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Toward a Decolonial Ethics in Human Rights and Peace Education

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Abstract

This article argues that interventions in HRE and PE that aim to decolonize understandings and praxes of peace and human rights will inevitably have to address the issue of decolonial ethics. Decolonial ethics imagines a set of ethical orientations that confront conventional assumptions about culture and history and challenge the normally uninterrogated consequences of coloniality (which is an enduring process that is still very much with us today, as opposed to colonialism which is understood as a temporal period of oppression that has come and gone) and Eurocentrism in disciplinary discourses and practices. Although both HRE and PE have historically

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claimed an ethical mission that has attempted in the past to articulate responses to the ethical problem of how to struggle against violations of rights and to reinstate respect and protection of rights and positive peace in the world, both conventional and progressive approaches have been generally unreflective about the ethical implications of coloniality and Eurocentrism in these fields. The article explores how decolonial reflections on ethics sketch a different path in HRE and PE from the familiar ethical theories along three directions: border thinking, being human as praxis, and pluriversality.

Keywords: Decolonial; Ethics; Human Rights Education; Peace Education; Pedagogy

Recent work in Human Rights Education (HRE) and Peace Education (PE) has begun to critique coloniality and Eurocentrism, unmasking how these maladies are implicated in un-critical, monolithic, depoliticized and largely de-contextualized manifestations of HRE and PE (e.g. see Bajaj, 2015; Bajaj & Brantmeier, 2011; Keet, 2015; Kester, 2019; Shirazi, 2011; Williams, 2013, 2016, 2017; Yang, 2015; Zakharia 2017; Zembylas, 2017a, 2017b, 2018). This work has drawn attention to a range of exclusions, epistemic injustices and other violences in HRE and PE, and to a failure to fully address issues of power, race, and coloniality. Some of the critiques and counter-projects that have been raised against coloniality and Eurocentrism draw inspiration from decolonial thinking, highlighting how a ‘colonial matrix of power’ systematically reproduces colonial patterns of racial domination, epistemic hierarchization, and marginalization of non-Western knowledges and lifeworlds in wide-ranging academic fields. Scholars such as Enrique Dussel (1985, 2013), Walter Mignolo (2000, 2011), Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2007, 2008), Sylvia Wynter (2003; Wynter & McKittrick, 2015), and others, have turned our attention to the deep influence of taken-for-granted epistemological, ontological, methodological, and ethical assumptions embedded within academic disciplines, and particularly the determining force of historical and contemporary relations of colonialism and coloniality to the most basic understandings and praxes of knowledge production (Fregoso Bailón & De Lissovoy, 2018).

This article argues that a fundamental part of the ongoing project of decolonization in academia is the task of developing decolonial ethics (Dussel, 1985, 2013; Maldonado-Torres, 2007, 2008). Decolonial ethics does not simply recognize the values of intercultural dialogue and cultural differences, as liberal, multiculturalist, and cosmopolitan orientations emphasize. Rather, decolonial ethics imagines a set of ethical orientations that confront conventional assumptions about culture and history and challenge the normally uninterrogated consequences of coloniality and Eurocentrism in disciplinary discourses and practices. In this sense, the task of developing a decolonial ethics is essentially a project of unworking the ethics of coloniality and Eurocentrism within disciplines (Odysseos, 2017). Therefore, decolonial ethics is distinct from, and critical of, the ethics implied in liberal, multiculturalist, and cosmopolitan orientations that circulate in many fields, including HRE and PE. Decolonial ethics may share with these orientations a refusal to circumscribe normative commitments to knowledge, politics and culture, yet it differs from them by virtue of rejecting fundamental principles of Western notions such as ‘individualism’ and ‘universality’ in favor of other values such as ‘border thinking’ and ‘pluriversality’ (Dunford, 2017). Border thinking highlights the contributions of subaltern knowledge producers, who are in the ‘borders’ or ‘margins,’ whereas pluriversality emphasizes that there are pluriversal values, that is, values which emerge from dialogue across multiple places, cultures and visions about the world.

I argue, then, that interventions in HRE and PE that aim to decolonize understandings and praxes of peace and human rights will inevitably have to address the question of decolonial ethics. However, as Odysseos (2017) emphasizes, this task will not be accomplished by “incorporating elements of decolonial critique or ‘translating’ these important attempts at decolonial ethics into our familiar ethical theories” (p. 449). Rather, if we want to retain “decolonial thought’s disruption of prevalent figurations, languages and ways of thinking about ‘ethics” (Odysseos, 2017, p. 449), we would need to create a new language of ethics—a language that moves beyond Eurocentric ethical theories and emerges from within the experience of the ‘colonial wound’ (Mignolo, 2005), a language that enables envisioning new social and political

imaginaries to the ethical problem of how to struggle against violations of rights and to reinstate respect and protection of rights and positive peace in the world, while coloniality still persists. Although both HRE and PE have historically claimed an ethical mission that has attempted in the past to articulate responses to the ethical problem of togetherness in the world, both conventional and even more progressive approaches that fall within critical HRE and critical PE, have been generally unreflective about the ethical implications of coloniality and Eurocentrism in these fields.

This article seeks to outline some elements of a future decolonial ethics in HRE and PE, while showing the limits of familiar ethical theories, namely, liberal, multiculturalist, and cosmopolitan orientations. The aim is not to provide a comprehensive description of decolonial ethics in HRE and PE, as this would not only be impossible, but it would risk repeating the same colonizing moves that are driven by currently dominant ontological, epistemological and ethical investments in universality, certainty, and mastery (Stein, 2019). As Dunford (2017) emphasizes, “an exhaustive and definitive statement of decolonial ethics [...] would be impossible, for decolonial ethics has emerged from, and must remain open to being shaped by, dialogues amongst millions of grassroots actors and activists” (p. 381). When understood in this form, decolonial ethics provides an ethical lens for HRE and PE to continually challenge the enduring legacies of coloniality and Eurocentrism in these fields.

