is overtly delusional. As Antonia Darder (2022) argues, we face tough times, paced by “stress and

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uncertainties that have been experienced even more forcefully by those who exist as colonized and minoritized populations”. From drastic demographic changes triggered by massive waves of immigration, the recent “conditions of the pandemic not only set off a global health crisis, along with distressing impacts on both education and worker conditions, but also highlighted enormous cleavages in political, economic, and racialized inequalities across societies, which are expected to increase in the post-pandemic world” (Darder, 2022).

One of the most structuring historical axes of the matrix of this absurdity lies in its eugenic nature, a sin that defines *el patrón colonial de poder* (Quijano, 1991). Such sin has been bloodily and mercilessly perpetuated over the centuries, much with the complicity of an educational system that produces and perpetuates an absurd existence, a eugenic absurd way of thinking through a glaring epistemicide. Such a system was designed to act fearlessly as the praetorian guard of such a *patrón*. The absurd in our educational institutions is the epistemicide, and it is epistemicidal.

Antonia Darder’s rich intellectual critical expedition – so well exemplified by her “Reflections on Cultural democracy and Schooling”– needs to be framed as a throaty anthem against such epistemicidal sin, tearing and opening avenues to unpack an oppressive white reason and its epistemicidal nature. In so doing, Darder’s exegesis also provides powerful avenues for the struggle for a world we all wish to see (Amin, 2008) advocating the need to short circuit the nexus ‘culture and power’, to decolonize social justice, and framing participatory and emancipatory democratic cultures as a de-racialized public pedagogy.

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2. A CRITIQUE OF PROPEROUS REASON

The invaders impose their view of the world upon those they invade and inhibit the creativity of the invaded by curbing their expression.

Freire (1970)

There is no white reason out of the Modern Western and Eurocentric which frames what anti-colonial and decolonial intellectuals termed as coloniality power matrix (Quijano, 1991; Mignolo, 2008). Such reason, as Boaventura de Sousa Santos argues, reflects a selective way of thinking, an abyssal reason. It consists of a system of visible and invisible distinctions, the invisible ones being the foundation of the visible ones. The invisible distinctions are established through radical lines that divide social reality into two realms, the realm of “this side of the line” and the realm of “the other side of the line”. The division is such that “the other side of the line” vanishes as reality, becomes nonexistent, and is indeed produced as nonexistent. Nonexistent means not existing in any relevant or comprehensible way of being. Whatever is produced as nonexistent is radically excluded because it lies beyond the realm of what the accepted conception of inclusion considers to be its other. What most fundamentally characterizes abyssal thinking is thus the impossibility of the co-presence of the two sides of the line. To the extent that it prevails, this side of the line only prevails by exhausting the field of relevant reality. Beyond it, there is only nonexistence, invisibility, and non-dialectical absence. (Santos, 2007, p. 45)

Modern Western Eurocentric white reason and its divisive nature coarct its capacity to address the world’s epistemological difference and diversity. It is a eugenic divisive nature though that doesn’t recognize the epistemological legitimacy

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of any other reason beyond the Eurocentric framework; it annihilates the possibility of Eurocentric and non-Eurocentric epistemologies as *primus inter pares*.

Echoing Paulo Freire's diegeses, Antonia Darder (2022) helps one to understand how the epistemicidal nature of such white reason saturates our educational institutions, coarcting any "political vision and it is out of sync with the human needs of the massive majority". The yoke of Modern Western Eurocentric epistemologies frames the eugenic supremacy of a Prosperous reason – as Paget Henry (2000) would certainly prefer to put it – one that was able to unleash and legitimize what Paulo Freire called cultural invasion through "the construction and imposition of deceptive myths and deficit views of subordinate cultural populations abound, a reason that preserves and perpetuates unequal institutional structures associate with oppressive forms of social and material control of subaltern populations" (Darder, 2022). Antonia Darder (2022) theorizes cultural invasion as

an antidialogical process, that reproduces the social, political, and economic oppression of subordinated populations, through silencing the cultural values, lived histories, and voices of subaltern populations. Freire (1970) describes the cultural invasion as a process by which "the invaders penetrate the cultural context of another group, in disrespect of the latter's potentialities; they impose their view of the world upon those they invade and inhibit the creativity of the invaded by curbing their expression (p. 150). The consequence is that those who are invaded are left believing that their survival is predicated on assimilating the ways of their colonizers.

