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On caste: towards critical non-derivative caste curriculum theory[1]

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ABSTRACT

Caste is one of the most obnoxious absences within our field's solar system. A graphic example of *Freudian* hysterical blindness, as MurzBan Jal (2023) proclaims, which aggravates the field's epistemicidal nature as well as its scholarship and research. This article examines the persistence of caste as a graded system that precedes the Empire, and the nefarious implications of its undergirded logic – the Hindutva rationale. Moreover, the essay highlights the significant contribution of Dalit and Anti-caste intellectuals working from and within what Santos (2014) calls the 'epistemologies from the South' to eradicate 'casted' societies. The paper examines and counters inaccurate impulses that conflate 'caste' with 'class' and 'race' that constitute a spitting image of the coloniality of whiteness and the 'monumentality' of Eurocentric white reason. Furthermore, the article calls for a commitment to a critical caste curriculum theory through an itinerant curriculum theory to help disestablish the field's original sin: eugenics.

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I Whose caste, anyway!

> Caste is a republic, a hate republic with a hate infrastructure (Teltumbde 2018)

Caste is an ancient Hindu institution whose origins go back to the second century BCE when it was 'legally codified in Manusmruti' (Thorat et al. 2020, ii). It was the Purusha Hymn of the 'Rigveda' that describes the creation of Castes[2] and places the Brahmans within the perpetual bubble of purity. Indeed, in Book X, Hymn 90, verses 11–12, 'an account is given to the creation of the four castes from the body of the great god Purusha' (Cox 1959, 85) The 'Rigveda' designed, established and consolidated a clear stratification between the Brahmans – an example of purity and superiority – and the Warriors or Agricultural – an instance of dirtiness (Dumont 1970; Rao 1931). Such a divine matrix 'is one of the most powerful bits in Hindu philosophy' (Cox 1959, 86), conferring on the Brahmans 'superior privileges and inviolable condition' (Dumont 1970, 24).

'Rigveda' provides the spiritual legitimacy of a 'needed' four-fold Varna system of Hinduism, one that 'frames the Hindu system of inviolable political stability confining the individuals to occupations handed down immutability from father to son' (Senart

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1930, iii). As we will see, such 'inviolability' pushes the debate on caste to another level, quite different from 'class' or 'race'. Crafting from Célestin Bouglé (1908), Louis Dumont (1970) states that caste implies

> separation in matters of marriage and contact, wheatear direct or indirect (food); division of labor, each group having, in theory, or by tradition, a profession from which their member can depart only within certain limits; and finally hierarchy, which ranks the groups as relatively superior or inferior to one another. (Dumont 1970, 21)

The abyssal line metaphor insightfully advanced by Santos (2007) to describe the Western way of thinking and existing fits like a glove to the casted Brahman blessed protectorate not only drawing clear 'divisive lines' (Santos 2007) between Brahmans, Rajanya, Vaisyas, and Sudras but also, in so doing, concomitantly establishing another unbeatable 'divisive line' between the four varnas and 'whatever would be the rest'. Such non-monolithic 'rest', the fifth varna (Pachamas), aka Untouchables (Asprushya and Achhuts), low born (Antyja), also referred to as Dalits, scheduled castes, and backward classes – socially tagged as dirty, polluted, smelly, cursed, hopeless savage primates – constitutes a pluriverse plethora of maculate human beings, whose 'existence' and 'visibility' were not blessed and only doable out of the four varnas. Outside the graded bouquet of caste are the *Ati Shudras*, also known as 'Untouchables', who are forced to perform the most 'polluted' and menial work (Ambedkar 1989). Such abyssal lines speak volumes about the graded 'Hindu social order' (Teltumbde 2018, 24).

The 'outcasted' fifth varna also breeds a divisive and graded matrix. Like the fourth varna, Anand Teltumbde (2018) argues, 'it congregates not only castes and sub-castes but also class differences in it'. The 'caste-out-casted' *Sanskritised* system (Srinivas 1962) 'may be defined by a small number of persons characterized by endogamy, hereditary by birth membership, and a specific style of life, which sometimes includes the pursuit of a tradition of a particular occupation and is usually associated with a more or less distinct ritual status in a hierarchical system' (Beteille 1971, 46). That is, castes 'who are of different origins are also of different nature. One caste forbids the remarriage of widows; another permits it; one permits its members to accept food from certain outsiders; another forbids such acceptance from anybody but a caste fellow'. Lower castes convey pollution 'by touch and mere proximity' (Blunt 1969; Thorat et al. 2020).

Caste is 'implied in people's names, in the way people referred to each other, in the work they did, in the clothes they wore, in the marriages they were arranged, in the language they spoke, and yet one never encounters the notion of caste in a single school textbook' (Dhanda 2015; Roy 2016, 17). There is no existence outside of caste. Caste 'is a Republic', a hate republic with a hate infrastructure (Teltumbde 2018, 2), a 'neurotic and psychotic' Republic (Jal 2023), with no parallel in the written history of humanity – although 'caste struggle cannot be seen in isolation from other injustices unleashed across the world' (Teltumbde 2018, 28).

Caste is the underlying logic of a given system of domination that fosters a particular cultural and political economy. Endogamy is the only characteristic peculiar to caste (Ambedkar 2018). Since its inception, this brutal system has faced serious opposition, led by anti-caste intellectuals, including Jyotiba Phule, Periyar Ramasamy, M. N. Srinivas, and Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar.