The article is divided into four sections. In the first section, I outline some general contours of decolonial critiques that highlight the distinctiveness of coloniality’s ethics. The second section shows how the ethics of coloniality is reflected in the engagement with understandings of peace and human rights theories and pedagogies. The third section turns to the work of decolonial scholars Enrique Dussel, Sylvia Wynter and Nelson Maldonado-Torres and critically engages with their ideas on decolonial ethics; in particular, my analysis addresses the idea of ethics of materiality, positionality and corporality, the critique of ethical subjectivity found in European epistemes, and the critique of the Eurocentric paradigm of war, since I find these issues to be pertinent in the fields of HRE and PE. The final section explores how these decolonial reflections on ethics sketch a different

path in HRE and PE from the familiar ethical theories along three important directions: border thinking, being human as praxis, and pluriversality. This section also discusses the tensions and possibilities emerging from attempts to develop a decolonial ethics in HRE and PE, arguing that the project of renewing HRE and PE is inextricably linked to the ethical dimensions of decolonization.

The Ethics of Coloniality

Decolonial thinking consists of a diverse set of critiques of colonialism and its aftermath—the coloniality of power and knowledge, land appropriation, racial hierarchization and exclusion, liberal individualism, and claims of universality (e.g. Dussel, 2013; Maldonado-Torres, 2008; Mignolo, 2011; Quijano, 2007; Wynter, 2003).¹ Key to this ‘colonial matrix of power’ (Quijano, 2007) are particular Western values such as civilization, development and liberalism, “that have been imposed on others as universal and globally applicable designs” (Dunford, 2017, p. 382). As various decolonial scholars argued, the colonial matrix of power rested on the racial classification of the world, capitalism as a violent mode of production, the exploitation of colonized populations, and the expropriation of non-Western religions, knowledges and cultures. As mentioned earlier, it would be

¹ It is important to clarify from the beginning that there are distinctive features that distinguish decolonial theories from postcolonialism and other critical theories (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015). A similar argument has been made in the field of education, namely, it has been argued that decolonial and postcolonial perspectives are not necessarily equivalent, complementary or even supplementary to critical theory and pedagogy projects (Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2012; Tuck & Yang, 2012). Discussing these theoretical differences lies beyond the scope of this article. It is sufficient to say here that the decolonial turn encourages re-thinking the world from the perspective of the marginalized, that is, from Latin America, from Africa, from Indigenous places and from the global South. While postcolonial theory—as it is exemplified, for example, in the work of Said and Spivak—has exposed Eurocentrism, decolonial theory presents a much more radical position that critiques the epistemological, ontological and ethical roots of coloniality. I come back to this issue, when I discuss the distinction between postcolonial manifestations of HRE or PE and a decolonial ethics in these fields.

impossible to capture in this section the diversity and complexity of decolonial thinking, therefore, I will focus on outlining three general contours of decolonial critiques that, in my view, highlight the distinctiveness of coloniality's ethics: coloniality as an enduring process that claims the superiority of colonialism's achievements; coloniality as constitutive of liberal values; and, coloniality as bound up with Eurocentric knowledge and the epistemicide of colonized subjects' knowledge. This discussion provides vital background for understanding decolonial ethics.

First, it is important to clarify that coloniality in general refers to "the continuity of colonial forms of domination after the end of colonial administrations, produced by colonial cultures and structures in the modern/colonial capitalist/patriarchal world-system" (Grosfoguel, 2007, p. 219). In other words, coloniality is a political, economic, racial and ethical system of classification and domination. As Maldonado-Torres (2007) emphasizes, there is an important distinction between coloniality and colonialism:

Coloniality is different from colonialism. Colonialism denotes a political and economic relation in which the sovereignty of a nation or a people rests on the power of another nation, which makes such nation an empire. Coloniality, instead, refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations. Thus, coloniality survives colonialism. It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience. In a way, as modern subjects we breathe coloniality all the time and every day. (p. 243)

The main point here is that coloniality is an enduring process that claims the superiority of colonialism's achievements and the inferiority of conquered populations—hence, the colonial matrix of power invokes a particular system of ethics. For example, the coloniality of power—manifested through the concentration in Europe of capital, the dispossession of lands, enslavement

and gendered violence—naturalizes Europe’s politics and culture through its “non-ethics of war” (Maldonado-Torres, p. 247). As Maldonado-Torres (2007) explains, the non-ethics of war refers to the idea that war is exempt from the ethics that regulate normal conduct in majority Christian countries, in favor of naturalizing violence and slavery justified by virtue of the conquered populations’ ‘race.’