Under the guise of neoliberalism, Modern Western Eurocentric reason – i.e. the Prosperous reason – has been able to saturate the commonsense with an overt racialized linguistic grammar (Darder, 2022) that naturalizes the "undermining of public access and limits the democratic participation of the masses in crucial

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decisions that impact their labor and daily existence” (Darder, 2022). The impact of neoliberalism on education – the most current currency of the coloniality of power, being, knowledge, gender, and labor (Quijano, 1991; Mignolo, 2008; Maldonado-Torres, 2008; Grosfoguel, 2018; Walsh, 2012) – is undeniable; neoliberalism is the dominant public pedagogy imposing “dehumanizing policies of accountability and instrumentalized forms of teaching to the test, in ways that shape student consciousness, discipline their bodies, minds and hearts, shape how students speak, the attitudes they hold toward those considered “other”, and how they define themselves and interpret the world in which they live” (Darder, 2022). Under the yoke of neoliberal public pedagogies – which deepens such divisive Prosperous reason – the curriculum epistemicide (Paraskeva, 2011, 2016, 2018, 2021, 2022) is racially upgraded to a different level.

Education is thus the supreme lab of epistemicide and reversive epistemicide (Paraskeva, 2021, 2022). The epistemicidal nature of curriculum theory, its history, and praxis is not just related to the content versed within the realm of the disciplines (Phenix, 1964). It is powerful and related to the dynamics of ideological production (McCarthy and Apple, 1988; Apple and Weis, 1983) framing our educational apparatuses – as ideological and repressive locomotives (Althusser, 1971), dynamics that foster “the curriculum injustices of the capitalist educational system to obscure global class struggles” (Darder, 2022). The curriculum epistemicide is also about race, class and sexual orientation segregated dynamics “within the classroom, veiled by an instrumentalized curriculum which intensify the labor of critical educators who struggle to enact practices of democratic learning” (Darder, 2022) – it is about the perpetuation of the eugenic nature of white reason, as I have framed in other context (Paraskeva, 2018, 2021, 2022).

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The curriculum epistemicide is also interrelated to wrangling ‘culture and power’ (Darder, 2022); it erupts out of the overt and hidden forms of symbolic power which frame a divisive pedagogical habitus (Bourdieu, 1989, 1990) whose strength relies paradoxically and absurdly on its “lack of clarity” (Darder, 2022) about class, race, and gender generating “confusion and contradictions among many working-class teachers, students, and communities, disrupting their capacity for resistance and coherent participation in the struggle” for a just society. Arguably like never before, today the educational worker lost their sense of class, race, and gender. The anti-intellectual intellectualism (Paraskeva, 2013) that frames teaching not only certifies the de-skilling of teachers but also concomitantly reinforces education as a neutral activity, paving the way to the sacred monumentality of forms of knowledge and science (Popkewitz, 1976) – fundamentally Eurocentric – a racialized and gendered monumentality that provides the epistemicidal appetite (Paraskeva, 2016, 2018, 2021, 2022; Harding, 2008; Walsh, 2012). To fast such appetite, to smash such divisive thinking, it is crucial to re-work our struggle for social justice – out of the coloniality power matrix and fearlessly bringing categories such as race back to the pedagogical table, thus opening sustainable avenues for emancipatory and participatory democratic forms.

3. THE DECOLONIAL TURN

The genealogy of decolonial thinking is unknown in the genealogy of Western European thinking.

