CRITICAL EDUCATION FOR CRITICAL TIMES: DECOLONIZATION, ANTI-RACISM, AND GLOBAL STRUGGLES FOR FREEDOM

AN INTERVIEW WITH ZEUS LEONARDO

ZEUS LEONARDO is Professor and past Associate Dean (2018-2021) of Education, and Faculty of the Critical Theory Designated Emphasis at the University of California, Berkeley. He is a Fellow of the American Educational Research Association (AERA) and past Vice President of AERA's Division G, Social Context of Education (2017-2020). He has received several recognitions, including the Derrick Bell Legacy Award from the Critical Race Studies in Education Association and the Scholars of Color Distinguished Career Contribution Award from AERA. He is a member of the US National Academy of Education. Leonardo has authored or edited ten books, such as *Race Frameworks*; the 2nd edition of *Education and Racism* (with Norton Grubb); *Race, Whiteness and Education;* and his most recent book, *Edward Said and Education*. His articles and book chapters critically engage race, class, and gender stratification in education; democratic schooling; and diversity in multiple forms, including epistemological and ideological difference. His work is interdisciplinary and brings together insights from sociology, contemporary philosophy, and race/ethnic studies. In addition to invitations in the U.S., Professor Leonardo has delivered keynotes in England, Sweden, Canada, and Australia. The interview was organized and conducted by Felipe Ziotti Narita and Jeremiah Morelock.

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Felipe Ziotti Narita: In the social sciences there are different matrixes of critical theory. You have engaged critical theory to grasp race, class, gender and culture in schooling processes. Could you talk about your own project on critical theory and how it sheds light on the contradictions between school and society?

Zeus Leonardo: In my writing and thinking, I have always been guided by two mantras. On the one hand, Albert Einstein and others have advised us to think about natural (and I would add, social) phenomena in the simplest ways, but not simpler. Another way to say this is a thinker's ability to keep analysis simple but

not simplistic. On the other hand, social problems are complex so I try to recruit critical theory to assemble an analysis to attest to or be commensurate with this complexity, usually by recruiting multiple frameworks, concepts, and perspectives across the disciplines. Another way of saying this is a thinker's ability to work through complexity without being overly complicated. Key in this hermeneutic is the role of language in an intellectual's capacity to illuminate contradictions and lay to bear the process of oppression. This is the power of language, a uniquely human invention, to understand the world we have created (even those we have not created, such as the natural world of physical laws), reflect on our creation, and by reflecting, confront and work to transcend what Freire referred to as "limit situations" in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (henceforth *Pedagogy*).

In this endeavor, language does not merely reflect objective reality as it were, but constructs a way into it, an entry point to apprehend its shapes and sounds. Thought of in this way, a critical theory of education does not distort or obscure reality but through critical dialogue unveils it for the exegete's objectification, which here means the process of tracing and tracking reality's innerworkings rather than objectification's more colloquial tie with exploitation. At the same time, a critical attitude towards language necessitates understanding its implication with existing structures. That is, language is not outside of the social relations it tries to understand, which includes being ensnared by their double binds and horizon of possibility. Transcending these limitations includes strategies of creating new terms (i.e., neologisms), concepts, and theories, although we need to acknowledge that even these forms of newness are connected to existing systems of meaning. Otherwise they would simply be illegible, which would limit their impact and likely be dismissed as ineffective interventions, although there may be cases of thinkers who are ahead of their time, sometimes fatally so as in Socrates' case, or Galileo's experience, as scapegoats or "heretics" who are appreciated more justly later. Intellectuals, including critical theorists, do not in fact transcend the strictures that impinge on their ability to explain race, class, and gender relations, which is always partial in two senses. It is partial in its very incompleteness; it is also partial in the way it sides with this or that direction in analysis and desire for an alternative to the current state of affairs. In all, this is the predicament of critical language to be caught up in contradictions even as it tries to outrun them, which is nothing to mourn or celebrate. It is part of the work. Together, the dialectic between simple and complex hopefully leads to what I have called a "down to earth" critical theory of education, which is neither enamored in excessive intellectualism, what Freire called "verbalism" in *Pedagogy*, nor rushes too quickly toward practical solutions, or what Freire called "mere activism." Regarding the former, a critical theory of education does not fetishize ideas over and above speaking to the human condition and about those who suffer and toil in it. Regarding the latter, it is not anti-intellectual in its anxiety to "do something." As Žižek argued, the haste to "do something" further causes