II. Pioneering the epistemologies from the south

> 'Ambedkarism' became the dominant theory of Dalit liberation. (Omvedt 1994)

Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar – aka 'Babasaheb' Ambedkar ('respectful father') graduated in Political Science from Columbia University, New York, and worked closely with John Dewey, establishing links with the African American struggles for emancipation. His close relationship with John Dewey made him a sublime pragmatist (Teltumbde 2016), crucial to crafting what would be called 'Ambedkarism' as an 'epistemology from the South' (see Paraskeva 2023a, 2023b; Santos 2014). In 1923, he was granted a Ph.D. from the London School of Economics with a thesis, 'The Problem of the Rupee'. He was the father of the Indian constitution and 1st law Minister in 1947, resigning before his tenure ended in conflict with Jawaharlal Nehru.

Babasaheb Ambedkar (2018) frames the 'caste system as not based on choice, individual sentiment, and/or preference but on the dogma of predestination'. He (2018) argues that one 'can turn in any direction one likes, caste is the monster that crosses your path'. Political and economic reform and caste constitute mutually excludant realities, which implies opening up the veins of the caste system, a formidable challenge to any revolutionary, transformative battle (Ambedkar 2018).

The future of a just society was undoubtedly out of caste; however, it could not avoid going through it to disassemble it. Such transformative logic – that implies an epistemological revolution – is at the core of the wrangle he led against Mahatma Gandhi (Biswas 2021). Contrary to Gandhi, Ambedkar (2018) was not ready to accept 'caste equality' and expressed a non-negotiable commitment to dismantling the caste system from its roots (see Guru 2017).

Babasaheb Ambedkar could well be placed among the pioneers of what Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2014) called the 'epistemologies from the South'. He pillared his theory through autochthonous epistemological veins. While lessons could, should and had to be learned from the struggles of other eugenic systems of dominance in different nations, the rights of the 'untouchables' could not be achieved by ignoring or misreading 'casted idiosyncrasies', which are crucial in edifying cultural and economic democracy (Chatterjee 2018). Gradually, 'Ambdekarism' became the dominant theory of Dalit liberation (Omvedt 1994), an enzyme in the struggle against untouchability with clear proximities and distances from Western counter-hegemonic impulses. Contrary to his predecessors, Babasaheb Ambedkar did not believe education alone could trigger 'Hindus to change their hearts' (Chatterjee 2018, 108). He (2018) argued that the end of untouchability implies changing the 'entire' Brahman and Hindu social system (Chatterjee 2018) and way of thinking. There is only one solution to address caste segregation: to abolish the caste system.

As I have argued in another context (Paraskeva 2023a), we cannot ignore and marginalise the critical contribution of intellectuals like Jyotiba Phule, Periyar Ramasamy, M. R. Srinivas, and others in the anti-caste struggle working from a 'Southern Non-Western' epistemological platform and countering the eugenic caste system and delinking from the Eurocentric dominant and counter dominant perspectives. However, it is undeniable that Bhimrao Ambedkar could well be defined as the demiurge of a well-structured theory of Dalit liberation and emancipation (Omvedt 1994). He was able to

craft a more systematised autochthonous praxis of liberation, which became a major tour de force within casted societies (Omvedt 1994). He offered 'an innovative diagnosis of the pathologies of caste and untouchability' (Ramesh 2022, 728) and 'set the Dalits on the path of an arduous emancipation' (Jaffrelot 2005, 7).

'Ambedkarism' or 'Ambedkarit' 'reinforces the identitarian orientation among Dalits' (Teltumbde 2018, xiii), epitomising Babasaheb Ambedkar's powerful autochthonous reason for countering the Hindutva logic, which shows a terrifying resilience over the centuries despite being formally abolished by the Indian Constitution (Teltumbde 2018).

III. The persistence of a historical 'chamber of horrors'

> Caste is a veritable chamber of horrors Ambedkar. (2009)

Caste is a social system that precedes colonial occupation and persists within the contemporary yoke of coloniality (Maldonado-Torres 2012; Mignolo 2008, 2018; Quijano 1992, 2008) – that is, 'the continuity of colonial forms of domination after the end of colonial administrations produced by colonial cultures and structures in the modern/colonial/capitalist world system' (Grosfoguel 2003, 4).

Caste shows an appalling endurance (Teltumbde 2010, 2017); it exhibits remarkable historical adjustability to diverse power structures and remains an essential category within the power matrix of 'coloniality empire of whiteness' (Jupp, Badenhorst, and Shim 2023; also, 1423; Quijano 1992; Mignolo 2008) – a histrotrical Eurocentrically saturated project of whitening, currently showing a predatory globalising and neoliberal footprint (Jupp, Badenhorst, and Shim 2023; Mignolo 2008; Paraskeva 2016). For most, 'it was a relic of Indian feudalism, which, it was thought, would disappear once capitalism was established. Capitalist production relations came to the villages and seemed to shake the caste structure to its roots – but caste survived, nonetheless' (Teltumbde 2010, 9); it persists throughout the centuries, constituting one of the carburetors of coloniality – an institutionalised segregation matrix that laid down 'a legal and normative logic' as Walter Mignolo (2021, 2018) and other anti-colonial and decolonial intellectuals would frame it. Caste 'have proven to be more durable in our so-called postcolonial world' (Saldívar 2007, 346), and as Menon (2022), 48) argues, 'should be visibilised as ever-present in any coloniality we discuss'.