Mignolo (2011)

As I have examined elsewhere (Paraskeva, 2021, 2022), the victorious wave of particular hegemonic traditions – currently unfolded in neoliberal terms – is a very

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short quilt to justify alone the perpetuation of the absurd era we face as humanity in general, and the eugenic sin which persistently sutures our educational apparatuses. It is thus crucial to take a serious look at our own critical/post-critical hemisphere – and the challenges we have faced and continue to face to interrupt such sin, despite some notable accomplishments (Paraskeva, 2018, 2021, 2022). What is the reason underpinning the incapacity of critical and post-critical perspectives to dismantle such sin? What happens then to the critical and post-critical approaches?

Notwithstanding laudable advances and pleasant conquests championed by counter-hegemonic traditions deeply influenced by critical and post-critical impulses, scandalously our field remains barb-wired by an epistemicidal straitjacket. Why? How it has been possible historically to reconcile undemocratic apparatuses within societies with a democratic ideal? Why the persistence of such epistemicidal nature? What good are critical theories if they cannot anticipate and respond to the problems facing the oppressed? Why “still bother with critical curriculum theories” (Cusset, 2008)? Does critical theory still have something to offer us, as it did in the not-so-distant past? What? Where is the importance of critical theory today? (Žižek, 2019). In which way? What/whose critical theory are we talking about? And who has benefited and continues to benefit from this approach? Academics? The academia? ‘We’ the people? The oppressed? And if they have benefited, how have they benefited? And, if they have benefited, why do we continue to fight for a more just society in a world where there have never been so many poor people, misery, inequality, and exploitation? Could it be that we have been working on and in a just theoretical framework to fairly deal with social sagas? Why is it a real nightmare for so many of us to overturn this absurd fate that crosses the field of education and curriculum and evaluation? Why is it that our critical thinking, our critical theory, and our emancipatory praxis cannot even be hegemonic in the large and dispersed

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counter-hegemonic hemisphere? Why after so many years of constant struggles and some gains made, we continue not to achieve change, the real change and we realize with sadness that one of the problems we have in our hands is no longer change, but non-change, given that there is so much made to change, and nothing changes – as Dwayne Huebner (1976) insightfully alerted decades ago.

At the epicenter of the struggle against the curriculum epistemicide, Antonia Darder (2022) conceptual weaponry non-euphemistically advocate the need to decolonize such a struggle. That is, as I have argued in other contexts, to decolonize implies deterritorializing, to de-link from the hydra of the Cartesian framework (Paraskeva, 2021, p. 264). It implies decolonial thinking, one that involves a nonnegotiable *desprendimento*, a decolonial delinking, which I would add must be a total detachment (Mignolo, 2011, p. 3). Following Mignolo's (2011) examination of Quijano's reasoning, *desprendimento* or *desprenderse* (i.e., delinking) implies

epistemic de-linking or, in other words, epistemic disobedience. Epistemic disobedience leads us to decolonial options as a set of projects that have in common the effects experienced by all the inhabitants of the globe that were at the receiving end of global designs to colonize the economy (appropriation of land and natural resources), authority (management by the Monarch, the State, or the Church), and police and military enforcement (coloniality of power), to colonize knowledge (languages, categories of thoughts, belief systems, etc.) and beings (subjectivity). "Delinking" is the necessary because there is no way out of the coloniality of power from within Western (Greek and Latin) categories of thought. (Mignolo, 2011, p. 45)

Hence, *desprendimento* – implies thinking and working out of the coloniality zone, as decolonial thinking challenges the "presumed totality of the gnosis of the Occident" (Mignolo, 2011, p. 48). To de-link entails a decolonial turn, and asserts

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dare by dominant and specific counter-dominant groups and movements – as part of the problem and an institutionalized obstacle to social justice.