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harm and what is required in its place is careful, deliberate and symptomatic thought. After all, it is presumptuous to speak with too much certainty about solving centuries-old dilemmas like racism, patriarchy, and class exploitation, vexing as they are, which no genius could possibly unveil despite getting close to a symptomatic reading. That said, what makes scholarship critical in the sense that I recognize when I read or hear it, is a feeling of urgency. Certainly Marx, Fanon, and bell hooks bear this family resemblance, just to name a few. Their analysis recognized that in the time it took for research to travel from conception to implementation, many people have suffered or perished, and not in the "natural" way we associate with the human cycle but as a consequence of social organization and the relations to which they give rise, including the educational apparatus.

Felipe Ziotti Narita: Critical race theory started gaining momentum in education in the late 1990s and your works have been critically engaged within this field. Please, could you talk about the constitution of this field and its political importance to discuss how social asymmetries can be reproduced in schooling as a by-product of the racist state?

Zeus Leonardo: To begin with, in many, if not most, cases, the originary source of intellectual interventions is rarely clear or agreed upon. For instance, although it would be reasonable, if not common, to assert that a critical theory of education begins with the Frankfurt School, Sirotnik and Oakes have argued that a case may be made to credit John Dewey with that honor (including temporally, since Dewey precedes Adorno et al.). This may be true at least with respect to tracing the North American influence on critical theory's development, with Paulo Freire its South American counterpart, and the Frankfurt School its European source. For clarity, I might suggest that a more *restrictive* sense of *Critical Theory and Education* is rightfully traced to the Frankfurt School, whereas a more *expansive* sense of *critical theory and education* includes non-Frankfurt meditations, such as the aforementioned intellectuals, but also including other insurgencies, like feminism, decolonial analysis, and poststructuralism. Some of these, such as Foucauldian discourse analysis, have been leveraged for critical race analysis. However, in the US intellectual scene, there is very little, if any, confusion or controversy surrounding the origins of a Critical Race Theory (henceforth CRT) of education. Let me speak briefly about this critical moment in the research literature. In 1995, Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate IV wrote a *Teachers College Record* article that I would later call the "essay that launched a thousand books (or careers)." Not unlike the Greek-Trojan War, a war in education has been waging with respect to the "race problem." In it, Ladson-Billings and Tate argued that, paralleling CRT in law, conservative and even liberal and

multicultural education, are limited in their neglect or tepid uptake of structural racism. Performing trenchant critiques of race-neutral perspectives, absent analysis of whiteness as a form of property a la Cheryl Harris, and lacking a more militant form of anti-racism, Ladson-Billings and Tate inaugurated what is now the heir apparent to multicultural education, at least regarding race analysis. More than this, CRT is often credited with the "critical turn" in race analysis in education, distinguishing it from pre-critical or non-critical perspectives on race. (cf. Althusser's 1971 critique of pre-scientific and non-scientific "ideologies"). That is, it is certainly the case that multiculturalism was an insurgent perspective on education during the 1970s, specifically as then an incipient attack on Eurocentrism. Trailblazers like James A. Banks knocked the traditional curriculum off-balance with an upper cut that questioned Eurocentric cultural specificities masquerading as universals. Fifty years later, hardly a public K-12 school would question the "multicultural turn" and remain a legitimate source of progressive ideas, which does not prevent some teachers and schools from doing just that. In other words, multicultural reform was eventually so successful, even devout proponents of a curriculum centering "dead white men" now argue that it is part of national *diversity*. Said another way, multicultural common sense has won an important war of position in the struggle over hegemony, to recall Gramsci. That said, the fight continues, as evidenced by the recent attacks on CRT (implicating multiculturalism), which gained traction during the Trump era. I will have more to say about this below.

If it is not yet obvious, I use "critical" here in a specific and special way, not in order to denigrate or demote other perspectives otherwise considered critical in the everyday sense of the term. As a cousin of critical theory, CRT may be responsible for race analysis becoming aware of itself as critical, not unlike philosophy's critical roots beginning with Immanuel Kant's critique of pure reason. As mentioned, educational scholars have CRT in law since the middle to late 1970s, arguably beginning with Derrick Bell's gambit, to thank for this revolution in ideas and politics. To answer your question further and more fully, one important difference between CRT in law and CRT in education is that whereas the former was in conversation with Critical Legal Studies (or CLS), a Marxist-inspired study of law and capitalism, Ladson-Billings and Tate's article and the thousand publications it launched (now an understatement, but allow me to continue with the Hellenic reference), has a more muted dialogue with Marxist educators who often wave the flag of Critical Pedagogy. This relationship is decisive and something to which I have devoted many hours and publications. They meet in the idea that education serves a critical state function, first as an ideological state apparatus of capitalism for Marxists like Althusser, Bowles and Gintis, and others, and then as a racialized state apparatus for CRT. They share parallels insofar as schooling, particularly publics but not excluding privates, reproduces the social relations of the state they serve. But that may be the extent