Resistance to the caste system was nonetheless ferocious, as we have been able to examine previously. In fact, 'if there was one [colonial] battle that [colonizers] never won, it was the battle for the appropriation of the [colonized] past', as Ranajit Guha (1997, 1) would stress. Caste bewilders the world by defying reason or prophecy. Under the latest hegemonic phase of coloniality's late modernity, as Giovanni Arrighi (2005) would have framed – popularised as neoliberal globalisation – caste has grown far more 'vicious, complex, and brutal' (Teltumbde 2010). The notion that neoliberal globalisation 'would create economic as well as cultural convergence, promote neo-liberal values and thereby weaken caste' (Teltumbde 2010, 11) has proven to be a fallacy. Casted societies have become the pristine sanctuary of neoliberal epistemo-logical ethos, upgrading the 'normalization' of brutalisation and 'thingification' of untouchability.

Caste perseverance is the face of the barbarity of Hinduism, 'a veritable chamber of horrors' (Ambedkar 2009, 296). Caste looks like a refined social chameleon, not just with the capacity to adapt to different historical phases in the history of humanity but also to be responsive to the diverse cultural and political graded needs and structures of the various historical stages, placing resiliently 'Dalit's aspirations as a breach of peace' (Roy 2016, 22). The Hindutva eugenic ideological impulses and the economic logic underpinning neoliberal global forms are 'not just reconcilable but complementary' - as Ahmad (2008, 15) would have indeed framed.

Caste and coloniality amalgamate (Teltumbde 2017, 20). Probably never has caste had such a perfect and manageable nest as coloniality – the 'hegemonic' contemporary 'form of domination in the world' (Quijano 1992, 2008). Welcome to the coloniality of caste. As I have argued elsewhere (Paraskeva 2016, 2021), colonialism and coloniality are two faces of the same eugenic currency – the epistemicide. Caste is one of the graded steroids at the core of such a currency. It upgrades other forms of epistemicidal reason framed and trivialised in class, race, ethnicity, and gender dynamics (Paraskeva 2023a).

Its historical lethal footprint reveals that we are in the presence of an apex predator – a predator without predators – that, unlike class, race, ethnicity, and gender, shows a remarkable malleability to intermingle within the dynamics of power without compromising its historical-divine eugenic matrix and 'bricolage', fostering the wrangle 'coercive-consent' in creative terms (Guha 1997; Paraskeva 2021, 2023a, 2023b). Coloniality of caste is about 'modifying and adapting feudal religious and tribal structures, but not dismantling them' (Crooke 1896; Teltumbde 2010, 54). Appallingly, 'casted' institutions – most of them from ancient times – 'comfortably coexist within *coloniality*'[3] (Teltumbde 2010, 54) due to its capability to de-construct and re-construct itself, addressing the cracks exhibited in any power structure – from pre-colonial and colonial times to the contemporary coloniality consulate – as Michel De Certeau (1988) would put it.

Like other divisive categories, the coloniality of caste relates to the Hindutva's 'epistemological perspective as unique and the only cognitive possibility. This cognitive fascism fertilizes graded subjectivities' (Paraskeva 2016, 3). The coloniality of the caste system is also about the coloniality of the mind. It is a 'defining prowess of the caste system, that even its victims easily forget their victimhood and assume the oppressor's posture vis-à-vis others when the opportunities arise' (Teltumbde 2018 –89; see, 88; Memmi 2000; Dirks 2002); it produces a cult of self-depreciation within the untouchables – as Freire (1990) would state.

Such a caste of mind pervades the social matrices, deepening the abyssal line between 'touchables and untouchables'. For any human being 'to have to use terms like "untouchable", "scheduled caste", "backward class", and "other backward classes" to describe fellow human beings, is like living in the chamber of horrors' (Roy 2016, 20) – that persists under coloniality. Caste supplies blood transfusions to the coloniality *patron de poder* (Mignolo 2008; Quijano 1992). Caste is inevitably about caste: class and race smell. However, caste smells differently (Kapoor 2021).

IV. Caste is caste. Not class!

> Caste is not merely a division of labor. It is also a division of laborers. (Ambedkar 2018)

To claim that the history of all hitherto Hindutva society is the history of caste struggle is not an overstatement. Caste is caste, transcending class, race, and labour (Sampath 2023). Caste needs to be confronted in caste terms, not in class and racial terms. However, class and caste 'are intertwined' (Beteille 1971; Teltumbde 2018, 19), and 'the elimination of the latter will necessarily involve a struggle against the former' (Chatterjee, 2018, 128–129). One thing is acknowledging the entangled character of such intricate dynamics; quite another is proclaiming that they are identical.

It has become a dangerous truism to grasp the dynamics of caste in the light of the dynamics of race and class that structure the terrains of Eurocentric modernity and in Eurocentric terms. This is an error from a historical and theoretical point of view (Paraskeva 2023a). The historical roots of caste are quite distinct from those of class and race, and although there are some theoretical similarities and proximities, the differences are undeniably abysmal and irresoluble (Paraskeva 2023a).

Teltumbde (2010, 67–68) articulates that caste is deeply a social capital that – like class – 'unites in economics, but it divides in politics'. Caste 'is unified from the outside, yet divided within' (Dumont 1970, 34). Like any classed or racialised society, caste societies are also flooded with patriarchal codes linked to exploitive modes of production (Chakravarti and Krishnaraj 2020). Like class, caste is intimately related to the consequences of graded cultural politics and political economy that pumped a system of atrocities (Paraskeva 2023a; Teltumbde 2010). Like class, caste can also be deconstructed from a reductive economic category, i.e. 'caste-in-itself', into the political and ideological dynamic, i.e. 'caste-for-itself' (see Wright 2000, 2015).