When the power of “majority rule” prevails in the classroom of the larger society, minority interests, views, and convictions are generally disregarded in the process of decision-making and certain groups are permanently relegated to the margins. Unfortunately, such an understanding of democracy is likely to become unstable and lose legitimacy in the eyes of its citizens. This becomes so because democracy cannot function where there does not exist room to organically develop a common will or common interest, and this cannot develop where a foundation of both social and economic equality does not exist. There is no question that democracy requires shared values and experiences if culturally diverse members of societies are to find any sense of identification with and trust in a shared political system deemed open and fair. (Darder, 2022)

To decolonize is also to confront history, a battle that cannot be won out of a decolonized educational platform. Drawing on John Dewey and Paulo Freire, Darder (2022) parallels schools with the community. Transformative education, in Darder’s (2022) terms, only occurs in permanent dialogical praxis, one that fosters political and critical consciousness of the human being away from rusted habits of submission and subalternity and the carburetor of “genuine democracy which demands dialogue, participation, social responsibility, political clarity and solidarity” (Darder, 2022). To decolonize education implies an alternative cultural democratic pedagogy, one that

is profoundly conducive to the addressing the needs of subaltern students, in that integral questions of cultural politics, economics, history, ideology, hegemony, dialectics, counter-hegemony, dialogue, and conscientization are

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central principles of such a perspective (Darder, 2012, 2022; Darder *et al.*, 2009). It holds the possibility for a discourse of hope in light of the tensions, conflicts, and contradictions that students from culturally subordinate communities face in the process of their intellectual formation. A teaching practice based on a culturally democratic framework of critical education prepares teachers to offer subaltern students many opportunities to explore their world, as they seek to also understand how the dominant culture affects their lives and their view of themselves as human beings [...]; It helps subaltern students to experience democracy as a lived reality of their classroom life, as together they learn and construct knowledge through a culturally diverse sense of solidarity and the common good; [...] It also creates the conditions for subaltern students to develop the courage to question the structures of domination that control their lives. In this way, they awaken their subaltern voice as they participate in moments of reflection, critique, and action together with other students who are also experiencing the same process of discovery. Hence, students are not only provided with curricular content that is considered culturally relevant or language instruction in their native tongues. Rather, they are actively involved in critically examining curricular content, texts, and classroom experiences to determine the emancipatory as well as oppressive and contradictory values that inform their thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors. Through this critical pedagogical process, subaltern students develop their abilities to understand their lives as cultural and political beings, as well as how to understand themselves as subjects of history and cultural citizens of the world. (Darder, 2022)

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4. AN ALTERNATIVE WAY TO THINK AND TO DO EDUCATION ALTERNATIVELY

Cultural democracy in schooling cannot be discussed – or accomplished – outside of the theoretical dimensions and material conditions that position teachers within their educational practice.

Darder (2022).

Darder's call to move towards cultural democratic schooling which implies emancipatory and participatory democratic pedagogies is indeed a crucial battle in a system dominated by what I called elsewhere non-naïve naïveté or thin intellectualism and the cult of political illiteracy (Paraskeva, 2012) – a cult so evident under the guise of neoliberalism – that pervades education and particularly teacher education programs. A transformative cultural democratic pedagogy, Darder (2022) argues, “cannot be discussed – or accomplished – outside of the theoretical dimensions and material conditions that position teachers within their educational practice”. Such battle cannot be romanticized – Darder (2022) alerts – as under the guise of neoliberalism “teacher education programs are notorious for reducing the role of teachers to that of technicians or automatons”. Anti-intellectualism frames public pedagogy, a neoliberal pedagogy in which, “spontaneous truth governs the conditions for all modes of intelligibility” (Giroux, 2011, p. 104).

Intellectualism is a rare collectible, an antique in school settings, with teachers fundamentally focused on classroom management and filling report forms (Paraskeva, 2012). Such anti-intellectualism needs to be understood as a racialized non-naïve naïveté that colonizes the commonsense framed in ‘new forms of political illiteracy’ (Giroux, 2011, p. 32), and that goes hand in hand with the current hegemonic view that forces schools to comply with the corporate model of education

