Decolonizing and Reconceptualizing Teacher Education: Indigenous Pedagogies for Transformative Futures in Postcolonial Contexts

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Abstract: Global education systems struggle with inequities rooted in colonialism/systemic racism, limiting opportunities for marginalized communities. Decolonial/postcolonial/critical pedagogical theories examine how traditional curricular-instructional practices perpetuate colonialism. A fundamental rethinking of how educators are prepared is essential to decolonizing schooling. Transformation of teacher education will occur when studying to be a Social Studies teacher includes consideration of historical power dynamics/cultural negotiations. Exploring global contexts, I analyze colonial schooling in Nigerian, African American, and Hawaiian communities. I also discuss a case of colonial erasure/normalization of colonialism in a middle school class in the U.S. Decolonial approach to teacher education addresses gaps in traditional training by connecting local contexts to global educational goals. The way forward to social justice, global equity, and cultural sustainability in schooling is inclusion in pedagogy of Indigenous perspectives on curricular topics.

Education systems worldwide grapple with the challenge of addressing systemic inequities long-embedded in their structures. Education plays a pivotal role in shaping societal values and promoting social justice, but inequities, often rooted in historical legacies of colonialism and systemic racism, perpetuate disparities in educational outcomes and limit opportunities for marginalized communities (Santos & Haycock, 2016; ACLU, 2023). In many postcolonial societies, education remains a powerful yet imperfect tool for social change (Brissett, 2018). Despite promise as a catalyst for social transformation, education continues to reinforce existing power dynamics due to its entanglement with colonial legacies and neoliberal agendas (Enslin, 2017; Tikly, 2020). Systemic inequities continue to marginalize communities whose voices have been sidelined by centuries of colonial domination. As a result, educational systems reflect sociocultural tensions of race and power, sustaining social inequality (Hickling-Hudson, 2005).

These inequities are not accidental. They are woven into the fabric of education systems that have historically prioritized Western modes of accumulating knowledge over Indigenous ways of holistic understanding. The COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted these disparities, exacerbating existing gaps in access to quality education, technology, and resources for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and communities of color (Anumenechi, C. K., 2023; Gee, K. A., Asmundson, V., & Vang, T. 2024). The pandemic starkly presented the need for systemic reforms addressing inequities in schools to ensure all students have equal opportunities to succeed. Addressing systemic inequities requires decolonizing traditionally colonial curriculum; reconceptualizing and reinvesting in educators as agents of change; and developing endogenous system leadership (Balarin & Milligan 2024). Justice-oriented reform creates a social-justice knowledge system to challenge global neoliberal agendas of colonialists all over the world. Moreover, promoting epistemic equity in education contributes to achieving wider cultural and linguistic rights by enhancing the agency and capabilities of future generations to tackle complex global challenges.

Addressing Systemic Inequities in Education

Current education systems perpetuate inequities due to deep-seated beliefs about the uniformity of learning and teaching despite contextual differences in educational spaces. These

beliefs lead to policies that neglect broader sociopolitical structures, resulting in fiscal disinvestment from minoritized schools and application of universal solutions to diverse communities, often exacerbating inequities (Hatch, Corson, and Gerth van den Berg, 2021). This situation makes reevaluating and transforming the foundational principles of teacher education essential. Addressing systemic inequities in schooling is crucial for fostering a more inclusive and equitable society. Traditional Western-centric curricula often overlook the diversity within Indigenous groups and regions, leading to cultural homogenization and a lack of representation in educational content. Critical analysis demonstrates that this oversight not only marginalizes Indigenous knowledge but also fails to equip teachers with the cultural competence needed to do their job well. Cultural homogenization, while holding the promise of facilitating exchange of ideas, can also lead to suppression of unique cultural identities and perspectives, worsening educational disparities (Tiwari, 2023; Russell, 2023).

Addressing these deep-seated disparities is not simply about revising curricula or updating textbooks; this work is about reimagining the very foundations of teacher education. Because when educators are trained in systems that uncritically reproduce outdated, Eurocentric paradigms, they inadvertently perpetuate cycles of exclusion in their classrooms (Apple, 1990; Nieto, 1996; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). As critical theorists argue, a transformative reconceptualized teacher education should move beyond surface-level reforms and engage in a fundamental rethinking of how educators are prepared to challenge prevailing power structures (Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994). Integrating diverse pedagogies and cultural competencies into teacher education is necessary to break these colonizing cycles and foster an inclusive and equitable learning environment. This includes recognizing the importance of Indigenous knowledge systems to teacher education programs. Recognizing Indigenous knowledge systems not only enriches the educational experience for all students but also empowers teachers to support and celebrate the unique identities and perspectives of their students (Tiwari, 2023; Govender & Mutendera, 2020). By valuing Indigenous knowledge, educators can foster a sense of pride and identity among Indigenous learners, ensuring Indigenous cultural heritage is preserved and respected.

