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## Challenging Hegemonic and Counter-hegemonic Epistemologies

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Our field will not progress beyond a certain primitive point unless we support a sector of theory (Pinar, 1998, p. xiii).

The fields of curriculum theory and curriculum studies have more than a century of history. This history includes explicit and implicit struggles between multiple epistemological fields—most of them Western and none of them capable of claiming a totalitarian position, as has been

documented by numerous researchers (cf. Kliebard, 1995; Pinar et al., 1995; Paraskeva, 2007, 2011a, 2011b; Schubert, 1986; Watkins, 2001). These struggles have become engrained in the very DNA of these fields.

However, if these clashes—many of them bordering on the cantankerous—contributed significantly and clearly to the development of a scientific field that seems to have been fueled continually by a permanent crisis, then these same theoretical restrictions seem to have brought about the worst one could imagine for such a dynamic field: the absence of a crisis in fact triggered a crisis. Put another way, it seems that the field has lost the audacity of the crisis. The field gave up on the crises. At a time when so many scholars theoretically pack up and move on to a different global project, one gets the feeling that the crisis of crisis, and especially the lack of audacity of the crisis becomes more visible. In an era of “mass civic illiteracy and private elitism raging wild” (Olorunda, 2011, p. 94), this type of theoretical “swamp” becomes problematic.



**Vanessa Andreotti's** *Actionable Postcolonial Theory in Education*, which won the AERA Division B book award in 2012, challenges such crises by bringing to the fore the need to dig within and beyond two postcolonial theoretical strands—one overtly Marxist, the other with poststructural

impulses. Drawing from Young (2001) and Spivak (1990), Andreotti's postcolonial framework makes a distinction between these two strands,

one leaning toward Marxist historicism (and metanarratives of progress and emancipation) focusing primarily on changing material circumstances of exploitation structured by assumptions of cultural supremacy and on the struggles of liberation of subjugated people; and [the other] a discursive orientation, leaning toward post-structuralism, focusing on contestation and complicity in the relations between colonizers and colonized, and on the possibility of imagining relationships beyond coercion, subjugation and epistemic violence. (p. 17)

Needless to say, Andreotti is not claiming a dichotomist reading of the postcolonial. As she argues, the postcolonial strand “more explicitly informed by post-structuralism [sits] in an ambivalent conflicted space between Marxism, postmodernism and identity struggle” (p. 18). It is undeniable that such strands coexist, but they also determine inner tensions and contradictions intrinsic to the Western ethnocentric hegemonic bloc (Paraskeva, 2011a, 2011b). However, despite the Western matrix of poststructuralist, postmodernist, and Marxist theories, Andreotti laudably reemphasizes the “indispensable and inadequate” character of Marxism and poststructuralism, as Chakrabarty (2000) so insightfully stated.

As I have examined elsewhere in great detail (Paraskeva, 2011a; 2011b), such character exhibits its importance when one examines the tensions within African intellectuals and intellectualism regarding “African positive neutralism,” as one can see from observing Lumumba, Machel, Mudimbe, and others. Lumumba (1963) states that “we are simply Africans. We do not want to subject ourselves to any foreign influence. We want nothing to do with any imported doctrines, either from the West, from Russia, or from America. The Congo remains the Congo. We are African; we are African and we shall remain Africans. We have our philosophy and our code of ethics and we are proud of them” (pp. 283-325). Machel (1985) noted that “no book by Marx ever arrived in my home town, nor any other book that spoke against colonialism. Our books were these elders. It was they who taught us what colonialism is, the evils of colonialism and what the colonialists did when they came here. They were our source of inspiration” (p. x). Mudimbe (1994), however, warns us to be sentient, as it is undeniable that during the 1960s,

the vocabulary of criticism of colonial ratio was Marxist, that of the African independences as well as of the nonalignment programs was Marxist. The regimes, the progressive movements, and their leaders were Marxist. Similarly, *interlocuteurs valables* (“authorized representatives”) in Africa were Marxist, or, at least, wielded a syntax that have a Marxist aspect; the Africanists who were respected and accepted, both by Africa

and by the West, were, more often than not, Marxists, or, at the very least Marxists sympathizers. The discipline of the future that attracted or terrorized political economy was Marxist. (p. 44)