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(Paraskeva, 2012, p. 713). Such lethal new forms of political illiteracy are at the core of blunt epistemological blindness (Paraskeva, 2016, 2021, 2022; Santos, 2014) framing our educational institutions and block to perceive the perpetuation of a racialized social canon. The incapability of most individuals – teachers and educators in general inclusively – to comprehend endless forms of individual and institutional racism and how educational institutions are engaged in racialized processes constitutes one of the most virulent forms of human oppression that exists in societies (Darder and Torres, 2004) is horrifying. Too many teachers, Darder (2022) claims,

are genuinely unaware of coercive expectations and everyday practices that loudly signal to racialized students that to ‘succeed’, they must accept dominant cultural values as their own. Teachers fail to see that subaltern students already possess cultural values, ancestral wisdom, and community knowledge essential to not only their learning but their survival, given their histories of struggle in the face of persistent conditions of material inequality and social exclusion. They, wittingly or unwittingly, reject the cultural definitions and meanings that subaltern students express and, as a consequence, violate their self-determination, confidence, and trust in their reading of the world.

The racialization of dominant pedagogical forms is deeply related to what I have examined elsewhere (Paraskeva, 2021, 2022) as linguistic coloniality – or the coloniality of Eurocentric languages – a form of epistemological fascism and cleansing that erases any other linguistic existence beyond the English Republic, what Tove Skutnabb-Kangas (2013) coined as linguistic genocide. Education, curriculum, and teacher education are profoundly implicated in such epistemological cleansing, which grants epistemic privilege to those who submissively exist under

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such eugenic linguistic consulate and at the core of what Memmi (1965) denounced as colonized minds of the colonized. Power is not neutral, and it implies segregated forms of oppression – hegemonically built as Antonio Gramsci (1990) taught us – one of those being undeniably linguistic domination which “silences student voices and seriously curtails their active participation in school life” (Darder, 2022).

Antonia Darder places cultural democracy in schooling and pedagogies as a challenge to the capitalist neoliberal public pedagogy; it is emancipatory towards an emancipatory pedagogical praxis called working with the cracks of a racialized system that bestializes the human being. Mackenzie Wark (2021) helps a great deal here. As he (2021, p. 39) adamantly argues, “to be working as vernacular English has it, is to be in your grind. Work, says Marx, is a meat grinder. Wage labor ends up reduced to blood, guts, and goo, minced and reduced to aspic, to dead flesh to be slurped down by a capitalist ruling class”. Our educational institutions have always been thought of as social laboratories preparing human beings for this chain of work, a chain that feeds the monstrosity of capital by vampirizing the working class. The attack on intellectualism in our schools echoes the ‘bestialization’ of the workers and their labor, and aligns with the supreme cult of the capitalist industrialization “that was never concerned and interested in workers who think and feel. It wanted hands. It wanted muscle” (Wark, 2021, p. 41). Darder’s cultural democracy in schooling and pedagogies is also a virulent attack, and antidote to our educational institutions that function as a “flesh-eating machine” (Wark, 2021, p. 41), a machine that – like an assembly line within the capitalist mode of production – “uses the human body as a vehicle and has its cognition erased”, ‘educating’ human being as “automatons” (Darder, 2012, p. 13).

Darder’s approach reflects not just an alternative way to challenge a historically racialized sin – at the core of our educational institutions, curriculum, and

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With such a sharp theoretical move – from a *Freirean-Neogramscian* authority – Darder (2002) attempts to address the world’s endless diverse oppressed categories and dynamics thus responding to the onto-epistemological needs and legitimacy of subaltern communities, individuals, and identities – quite sentient that “there is no single principle of social transformation as there are no unique historical agents or a unique form of domination” (Santos, 1999, p. 202).

5. TOWARDS A NEW CRITICAL LOGIC: TO BE CONTINUED

There is something inside us that has no name, and that something is what we call us.

Saramago (1997)

Antonia Darder’s exegesis on ‘Cultural Democracy and Schooling’ is a refined *Freirean* approach peppered with sublime *Neogramscian* impulses of the challenges educators face not just against an educational system that fosters “deceptive myths and deficit views of subordinate cultural populations abound, views that preserve and perpetuate institutional structures of cultural invasion, associated with oppressive forms of social and material control of subaltern populations”, but also how the very critical/post-critical intellectual artillery needs to be politically and epistemologically re-worked – as I have argued in other contexts (Paraskeva, 2016, 2018, 2021, 2022) – to smash the epistemicidal nature of our educational institutions.