Second, coloniality is constitutive of liberal values and Western democratic political institutions (Dunford, 2017). As Maldonado-Torres (2007) writes about Mignolo’s (2003) notion of coloniality as ‘the darker side of modernity’:

Modernity, usually considered to be a product of the European Renaissance or the European Enlightenment, has a darker side, which is constitutive of it. Modernity as a discourse and as a practice would not be possible without coloniality, and coloniality continues to be an inevitable outcome of modern discourses. (p. 244)

Modern discourses of liberal rights, in particular rights to private property, can be traced in the politics of colonialism and the economic growth of Europe enabled by colonialism that has led to a wider distribution of property (Jahn, 2013). As Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) explains:

The darker or underside of modernity included the slave trade, fratricidal colonial wars of conquest, negative development, violent civilizing missions, forcible Christianization, material dispossessions and other forms of violence. The brighter side of modernity included the flowering of individual liberties, universal suffrage, mass democracy, secularization and emancipation of the masses from the tyranny of tradition and religion, rationality and scientific spirit, popular education, technology and many other accomplishments (Boron, 2005, p. 32). But for one to experience the darker or brighter aspects of modernity depended on which side of the abyssal lines one was located as well as the racial category into which one was classified. (p. 25)

Needless to say, the so-called ‘brighter side of modernity’ is not without caveats. Individual liberties come sometimes at the cost of collective struggles; mass democracy is turning into the tyranny of the majority; the

assumed emancipation of tradition and religion is leading to Islamophobia; popular education assumes that other types of education are not relevant.² In short, coloniality is inextricably linked to liberal-democratic values and institutions in Europe, hence the ethico-political foundations of European values—e.g. private property, tolerance, multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism, individual rights, human rights and so on—were borne out of the colonial experience. As De Lissovoy (2010) points out, the principle of coexistence is a fundamental ethical value of coloniality “in which the radical differences between hegemonic and indigenous standpoints are not suppressed” (p. 282). However, the hypocrisy is that coexistence is manifested through “the appropriation of indigenous lands, resources, knowledge and culture within a colonial dynamic” (De Lissovoy, p. 282). For example, the ideals of peace, democracy and human rights that are dominant in the twenty-first century, have all been imposed by violence under the rhetoric of modernity’s superiority over non-Europeans’ inferiority (Grosfoguel, 2007).

Third, coloniality is bound up with Eurocentric knowledge and the epistemicide of colonized subjects’ knowledge. The concept of ‘coloniality of knowledge’ (Quijano, 2007) refers to how Eurocentric knowledge was made globally hegemonic through the workings of colonialism and capitalism. In this manner, Western knowledge was considered universally salient—hence, the idea of ‘universality’ of Eurocentric knowledge—while indigenous and other colonized subjects’ knowledge was deemed to be provincial.³ This epistemological model, explains Quijano, works through establishing binary, hierarchical relations such as primitive versus civilized, irrational versus rational, and traditional versus modern such that everything that is ‘non-European’ is identified with inferiority. The challenge for decoloniality is how

² I am indebted to one of the anonymous reviewers for suggesting this clarification.

³ The word ‘indigenous’ here is used to describe a variety of Aboriginal peoples; hence, the assumption is that the indigenous is not homogenous. By ‘indigenous knowledge’, then, I do not mean to refer to a homogenous body of knowledge that is the antidote to the Eurocentric. Rather, indigenous knowledge entails a variety of worldviews, skills, practices, and rituals developed by societies with long histories of interaction with their surroundings (Bruchac, 2014).

to ‘delink’ knowledge production from the colonial matrix of power towards different ways of knowing and being in the world (Mignolo, 2007). As Mignolo explains:

Decoloniality, then, means working toward a vision of human life that is not dependent upon or structured by the forced imposition of one ideal of society over those that differ, which is what modernity/coloniality does and, hence, where decolonization of the mind should begin. The struggle is for changing the terms in addition to the content of the conversation. (p. 459)

Recognizing the consequences of coloniality of knowledge and the need to delink knowledge production from the colonial matrix of power highlights that epistemic hierarchies are entangled with political, economic, *and* ethical hierarchies. Therefore, a decolonial conceptualization of ethics constitutes an inextricable part of decolonization, because it “offers more than an alternative to Eurocentric ones” (De Lissovoy, 2010, p. 282). As De Lissovoy argues, a decolonial ethics “exposes the several dimensions of a constitutive contradiction and hypocrisy in the Western traditions of political and ethical philosophy, and in the concrete projects of democracy-building that have been informed by them” (p. 282). For example, the universalism that was proclaimed for humanity was distorted, as it was imposed through deeply racist and colonial discourses and practices such as the imposition of ‘civilizing missions’ and ‘developmentalist projects’ justified on the basis of claims that these interventions would save the other from its own barbarism (Grosfoguel, 2007).

To sum up, acknowledging the ethics of coloniality—as constitutive of values about the superiority and universalization of Eurocentric knowledge, the imposition of liberal values and the epistemicide of colonized subjects’ knowledge—raises questions about the extent to which this sort of ethics is embedded in various academic disciplines and fields. In the next part of the article, I will discuss how recent contributions in HRE and PE have begun to problematize Eurocentric understandings of peace and human rights theories and pedagogies. My goal is not to provide a comprehensive review of this work, but rather to highlight the importance of paying attention to how coloniality has had an influence on the ethical theories that have become

dominant in HRE and PE, namely, liberal, multiculturalist, and cosmopolitan orientations. I will argue that if the reproduction of Western values and Eurocentric knowledge production is going to be interrupted, then an alternative, namely, a ‘decolonial ethics’ is required to be developed through HRE and PE theories and pedagogies.

Eurocentric Understandings of Peace and Human Rights Theories and Pedagogies

Recent work in both HRE and PE shows that many concepts in these fields have been monopolized by Eurocentric scholarship. Take, for example, the concept of ‘human rights’ itself and its grounding in liberal views of modernity and specifically humanist notions of ‘the human’ as an autonomous, rational, and sovereign ‘individual’ (Donnelly, 2003; Douzinas, 2000; Mutua, 2002). The very constitution of ‘human’ in human rights discourses is predicated upon Eurocentric assumptions within which only particular kinds of ethical subjects are recognizable as ‘human,’ while all others are excluded through racialization and colonization (Mignolo, 2000; Wynter, 2003). Pointing to the Eurocentric character of today’s conceptualizations of human rights reveals their epistemological, ontological and ethical grounding, which “is the offspring of a particular perspective grounded in a historical and geographical context” (Barreto, 2012, p. 3). Today’s conceptualizations of human rights, then, have colonizing functions for those who have been, and still are, systematically excluded from its imaginary (Khoja-Moolji, 2017).