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of their agreement. For CRT, the racialized social system is not driven by economic and profit imperative, but by the stratification of persons or personhood that are racial in form. The racist state is at the same time a white-dominated political system that functions under what race philosopher Charles Mills called the "racial contract," which is not a race theory as such but a description of an actual state of affair for which there is a paper trail, like the Constitution, laws, and policies. But the racial contract is also a way to imagine spatial organization, such as neighborhoods on one hand or tracking practices in schools on the other; cognition, such as who has the capacity to think and understand; and epistemology, such as whose knowledge counts and therefore who constitutes the objects versus subjects of knowledge. To CRT, an orthodox Marxist analysis of political economy misses the opportunity to shed light on these insults and injuries (e.g., microaggressions) to the targeted persons, which are racial in nature.

Felipe Ziotti Narita: Your theory of "race ambivalence" has been pointing to the need for a multidimensional analysis and critique of the relationship between race, racism, school and education. Could you explain the main arguments of your theory?

Zeus Leonardo: In my recent book, *Race Frameworks*, and several articles preceding it, I put in conversation several critical perspectives on race, racism, and education. I called them "frameworks," having been inspired by Jaggar and Rothenberg's edited anthology, *Feminist Frameworks*, a more ambitious undertaking where the editors reproduced various essay on gender stratification, ranging from liberal, to socialist, and psychoanalytic feminism, to name a few. My attempt differs to the extent that I focus on four "critical" schools of thought (namely CRT, Marxism, Whiteness Studies, and Cultural Studies), whereas Jaggar and Rothenberg include even conservative feminism (one might call this particular framework an oxymoron, but I digress). In *Race Frameworks*, I first present the main arguments or center of gravity found in the four frameworks, and then proceed to appraise them, which includes affirmations as well as critiques. I structured the book in this manner because 1) these are the schools of thought that have most influenced my thinking on race and 2) I thought it would be helpful to put them in conversation in one monograph in a more or less dialogic way. I end with a chapter on "race ambivalence," which arguably combines aspects of all four frameworks into one overarching framework. It is consistent with my point above that race and racism are complex and a more complete analysis will necessitate an equally complex perspective that is non-paradigmatic or tasks any one framework for a silver bullet explanation of the vexing relation we know as race.

To begin with, four critical frameworks on race does not exhaust the possible perspectives that exist on race and which rightfully belong in the book. Decolonial thought and settler colonial analysis, disability studies, anti-blackness, feminist theory, and query theory are powerful explanatory frameworks that command a seat at the table. So a second edition of *Race Frameworks* is possible, which includes other critical perspectives and expands on the four on which I focus. Stay tuned for that. Next, as a critical theorist of race, I believe in the centrality of critique. By this, I mean the ability to assess the limits of any framework on race, but only after following it down the rabbit hole, as it were. The critical model is the capacity of an intellectual to affirm and interrogate ideas and systems, as Henry Giroux has insisted. It is meant to be generative, open, and represents an invitation rather than an exercise in refutation. As I have said elsewhere, good critique provides the condition for further or future critiques rather than closes them off. It also requires that the intellectual become open to dynamism and change, including changing one's mind in light of compelling evidence to the contrary or the development of more powerful theories not yet extant.

For me, race ambivalence opens up this kind of space. In some respects, it is not far off from what other scholars call "post-race." By this, I take these intellectuals to mean a certain critical distance from an object of study in order to objectify it for critical thought, in this case race, which is different from detachment or objectivity because I am completely committed to and implicated by my deep dive into race, *as a race scholar*. So as I understand it, post-race thought is race-conscious, not race-neutral, theory. It attempts to prognosticate the future of race, *as an organizing principle of society,* by going through race, by entering raciology and racial interpellation, and by immersing oneself in the best insights available. It also means taking seriously these thought experiments by following their logical conclusions based on deep readings of them. This is ultimately missing from the rather facile attacks on CRT currently raging in the US. Their authors are hardly interested in engagement, or engaging CRT outside of caricaturist portraits of their authors and ideas. For some, it is difficult to take them seriously. However, this does not prevent us from seriously scrutinizing race at the level of principles and axioms, *in the spirit of greater clarity*, about a several centuries-old and vexing social relation and its future.