Darder’s critical advocacy of cultural democratic schooling and pedagogies provides a for instance for what I called an ‘itinerant educational and curriculum approach’ (Paraskeva, 2011, 2016, 2018, 2021, 2022). As I have flagged before, cultural democratic schooling and pedagogies imply the need to deterritorialize our

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way of thinking and doing education and pedagogy to address the world's epistemological difference and diversity. Such a call speaks volumes to an itinerant theoretical curriculum (ICT) perspective, one that is capable to challenge our divisive educational curriculum reason, eugenic in its hegemonic and counter-hegemonic Eurocentric platforms, and argued for a non-derivative non-abysal approach (Santos, 2014; Paraskeva, 2011, 2016, 2017, 2021), a deterritorialized one, an itinerant curriculum theoretical path (Paraskeva, 2011, 2016, 2017, 2021).

Such an approach also confronts our critical field historically and theoretically, voicing the silences (Janson and Paraskeva, 2015; see also Janson, 2020) of its sociological absences (Santos, 2014), and questions the institutionalization of the visibility and existence of particular forms of knowledge – fundamentally Eurocentric – pushing critical theories and their history out of the colonial zone. I have called this momentum 'the epistemological turn', a decolonial one (Paraskeva, 2011, 2016, 2017, 2021). The struggle for a cultural democratic pedagogy thus implies an 'itinerantology' – challenging both dominant and counter dominant Eurocentric approaches – a commitment to what Enrique Dussel (2013) calls analectic – or anadialectic approach – breaking the abyssal divide produced by modernist/post-modernist wrangles which persistently produces the Global South as non-existent. ICT places the struggle against the epistemicides and reverse epistemicides as the center of gravity of a new utopian logic. Cultural democratic pedagogies toward just schooling – as advocated by Darder (2022) – asks for such itinerant theory, as such theory is indeed a performative utterance (Austin, 1962), that is, a 'theory – itinerant – that does something by saving it. Darder's (2022) call for a decolonial democracy flooded with an "emancipatory spirit of hope and a commitment to liberation can only emerge within a critical pedagogical context where teachers possess the political clarity to contend with inequalities". Such commitment demands an *ICTheorist*, that

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is, an epistemological pariah – a just political take deeply committed to social cognitive, and intergenerational justice. It entails a non-derivative praxis – as Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2014) would phrase – illuminating “creative ways to expand opportunities for subaltern students to become authentic, coherent, and integral social beings, despite the limitations of traditional curricula and social inequalities that persist” (Darder 2022; see also Darder, 2012). As a non-derivative praxis, cultural democratic pedagogies are in sync with the itinerant educational and curriculum theory by fostering the radical co-presence (Santos, 2007) of every existing epistemological perspective.

Darder’s (2022) critical advocacy for an alternative democratic praxis documents the educational and curriculum itinerant theory, as Zhao (2019, p. 27) states, as “a form of decolonial thinking that recognizes an ecological co-existence of varying epistemological forms of knowledge around the world paying attention to knowledges and epistemologies largely marginalized and discredited in the current world order”; it reinforces the itinerant educational and curriculum theory as a new conceptual grammar (Jupp, 2017) that moves itinerantly within and beyond “(a) the colonality of power, knowledge, and being; (b) epistemicides, linguisticides, abyssality, and the ecology of knowledges; and (c) poststructuralist hermeneutic itinerancy” producing a new non-abyssal alphabet of knowledge (Paraskeva, 2022); it shows the impossibility of a just democracy without “a general epistemology of the impossibility of a general epistemology” (Santos, 2007, p. 67) as provided by the itinerant educational and curriculum theory. In fact, as Darder (2016, p. 12) argues, the itinerant educational and curriculum platforms constitute “an epistemology of liberation that can persistently challenge structures of authority, hierarchy, and domination in every aspect of life, an epistemology that must be cultivated, nurtured

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and embodied within the blessed messiness and unwieldy chaos of everyday life within schools and communities”.

