[Draft] Coloniality, complexity and the unconscious

[This short academic text was written as an invited response to an article of João Paraskeva who is a curriculum studies scholar who asked a set of questions related to how we can produce critical educational theories and courses/curriculum that can be relevant and effective in the current context of increased social violence, polarization and ecological collapse. The text starts by offering an overview of the differences between solid and liquid modernity and then outlines Facing Human Wrongs as an example of an educational experiment that addresses the conditions of liquid/disintegrating modernity.]

As I sat with the questions posed by Paraskeva about the difficulties around producing a critical curriculum theory in ways that can "land" and "deliver" in contemporary educational contexts, it was the voice of Zygmunt Bauman (2001, 2011) that spoke loudly at the back of my mind: Could it be that critical curriculum studies and other critical traditions that have made themselves legible within "solid" modernity, despite their critiques of modernity, still maintain a relationship with modernity that is out of sync with modernity's current "liquid" state? What is different about the current "liquid" educational context from previous eras that would make it so difficult for critical curriculum studies to land and deliver?

The last question resonates with the educational inquiry of the Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures Arts/Research Collective (GTDF), which I am part of. GTDF is a collective of scholars, educational practitioners, artists, activists, and Indigenous knowledge keepers that works at the interface of two sets of questions: questions related to the historical, systemic and ongoing violence of modernity/coloniality (e.g. imperialism, colonialism, racism, and more), and questions related to the unsustainability of modern/colonial habits of being with reference to climate, biodiversity, health, social and ecological crises and the expansion of social and ecological collapse (Stein et al., 2020, 2022). The GTDF collective offers a systems/complexity approach to decolonial education based on postcolonial, decolonial, and Indigenous critiques combined with non-Western psychoanalytic practices that focus on the (de)colonisation of our unconscious and that prioritise ontological over epistemological concerns. We call the approach that combines critiques of modernity/coloniality, systems/complexity analyses and a pedagogy that attempts to interrupt the colonisation of the unconscious "depth education" (Andreotti, 2021a; Andreotti & Stein, 2022).

Bauman's analyses of how foundational structures of modernity (e.g. educational institutions) are irreversibly impacted and transformed by technology (e.g. algorithmic capitalism) and by changes driven by technology in social relations and knowledge production and consumption (e.g. social media) have been extremely useful for our collective, especially when combined with a decolonial analysis of modernity/coloniality reaching the limits of the planet. Taking the climate and biodiversity catastrophes into account, what Bauman describes as "liquid modernity" can be interpreted as the last stage of modernity-as-we-know-it. This combined analysis highlights how (and why) what worked in "solid modernity" (when modern structures and

institutions were thriving and the promises of modernity had almost uncontested purchase and credibility) won't work in "liquid modernity" (in contexts where modernity is in decline or in "palliative care").

We have applied Bauman's analyses of the implications of liquid modernity in different contexts where we work (e.g. Stein, 2021; Oliveira, 2021). The application of his insights in the context of curriculum studies may help explain why knowledge production and mobilisation cannot work in the same way it used to work. We have mapped some of the trends that characterise our social-educational context that make this shift more visible. We have used this cartography to inform the design of our educational and artistic experiments, but if the analysis is expanded to address Paraskeva's questions, it may help explain why the forms of critique that promised to land and deliver in the past (i.e. solid modernity) may be less effective and compelling in the present context of modernity.

10 characteristics of liquid social-educational contexts:

1. Hyper-heteroglossia (chaotic cacophony of perspectives): (mis)information overload, which contributes to the end of the viability of compelling meta-narratives, and the impossibility of stable (epistemic) authorities, durable (counter-)hegemonies, or consensus (imposed or otherwise);
2. Arrested parrhesia: when everyone is seeking to speak and to secure validation and platform in different contexts of epistemic struggle (often by speaking louder than others), then no one is really listening (see Andreotti, 2014);
3. Polysemic confusion (rapid proliferation of layers of meaning): people have rediscovered how to use words and phrases in multiple, fluid, multi-layered, and deliberately transgressive ways that challenge artificial universalist impositions, causing difficulties and confusion for those still conditioned by and attached to universalism and logocentrism (i.e. the idea that reality can be indexed in human language);
4. Oversaturation of unprocessed emotions and propensity for self-infantilization: lack of resilience and collective capacity to process complex emotions both individually and collectively, leading to the intensification and multiplication of fragilities and the idealisation of safety as the complete control of risk of failure, triggers and/or trauma;
5. Fast-paced increase in volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (VUCA): our modern/colonial conditioned response to VUCA is to look for certainty as a response to perceived threats to the version of solid modernity we are trying to protect (e.g. liberal, critical or conservative), which in turn leads to social polarization, social fragmentation and irreconcilable perspectives on the common good;
6. Reification of consumption as a way of relating to the world: incentives and rewards for self-centred, satisfaction driven, hyper-individualistic behaviour leading to a meta-entitlement to curate and to consume a palatable and pleasurable version of reality (i.e. the consumption of knowledge, critique, experiences, etc.);
7. Meta-Alethea: increased awareness that our narratives of reality are inherently heuristic/fictional, which, *when irresponsibly mobilised*, leads to "truths" being manufactured and consumed according to convenience (i.e., "post-truth").
8. Teleological hang-ups: hope and futurity are seen as a projected image (of an improved reality) in a future time, rather than relational possibilities in the present that account for

the (systemic, historical, collective and individual, metaphorical and literal) "shit" that has been accumulated and that needs to be collectively composted if a genuinely different future is to be made viable;

9. Intergenerational resentment: as the limits of the planet are being reached and modernity's promises of endless progress and prosperity are perceived as broken, young people blame previous generations for "stealing" their future;

10. Contradictions overload: illustrated in the recent description of a university student who is part of GTDF describing their life experience in liquid modernity as "watching with anger a train wreck in slow motion, while feeling entitled to a Gucci bag and, at the same time, knowing this (perceived entitlement) is a harmful scam, but not being able to interrupt it".

Taking this "liquid" context into account without nostalgic resentment towards what seemed to have worked before has been extremely useful both for GTDF's educational inquiry and the design of educational and artistic experiences and experiments, including the TOOC (targeted open online course) "Facing Human Wrongs - Navigating the complexities and paradoxes of social and global change" (FHW - facinghumanwrongs.net). This educational experiment can be interpreted as a curriculum around violence and unsustainability created for a context of liquid modernity. I will describe it briefly as an example of a complex, situated educational experiment that gestures beyond the onto-epistemic straight-jackets of the discipline of curriculum studies.

Facing Human Wrongs

Grounded in depth education and foregrounding coloniality, complexity and the unconscious, FHW does not propose or position itself as a universal, timeless educational intervention. Instead, it offers a partial, provisional pedagogy that can support learners (particularly in the global north, in contexts of no or low-intensity struggle) to be more responsive and responsible as they navigate the contemporary context of liquid modernity and the ongoing undercurrent of coloniality that underpins liquid modernity as well as modernity's previous iterations. FHW invites participants to consider how violence and unsustainability are conditions that are necessary for the modern/colonial system to exist, how our livelihoods are underwritten by this system (how we are unavoidably systemically complicit in harm) and how this system has a libidinal/neurobiological hold on our psyche that is largely unconscious (Oliveira, 2021; Kapoor, 2020).

The design of FHW was organized around four denials: the denial of systemic complicity in harm, of unsustainability, of entanglement, and of the magnitude and depth of the challenges we will need to face together. The course offers six un/learning bundles with eight invitations each, including a mini-lecture, choices of texts and documentaries, cognitive, affective and relational exercises, a forest/city walk, engagements with artistic practices and pop culture, and land/body recalibrations. Participants are encouraged (or required, if the course is for credit) to experience 75% of each unlearning bundle, before they participate in sharing and processing spaces (tutorials). Those who are interested in taking the course must complete a sample unit and the questionnaire "Is this course for me at this point in time?" where they are prompted to consider the potential psychological and relational costs of doing the course and to offer informed consent for the process. Those who proceed to subsequent units are taught a methodology for

psychoanalytic distancing ("the bus within us" [see Oliveira, 2021; Stein et al., 2022]) and offered the choice to select between receiving no feedback, sugar coated feedback, honest feedback, or brutally honest feedback for their un/learning journals. The course explicitly invites a conscious suspension of desires for solutions, alternatives, agency, hope, progress, redemption, virtue, innocence, benevolence, protagonism and for the suspension of the idealization of any group of humans as having universal answers. The aims of the course are articulated largely around expanding the capacity of participants to hold space for difficult and painful things without feeling overwhelmed, immobilized, or demanding quick fixes, and to navigate VUCA in more generative and accountable ways.