All that said, in the end I favored the phrase "race ambivalence" because "post-race" is easily misunderstood by the skeptical and radical left and weaponized by the conservative right. I have no problems with post-race because of the way I enter and understand it. But for strategic reasons, I went toward ambivalence. In addition, race ambivalence better captures the relationship many intellectuals have with race relations' ironies even as they commit to radical race analysis. It describes a feeling of melancholy they have about a relation that has so fundamentally shaped them. This melancholy turns into outrage in figures like Fanon, who rejects what whiteness has made of his blackness, indeed

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responsible for having created it in the first place. Fanon's is an ambivalence that turns radical, both inwardly towards the psychic self and outwardly towards an indefensible sociality. I am also speaking here of Paul Gilroy's assertion that race creates as many problems as it does solutions, including cheap pseudo-solidarities and stubborn essentialisms, which he explains in *Against Race*. Race ambivalence is my recognition of our complex relationship with race. It is informed by Marxism, which I consider a species of post-class thought. In other words, Marxism affirms class analysis and class struggle in order to destroy class relations and introducing the dictatorship of the proletariat. Although race scholarship, in general, is nowhere near that conclusion, there are recent arguments that an anti-racism that does not consider anti-race as both a logical conclusion or possibility, risks becoming anachronistic. Race ambivalence is an invitation into this intellectual space in order to broach an awkward and uncomfortable conversation that haunts even (or perhaps especially) race scholars in our reflective moments.

To re-emphasize, race ambivalence does not endorse race-neutrality, or what has popularly gone by the term "colorblindness," which comes with ableist overtones and slowly goes out of favor these days. Ambivalence does not argue a return to pre-race because too much has been done, too much has been said, in the name of race. Like Fanon, whose problems with negritude's return to an essential blackness became more palpable by the time he penned *The Wretched of the Earth*, one may be *anti*-racist or *anti*-race but it is rather impossible to be *ante*-race. In his short career (Fanon died from leukemia in 1961 at age 36), Fanon argued for a new humanism that gestures to the end of race as we knew it, even the end of blackness as a construct invented by whiteness. Or as I wrote in *Race Frameworks*, if all good rides eventually come to an end, surely bad ones ought to.

Felipe Ziotti Narita: You propose a materialist framework for critical race theory and critical pedagogy. How can this approach help understand educational stratification and the critique of school system?

Zeus Leonardo: Race scholarship from psychology, to sociology, to education has favored an ideological analysis of race. As a formerly Marxist-trained scholar and one influenced by Marxist concepts that I have leveraged for the study of race, I use "ideology" here within that long tradition, from Lenin, to Lukács, to its rehabilitation in the writings of Stuart Hall, Giroux, and Gouldner. Decisive in this lineage is Althusser's turn from an epistemological/cognitive theory of ideology as falsehood, which we inherited from orthodox Marxism, to an affective theory of ideology as a lived relation to the real relations (of production). In other words, from Althusser's appropriations of Lacan's theory of the mirror and subject, we

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receive a rehabilitated notion of ideology as not only pejorative and wrong-headed but one that functions by hailing individuals as subjects of social relations like capitalism. In this process, ideology is not mere *illusion*, as in orthodox Marxism since Marx and Engels' *The German Ideology*, but an *allusion* to the real, albeit ensnared in the circular process of misrecognition. As a pre-scientific or spontaneous understanding of the world, ideology is necessary in order for subjects to apprehend their own place in social life. Without ideology, meanings are chaotic and lack form; with it, life as we know it takes some recognizable shape. But the full security of meaning is subverted by the individual's, such as students', belief that they authored said meanings as autonomous and rational beings, the lynchpin of humanist, liberal thought. To the anti-humanist Althusser, "human" (a European Enlightenment invention) is not a transcendental category and even less a reliable construct. It is subject to the social formation's interpellative system (or "hailing") to which it gives rise. In all, Althusser was a key moment in the theory of ideology as "eternal," much like the unconscious for Lacan. It continues even into socialism and communism as ideology persists as a structuring principle in a constant dance with scientific understanding. Contrary to the popular, and accurate, interpretation of Althusser as promoting scientific or structural Marxism, and although this theory of ideology is both incomplete and not without problems – the most notable being his fetish of science - he remains unsurpassed as a theorist of ideology in the modern era. This ideological turn spurred important works in education as an ideological state apparatus, Bowles and Gintis' *Schooling in Capitalist America* arguably being the most programmatic and prominent advocate of it. It allowed an entry point for Marxists to document the history of schooling without the orthodoxy cringing and hurling insults that they were crossing the line into speculative analysis. After all, education belongs on the side of ideology and culture, rather than the material base. A divorce was not impending, but this did not mean there were no arguments in the marriage.