Finally, Darder’s decolonial call – which implies de-linking from our current epistemological platforms – is also a refine alert to the insufficiencies we face within the critical and post-critical hemisphere. Reading Darder’s (2022) reflections on “Cultural Democracy and Schooling” is a clarion call to all of us to think very carefully and strategically about some of the crucial challenges we have been unable to overcome. The point is not to engage in a frenetic policing of what we are doing. The task though is to face the challenges we have encountered historically and understand why it has been impossible for the critical armada to achieve a hegemonic position. Hegemony is not a minor ‘category’ for Antonia Darder as undeniably ‘the’ leading female *Neogramscian* in our field.

Why it has been impossible to interrupt the contemporary absurd we face as humanity? What is the reason underpinning the incapacity of critical and post-critical perspectives to dismantle such sin? What happens then to the critical and post-critical approaches? Notwithstanding laudable advances and pleasant conquests championed by counter-hegemonic traditions deeply influenced by critical and post-critical impulses, scandalously our field remains barb-wired by an epistemicidal straitjacket. Why? How it has been possible historically to reconcile undemocratic apparatuses within societies with a democratic ideal? Why the persistence of such epistemicidal nature? What good are critical theories if they cannot anticipate and respond to the problems facing the oppressed? Why “still bother with critical curriculum theories” (Cusset, 2008)? Does critical theory still have something to offer us, as it did in the not-so-distant past? What? Where is the importance of critical theory today? (Žižek, 2019). In which way? What/whose critical theory are we talking about? And who has benefited and continues to benefit from this approach?

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Academics? The academia? ‘We’ the people? The oppressed? And if they have benefited, how have they benefited? And, if they have benefited, why do we continue to fight for a more just society in a world where there have never been so many poor people, misery, inequality, and exploitation? Could it be that we have been working on and in a just theoretical framework to fairly deal with social sagas? Why is it a real nightmare for so many of us to overturn this absurd fate that crosses the field of education and curriculum and evaluation? Why is not empowering? (Ellsworth, 1989). Why is it that our critical thinking, our critical theory, and our emancipatory praxis cannot even be hegemonic in the large and dispersed counter-hegemonic hemisphere? Why after so many years of constant struggles and some gains made, we continue not to achieve change, the real change and we realize with sadness that one of the problems we have in our hands is no longer change, but non-change, given that there is so much made to change, and nothing changes – as Dwayne Huebner (1976) insightfully alerted decades ago.

Do critical and so-called post-critical theories and cultural theories suffer from the same problems? (Eagleton, 2004). Did they disintegrate and crumble with the same violence with which they arrived? Could it be that, like cultural theories, critical and post-critical theories also ‘promised to grapple with some fundamental problems, but on the whole failed to deliver?’ (Eagleton, 2004). The great counter-hegemonic march carried out through the cartography of critical theory has served whose interests? (Macdonald, 1977). For many – including the field of the critic – critical approaches are theoretically insolvent (Rancière, 2010), insolvency that pillars their absence within the current dominant public pedagogies subjugated to market principles and goals. Why counter-hegemonic traditions working within the vast critical and post-critical platform has been persistently produced through a “deficit of

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grasp differently why the “disruptions that have multiplied in the planetary landscape, have not produced a change in the dominant paradigm, a conscious movement of self-organization, or a revolutionary upheaval” (Berardi, 2012, p. 11). Her focus wasn’t just on the triumphalist nature of neoliberal market policies in education, curriculum, and teacher preparation programs, but also on some dangerous moves within counter-hegemonic platforms – i.e. the wrangle against the functionalism and circularity of critical race theories advocated by scholars such as Ladson-Billings and Tate IV constitutes an inspirational example. Darder and Torres (2004) did not hesitate to aggressively *neogramscianize* the battle, arguing that “poverty, exploitation, and segregation dynamics, structurally are key categories at work in the formation and perpetuation of epistemicides, and cannot be detached from the capitalist modes of production and stripped from its ideological bone” (Paraskeva, 2017, p. 10).