Thus, to accurately examine and understand what Patrice Lumumba (1963) coined as an African “policy of positive neutralism [that requires engagement in] a psychological decolonization” (p. 325) implies a need not just to dissect the paradox of inadequacy and indispensability, but also to consistently go beyond such paradox—something Andreotti’s *Actionable Postcolonial Theory in Education* challenges the reader to do. It is crucial to highlight the way Andreotti (p. 217) engages with other knowledge systems via *Through Other Eyes* (hereafter TOE), a program that was developed between 2006 and 2008 and involved myriad partnerships—Manchester Metropolitan University, the Centre for Research in Development in Education and Global Learning at the University of London, and Survival International—and is currently used in more 33 higher education institutions around the world. As Andreotti stresses, TOE “is a free online study programme primarily aimed at teacher education focusing on engagements with indigenous/aboriginal perceptions of global issues” (p. 217). Along with Bhabha, she argues that

TOE attempted to provide a pedagogical framework by postcolonial theory that supported the engagement with epistemological pluralism among non-indigenous learning communities in

ways that challenged both absolute universalisms and absolute relativisms, placing emphasis on the inherent heterogeneous and dynamic nature of the construction of meaning and culture itself. (p. 238)

Andreotti's book also makes us think about a conversation that has been missing from our field—and about why it is missing. The book is not merely a eulogy for the postcolonial artillery. Andreotti in fact proposes a path, one that addresses the concerns many in the field of social sciences have if they are really concerned with social and cognitive justice (cf. Sousa Santos, 2009). She dissects the “hostility to difference embedded in the normative teleological project of Western/ Enlightenment humanism, which is the basis of dominant Western epistemologies” (p. 1), and in so doing brings to the fore the metaphor of the yellow corn cob to show how

the prevalence of the yellow corn cob in people's imagination and their surprise at the existence of multicolored varieties can be used to illustrate the institutionalization of the globally hegemonic ethnocentrism of the Western/Enlightenment epistemology. (p. 4)

Andreotti's metaphor challenges “simplistic analyses of power and oppression” (p. 5). In fact, “the capacity for harm through epistemic dominance, epistemic violence and ‘epistemicide’ and the vulnerability to such practices are severely unevenly distributed on a global scale among yellow

and multicolored corncobs” (p. 4). She argues that postcolonial theory can be relevant to “at least five different political communities”:

Those in the global north (and in the north of the South) over socialized in the ethnocentric hegemony of Eurocentric modernity and benefiting from it (yellow corn cobs who cannot imagine other corn cobs; those in the south of the global North and in the global South aspiring to benefit from the ethnocentric hegemony through voluntary socialization and defense of Eurocentric modernity (multicolored cobs who want to be yellow); those in the south of the global South and the global North suffering the effects of ethnocentric global hegemonies and fighting to reassert their right to self-governance or self-determination (multicolored corn cobs struggling to become visible in the yellow corn cob's imagination in order to disrupt their violence and imagination; those bearing the brunt of violence of ethnocentric hegemonies whose main priority is survival and who cannot afford to be engaged in political mobilizations (multicolored and “cooked” yellow corn cobs fighting predatory Darwinist extermination: and those (translators and catalysts) in-between political communities who both benefit from and are critical of ethnocentric global hegemonies and who aspire to use their privilege/lines of social mobility in the work against the grain of ethnocentrism and hegemony

(both yellow and multicolored corn cobs). (pp. 7-8)

In this context, and as I have examined in detail elsewhere (Paraskeva, 2011a, 2011b), Andreotti accurately challenges both hegemonic and counterhegemonic epistemologies. Her contribution to the debate goes beyond the pale identification of conflicts and contradictions within the postcolonial terrain. She insightfully suggests a new critical tone, which is quite visible in her “personal and collective leaning journey,” which is structured in three parts. The first part addresses postcolonialism and postcolonial theories, in which Andreotti dissects key issues highlighting the role of intellectuals such as Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak. In the second part, Andreotti unveils actioning postcolonial theory in educational research, and in the third she exposes how postcolonial theory can be put to work in educational practice.

Andreotti claims that *Actionable Postcolonial Theory in Education* is not a manifesto; it is an analysis that, she claims,

engages with the gifts and limitations of [a particular] theory in an attempt to imagine dialogue, relationships and education “otherwise” beyond the confines of dominance, ethnocentrism, and coercion that have characterized institutionalized process of modern schooling and education is general. (p. 7)

In this context, I see commonalities between Andreotti’s perspective and my claim for the need to deterritorialize the field and move

toward an itinerant theoretical approach (cf. Paraskeva, 2011a, 2011b). The aim, as Andreotti argues, is neither to “reach a specific stable condition of harmony [nor] to promise heroic or Salvationist glories at the end of a revolutionary struggle” (p. 7). As I had the opportunity to consider extensively in other contexts (Paraskeva, 2011a, 2011b), such itinerant theory(ist) provokes and exists in the midst of a set of crises, and also produces laudable silences. It provokes an abstinence of theoretical uniformity and stabilization. The theory(ist) is like a volcanic chain, in that he/she shows a constant lack of equilibrium, is always a stranger in his/her own language, is an itinerant theory(ist) profoundly sentient of the multiplicities of lines, spaces, and dynamic transformations (Deleuze, 1990).