Depth education follows a very different logic to approaches that foreground mastery, self-expression, dialogue, care, social critique and/or moral authority. Different from education whose goal is to impart content (i.e., teacher-centered) or to elicit participation from students (i.e. learner-centered), a depth approach to (decolonial) education is primarily about supporting people to encounter differently and digest (cognitively, affectively and relationally) what they have already been exposed to and that they find it difficult to process. Drawing on non-western psychoanalytical practices, depth education encourages participants to develop a healthy suspicion of their conditioned desires and of the narratives they use and consume to perform their identities within modernity/coloniality. Depth education is different from critical pedagogy and is counter-intuitive to expect it to operate in the same way. Since depth education emphasises hyper-self-reflexive examination rather than exchange of (critical) perspectives for building consensus, it is not "dialogic". In its attempt to enable analectics (Dussel, 1994; Andreotti, 2021b), depth education invites participants to identify and temporarily interrupt conditioned patterns learned in forms of education that emphasize dialectics (see Andreotti, 2021b). Since depth education requires consent for psychoanalytic processing, it can only be invitational and not accusatory or compulsory. It is important to emphasize that depth education needs to be appropriately tailored to one's audience, especially in recognition of uneven marginalisation and complicity in systemic harm. We use depth education as an umbrella term that refers to educational experiences that have three distinct, but inter-related objectives:

1. to invite us to interrupt our investments in harmful conditioned modern/colonial denials, desires, and perceived entitlements (psychoanalytic dimension);
2. to build our collective capacity and stamina for bearing the weight and demands of VUCA and of wicked challenges (systems/complexity literacy dimension) (Stein, 2021); and
3. to activate a visceral form of accountability before will (Spivak 2004) that can prompt an imperative for us to act from/with decolonial forms of sobriety, maturity, discernment and responsibility, even when this goes against our perceived self-interest (existential/ political/relational dimension) as we face the crises at the end of the modernity as we know it (Andreotti, 2020; Stein, et. al. 2021).

Depth education also aims to "hack" the political grammar of modernity/coloniality that demands intelligible politics to manifest through the 5 E's of exceptionalism, exaltedness, expansion of entitlements, externalization of culpability, emancipation from constraints and empowerment of the ego (Oliveira, 2021). The course is testing the viability of a political practice of healing and wellbeing grounded on non-exceptionality/ordinariness (Andreotti, 2020)

and the collective ability to compost metaphorical and literal, systemic and historical, collective and individual "shit" in ways that can recalibrate our vital compass (Andreotti, et. al. 2021). This political practice is illustrated in the analogy of learning to walk a tightrope between naive hope and desperate hopelessness, with honesty, humility, humor and hyper-self-reflexivity, balancing intellectual and relational rigour as we hospice modernity/coloniality and offer pre-natal care for something currently unimaginable and potentially wiser without suffocating what is gestating with our own projections, idealisations and smothering "care".

As much as FHW attempts to "hack" modern/colonial affective and relational conditionings, it still unavoidably reproduces the intellectual grammar of modernity, otherwise it wouldn't be intelligible within modernity/coloniality or potentially effective in what it proposes to do. Ironically, it is precisely the conscious bearing of these kinds of paradoxes that shows the potential of depth education (and curriculum studies) to gesture beyond the (Eurocentric) impasse between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic traditions. The Master's tools cannot indeed dismantle the house (Lorde, 1984), but they can widen and draw attention to the damage in its foundation (and the root causes of this damage), so that more insistent plants can find their way through the open cracks.

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