Together with Torres (Darder and Torres, 2004, p. 98), she alerts for the dangers of the use of “race as the central unity of analysis of racialized oppression and racism”. Such centrality quashes ideological dynamics that manure capitalism’s unequal social structures. That is, “the failure to engage the political economy and its impact on class formations” (hooks, 2000, p. 4) situates debates around critical issues involving class, race, ethnicity, and gender in a dangerous vacuum – what one would call autonomy nullification, a kind of perpetual short circuit in agency dynamics – for any counter-hegemonic agenda. The fallacy of the centrality of race, Darder and Torres (2004) claim, in examining the eugenic bone of the epistemicide produces a “circularity of race logic” (p. 5) that legitimizes the erroneously cult that “racism exists because there is such thing as race” (p. 100).

Antonia Darder’s call for cultural democratic schooling and pedagogies is indeed a subalternity exfoliation – as José Gil (2009) would put it – to decolonize

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democracy and its institutions which implies a radical transformation in the way we think and do education, the way we theorize and *atheorize*, one that understands that “there are no unique historical agents or a unique form of domination” (Santos, 1999, p. 202). “Cultural Democracy and Schooling” is an accurate example of the fearless roar of a refined *Freirean* and *Neogramscian* organic/public intellectual – the leading female neogramscian in our field – critical reflecting on a particularly powerful trajectory, a trajectory of a remarkable group of scholars that I have called the generation of utopia swimming in a critical/post-critical river *Neogramscianized* through falls and flows in which the leading contribute of Antonia is indisputable.

About 10 years ago I received an invitation to help translate a text from Paulo Freire – from Portuguese to English. The text, like all texts by Paulo Freire, is always a powerful challenge to the reader for what it is explicit but above all for what is implicit – a dimension only within the reach of great thinkers such as Paulo Freire. The text was related to Paulo Freire’s experience in Guinea Bissau, his study of Amílcar Cabral and his attempt to meet with him and the painful frustration of never having succeeded it. In the text – which I recommend reading – (for those who read Portuguese should do so in the original, and those who do not master the Portuguese language, why not learn it) Paulo Freire establishes a parallel between Antonio Gramsci and Amílcar Cabral, working conceptually in the chiasm ‘Amílcar Cabral Pedagogue of the Revolution or Revolutionary Pedagogue’. In his analysis, Paulo Freire states that Amílcar overlaps Gramsci on many issues – ‘return to the source’, for example – but that Amílcar should have read Gramsci and that he should have enjoyed meeting Gramsci. Knowing the work of Amílcar Cabral and Antonia Darder, and due to their *Gramscian* conceptual parallel, I can only close my eyes and imagine the dialogue that would not result from such an encounter. Antonia Darder’s intellectual yarn is a fearless roaring against epistemological blindness, a

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non-abyssal anti-colonial anthem of itinerant curriculum theory as it unpacks the ‘no name inside us’, it decolonizes ‘that something that we call us’, it *neogramscianizes* the ‘inner/outer coloniality forms’ of being, knowledge, power, and labor that frames humanity and its needed sub-humanity. Her intellectual legacy is a powerful perpetual ‘return to the source’.

This might be a very abstract way to end this piece, and I do agree. However, as Karl Marx (1990, p. 90) stated in his preface of the 1st edition of “Das Kapital”, “in the analyses of economic forms – and education is one of them – neither microscopes nor chemical reagents are of any assistance. We have to replace both with the power of abstraction”. Darder’s reflections on cultural democracy in schooling and pedagogies constitute, as Karl Marx (1990, p. 104) reminded us, that “there is no royal road to science, and only those who do not dread the fatiguing climb of its steps paths have a chance of gaining its luminous summits”.

To be continued.

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