I mention this important history because I perceive a "correct" analysis of race and other social relations as not merely ideological on one hand or materialist on the other, even if I have asserted a turn towards a materialist orientation to race. Rather, the complementarity between ideology and materialism builds a critical theory of race based an *appropriate theory of the relationship between them.* So when I affirm an ideological analysis of race, it does not signal siding with language and representation at the expense of materialism. Far from it. I understand them as chasing each other such that they necessitate one another. No scientific work without dealing with ideology, no ideology without the possibility of science. That said, a materialist turn toward race is my attempt to address (1) the derogation of race as epiphenomenal or descriptive in Marxist analysis and (2) the excesses of a constructionist view of race as an idea.

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First, Marxism's still official line with respect to race reduces it to the status of description. Marxists have become more sensitive towards, and in some case more clever with, incorporating race into a complex understanding of political economy. But for the most part, the problem of racism remains a secondary reflex of the economy and material exchange. Race remains an ideology in the classical sense and any problems associated with it are assumed to wither with the coming of socialist revolution. Although "smart" Marxism no longer perceives this resolution of race through class struggle as a teleology or a politics of inevitability, race continues to play second fiddle, even in completely racialized social systems like the US (not unlike Brazil or South Africa, albeit racially structured differently through racial democracy or *la raza cosmica* and apartheid, respectively). Many race scholars, including me, go a long way with the suggestion that race was an invention. The dating of race's origin is not agreed upon, some arguing for 1492, others for the 1600s' chattel slavery, and still others trace it through legal constructions and codifications of race later during the 1800s in the US. They do not reject the basic Marxist classification of *race as an idea.* But as an idea, race lives in material forms and consequences, which is in line with Althusser's reconstruction of ideology that, while certainly not material, exists in material or empirical forms, such as the racial state, racialized economy or division of labor, or for our concerns here, the educational apparatus.

Second, it has become popular to conceive of race as a social construction. This was necessary in attempts to counter the prevailing notion of race as biological. And although biological race has not gone into the dustbin of history, such as its return through the genome project, ethnically conceived, designed, and marketed medicines like BiDil, and ancestry programs popularized by the Mormon church in the US, the dominant mood surrounding race is as a social construction. However, when not careful or nuanced, analyses may have bent the ideological stick too far in this direction that, while not Marxist in orientation, shares Marxism's framing of race as not real. Instead, I argue that the social construction of race very much leads to material disparities between whites and non-whites. After all, race is socially constructed for particular material ends that usually favor whites, not in an absolute, but certainly a relative, way. It is not absolute because certain segments of the white population, such as the poor or working class, are willing to give up the material rewards of whiteness in exchange for its public and psychological wages, as persuasively argued by Du Bois. This is most poignant in the racial divide within working class or gender equity movements that fail to build authentic solidarity across races, leading the philosopher Charles Mills to argue that there exists no lasting trans-racial coalition in class or gender-based movements. It has become somewhat vogue to interpret Du Bois as only suggesting a psychic wage that whites accrue by being constructed as socially white, perhaps fueled by the several decades of writings on "white privilege." But I am reminded that Du Bois also speaks of *real* wages, such as the income,

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educational, and wealth gap. So a materialist race analysis seems to help perform a corrective with respect to the excesses of a social constructionist theory of race that begs bending the analytic stick the other way.

