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

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

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ABSTRACT

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

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

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

RESUMEN

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

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

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

1. THE ABSURD

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

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

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

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

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

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

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2. A CRITIQUE OF PROPEROUS REASON

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

Freire (1970)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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that “a decolonial turn is the opening and the freedom from the thinking and the forms of living (economies-other, political theories-other), the cleansing of the coloniality of being and of knowledge; the de-linking from the spell of the rhetoric of modernity, from its imperial imaginary articulated in the rhetoric of democracy” (Mignolo, 2011, p. 48). De-linking is not an easy task as “the genealogy of decolonial thinking is unknown in the genealogy of Western European thinking” (Mignolo, 2011, p. 59).

To decolonize social justice is to challenge how the concept and praxis “is generally discussed in abstracted and conservative ways, which fall miserably short of including a culturally democratic understanding of justice” (Darder, 2022), but not in Prosperous epistemological terms. To decolonize social justice is to understand that there is no social justice without cognitive (Santos, 2014) and intergenerational justice (Innerarity, 2012). Is to be understood that in a world of epistemological diverse one cannot address the social sagas from one single epistemological position – which in the vast majority of the cases is Eurocentric (Santos, 2014). To de-link the concept of social justice implies learning from and with the South, understanding that the South exists, and going to the South (Santos, 2014). It entails perceiving, Darder (2022) argues, the reasons why

commonsensical views speak of equality and social justice as if all people reside on a level playing field and it is just a matter of tweaking the system (or individuals) here and there. Yet, nothing could be farther from the truth, in that longstanding inequalities persist within the lives of subaltern populations. In contrast, decolonizing views of social justice challenge the racializing culture of class/caste formation that systematically erodes subaltern belonging, cultural identity, voice, and participation, stripping away our histories, cultural knowledge, our languages, and ancestral wisdom.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

To be continued.

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