In particular, liberal theories of politics and ethics—which often take the form of moral cosmopolitan and multicultural views in human rights discourses—are based on the idea that all human beings belong to the same collectivity and should be treated equally regardless of their nationality, language or religion (López, 2010).⁴ The distinctive characteristics of

⁴ Needless to say, I do not reject *all* cosmopolitan and multicultural thought; my concern here is that which is grounded in universalistic and individualistic frames (López, 2010). As

cosmopolitanism, López points out, are individualism, universal equality, and the generality of application, while multiculturalism emphasizes the consideration and respect of difference. And yet, as the history of colonialism shows, the ethico-political grounding of liberal theories is tied to the project of coloniality and the reproduction of the colonial matrix of power. What seems to be missing from liberal theories is how modernity and coloniality have been responsible for the persistent coloniality and structural inequalities in the world today (Dunford, 2017).

A similar argument has been made about HRE, namely, how the field has been shaped within the epistemological, ontological and ethical conditions of coloniality that have delimited its own space, both theoretically and practically (Bajaj, Cislighi & Mackie, 2016; Keet, 2015; Osler, 2015; Yang, 2015, Zembylas, 2017a, 2017b; Zembylas & Keet, 2019). Although there is a range of perspectives in relation to HRE, it is generally understood as both a field of study and an area of social education that is concerned with the teaching and learning of human rights. The historical development of HRE itself as a field has been linked to liberal, cosmopolitan and multicultural perspectives that invoke the fundamental epistemological and ethical stance of the West—that it can unilaterally know and determine the right and the true for itself and all others through educational, political and cultural interventions (Fregoso Bailón & De Lissovoy, 2018). For example, the underlying assumption of many conventional HRE programs that primarily promote knowledge about universal human rights is that learning about or from universal human rights is a major way to secure ‘development’ and ‘emancipation’ in ‘developing’ countries; alternative conceptions from Africa or other indigenous populations of what it means to be ‘human’ to live a meaningful life —e.g. humanity in relational terms; the inclusion of nonhumans in systems of living—are systematically undermined or completely erased from these programs (Khoja-Moolji, 2017).

I show next in the article, the point is not to give up on cosmopolitan and multicultural thought as such, but rather to develop such thinking within a frame of decolonial ethics.

There is now growing evidence that conventional HRE projects in schools, universities, non-governmental organisations and communities seldom question the epistemological and ontological underpinnings of the Eurocentric theory of human rights (Keet, 2014), perpetuating an uncritical advancement of human rights universals as an uncontested social good (Keet, 2015). Building on Keet's argument about the 'imprisonment' of human rights and HRE into colonial and neoliberal arrangements (see also Coysh, 2014; Zembylas & Keet, 2019), I would go a step further and suggest that it is time we questioned the ethical underpinnings of HRE as well, and specifically how its liberal framework has limited the ethical promise of HRE within a normative frame. But before I make an attempt to do so, it is important to show how PE has followed a similar trajectory when it comes to its embeddedness in Eurocentric ethical theories and pedagogies.

Similar to HRE, PE is defined as both a field of study and an area of social education that is concerned with war, conflict and violence, and with how to promote peace in the world (Burns & Aspeslagh, 1996; Harris & Morrison, 2003; Salomon & Nevo, 2002). There are clearly overlaps between HRE and PE in that the ideas of peace and human rights are often interconnected when it comes to teaching and learning; they differ though in terms of what they prioritize as their lens or focus of interest. Critiques of PE theory and practice in recent years have also acknowledged how Eurocentric ideas have influenced views on peacebuilding and peace education programs (Bajaj, 2015; Bajaj & Brantmeier, 2011; Kester, 2019; Shirazi, 2011; Williams, 2013, 2016, 2017; Zakharia 2017; Zembylas, 2018). In particular, these critiques highlight the limitations of the Eurocentric modernist framework undergirding peace pedagogies and essentially the reproduction of peacebuilding practices and institutions grounded in whiteness, coloniality and liberalism. Similar to HRE, liberal theories in PE are reflected in the epistemological, political and ontological premises of peace and peace education (Zembylas & Bekerman, 2013, 2017).

Importantly, there are growing efforts in PE to utilize more explicitly ideas from decolonial theory to discuss and analyze understandings and practices of peace education. For example, Williams (2017) uses decolonial thinking to discuss how colonialism and slavery need to inform more critical

ways forward in the work of peace education; this may take, for instance, the form of questioning the colonial histories and iterations of structural violence found in specific teaching and learning contexts in which ‘peace’ is invoked. A similar argument has been put forward by Sumida Huaman (2011) who makes a link between ‘critical peace education’ and ‘Indigenous education’ by suggesting that it is important to recognize the legacies of colonization in Indigenous societies and the need to include Indigenous knowledges in nurturing transformative agencies toward critical peace education. In my own recent work, I have also brought into conversation ‘postcolonial peace education’ with ‘critical peace education’, making an attempt to theorize their convergences and divergences (Zembylas, 2018). Other scholars’ efforts in peace education (e.g. Shirazi, 2011; Zakharia, 2017) also explore the linkages between postcolonial theory and critical peace education to articulate what it means for peace education to be inspired by ‘postcolonial’ ideas.⁵

