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Decolonial Pedagogies and Critical Intersectional Perspective: Contemporary Reflections¹

Pedagogías descoloniales y perspectiva crítica interseccional: reflexiones contemporáneas

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RESUMEN

En este artículo compartimos algunas reflexiones emanadas de nuestras praxis de educación e investigación en América Latina y Francia. Pretendemos abonar desde nuestro aporte a la comprensión del pensamiento freireano en su singularidad en lo que hace a la perspectiva descolonial planteando lo pionero de las reflexiones en los vínculos entre educación y colonialidad en los años 60 y 70 en América Latina. Para ello recuperamos las reflexiones del pedagogo brasileño y sus diálogos con la obra de Frantz Fanon. Reflexionamos acerca del contexto contemporáneo en las realidades en que inscribimos nuestras praxis y la urgencia de una pedagogía descolonizadora. Abonamos finalmente en reflexiones sobre un presente de la corriente educación popular en el que se haya interpelada por la perspectiva interseccional planteando que nos hallamos en un contexto de una nueva refundamentación de esta corriente.

Palabras clave: educación de adultos, interseccionalidad, desigualdad, descolonialidad.

ABSTRACT

In this article, we share some reflections emanating from our educational practices and research in Latin America and France. We aim to contribute to the understanding of Freirean thought in its uniqueness regarding the decolonial perspective by highlighting the pioneering reflections on the links between education and coloniality in the 1960s and 1970s in Latin America. To this end, we revisit the Brazilian educator's reflections and his dialogues with the work of Frantz Fanon. We reflect on the contemporary context in which we inscribe our practices and the urgency of a decolonizing pedagogy. Finally, we contribute to reflections on a present-day movement in popular education, which has been challenged by the intersectional perspective, suggesting that we find ourselves in a context of a new refoundation of this movement.

Keywords: adult education, intersectionality, inequality, decoloniality.

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PAULO FREIRE AND HIS PIONEERING CONTRIBUTION TO REFLECTIONS ON COLONIALITY AND EDUCATION IN LATIN AMERICA: DECOLONIAL PERSPECTIVES FROM FANON TO FREIRE

For Inés Fernandez Moujan (2014), there is a close relationship between Fanon's political proposition and Freire's stance in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. According to Fernandez, *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth* had a significant influence on *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. For Fernandez, the notions of liberation and decolonization are key to understanding the Freire-Fanon relationship. Both situate themselves politically in different ways: Fanon reflects on the consequences of colonization on the subjectivity of the oppressed, while Freire intervenes directly in education.

John O'Neill (1974) notes that Frantz Fanon and Paulo Freire were interested in the crucial relationship between politics and language in situations of oppression and the struggle for decolonization. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon reveals the importance of language as a primary element of colonial culture (*ibid.*, p. 57). For Fanon, the Black person who expresses themselves in the language of the White person cannot situate themselves outside the place assigned to them by White society (*ibid.*).

This is why Fanon and Freire draw on Hegelian Marxism to argue that the problem of alienation requires a pedagogical theory (*ibid.*). For O'Neill (*ibid.*, p. 58), Freire's critique of education as a "banking" instrument of oppression helps illuminate literature advocating the "deschooling" of industrial society. Freire and Fanon believe that essential activities (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) in the lives of free human beings should not be seen as exclusive to exceptionally gifted individuals (*ibid.*), but as a means for people to name and transform the world they inhabit (*ibid.*).

O'Neill prefers to evoke the notion of conscientization rather than deschooling to establish a common ground between Freire and Fanon. For Fanon, the oppressed are instruments of the "culture of silence," sustained by the political domination of language and education (*ibid.*, p. 59). Fanon interprets this culture of silence as an expression of an internalized fear of freedom and of their "master" by oppressed populations (*ibid.*). Thus, the pedagogy of oppressed populations becomes a tool for self-discovery, as well as for recognizing their oppressors and manifestations of dehumanization (*ibid.*).

For Freire, this process of conscientization should not be carried out by proclaimed cultural or political leaders who speak on behalf of the people, but by the oppressed populations themselves, who, through an "authentic" word, lay the foundation for thought and action to transform the world (*ibid.*, p. 60). O'Neill asserts that whenever men think, speak, and act on behalf of others, thought and action are stripped of all authentic praxis (*ibid.*). Freire, for his part, argues that people are not made in silence but in word, work, and reflection-action (*ibid.*).