However, class and caste formations and structures trigger different metamorphoses. Caste closeness, endogamic, hereditary, and spiritual *quasi-irreversible* dynamics introduce other elements to its graded structure and formation, and they occupy a verticality that we do not find in the class system. The class system relies on underclasses, 'a category of social agents who are economically oppressed but not consistently exploited within a given system' (Wright 2000, 48); the caste system is not only about upper caste and under caste but also abominably it is about the outcaste (Ambedkar 2018; Teltumbde 2010, 2018; Yengde and Teltumbde 2018). Caste struggle complexifies and upgrades the Marxist underclass concept of 'lumpenproletariat' (Barrow 2021; Wright 2000), devoid of political consciousness.

In the minds of the doyens of the anti-Caste movement, caste was never a class matter. However, the class was a dynamic, meandering, and undergirding caste; Class is the 'veneer of [caste][4] historical bloody trajectory' (Teltumbde 2018, 19). Ambedkar (2018, 15–16) defines the caste system as the matrix of Hinduism, pumped by the division of labourers, not through a division of labour like the class system.

> The Caste System is not merely a division of labor; it is also a division of laborers. Civilized society undoubtedly needs a division of labor. However, no civilized society is accompanied by this unnatural division of laborers into watertight compartments.

The division of labourer is about 'casteized labour', which produces the 'casteized subject' (Gajarawala 2012, 71), and a 'casteized mind' (Paraskeva 2023a).

Anti-caste intellectuals tirelessly challenge dominant views 'that maintain class primacy as a social category' (Teltumbde 2018, 113). As Teltumbde (2010, 65) argues, 'even in trade unions and staff associations where class interests should be the ground for solidarity, we see Dalits being forced to form caste-based associations'. Caste often encompasses classes within it. Any class analysis 'cannot be done without cognizance of the overriding reality of caste' (Teltumbde 2018, 20).

Ambedkar (1979) defines caste as an 'enclosed endogamous class', which 'cannot absorb class identities' (Basu 2003, 112). The fact that someone else's previous life is the harbinger of a future person's pain, torment, and anguish when born into the lowest cast (Sampath 2023) is one of the distinctive features of the caste system. While class 'potentially brings people together, the very nature of caste is to divide them by seeking hierarchy' (Teltumbde 2018, 98). To be more precise, while 'the proletariat would include most of the Shudras and Dalits, they would not automatically form a class until the caste contradictions between them are eradicated' (98). To argue that class subsumes caste (see Mukherjee 2000) is a mistake. Untouchability "will not go away unless castes are destroyed (Teltumbde 2018, 53). Contrary to caste, class is an open system. Like any other oppressive category, caste has 'relative autonomy' as Apple and Weis (1983) would frame it. Caste is not class, and it is not race either.

V. Caste is caste. Not race!

> The visibility of caste is not the visibility of skin color. (Dhanda 2015)

If equating caste with class as identical categories is a theoretical and historical misrepresentation, to do so with race is a theoretical aberration and historical rape (see Phule 1911). To say Western and South Asian societies and their diaspora (Swapnil 2015) are historically segregated is one thing. To say that they were and are segregated in the same way – and to transplant unpardonable eugenic Eurocentric models to the South Asian contexts, and vice versa – is quite another and manifestly wrong. Western and non-Western societies were and are brutally segregated – a blatant historical carnage unbelievably 'scientifically' justified for centuries – but they were and continue to be in radically different ways.

The caste system 'does not demarcate racial division; it is a social division of people of the same race' (Ambedkar 2018, 238). It is a system 'not based in Aryo-Dravidian racial antagonism' (Cox 1959, 84). Caste is not class. Caste is not race either; it is worse. To hold that distinction of castes 'are distinctions of race, and to treat different castes as though there were so many different castes, is a gross perversion of facts' (17).

The caste system 'cannot be said to have grown as means of preventing the admixture of races, or as a means of maintaining purity of blood'. However, Western intellectuals 'opted for race as the root cause of the problem of caste because they were themselves impregnated by color prejudice' (Ambedkar 1979, 22).

There is no parallel in the bloody struggle for black emancipation in the Western world to the gotra system, a hallmark of the Brahmin graded social structure – 'a system that reflects an exogenous division whose members are believed, particularly among

Brahmins, to be agnatically decent from a saint or seer' (Beteille 1971, 48). The sanguinary wrangle of 'light-skin beneficiaries *vs*. dark-skin victims' (Hall and Mishra 2018, 15) frames caste and race differently. The caste system, as we argued before, 'is based on religious myth, while the [Western Eurocentric][5] ideology of race is pseudoscientific' (Tartakov 2018, 36).

Teltumbde (2010, 11) highlights the specificity of the caste system, which notoriously distances caste from race and class – 'a system in which contact is restricted and mobility impossible'. One should remember that Meena Dhanda (2015, 40) alerts that 'the visibility of caste is not the visibility of skin color but of the clothed body, the body in the space of action, meaning, and vulnerability'. Caste 'exists only in the plural number. There is no such thing as caste. There are always castes' (Ambedkar 1979, 20). The question of caste 'is not one of race at all' (Risley 1892, xxi; Senart 1930; Banerjee-Dube 2014; Appadurai 2020).