Although these efforts do move away from the influence of Eurocentric theorizing and engage explicitly with the ways in which philosophical understandings and pedagogical practices of peace education are implicated in modernity and coloniality, there is still considerable work to be done to specify and unpack the ethical contours of decolonizing efforts in PE. Clearly, work in ‘critical peace education’ has paid attention to issues of structural inequalities and aims at cultivating a sense of ‘transformative agency’ or ‘voice’ to create new social, epistemic and political structures that advance peace and human rights. Yet, concepts such as agency or voice are

⁵ It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss the variety of understandings and definitions around ‘critical peace education,’ ‘postcolonial peace education’ and related notions. It is sufficient here to say that what differentiates ‘conventional’ PE from critical peace education is that the latter brings in theoretical frameworks and conceptual resources that draw from fields such as critical pedagogy, social justice education, critical race theory, and post-colonial and post-structural theory (e.g. see Bajaj, 2015; Bajaj & Brantmeier, 2011; Bajaj & Hantzopoulos, 2016; Zembylas & Bekerman, 2013, 2017). Postcolonial peace education highlights, in particular, how larger structural, material and political realities of coloniality influence understandings and pedagogical practices of peace (Zakharia, 2017; Zembylas, 2018).

problematic as they feature strongly in colonial and universalist discourses. Hence, a decolonial conceptualization of ethics is not yet reflected in theorizations of critical peace education.

In particular, I would argue that it is important to develop a *critical decolonial ethics* in both PE and HRE—that is, an ethics which is viewed as part of decolonizing projects (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2014). A critical decolonial ethics in PE and HRE, then, would seek to develop decolonized accounts of peace and human rights in which a new humanity could be made possible, rather than being limited to a critique of modernity building on critical social theories that are not calling for the total dismantling of Eurocentric modernity (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2014). A decolonial PE, just as a decolonial HRE, would emphasize the ongoing process of resistance (De Lissovoy, 2010) to any colonial patterns of hierarchization and oppression in peacebuilding and human rights efforts.

All in all, a decolonial perspective on ethics in HRE and PE poses fundamental questions such as: How can the experience of the colonial wound be acknowledged in HRE and PE accounts? What alternatives to Eurocentric ethical theories may be developed in HRE and PE? How does a decolonial perspective on ethics in HRE and PE radicalize liberal, cosmopolitan, and multiculturalist considerations of difference? These questions do not have simple answers, but rather highlight the significance of explicit engagement with the ethical dimensions of coloniality in critiques of HRE and PE.

Decolonial Ethics: Insights from Dussel, Wynter and Maldonado-Torres

This section explores the insights on decolonial ethics of three prominent scholars who have addressed the issue of ethics more explicitly in their writings: Enrique Dussel, Sylvia Wynter and Nelson Maldonado-Torres. I focus on these scholars because they address issues that I find to be pertinent in the fields of HRE and PE, namely, the idea of ethics of materiality, positionality and corporality, the critique of ethical subjectivity found in European epistemes, and the critique of the Eurocentric paradigm

of war. All of these issues come up, one way or another, in theorizations of HRE and PE, although the sort of complexity invoked by these decolonial thinkers is not yet widely reflected in discussions of coloniality, hierarchization and marginalization in HRE and PE. My analysis here, then, draws attention to these issues to expose the importance of the *ethical* in attempts to decolonize HRE and PE.

In his long-standing work on the ethics of liberation, Dussel (1985, 2013) maintains that Western ethics are grounded in a disembodied and metaphysical humanity that disregards materiality, positionality and corporality. Therefore, he argues that corporality, positionality and materiality should be reinstated by taking into consideration the multidimensionality of life—e.g. cultural values, biological factors, material factors etc.—and how each of these dimensions implies ethical obligations. As López (2010) observes, Dussel develops a critique of Western ethics by departing from the abstract modern moralism of Kant and moving toward an ethics that takes seriously the materiality of human life: “He [Dussel] maintains that an ethics that attempts to deal with evidently factual matters such as misery and the conditions of those excluded from the global order necessarily requires the primacy of a material order” (p. 666).

In other words, confronting the materiality of coloniality demands a decolonial ethics that positions the others (e.g. the poor, the oppressed) in practical-material terms; that is, the ethical responsibility to confront the affective and material consequences of coloniality (e.g. see Pedwell, 2016) is foregrounded. As Dussel explains, the true ethical response is not an issue of applying an ideal ethical system that dictates how one ought to act, but rather it is formulated on the basis of the other’s affective and material experiences and assessments of political conditions:

Others reveal themselves as others in all the acuteness of their exteriority when they burst in upon us as something extremely distinct, as nonhabitual, nonroutine, as the extraordinary, the enormous (“apart from the norm”)—the poor, the oppressed. They are the ones who, by the side of the road, outside the system, show their suffering, challenging faces: “We’re hungry! We have the right to eat” (1985, p. 43).

The ethical moment is the cry that people *ought not* to be poor and oppressed; the materiality, positionality and corporality of this moment is precisely what disturbs the world and its colonial organization and reconceptualizes life on the basis of the gaze of the other. Importantly, the ethics of materiality, positionality and corporality extends well beyond particular persons encountering each other to encompass the social, historical and physical environment (De Lissovoy, 2018).