Felipe Ziotti Narita: Especially in the wake of the Black Lives Matter and the critical perception of how race issues intersect social asymmetries, anti-racist pedagogy has become the motto *of many social movements and institutions devoted to counteract the impacts of racism. Could you describe the theoretical and practical foundations of an anti-racist pedagogy?*

Zeus Leonardo: Anti-racism is perhaps the more militant and recent updating of multiculturalism. I say this as part of a long and historical progression of ideas. That is, multiculturalism is clearly anti-racist. When multiculturalism was incipient during the 1970s, it was perceived as insurgent and threatening to whites in the US. The stronghold of Eurocentrism in schools and universities was then largely unquestioned. Early works by James Banks and others, up to later exchanges with traditional humanists like Arthur Schlesinger, faced stiff criticisms as anti-American and appealing to identity politics. For himself, Banks fired back that it is rather the case that traditionalists (both conservative and liberals) were guilty of perspectivism and special interests since a multicultural curriculum represented the diversity of the US nation and therefore appealed to its more complete history and epistemological variety. In other words, Schlesinger and company were the ones caught with their hand in the identity cookie jar.

As multiculturalism gained a stronger foothold in schools, it unavoidably had to change if it were to become the hegemonic framework for common sense. I believe it has won that war of position and as mentioned above, although the king has not been toppled, the castle has been remodeled. But it did not come without compromises, which goes a long way to explain multiculturalism through a Gramscian lens. In order to be *effective*, in some cases *accepted*, multiculturalism had to accommodate the counter-demands of a de facto Eurocentrism. This may have deradicalized multiculturalism, but it goes without saying that having little institutional influence is no poster child for radicalism either. As the cultural wars from the 1990s ebbed and flowed, multiculturalism received criticism not only from the educational right but also the left.

Enter CRT, the heir apparent to multiculturalism. The language of diversity began to give way to a language of anti-racism; the platform of inclusion became perceived as assimilation into an a priori existing system and challenged by a discourse that targeted changing that very system; and a politics of equitable representation shifted to a politics of redistribution. Of course, as Nancy Fraser would argue, any politics of representation assumes and rebounds on redistribution and vice versa. At university campuses, student clamoring for

decolonization and institutional climate change goes beyond diversification of the student body, as a diverse campus transitions to an anti-racist campus. Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectional theory becomes the battle cry over integration theory. In all, the mood from the 2000's to the present heeds Ladson-Billings and Tate's earlier mentioned article from 1995 and CRT, in its theoretical and empirical versions, has become more popular than Nike at large conferences like the American Educational Research Association. Even a cursory look at the annual program for CRT-inspired presentations would bear out this thesis. But, just like the popularization of multiculturalism may have led to its deradicalization, not the least of which is understandable through Derrick Bell's concept of *interest convergence* whereby racial progress is only tolerated when whiteness and white interests still come out on top, there have been plenty of warnings that a similar fate may await CRT as everyone's sister or cousin waves the CRT flag in educational scholarship these days. Nathan Glazer once wrote a sardonic book titled, *We Are All Multiculturalists Now*, meant to be a criticism of multiculturalism. It is easy to imagine the follow up, titled *We Are All Critical Race Theorists Now*. That said, the main difference between multiculturalism and CRT is that the latter has yet to gain a solid foothold in public schools almost 30 years since the initial writings in education, despite herculean efforts by activist scholars like Daniel Solorzano and his collaborators. This predicament is made perfectly clear when CRT scholars respond to the rightist attacks against the proliferation of CRT-inspired teachers and school content that the CRT teacher is a bogeyperson serving the propaganda of subversive politicians. In other words, the vast majority of teachers, including race-informed ones, do not follow CRT. And with such lockstep curricula sweeping across the US, even those with inclinations to incorporate CRT find themselves with little pedagogical room to do so. The rest are likely more familiar with the antics of QAnon than the writings of Frantz Fanon, the social media postings of Kim Kardashian than the books by Kim Crenshaw, and although they may have heard of bell hooks, Derrick Bell unlikely graces their bookshelf.

It is then ironic that hordes of white parents, many of whom are white women, are whipped up by a new McCarthyism against a phenomenon that does not exist in fact and is mainly a social media fabrication. *Not since the white riots during the 1950s-60s Civil Rights Movement have we witnessed such widespread and public white rage directed at people of color and their white sympathizers.* This is an important development in the history of US race relations because it shows white resentment as having gone underground (not in the absolute sense since people of color have always been under attack in various ways) but eventually found the staircase when the opportunity presented itself. It also showcases what Nietzsche called *ressentiment*, this time applied to whites' perception of being eclipsed and the nihilism through which their will to power expresses itself in a winner-takes-all politics of the apocalypse. Recall the tiki torch brandishing whites

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in Charlotteville, Virginia threateningly chanting "Jews Shall Not Replace Us" or "We Will Not Be Replaced."