As I have been flagging (Paraskeva 2021, 2023a, 2023b) and as we will see later, too many scholars, working from and within a critical Eurocentric epistemological matrix, erroneously mobilise 'European ideas of race to unpack taxonomies related to [the Global] South' (Jayawardene 2016, 332).[6] In doing so, they forcibly see a caste-graded system in class and racial terms as a racial and class wrangle, showing blunt incapability to engage in what Santos (2018) calls a process of 'translation' - one that respects the endless different onto-epistemological diversity of the world (Paraskeva 2022, 2016, 2018, 2021; Paraskeva 2022; Santos 2014). Caste dynamics cannot be 'castigated, reducing it to a raced and classed phenomenon' (Brown 2018; Jayawardene 2016, 331) – although race and class are not absent categories within the caste dynamics.

Despite some commonalities, caste, class, and race differences are glaring". While at the centre 'of race and caste superstructures sits dehumanization, inequality and condemnation' (Yengde 2022, 348), caste 'is more insidious' (349). Equating caste with race/or class is what Mosse (2020, 15) defines as 'externalization as it misrepresents – maliciously transmutes – caste as a racist idea'. Such misrepresentation makes caste 'appears benign. To Dalits, caste is not benign, but brutal' (Natrajan 2022, 309–310). While 'race divides, caste subdivides' (Harney 2015, 45). Eurocentric graded systems 'do not exactly conform to those of the caste system' (117). Whereas 'Brahminhood is a no-entry zone, untouchability in a no-exit zone' (Manoharan 2017, 87). Contrary to race – or class – caste is an ancient system that 'change has been molecular at best' (Bag and Watkins 2021, 56). The caste system 'is geared to an infinity of caste ranks' a sharp difference from racialised systems (Appadurai 2020, 2).

To mingle caste, class, and race is an 'act of violence' (Guha 1997, 85); it reflects what Mignolo (2021) calls a colonial wound made by the West, who despotically frame Eurocentric classifications as unique and unquestionably providing an accurate X-ray of society; mingling caste, class, and race mirrors the superlative eugenic point of 'white supremacy and Europeanized subjectifications' (Jupp, Badenhorst, and Shim 2023, 1420). Weirdly, and ultimately, there is no caste. Such violence – epistemicidal by nature – twists the ethnographic, ideological, and political understandings of caste (Basu 2003), misrepresents historical and theoretical matters, and speaks volumes for the monumentalism of Modern Western Eurocentric views of the 'word and the world'.

VI. The cruelty of the identical and the monumentality of white reason

> The eyes of the other are bound to be different because they are trained in another culture. (Santos 2018)

As I have been arguing, there is a dangerous tendency to amalgamate class, race, and caste as 'identical', which is a gross misreading of history – in its ancient and contemporary dynamics. Crafting on Byung Chul Hang (2018), such a tendency mirrors the 'cruelty of the identical', which is a symptom of what Santos (2018) defined as the monumentality of whiteness that saturates modern Western White reason, which is an abyssal reason (Santos 2007). Subsumed within such cruelty relies the perpetual production of 'existent-inexistences' and 'visible-invisibilities'. The 'cruelty of the identical' (Han 2018) is a eugenic process of sameness that concomitantly produces 'absent-presences'. Coloniality of caste – like its predecessors' systems of dominance – is a perpetual wrangle between 'monumentalist' existences/visibilities and 'monumentalist' non-existences /invisibilities (Paraskeva 2023a). The coloniality of caste is the coloniality of the Hindutva reason and its millennial hegemony (Menon 2022).

The way caste has been forcibly 'identicalised' as race and class by hegemonic and counter-hegemonic modern Western Eurocentric platforms only reveals the acute eugenic ethos of 'whiteness as hegemonic normativity' (Jupp 2021, 4) reflecting a blunt epistemological despotism that dares to 'monolithicise' different oppressive categories and dynamics, regardless of its diverse historical and contemporary roots and metamorphosis. Such a graded reason epitomises epistemological repression that eugenically grants the right to determine 'how' and 'where' the 'other' could and should be defined, denying the existence of disparate 'Others' within the 'Other', and as if the 'other' can only be explained 'out of its existence and reason'. It exhibits an egregious epistemological blindness that assumes 'that there is only one form of dominance and counter-dominance' (Santos 1999), producing an identity cleansing, crafting a eugenic reading of caste 'words and worlds' from and within Eurocentric dioptres. Unfortunately, such tendency is also so visible within the counter-hegemonic hemisphere that it cannot get out of such epistemological straitjacket, refusing to commit to what Santos (2014) calls epistemologies from the South, promoting the 'absoluteness' of class and/or race – as Jacques Rancière (2010) would put it – which constitutes egregious inaccuracy. Critical and postcritical waves, somehow undermining caste as a differentiated eugenic category, a 'Republic on its own' (Teltumbde 2018), marginalising anti-caste scholarship and intellectuals in their deconstructions of coloniality (Menon 2022).

We have no shortage of examples of this trend attempting to 'synonymise' caste, class, and race, either framing 'slavery in caste terms' (Sumner 1845) or as a 'racial caste line separating what would later become labeled "blacks" and "whites"' (Wacquant 2002, 45); arguing that caste stands for the politics of 'race' (Douglass 1845; DuBois 1911); or claiming that caste should be considered a form of absolutely rigid class (Davis, Gardner, and Gardner 1941; Myrdal 1967, 1944; Warner 1936). Such approaches minimised that caste makes it 'impossible to move from one level to another across generations; there is no predecessor or successor system in human societies, including intergenerational slavery through the ages, Western feudalism, or Jim Crow White-Black segregation in America, that compares with the caste system' (Sampath 2023; Paraskeva). They

underestimated that the eyes of the other 'are bound to be different eyes because they are trained in another culture' (Santos 2018, 175).