Through this work of conscientization, true human dialogue can be established as the ultimate right of the community (*ibid.*). For O'Neill, this dialogue can only exist if humans love the world and society they inhabit (*ibid.*). Such love must be reciprocal and shared to engender the freedom it needs to grow, but it also requires humility and faith in the human capacity for dialogue (*ibid.*, p. 61). When dialogue is based on love, humility, and faith, trust emerges in the task of naming the world (*ibid.*). Likewise, humility and trust expressed in dialogue allow hope—the militant belief in the essentially unfinished nature of human beings—to avoid seeing injustice as inevitable but rather as a quest for communion and a broader sense of humanity (*ibid.*).

In this sense, the process of conscientization can become an instrument of decolonization, and literacy an exercise in dialogue (*ibid.*). Freire's method makes language the foundational tool of a true pedagogical dialogue in which the human world questions the existence of men and women for themselves (*ibid.*, p. 63). This literacy method integrates the historical and ontological task of human beings to name their world, as well as the daily tasks of pedagogical and social labor (*ibid.*). For Freire, methodology and rationality become ideological instruments of paternalism, domination, and mass manipulation by experts (*ibid.*), unless these instruments are subjected to a genuine praxis of popular education (*ibid.*).

If, for both Fanon and Freire, the malady of our time is the domestication of the intellect, will, and human imagination, they continue to sow hope in humanity (ibid.). The pedagogy of the oppressed is the instrument of a possible anthropological hope, insofar as it denounces an existing reality and, at the same time, identifies mechanisms to create consciousness and transform that reality (ibid.). Likewise, a revolutionary society must avoid the historical fatalism of so-called advanced countries (ibid.).

Similarly, if ignorance is an instrument of domination, the people can be oppressed by knowledge as much as by violence, insofar as the people may find themselves removed from the everyday context of popular action and reflection to serve the interests of their political elite (ibid., p. 64). For O'Neill, the paradox of revolution lies in knowing that although there is always someone oppressed by an oppressor, there is no guarantee that the liberator can liberate (ibid.). This is why the education of the people will always be the education of the educators themselves (ibid.).

Thus, Fanon and Freire stand as cultural critics who reveal the power of language as testimony and as a defender of coherence between words and actions (ibid.). Fanon and Freire commit to living and loving the world to the point of risking the attempt to transform it into a more just one, while strengthening "man's" faith in himself.

Maria Impedovo (2021), for her part, argues that Fanon's texts contribute a pedagogical reflection that inspires critical perspectives. Although marginal in France, these perspectives allow for thinking about a more inclusive and equitable pedagogy.

FROM THE MARGINS TO THE CENTER: URGENCIES AND DECOLONIALITY IN A CRITICAL INTERSECTIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui has called us to reflect that there is no decolonial thought without a practice of decolonization (2010), and it is in this sense that we situate the praxis we develop and the perspectives we share. Throughout our work, we delve into the social, political, and cultural processes that frame contemporary educational processes in Latin America or Abya Yala and in France. This approach, as bell hooks (2015) invites us, is carried out from a reading "from the margins to the center." Within an intersectional framework of oppressions, these perspectives allow us to focus on identities struggling to exist, on denied identities that have endured genocides, epistemicides (Walsh, 2012; Grosfoguel, 2006, 2007), and ontocides (Barbosa P., 2022). Yet, through everyday resistance, learning, oral transmissions, know-how, storytelling, playing, and conversations, as well as organizational processes of varying significance, these identities persist and resist.

Reflecting from the experiences of Black women, migrant women, working-class women, racialized women, incarcerated women, and residents of informal settlements—known as "tomas," "pueblos nuevos," or "poblaciones callampas" depending on the Latin American country—we understand the lived experience of oppression under a systemic framework. For bell hooks, the "margins" represent spaces of exclusion where the experiences and voices of women outside dominant feminist circles (primarily composed of white, middle-class women) have been ignored. Meanwhile, the "center" symbolizes where decisions are made, priorities are set, and agendas are defined.

Women inhabiting the margins hold a deeply transversal perspective on life, the patriarchal system, and white supremacy, experiencing unique forms of oppression under colonial capitalism (gender, racialization, class, among others). These experiences must occupy the "center" of feminist analysis because they offer not only an integral but also a transformative vision of the struggle against oppression—one that unites structure and subjectivity, identity and politics, culture and politics, territory and subjectivity, ancestry and politics in decolonial processes.

From Latin America, Quijano denounced the persistence of a colonial logic of power beyond decolonization processes. He highlighted how this "coloniality of power" sustained control over subjectivity, knowledge, and practices. Quijano argued that coloniality affects not only economic and political relations but

also cultural and epistemic ones, imposing Western knowledge hegemony while marginalizing or destroying other systems, such as those of Indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples—a phenomenon he termed "epistemicide" (Quijano, 1992, 1998).