Decolonizing teacher education by challenging dominant Western epistemologies and advocating for diverse knowledge systems is essential for promoting global equity, racial justice, and social justice. Understanding the principles of decolonization, which ultimately makes room in the curriculum for Indigenous knowledge, requires an education oriented towards social justice. Social justice, as defined by Grant & Ladson-Billings (1997), posits that "citizens have a personal obligation, mediated through political obligations, to help create a society in which the concerns for concrete needs of all persons and the creation of reciprocal interdependence are fundamental" (247). Grant & Ladson-Billings further assert that education for justice is education for collaboration, cooperation, and community. This theoretical perspective underscores the necessity of fostering an educational environment that prioritizes equity and inclusiveness. In essence, decolonizing teacher education is about reclaiming agency over the educational narrative. This work is a call to honor the richness of Indigenous cultures, ensuring that every learner has access to education that is both relevant and liberating. This approach paves the way for futures that are as diverse and dynamic as the communities they serve. By emphasizing critical thinking, wisdom-keeping customs, and cultural sustainability, decolonization of teacher education provides a framework for transformative futures in postcolonial educational contexts.

Reconceptualization in this context refers to the process of fundamentally rethinking and redesigning teacher education curriculum to address its current limitations and align teacher

education with a more inclusive and culturally responsive framework. This reconceptualization invites a reimagining of teacher education that is rooted in social justice, collaboration, and community; that challenges the status quo; and that considers what a truly equitable education system could look like. Educators and all the key players involved in the curriculum process — developers, designers, implementers — and policymakers, as well, should make part of their standard operating procedure critical engagement with history, recognition of the value of diverse epistemologies, and dissolution of the structures that have long favored certain groups over others (UNESCO, 2017; Levinson & Geron, 2022).

White supremacy, needed to justify settler colonialism,[1] often produces master narratives that exclude consideration of other points of view (Tuck & Gaztambide, 2013). According to Calderon (2011, 108), the exclusion enacted within colonial perspectives creates "gaps that have concrete consequences for many communities that are not allowed full participation in educational knowledge production." Calderon's (2011) critique of how traditional education systems perpetuate dominant ideologies that marginalize non-Western and Indigenous perspectives explains that exclusion limits critical inquiry and reinforces colonialist narratives. Building from Bonilla Silva's (2001) work on the discourse of colorblind ideologies, Calderon refers to curricular exclusion, representative of a dominant ideology, as *colonial blind discourse*.

Historical Power Dynamics/Cultural Negotiations: Four Theoretical Approaches

The transformation of teacher education is best understood as a process deeply embedded in study of historical power dynamics and cultural negotiations. Systemic reform draws on decolonial, postcolonial, and critical pedagogical theories to examine how traditional curricular practices have perpetuated inequities in education. Exploring these processes gives insight into how Indigenous pedagogies not only challenge established norms but also offer innovative pathways to a reconceptualized curriculum in teacher education. Following discussion of decolonial schooling, several case studies will serve as critical examples of how colonial legacies have shaped education systems and how racialized educators perpetuate inequalities in classrooms. Consideration of these cases establishes the need for a reconceptualized curriculum able to contribute to the ongoing dialogue on transforming teacher education by inspiring actionable strategies to decolonize curricula globally (Tikly, 2024).

Aspects of decolonial/postcolonial/critical pedagogical theory combine to facilitate thorough examination of 1) how traditional curricular practices have perpetuated inequities in education, 2) how those inequities may be overcome, and 3) how new curricular/instructional practices can guide teachers/students in co-construction of social justice in their life worlds. Decolonized curriculum promises to affect positively the very lives, "the biographically determined situations" (Schutz, 1971, 288) of marginalized individuals and groups.

Decolonial Theory: Decolonial Theory, principally developed in the early 1990s by Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano, introduces the foundational concept of "coloniality of power" to critique social discrimination, Eurocentric knowledge systems, and other enduring structures of colonial domination that persist in modern societies. "Coloniality of power" challenges the dominance of Western epistemologies by advocating for inclusion of diverse knowledge systems

[1] A kind of colonialism that accomplishes imperialist aims by land appropriation that necessitates the removal or elimination of Indigenous populations and their replacement by Whites (Wolfe, 2001).

in societal decision-making (Quijano, 2000). Eurocentric bias in traditional knowledge production historically marginalized Indigenous and non-Western perspectives (Mignolo, 2007). Decolonial theory is used to dismantle structures, biases, and power dynamics favoring Western knowledge systems, promoting more inclusive understanding of knowledge and reality. Curricula, especially in teacher education, have been constructed through a colonial lens, which marginalizes Indigenous ways of knowing (Quijano, 2000). Urging educators to break down entrenched biases and embrace diverse, Indigenous epistemologies that reflect cultural realities of marginalized communities, Decolonial Theory calls for a radical rethinking of curriculum both in content and in pedagogy (Walsh, 2018).