Like Dussel, Sylvia Wynter emerges as another unrelenting critic of the Eurocentric ethical foundations by focusing specifically on one figure—white European ‘Man’ as a rational, masterful and civilized being—and how he has monopolized the human (Odysseos, 2017). Wynter (2003; Wynter & McKittrick, 2015) highlights how the organization of colonial discourses and practices entailed the assumption of human as a single homogenized being based on the figure of the West’s liberal Man. For Wynter (2003), Man emerged through ‘genres’ that occurred through historical ruptures in European history—e.g. the *homo politicus* Man of the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century or the *homo economicus* Man of capitalism in the nineteenth century. Her genealogy of genres of Man shows how knowledge systems, values and ethics are embodied and historically situated. However, these ethical principles (e.g. White rationality, Christian principles of spirituality, etc.) have become normalized, while other ethics (e.g. Indigenous populations) have been undermined or excluded from the prevailing genre of the human.⁶

For Wynter, challenging the overrepresented figure of Man is “central to ethical inquiry and subjectivity, *in situ* at the multiple sites of contemporary coloniality” (Odysseos, 2017, p. 458). In other words, Wynter’s interrogation of the ethics of Man is not an intellectual matter but rather “one of social, political and ethical-relational importance for ongoing projects

⁶ As noted earlier, Indigenous populations are not homogeneous in their religion or even value systems. It’s the imposition of this unified / universal values that is problematic. Once again, I am indebted to one of the anonymous reviewers for suggesting this clarification.

of decolonization” (Odysseos, 2017, p. 458) In her efforts to decenter Man and the grounding of his ethical subjectivity, Wynter invokes a new notion of humanness that is articulated as a collective body and praxis rather than an individual autonomous entity as found in European epistemes: As McKittrick (2015) explains: “Being human [for Wynter] signals not a noun but a verb. Being human is a praxis of humanness” (p. 3). It is important to show how human selves are multifarious and are enacted differently in various (colonized) contexts; therefore, an important part of developing decolonial ethics, Wynter tells us, ought to be the de-generalization of the Man and his universal ethics.

Finally, I turn to decolonial theorist Maldonado-Torres and his ground-breaking book *Against War: View from the Underside of Modernity* (2008) in which he articulates critical decolonial ethics in relation to the paradigm of war and racism that is inextricably tied to coloniality. A paradigm of war is defined by Maldonado-Torres as “a way of conceiving humanity, knowledge, and social relations that privileges conflict or *polemos*” (p. 3). This paradigm is genealogically traceable to the emergence of Eurocentric modernity in 1492, which is interpreted as paradigmatic of the birth of a world capitalist economy, the colonial exploitation by Europe, and the use of violence to impose a modern subjectivity based on race as an organizing principle. Decolonial ethics, then, is opposed to this world system and the ethics it invokes: racially hierarchized, capitalist, patriarchal, sexist, Eurocentric, Christian-centric, and colonial (Grosfoguel, 2007). The decolonial turn, according to Maldonado-Torres (2008),

posits the primacy of ethics as an antidote to problems with Western conceptions of freedom, autonomy and equality, as well as the necessity of politics to forge a world where ethical relations become the norm rather than the exception. The de-colonial turn highlights the epistemic relevance of the enslaved and colonized search for humanity. (p. 7)

According to Maldonado-Torres, the post-1492 modern world-system was driven by war, and at its center was Eurocentrism and coloniality. What critical decolonial ethics seeks is, therefore, a paradigm of peace, yet not one that superficially extols peace for the sake of it, but one “that is constitutive

of decolonial liberatory ethics [and] marks a radical humanistic-oriented departure from the paradigm of war” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2014, p. 910). If we are going to overcome what Maldonado-Torres (2008) calls the ‘master morality’ premised on the refusal to engage the colonized person as ethical being and defines non-white bodies as sub-human, then we clearly need to develop a decolonial ethics outside of Western ethics and politics.

To sum up, the elements that each decolonial thinker adds—i.e. an ethics of materiality, positionality and corporality, the critique of ethical subjectivity found in European epistemes, and the critique of the Eurocentric paradigm of war —contribute toward a decolonial ethics that aims at rehumanizing people who have been reduced by racism and colonialism to the ‘wretched of the earth’ (Fanon, 1963). Given that coloniality has been imposed on notions of universality, it might be tempting to think that decolonial ethics would reject any global design of ethics “on the basis that it will inevitably crush differences and reinforce coloniality” (Dunford, 2017, p. 387). Indeed, as De Lissovoy (2010) also points out, there are serious concerns, when claims are made about a global decolonial ethics. Such concerns emerge from the fact that notions of unity and commonality in ethical projects “have been infected by the assimilative impulse of Eurocentrism” and so it may be argued that “any truly global ethics [of decoloniality] will have to break with the epistemologically predatory determinations of [Eurocentrism]” (De Lissovoy, 2010, p. 283). However, argues De Lissovoy, to reject a global decolonial ethics altogether “is only to recoil into the obverse of a colonial universalism” (p. 283). Similarly, Dunford (2017) suggests that challenging the colonial matrix of power and developing a decolonial ethics constitutes a global project, in the sense “that decolonial ethics is and must be globally minded” (p. 387). The difference is that such a globally minded ethics has to be built outside of Western traditions and should be an ongoing and provisional product of dialogue and collaboration between differences rather than an *a priori* set of European ethical values (De Lissovoy, 2010), no matter how ‘noble’ they sound such as liberal, multicultural or cosmopolitan values.

Toward a Decolonial Ethics in HRE and PE

In this last section of the article, I explore how the decolonial reflections on ethics outlined so far may sketch a different trajectory in HRE and PE—one that moves beyond familiar ethical theories of liberal, multiculturalist, and cosmopolitan orientations. In particular, I will focus on three ideas that invoke new forms of HRE and PE as ethical and incessant decolonial projects: border thinking, being human as praxis, and pluriversality. These ideas are inspired by the insights discussed from the work of Dussel, Wynter and Maldonado-Torres. Once again, these ideas are not meant to be exhaustive or even exemplary of a decolonial global ethics in HRE and PE, but rather as illustrative of the ethical possibilities that are opened for scholarship in these fields.