Bolivian sociologist Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui addresses coloniality from a critical and situated perspective, focusing on Andean realities and internal colonialism (2010, 2015, 2018). She emphasizes the existence of Indigenous epistemologies and the need to decolonize knowledge, critiquing the superficial and exoticizing appropriation of Indigenous knowledges by Westernized academia as "intellectual extractivism" (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2015, 2018). She advocates for a return to local, communal, and embodied knowledges, rooted in everyday practices, and highlights the coloniality of the body and memory, where colonial structures affect not only ideas but also bodies, practices, and territorial inhabitation. For Cusicanqui, collective memory is a field of resistance against coloniality. Her decolonization perspective is grounded in commitment to territories and communities, opposing what she calls "desktop decolonization" (2015), where theory is disconnected from practice.

Achille Mbembe (2003, 2019) frames decolonization through dehumanization and necropolitics, urging us to reflect on coloniality's enduring impact on our contexts and subjectivities. He calls for decolonizing university thought (2023).

Within these frameworks, we situate our perspective of intersectionality as "critical," distinguishing it from descriptive intersectionality (Visotsky, 2023). The latter, promoted by international funding agencies and states still entrenched in colonial practices, serves descriptive purposes. In contrast, critical intersectionality seeks to explain the causes of oppression, denouncing a patriarchal, colonial, capitalist, and white supremacist system. It aligns with emancipatory and decolonial paradigms, functioning as a political tool within liberation processes—from small activist groups to large movements—advancing autonomy at various scales.

We also recognize the need to root intersectionality in the struggles of Black women and Black feminism. Racialized women, through the thought of ancestors who fought against slavery, for suffrage, abolitionism, and against structural racism, articulated this concept, which has become significant in other contexts where racialized women face similar yet singular multiple oppressions.

Decolonization practices from pedagogical experiences that re-signify marginality include literacy and oral history spaces with migrant women—Indigenous, Afro-diasporic, land and housing activists, peasant women, and trans migrant women in France. These spaces, shaped by ancestral and popular epistemologies, resist coloniality through memory, dialogue, and everyday resistance, aligning with Rivera Cusicanqui's "ch'ixi epistemology" (2018) and Homi Bhabha's "vernacular cosmopolitanisms."

Bhabha's "vernacular cosmopolitanisms" (2013: 93) emerge at the intersection of cultural traditions, measuring global progress from minority perspectives. This right to difference, as Balibar notes, does not seek to restore an essentialist cultural identity or neutralize differences in the name of a universal "humanity." These subjectivities, as vernacular cosmopolitanisms, understand commitment to equality in difference as emerging from political practices and ethical choices, generating new forms of agency, recognition, and political representation (Bhabha, 2013). Bhabha calls for "re-mapping our intimate and autochthonous landscapes" (2013: 103) in a globalized world.

REFOUNDATION OF THE POPULAR EDUCATION MOVEMENT CHALLENGED BY CRITICAL INTERSECTIONALITY

From Latin America, popular educator Oscar Jara (2020) revisits debates within the popular education movement about the need for refoundation in the early 21st century. These debates included the historical and theoretical context in Latin America, recovering discussions from the 1980s about popular education as an alternative paradigm and critiquing its practices.

Carlos Rodriguez Brandao (2014), a Brazilian popular education referent, reflects on the movement's origins, describing its early days as "crossed paths... pioneering, initial, and critical times of popular education. When we didn't know where, how to begin, or how far we wanted to go. It was a time of searching, horizons, creating imaginaries... We still have crossed paths, but now they diverge." He highlights the diversity and polysemy of practices and meanings within popular education.

We argue that the current historical and theoretical context involves deep geopolitical, economic, social, and cultural reconfigurations. Movements—Black, Indigenous, feminist, socio-environmental, and LGBTQ+—are reshaping political and epistemological debates, challenging coloniality in Latin American states and broader social movements. Popular education spaces are also being transformed by these identity and territorial resistance processes.

Claudia Korol (2008, 2016), a Latin American referent, has accompanied these transformations from popular education, denouncing colonialism and racism through feminist, Indigenous, and anti-capitalist struggles. Popular education, in these praxis-driven spaces, fosters collective reflection and activism. We propose that intersectional perspectives are central to political-pedagogical praxis, anchoring popular education in resistance processes beyond Latin America.

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