Another recent example of such tendency – arguably the most popularised – frames Isabel Wilkerson's (2020, 6) simplistic analyses that invariably replaces the term 'race' with 'caste' ('the African American as a man of a lower caste'); she (2021) mistakenly regards the immense African American community as Dalits, arguing – erroneously – that they 'operate under the same instruction manual' (Gilda and Horn 2021, 20).

In her understanding 'race is the visible decoy, the primary tool, the front man for the caste system, doing its heavy lifting, or a visual cue, a historical flashboard, indicting to what cast an American should be assigned' (Gilda and Horn 2021, 21). She falls into a massive swamp ignoring that 'to call American blacks a caste need not imply that whites composed one too' (21). It is one thing to invoke Martin Luther King Jr. when he, in a sharp stereophony, parallels caste and untouchability within the African American struggle in the U.S. ('I am untouchable and every negro in America is an untouchable'; quite another and abusive is to assume that for Dr. King Jr. 'caste untouchability' and the 'U.S. racial untouchability' is identical. Also, one thing is to say that 'the untouchables cannot forget the fate of the Negroes' (Ambedkar 2009, 171), quite another is to claim that Dalits and Untouchables replaced their outcaste identity with the African American racial subject position. Worse, Wilkerson (2020) undermines that caste oppression and segregation 'was not based on the eradication [of lower castes] but rather on their domination' (Menon 2022, 45). To place the indigeneity related to the caste system within 'one specific [common] past is not only misleading but also violent towards people who do not identify with that specific past, it oversimplifies and oversubjectivifies indigeneity' (45).

Wilkerson's (2020) 'On Caste' 'is not a formally or analytically structured work but a collage of short sermons, poetic flights, social philosophizing, potted history, journalistic sketches, personal anecdotes, and meditations, across thirty-plus uneven chapters. The result is as conceptually thin as it is stylistically over-egged' (Gilda and Horn 2021, 23). Jupp, Badenhorst, and Shim (2023) help us a great deal here. Echoing intellectuals such as Fanon, Cabral, Hall, and Anzaldúa, they (2023, 1421) not euphemistically stand against

> Manichean essentializing critical innocence and instead acknowledge the fall-ness of identity interlocution by recognizing that, within the sociogenesis of capitalist global systems, some interlocutors of Color might become 'whiter than whites'.

Wilkerson's (2020) reason is a spitting image of one of the logics of the monumentality of the coloniality of whiteness; that is, its despotic ethos that erroneously frames all forms of oppression and exploitation into one single metanarrative (Mignolo 2021). Her (2000) approach is a first-rate testimony of a dominant wave within many counter-hegemonic platforms that describe the world through epistemological blinders that hinder her ability to provide an accurate interpretation of humanity's mechanisms of domination and exploitation, whether from a synchronic or diachronic perspective. Such waves reflect the reductive nature of the classification frameworks of the monumentality of whiteness, which, by failing to recognise the legitimacy of a non-Eurocentric reason, operate only within the limits of Eurocentric reason – saturated in the logic of whiteness. The monumentality of whiteness is a eugenic sociogenis (Fanon 2008) who is incapable of

acknowledging its 'ignorant ignorance and willing to move towards a learned ignorance, thus recognizing that all forms of knowledge express particular forms of ignorance' (Santos 2014). As Žižek (2002, 2) teaches us, 'we think we know the things we claim that we know, because we lack the very language to articulate what we don't know'. Along with Cabral (1979), 6), I would argue that it is crucial to 'not confuse the reality one lives in with the ideas one has in one's head'.

Caste is a 'social endosmosis' (Ambedkar 2018, 29) that cannot be interpreted and disestablished through 'crassly Orientalist analysis' (Menon 2014, 36), using unreliable sources, a 'pitiless exposure of Indian ideology, showing a method of engaging with non-Western modes of thought jeering like a schoolboy at funny foreign notions to make sarcastic jibes' (Menon 2014, 44–45). The examples provided speak volumes about the eugenic nerve of the monumentality of coloniality. This reason imposes the 'violence of the identical' (Han 2018) – i.e. reducing disparate social phenomena under one-dimensional dioptres, fundamentally Eurocentric.

VII. An absence presence in our field

> The West likes to call everything Western international and then, to call everything international Western. (Kundera 2023)

One of the most prominent symptoms of the monumentality of the geography of the empire of whiteness reason (Jupp, Badenhorst, and Shim 2023) relates to the absence of caste in education, curriculum, and teacher education scholarship and debates. Caste is one of the most obnoxious absences within our field's solar system (Paraskeva 2023a). A graphic example of *Freudian* hysterical blindness, as MurzBan Jal (2023) proclaims. It speaks volumes about the superciliousness of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic Eurocentric impulses. While the former is not even predisposed to interpret the curriculum phenomena as a political arena and within the context of class, race, or gender dynamics – much less caste – the latter incomprehensibly silences caste. Our counter-hegemonic curriculum platforms cannot think of the 'word and the world' beyond the Western epistemological matrix (Paraskeva 2021, 2023a).