Border Thinking

As noted earlier, liberal, multiculturalist, and cosmopolitan theories promote thinking in abstract universalist terms, while ignoring the positionality and contribution of the poor and the marginalized (Dunford, 2017). On the contrary, decolonial scholars invoke thinking from the border to highlight the contributions of subaltern knowledge producers, who are in the margins, yet whose positions are legitimate to be heard (Maldonado-Torres, 2008). As Maldonado-Torres writes, these positions must be taken into consideration not because they have equal value in the name of an abstract cosmopolitanism, “but because the centuries old experience of coloniality and dehumanization provides colonized subjects with important perspectives” (p. 250). Border thinking, then, does not assume that those positions will remain at the border and margins. It means that those positions are reacting to the dominant Eurocentric discourse, rather than being the core and leading the way forward to decoloniality. Also, it is not only the positions that are brought in, but also the experiences of struggle and praxis.

Thinking from the borders in HRE and PE involves giving up the supremacy of liberal, multicultural or cosmopolitan ethics embedded in these fields and taking an active stance against colonial patterns of

hierarchization and oppression in peacebuilding and human rights efforts. For example, to think from the borders implies decolonizing HRE and PE interventions so that the histories and experiences of colonized people are included and active engagement with subjugated knowledges is invoked—e.g. the recognition of colonized people’s experiences of peace and war (see Zakharia, 2017). Developing a decolonial ethics in HRE and PE means making subjugated knowledges key points at the levels of pedagogy, curriculum programs, and teacher education, while rejecting Eurocentric supremacy in determining what legitimate knowledge is.

Furthermore, to think from the borders is not only to acknowledge the experience of the colonial wound in HRE and PE accounts, but also to *think with* these experiences of coloniality and dehumanization when developing contextualized HRE and PE programs. This means that decolonial ethics radicalizes liberal, cosmopolitan, and multiculturalist considerations of difference embedded in HRE and PE programs, because it offers different understandings of what is of fundamental moral significance. There are for instance, indigenous cultures that do not prioritize the ‘rights’ and moral worth of human beings as compared to other beings. Some of the moral visions that operate at the borders, then, refuse to specify in advance that some beings are more worthy than others (Dunford, 2017). The recognition of indigenous’ understandings and experiences of ‘rights’ in HRE provides an alternative vision of ethics.

Being Human as Praxis

As noted earlier, Wynter’s (2013; Wynter & McKittrick, 2015) notion of ‘being human as praxis’ “renews the question of ethics and shows that the modern colonial stabilization of knowledge about who we are as human cannot function as a foundation for a revised humanism or for decolonial ethics” (Odysseos, 2017, p. 458). De-generalizing the figure of Man through the development of a decolonizing HRE and PE would entail efforts towards new forms of education that raise, much like decolonial ethics, fundamental questions anew such as “what do we ‘teach’, how do we educate, in what languages, and in what systemic conditions? Moreover, how politically do we

challenge knowledge orders that continue to do epistemic, and legitimate actual, violence?” (Odysseos, 2017, p. 466). In this sense, forms of education such as HRE and PE may be thought of as ‘unfinished’ projects that are “inextricably connected to specific struggles of epistemic justice” (Odysseos, 2017, p. 466).

In other words, struggles towards epistemic justice in HRE and PE are embedded in larger projects of decolonization; this implies that to promote global social justice, we will also need to begin interrogating the construction of epistemic injustice in all educational contexts, theories, policies and pedagogical practices (Zembylas, 2017b). If Wynter’s work on human as praxis teaches us anything, argues Odysseos (2017), it is that grasping the multiplicity of humanity, as manifested in different contexts, can only result in the dissolution of disciplinary boundaries and an obsolescence of the disciplines as narrowly conceived in Eurocentric domains of knowledge (p. 469). To put this simply: HRE and PE need to cease to exist as Eurocentric disciplines and dissolve the disciplinary boundaries, and begin to employ practices of knowledge and language that seek to develop radical and transgressive praxis, which sees the world as relation rather than in individualist terms.

The ‘renewal’ of HRE and PE, then, is inextricably linked to knowledge-production and cultivation as participation in practices that aim to make possible and viable the existence of new ethical relations with others (humans and non-humans alike) and engage in ongoing struggles for decolonization. HRE and PE as knowledge practices are not isolated from decolonization efforts; on the contrary, to insist on renewing these fields, academically, ethically, politically, and practically means radical institutional, epistemic and ethical reforms that erase existing colonial remnants of knowledge in all manifestations of what is called HRE and PE. To enable this radical renewal of HRE and PE, then, our conceptualizations of ‘human rights’ and ‘peace’ as Western conceptions need to abandon their claim to universality and should be replaced by pluriversality.