Such a theoretical course is defined by a cutting edge set of processes that is both “Malangatania”<sup>1</sup> and “Pollockian,”<sup>2</sup> not because it is abstract but because it is oppressive in its freedom. It is not a sole act, however; it is a populated solitude. This itinerant theoretical path claims a multifaceted curriculum compromise and “runs away” from any unfortunate “canonology.” It is actually an invitation to “get involved with alternative readings that have been hidden, erased, or marginalized within the curriculum field” (Malewski, 2010). Such itinerant curriculum theory is an anthem against the indignity of speaking for the other (Deleuze, 1990).

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the work of Malangatana Valente, the great Mozambican painter.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the work of Jackson Pollock, an icon of U.S. expressionism

This itinerant theory(ist) is much more than an eclectic approach; it is actually a profoundly theoretical discipline that “challenges one of the most pejorative judgments of educational research, [which claims such research as] decontextualized, that it has failed to consider the context, that it is out of context, or even that it has been miscontextualized” (Luke, 2010, p. 145) After all, as Popkewitz (2001) claims, “the challenges about knowledge are not only about academic knowledge, but about cultural norms of progress and social change that are part of the politics of contemporary life” (p. 241).

This itinerant theoretical posture is also overtly visible in Andreotti, as well as in Andreotti and Souza (2012, p. 3), a “beyond and . . . beyond [position of] yet-to-come postcolonial possibilities” (Andreotti & Souza, 2012, p. 2):

Conceptualize the prefix “post” in postcolonialism as a constant interrogation, a possibility that is “not yet” but that may announce the prospect of something new. We define postcolonial theories as tools-for-thinking rather than theories of truth. In this sense we acknowledge their situatedness and partiality. (p. 2)

Such itinerant theory is a political struggle over what one might call the “corn dynamic nominalisms”, which relies on Ian Hacking’s concept that is so well formulated by Gahnian intellectual Kwame Anthony Appiah (2005). Andreotti’s accurate metaphor for political communities becomes even more complex if one pays attention to

Appiah’s (2005) position on culture and identity. In fact, the way the

yellow corn cobs who cannot imagine other corn cobs; the multicolored cobs who want to be yellow; the multicolored corn cobs struggling to become visible in the yellow corn cob’s imagination in order to disrupt their violence and imagination; the multicolored and “cooked” yellow corn cobs fighting predatory Darwinist extermination: and those (translators and catalysts) in-between political communities who both benefit from and are critical of ethnocentric global hegemonies and who aspire to use their privilege/lines of social mobility in the work against the grain of ethnocentrism and hegemony. (Andreotti, 2011, pp. 7-8)

According to Appiah (2005), “every collective identity seems to have the following sort of structure”:

First, it requires the availability of terms in public discourse that used to pick out the bearers of the identity by way of criteria of ascription, so that some people are recognized as members of the group[;] a second element of social identity is the internationalization of those labels as parts of the individual identities of at least some of those who bear the label [and] the final element of a social identity is the existence of patterns of behavior towards [a particular label]. (pp. 66-69).

Andreotti’s lens is crucial to understanding curriculum within the dynamics of

ideological production (Paraskeva, 2007, 2011a, 2011b). Needless to say, *Actionable Postcolonial Theory in Education* is not claiming that each corn political community is a monolithic community—although I admit that should be made more explicit. Andreotti’s volume is an important contribution to “the struggle against epistemicides, is indeed a struggle against what we might call ‘indigenoustude’—a mystification of indigenous cultures and knowledges” (Paraskeva, 2011a, p. 187). It plays a critical role in the struggle against dominant and particular counter-dominant positions. Aijaz Ahmad (2008), along with Andreotti, argues that this approach helps to fight for a theoretical pattern that “cannot be based upon the exclusionary pleasures of dominant taste, but upon an inclusive and opulent sense of heterogeneity” (p. 95). Andreotti’s *Actionable Postcolonial Theory in Education* is a credibility check on how powerful itinerant curriculum theory is (Paraskeva, 2011).

As Kwame Kkhrumah would put it , we cannot change societies if we don’t change mentalities. Justice is done and, modesty aside, the curriculum field is actually making a huge contribution to this cause. Andreotti’s book is an amazing and graphic example of this contribution.

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