Felipe Ziotti Narita: Decolonial theories have been much discussed in Latin American popular education. You argue that decolonization is also a curricular problem, that is, curriculum reform must be part of the decolonial practice. Maybe, beyond a curricular reform, a decolonial perspective could critique the very epistemological foundations of school knowledge. Could you talk about this view?

Zeus Leonardo: In several publications culminating in my recent book, *Edward Said and Education*, I offer a decolonial lens to make sense of modern education. First off, applying such a framework in a country like the US runs into a basic problem. That is, although race discourse is alive and well in public discourse and the public's imagination as a filter through which social redress is framed, one cannot say the same for colonialism, which is assumed as something that has been solved through decolonization in places like Africa or as a relic of a cruel past with the land theft and genocide faced by Native Americans. Colonialism is now reduced to a trope and one can pick up drycleaning from a shopping center called "Colonial Corner," buy furniture from the colonial era, and live in a condominium called "The Colony." Astrophysicists and scientists even speak of the necessity, perhaps eventuality, to colonize the planet Mars as humans stridently march toward planetary destruction of the Earth. The picture I am trying to paint here is the US collective amnesia about what Anibal Quijano and the Decolonial Reading Group call the continuation of coloniality, which necessitates what Mignolo calls epistemic disobedience. Fortunately, we also benefit from Edward Said and postcolonial intellectuals' turn toward the literary or cultural form of colonialism and the reinvigorated interest in Frantz Fanon 70 years after he published *Black Skin, White Masks*. This recent uptake of and uptick in anti-colonial understanding of education is a reminder that colonialism does not just happen through the end of the barrel of the gun but is able to permeate a society through the ball point of a pen (or a computer keyboard to be more modern, for sure).

I am fond of saying that colonialism is one part military, one part literary. By this, I join decolonial scholars to argue that colonialism happens through a material process and maintained through knowledge relations that assert the superiority of the Occident and the inferiority of the Orient, just to take Said's case study. This does not suggest that one came before the other and Said makes a good case that novels by Jane Austen and poetry by Kipling made Europeans more susceptible and accepting of colonialism when non-Europeans are represented as ill-equipped for civilizational life and therefore must be conquered *for their own good*, usually through military force. In the end, which one is more damaging and

damning is a difficult judgment to make. To return to an earlier point I made, it is not so much a question of whether ideological or materialist analysis produces the accurate way into a dilemma like colonialism but necessitates weaving a theory that attests to their appropriate relationship. In education, this point of view is arguably most compelling through studies of the curriculum, which, from knowledge to college, explains the upkeep of colonialism as an example of racial-colonial hegemony.

I do not understand curriculum as only or mainly a relationship between teachers and students and the "stuff" of schools, such as what books to include or exclude in forging the official curriculum. Following decolonial and postcolonial scholars, it means being aware of how subjects and objects of the colonial relation are rendered, repeated, and reproduced as part of an apparently objective process. In the modern Orient and within the time frame that Said studied, this objectification took place through the arts and letters. More recently, US Orientalism leverages the social sciences and data-driven analytics to enact its unique form of (postmodern?) colonialism, implicating the role of science in the colonial knowledge enterprise. This is to say that there exists a multitude to colonial strategies and interpellations that increasingly recruit the certainty of science as a legitimating force. It brings to relief the rather horrifying admission, for some, that how we come to know, what we know, and our claims to knowledge are always nocent. And because colonialism intervenes in our complete understanding, historical events like Orientalism and their corollaries in other colonized spaces, are not simply misunderstandings. I am reminded of Said's profound statement that Orientalists do not merely misunderstand the Orient and those they conveniently create as "Orientals," because *Orientalists did not intend to understand them accurately in the first place*, at least not in the colonized's own terms since Said did not foolishly believe in a "real Oriental" or an objectively existing Orient outside of ideology and the will to represent by the colonized. It means that understanding, even self-understanding, is what the educational philosopher, Gert Biesta, following Derrida, calls an ideological moment since it is haunted by its complement, or misunderstanding. But no form of understanding worth the process of education proceeds without the risk of misunderstanding that subverts understanding's ultimate security as a form of knowledge. Therefore, true education is precisely putting knowledge at risk. In their rush towards the will to expertise as a will to dominate, the colonizer fails to appreciate this philosophical limit to practical knowledge. They are insufficiently self-critical of a world they have created which they then proceed to misinterpret, as Charles Mills reminds us. Worse than that. Mills turns the screw a quarter turn more to suggest that this very **ignorance** is what fronts as **knowledge**, a militant, aggressive, and power-invested annunciation of a world built on questionable premises.