Pluriversality

Pluriversality means recognizing that there are pluriversal values, that is, values which emerge from dialogue across multiple places, cultures and visions about the world (Dussel, 2013; Mignolo, 2011). There are overlaps and distinctions between border thinking and pluriversality, however, they are complementary ideas. While the former focuses on the notion of taking seriously as producers of knowledge those shunned by coloniality, the latter turns our attention to a different process of knowledge production that overcomes epistemic coloniality. Both of these ideas though overlap when it comes to valuing “a world in which other worlds are possible [...] a world in which multiple cosmovisions, worldviews, practices and livelihoods co-exist” (Dunford, 2017, pp. 380-381). In particular, pluriversality’s focus on dialogue, explains Dunford, involves all forms of communication (e.g. argumentation, discussion, performance, ceremony) and if conducted with respect, then it can foster commonality and values that have global significance “not by virtue of an already-existing universality that can be articulated from one particular place, but on the basis of resonances amongst, translation across and the construction of common understandings amongst multiple positions” (p. 390). For example, Mignolo (2011) has talked about the need to pluriversalize human rights, namely, to recognize that there are plural principles of human rights across all cultures rather than only the Western ones. That Western epistemology appears universalistic compared to epistemologies of the South is because Western conceptions of human rights are part of the imperial and colonial project. Respectful intercultural translation across cultures that have different understandings and experiences of ‘human rights’ can be used as valuable tools to develop a critical and interpretative approach to HRE that could pluriversalise human rights (Zembylas, 2017b). To pluriversalize human rights, human rights need to be historicized, that is, the history of rights has to extend to other geographies and historical thinkers who approach rights from perspectives beyond Europe (i.e. Third World, South, indigenous).

Furthermore, pluriversalizing HRE and PE means turning the process of knowledge production in these fields open to epistemic diversity. A

pluriversal HRE or PE, therefore, is conceived as a process of advancing epistemic justice by delinking human rights teaching or peace pedagogies from Eurocentrism; similar to border thinking, pluriversalizing HRE and PE recognizes and includes forms of knowledge that have been subjugated by modernity and coloniality. To advance epistemic justice, HRE and PE need to excavate and surface the counter-histories of erasures and dehumanizations. Epistemic justice is advanced from contesting ethical theories in HRE and PE that are taken for granted, while acknowledging in the process the material and symbolic negations and losses as a result of colonialism and contemporary forms of dispossession, domination and epistemicide grounded in the daily life (cf. Dussel, 2013).

Needless to say, developing a decolonial ethics—in HRE, PE or elsewhere—that is grounded in pluriversality is not without its risks and tensions. For example, Dunford (2017) wonders whether ‘inter-cultural dialogue’ has limits and constraints⁷:

Are values justified solely by virtue of having emerged through inter-cultural dialogue, or is it possible for a value to be wrong, normatively speaking, despite emerging from this process? Are any and all views allowed to the table, or ought certain views be rejected? What about those views that reproduce colonial narratives or values that have done so much to silence, undermine and oppress those on the underside of the colonial matrix of power? (Dunford, 2017, p. 391)

As Dunford suggests, without any reflection on the emergence of pluriversality within specific contexts that examine the compatibility of practices, worldviews, values or policies, then there is a risk to turn pluriversality into another abstract, universal principle that would undermine all producers of knowledge, especially those who are marginalized.

⁷ ‘Intercultural dialogue’ is a concept championed by the Council of Europe and other intergovernmental organizations and many programs are created around this concept for young people and different communities; however, all of these initiatives often fail to tackle issues of coloniality, oppression, race, power and so on. This is similar to coexistence, peace and other concepts that often gloss over all the colonial manifestations.

A major tension emerging from attempts to develop a decolonial ethics in HRE and PE, then, according to Dunford (2017) is whether decoloniality is an option or an imperative. For Mignolo (2011), decoloniality is an option, otherwise it would be incompatible with decolonial ethics, as it would amount to replacing one hegemonic discourse (Western values) with another. As he explains: “The decolonial option is not aiming to be the one. It is just an option that, beyond asserting itself as such, makes clear that all the rest are also options” (p. 21). This implies that liberal, multicultural and cosmopolitan ethical theories are not rejected, as long as they are also presented as options rather than imperatives.

On the other hand, if decolonial ethics is to provide an alternative that truly dismantles the colonial matrix of power, then it is argued that it must be an imperative (Dunford, 2017). Far from settling the issue here, my point is that this tension needs to be seriously considered, especially its repercussions, whenever an argument is made about decolonizing HRE and PE. Reflecting on the ethos of decolonizing HRE and PE requires addressing the vital question of how scholars in these fields might actually practice the disruptive, decolonial HRE and PE in ways that align with decolonial ethics. Advocating for the pluriversalisation of HRE and PE, then, has important implications for disciplinary formations and knowledge production, including the production of ethical and decolonial theorizing in these fields (cf. Odysseos, 2017, p. 471). As calls for decolonization grow in various academic fields, “we may choose to refuse these; or we might decide to strategically engage in the sort of pluralization of knowledge” (Odysseos, 2017, p. 471) discussed above, as part of a broader attempt to elaborate a decolonial HRE or PE on the basis of decolonial ethics or decolonial approaches to race, power, and knowledge.

Conclusion

Decolonial thinking is increasingly serving as a resource for HRE and PE scholars seeking ways to interrogate and disrupt Eurocentric knowledge production in these fields. This article has suggested that an important task in these efforts is the development of decolonial ethics. In particular, the

article has discussed some elements of a future decolonial ethics in HRE and PE, while showing the limits of familiar ethical theories, namely, liberal, multiculturalist, and cosmopolitan ones. In light of the work of Dussel, Wynter and Maldonado-Torres on decolonial ethics, the analysis has attempted to sketch a different path in HRE and PE from the familiar ethical theories along three important directions: border thinking, being human as praxis, and pluriversality.

Taking decolonial ethics seriously creates openings for further work in HRE and PE to continue ongoing attempts that challenge and transform the coloniality of academic, institutions, disciplines and structures. The three directions outlined here help raise questions about whether, how and why policies, practices, programs, curricula, and theories in HRE and PE truly promote epistemic justice. Insisting, then, on questions of decolonial ethics illuminates not only the ethico-political elements of HRE and PE, but also the prospects of invoking transformative praxis in these fields.

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