This silence becomes more cacophonous (Jal 2023), especially in the heyday of the field's internationalisation under the elasticity promoted by 'complicated celebratory conversations' - in itself epistemicidal (see Huebner 2022; Huebner and Paraskeva 2022) and unable to provoke communicative pedagogies (Mahadevan 2023). Caste never attracted the attention of the rich theoretical veins of the heralds of what I have called the generation of utopia (Paraskeva). Such debates on the field's internationalisation are strange, given that caste is not just confined to Southeast Asian countries and has a global historical footprint (Dhanda et al. 2014; Gordon 2017; Harney 2015; Mosse 2020; Paraskeva 2023a; Pathania and Tierney 2018; Todd 1977; Yengde 2022). Caste also pervades the Roman (aka gypsy) communities (Pathania and Kalyani 2023; Blunt 1969; Naumenko and Naumenko 2018; also, 148; Čvorović 2007; Tamim 2018), and coincidently, the 'Roman Question' is not part of the curriculum debates. The coloniality of caste is related to the coloniality of the casted diasporas (Martinez-San Miguel 2014). The internationalisation wave is another symptom of how 'the West likes to call everything

Western international, and then to call everything international Western' (Kundera 2023).

The noisy silence on caste is a vivid example of a field lost in time, historically and theoretically mutilated, a producer of erratic, reckless, and dangerous avenues, a theoretically deficient field hostage to an abyssal intellectual and theoretical work that persistently promotes an epistemicidal matrix, and thus irremediably condemned to produce an abyssal theory and fabricate a divisive history. It is, therefore, crucial to open the field's epistemicidal canon, delinking from absolutist epistemological impulses (Amin 1990), dismantling the abyssal divide by placing caste at the centre of the curriculum debates (Paraskeva 2015).

The way the caste system has been absent inclusively from the curriculum decolonial debates (Menon 2022; Paraskeva 2021; Paraskeva and Huebner 2023) speaks volumes to a manifest theoretical insufficiency from counterhegemonic Eurocentric platforms – which is not innocent – responsible for what I call reversive epistemicide – that is, in the struggle against the epistemicide another epistemicide is committed (Paraskeva 2016, 2018, 2021, 2022, 2025). It is thus crucial to break the eugenic silence on the caste system in our field and pave the way for a critical caste curriculum theory, the rich river of the Untouchables. An excellent way to address such an unpardonable absence is to engage in what I have championed as itinerant curriculum theory – ict (Paraskeva 2011). This non-derivative approach provides the needed 'epistemic reconstitution' (Mignolo, 2021, p. 24), placing 'caste' *ex-equo* with other eugenic dynamics such as race, ethnicity, class, and gender, respecting its relative sovereignty.

viii. Itinerant curriculum theory. Towards critical caste curriculum studies

> ccct constitutes a pinacol in the struggle against the epistemicidal nature of our field (Paraskeva)

It 'is impossible to bring together all resistances and agencies under a common grand theory' (Santos 1999, 203). While caste, class, race, and gender exhibit common points of contact (Cox 1959), more than a common theory, 'what we need is a translation theory that makes the different struggles mutually intelligible and allows collective actors to talk about the oppressions they resist and the aspirations they animate' (203). Such desideratum is delusional without a debate on caste in our curriculum affairs. The itinerant curriculum theory (ict) paves the way for such intercultural inter/intra-political translation theory (Santos 2018), fostering a non-derivative critical caste curriculum theory (ccct), one that constitutes a pinacol in the struggle against the epistemicidal nature of our field. ccct challenges the 'typical absence of caste in the decolonial matrix' (Menon 2022, 37) and places untouthability and Dalitism at the centre of decolonial thought. As 'there is no living organism that is immune to coloniality' (Mignolo 2021), untouchability and dalitism must be at the very core of the decolonial disobedience and delinking. ccct non-derivatively places caste dynamics right at the core of the different and diverse waves within the field of critical white studies (Byrne 2006; Hill 1997; Jupp 2021), complexifying our understanding of an 'invisible eugenic normativity' that maps humanity (Milner 2024)

It is a call to counter the curriculum epistemicide and reversive epistemicide (Paraskeva 2022, 2011, 2016, 2018, 2021, 2022), unpacking the functionalist nature of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic Eurocentric curriculum traditions. ccct is 'Dalit *Chetna*,[7] obsessed with touching' (Elan 2021; Gajarawala 2012, pp. 68–69), and putting Dalit reason and the Untouchable nerve at the core of the anti-caste struggle through education and curriculum. ccct epitomises a diverse 'praxis of words' (Paraskeva 2021) and 'worlding' (Rao 2023) committed to a non-derivative curriculum as an epistemological choreography; it thus responds to different and varied traditions and fosters an endless epistemological co-habitus (Paraskeva 2025) from the perspective of the epistemologies from the South (Santos 2014); ccct is a 'degree zero commitment' (see Sampath 2023), a decoloniality itinerant zone that dissects how caste is 'eugenic eugenicism'. It is thus an itinerant 'exercise of intercultural translation and dystopic hermeneutics through which the reciprocal limitations of alternative conceptions of human dignity can be identified, thus opening the possibility of new relations and dialogues among them' (Santos, 2009, p. 18; Santos 1999, 2014). Such intercultural translation enriches the field with a 'new conceptual grammar' (Jupp 2017), recognising the legitimacy of disparated graded 'transnational and bioregional histories which are fundamental to critical pedagogical and curricular praxes' (Jupp 2023, 3).

Following Mignolo (2021), ccct is not just about modifying the content of the curriculum debates, but to sharply change the terms and language of such debates. In doing so, ccct lends a non-derivative avenue to the critical hemispheres of whiteness studies, pushing to a decolonial turn, sharpening its political edge. The coloniality of whiteness reason cannot be explained apart from the coloniality of the Hindutva reason and vice versa. They constitute a fatal revolutionary co-presence (Angotti 1986; Santos 2007) within the coloniaity of power matrix. ccct echoes Meon (2022, p. 43) proclamations 'for a decolonial ethos that challenges false narratives of victimhood, decentralisation of knowledge production, and centring anti-colonial, decolonial, and postcolonial thinkers and doers in the world'.