ZEUS LEONARDO | FELIPE ZIOTTI NARITA | JEREMIAH MORELOCK

Felipe Ziotti Narita: When you think on dis-orienting western regimes of knowledge, you point out that a travelling curriculum implies a deconstruction of the colonial project embedded in knowledge. Could you explain the importance of travelling curriculum? How does it relate to the contemporary debate on cultural transfers and cultural hybridization?

Zeus Leonardo: A travelling curriculum works towards the secularization of knowledge. Following Said, by this I do not refer to religion as an institution that drives the production of knowledge in schools, at least not in the literal sense, but a critique of the "sacred" or "originary" status of some knowledge over others. Put differently, it interrogates knowledge that has been given, usually a kind of self-ascension, a religious-like status. When asked to justify itself, what Michael Apple calls "official knowledge" becomes self-referential and uses its own knowledge base to rationalize its assumed superiority. And when considered as a *network of knowledge*, a genealogy in the sense that Nietzsche ties diverse thinkers from Socrates to Descartes and Schopenhauer to Kant, it becomes circular and self-legitimating. This is what Said ultimately finds, when multiple texts on the Orient began to "conspire" (my term) with each other in their denigration of Orientals, almost unconsciously but nevertheless consistently and through sheer repetition. Charles Mills asserts something similar when, in contesting the racial contract, black and other non-white philosophers are subjected to refutations and judgments whose logic stems from the terms of the racial contract, assumed to be a self-correcting perspective that does not have to appeal to other systems of knowledge. Speaking back to this racial contract on non-white terms risks being labeled irrational.

At root, this claim to expertise is a form of emplacement not unlike the colonizer's ability to step foot onto and name a "discovered" land, and by naming call it into existence as if a society had not built a civilization there. Otherwise known as settler colonialism, the process of erecting a home on top of someone else's has wreaked havoc on indigenous populations as diverse as the Israel occupation of Palestine in the Middle East, the Pakeha white takeover in New Zealand, and the Inca displacement in Peru. Centuries later, these same settlers may even appropriate the title "native" to announce themselves as originating from lands they have settled, stripping indigenous people rightful claims to that name. The structure of feeling of being "at home" is the mode of existence for the potentate, according to Said, the opposite of which is the exile, émigré, or refugee. To be clear, for Said the exile is not only a literal description, but a metaphorical representation or political choice that one makes to exist from the intellectual position of the exile, at once wanting desperately to find a home but restlessly fending it off or simply failing to feel comfort in any "home" or nation. Historical figures like Hemingway, Joyce, Conrad chose exile as a form of disjuncture in their personal trajectories, a break in their own histories. Of course, Paulo Freire

experienced literal exile when he was forced out of Brazil, an unfortunate experience he nevertheless chose not to mourn but which expanded his sense of humanity and self-understanding of a radical life in the making. These examples of travel, some forced some chosen, speak to the knowledge that lives put at risk produce. They help the exile realize that home is both romanticized and repelled, a necessary but insufficient desire, and a condition that is both excessive and yet not enough. This was certainly true for Freire and his beloved Brazil.

As Said says, we live in the era of the exile. People transit the globe because of war, economic restructuring and disruption, and political displacement. Even immigration is not simply chosen but something motivated by social pressures of pull and push forces. For instance, the US pulls immigrants because of myths and opportunities but the same immigrants are pushed out of their national situation because of instabilities and unlivable conditions. This kind of mixing is ripe for hybridization, creolization, trans-languaging practices, and cultural syncretism. Unfortunately, the metropole or the colonizer's cosmopolitanism usually constitutes the image of this valued sophistication, a premium found in New York rather than New Delhi, London or Los Angeles instead of Lima, or nations like France over French-ruled colonies like Fanon's Martinique. Julian Go suggests that the cosmopolitanism of the other, of the colonized, of Fanon's subject, represents an alternative to the colonizer's for it was through their colonization that a global, cultural exchange between the West and the rest was produced, including the incomplete process of colonization to foreclose culture once and for all. The colonized's cosmopolitanism is a form of hybridization that values an education built on movement, a nomadic experience of culture as crisscrossing each other at oblique angles, an existence of precarity that nevertheless produces joy. A travelling curriculum affirms the epistemology of the colony as a source of knowledge that yearns for the human, not unlike Fanon, but like Fanon, is a pre-condition for the new human that such a predicament is likely to birth.

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