Moreover, ccct challenges the 'pathologization of Dalit subjects as inadequate or abnormal' (Vijay and Nair 2019, 329); it is about 'Dalit life which is street life, defined by the lack of privacy, and proximity to shit and garbage' (Rao 2023); it brings and reinforces the legitimacy of Dalit *Sahitya*,[8] which, although a labour of love, is, however, 'not about pure aesthetics, but pain and anguish' (Pathania and Kalyani 2023). ccct epitomises Mignolo's (2021, p. 25) call for decolonial investigations,

> to unveil the underlying logic that has tricked all of us on the planet Earth under the mirage of the universality of knowledge and of human destiny, as well as to reconsider the cosmogonies and cosmologies that never thought to divide us from the living energy of planet Earth and the cosmos. These investigations shall contribute to rebuilding and reenacting our parameters of knowing, and sensing as well as to the restitution of our love and mutual respect; it aims to restore the communal, encompassing the relationality of the human species within/in all the living universe; [it is] an inquiry and analysis oriented towards changing the assumptions and presumptions – not just the contents – that currently validated Western political economy, polotial theory, an the opinion transmitted by the corporate media to the public at large.

ccct voices and places caste as caste, not race and class, and respects the relative political sovereignty of each socially graded category. In doing so, it reacts against the violence and

cruelty of the identical (Han 2018) that pervade Global North forms of reason. It counters the 'resignification' (Gajarawala 2012, p. 93) errors that make class, race, and caste identical. It stands as an itinerant curriculum theoretical 'isonomia' (Karatani 2017). ccct is much more than a challenge or a denunciation of the silence and absence of caste in our pedagogical apparatuses; it is the proclamation of a non-aligned itinerant epistemological river that breaks with a 'constructed ignorance', conscious that all ignorance 'is ignorance of a given kind of knowledge and all knowledge is overcoming a certain kind of ignorance' (Santos 2018, 40).

ccct responds to Ambedkar's (1989, 9) call to 'to change the Touchable Hindus' and a commitment to 'theorize Hindutva nationalism' (Sampath 2023); to deconstruct it as a form of 'epistemic violence' (Natrajan 2022, 303); ccct is an anthem to smash Hindutva as a myth, a praxis, and as a sublime form of barbaric ignorance, through our curriculum and pedagogies. ccct brings Hinduism/Hindutva to justice. As Susan Sontag (2010, p. 29) would put it, ccct is an itinerant 'emotional and rational emancipation of the critical'.

ccct implies knowledge emancipation; it implies an itinerant theorist which counters 'the monoculture of scientific knowledge [and fights for an] ecology of knowledges' (Santos 2007, xx) is a non-abyssal struggle done by non-abyssal thinkers. ccct is a tout-court *Ambekarite* theory, knowing that the future needs to go beyond *Ambedkarism* without avoiding it. It places caste as the underlying logic of a graded system of domination that precedes the Empire and that fosters a particular cultural and political economy; it is thus cautious about epistemological and material conditions related to the decolonial struggle against coloniality power matrices such as caste and whiteness (see Mignolo 2021).

As an archaeology of anti-casteized ways of knowing from the South, ccct echoes its itinerant nerve and challenges any form of indigenoustude (Paraskeva 2022, 2021, 2022, 2023b); it challenges 'anti-casteism casteism' (Manoharan 2017); that is, ccct is not bacteriological pure and understands that any theory carries with it all the purity and impurity of the reality that builds it and for which it is intended. ccct jazzes with a multiplicity of anti-colonial and decolonial approaches (Cabral 1973; Nkrumah 1964) to help emancipate the mind of the colonised (Cesaire 2000; Wa' Thing'o, 2005); it epitomises an 'ethics of liberation' (Dussel 2013) and torpedos the monumentality of Eurocentric reason crafted within the hemisphere of both dominant and counter dominant traditions.

ccct is the theory of the 'casted wretched of the earth' (Fanon 1963); it dismantles caste as an idea (Ambedkar 1991, 2018); it demonumentalizes the one-dimensional Eurocentric epistemological yarn; ccct exposed the insufficiencies of the Eurocentric theory. ccct exemplifies that the master's tools could not dismantle the master's house – as Lorde (2007) taught us. It deconstructs the icons that arise through the theft of history and theory (Goody 2006; Gunder; Frank 1998; Amin 2011; Paraskeva 2018, 2016), kidnapping reality into space and time that, in fact, never existed.

The ccc*theorists* speak and act 'in the voice of conscience and of truth and refuse to grant to the Hinduized state the monopoly of the conscience' (Appadurai 2021, 15); it is about a decent education and a decent curriculum for a decent life, for a world we all wish to see (Amin 2008). To ccc*theorists*, the battle for social and cognitive justice cannot be accomplished without a non-derivative caste debate (Paraskeva 2024).

Notes

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2. The Rigveda is an ancient Indian collection of Vedic Sanskrit hymns. It is one of the four sacred canonical Hindu texts known as the Vedas. The Rigveda is the oldest known Vedic Sanskrit text. Its early layers are one of the oldest texts in any Indo-European language.
3. Italic mine.
4. Parenthesis mine.
5. Parenthesis mine.
6. Parenthesis mine.
7. Consciousness.
8. Literature.

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