Postcolonial Theory: Postcolonial Theory, significantly shaped by Palestinian American scholar Edward W. Said, particularly through his seminal work *Orientalism* (1978) may be used to examine enduring impacts of colonial dominance in education, especially how colonial discourses continue to privilege Western knowledge systems and marginalize Indigenous narratives (Enslin, 2017; Said, 1978; Spivak, 1988). Postcolonial Theory demands recognition of the ongoing impact of colonialism on contemporary education systems, advocating for a pedagogy of criticality and transformation to address these historical injustices (Wa Thiong'o, 1986). Educational institutions have historically functioned as instruments of cultural control, imposing a dominant worldview that marginalizes local voices (Bhabha, 1994). Postcolonial Theory exposes the dilemmatic tensions educators face when navigating curricula that simultaneously reflect colonial legacies and attempt to respond to contemporary calls for cultural responsiveness. Integrating postcolonial insights into teacher training is crucial for developing curricula that both acknowledge past injustices and work actively to dethrone enduring structures of inequality (Loomba, 2005).

Critical Pedagogy: Critical Pedagogy, developed by Paulo Freire (1970), positions education as a practice of liberation rather than domination and emphasizes the importance of dialogic, critical reflection. Co-creation of knowledge between teachers and students becomes feasible because this pedagogical approach challenges traditional power dynamics in the classroom. Educational practice that fosters critical consciousness empowers learners to question/challenge dominant narratives, to take action against oppression, and to transform their social realities (Giroux, 1983). In teacher education, Critical Pedagogy promotes a dialogic relationship between teaching and learning as teacher education programs seek to nurture reflective practitioners committed to social justice and equipped to challenge systemic inequities within their communities (Shor, 1992).

Asian Critical Race Theory: AsianCrit focuses on the lived experiences and marginalization of Asian Americans. Iftikar & Museus (2018) explored the application of AsianCrit in education, emphasizing the need for policies and curricula that reflect Asian American voices. They advocate for recognizing the diversity within the Asian American community, acknowledging that being Asian is not monolithic but comprises varied backgrounds, experiences, and identities. This approach advances equity and inclusion in meaningful ways by emphasizing the importance of understanding the transnational contexts and histories of Asian Americans, including influences of migration patterns, colonialism, and imperialism on their experiences. Specifically, AsianCrit exposes how the dominant educational discourse often sidelines cultural contributions from an array of Asian communities, thereby perpetuating a narrow, Western-centric narrative. By foregrounding the unique challenges faced by Asian communities, AsianCrit underscores the necessity for decolonizing education in context, advocating for a reformed curriculum that not only recognizes but also integrates diverse knowledge systems. Such a curriculum ensures the rich histories/contributions of Asian Americans (7.2% of total U.S. population and at 24.7 million the

third-largest racial group in the U.S. (United States Census Bureau, 2024), alongside those of other marginalized groups, are both acknowledged and valued within our educational frameworks.

Historical Case Studies: Nigerian, African American, and Hawaiian Perspectives

This section considers three cases of communities faced with the need for decolonized curriculum. By exploring cases such as these that converge on the goal of fostering equity by respecting students' identities, valuing their cultural or Indigenous narratives, and addressing marginalization in all its forms, we lend our voice to demonstrating the transformative potential of decolonized education to restore equity and other forms of justice (National Education Association, 2021). These global comparisons underscore universal challenges that transcend geographical boundaries and call for a concerted global dialogue on decolonizing education, including resolution of issues like the marginalization of indigenous perspectives and the need for culturally responsive teacher education, (Sultana, 2010). By engaging in this dialogue, we can envision and work towards a reconceptualized education.

Nigerian Perspective: The Nigerian educational system is patterned on the British Colonial Education policy. The system is three-tiered: Basic, Post-basic, and Tertiary. Formal education is concerned with reading, writing, and numeracy, with the introduction of technology and science in the post-independence era. However, the objectives of this educational system did not address the aspirations of the Indigenous people neither before nor after Nigerian independence in 1960. Clamors for change resulted in the first indigenous National Policy on Education in 1977.[2]

In Nigeria, the enduring impact of colonial legacies on teacher education is particularly evident when examining the historical narratives that shape(d) curriculum. Circa 1840, Western education came to Nigeria via Christian British missionaries (Edeh, 2021). Syllabi used in Nigerian History/Social Studies curriculum and many textbooks suggest formal Western education in Nigeria *began* in 1842. However, historical records indicate Portuguese merchants were active in Nigeria well before the slave trade and were among the first Europeans to establish contact with the Nigerian coast during the late 15th-early 16th centuries (Lovejoy, 1991). Because their initial missions were driven by commercial interests, Portuguese direct impact on formal schooling in Nigeria was limited. Nevertheless, they established the first school in the Benin Kingdom in 1515. Early Portuguese presence not only opened Nigeria to global trade networks but also contributed to diffusion of Western cultural and intellectual practices when literacy and numeracy for language development were taught (Falola & Heaton, 2008). Evidence of earlier introduction of Western influences was later suppressed by colonial narratives. This significant gap in historical acknowledgment offers a striking example of how a colonial state's curriculum influences what is taught and learned, included or excluded, and forgotten or remembered in schooling. A recent influx of historical narratives from Indigenous perspectives into Nigeria's curriculum helps to

[2] While I do not intend to discuss the history of education in Africa, it is worth mentioning that centuries before colonial domination, various African cultures flourished and produced achievements in art and architecture, such as Ancient Egyptian pyramids, and agriculture, including irrigation along the Nile and Congo Rivers; history, including Solomon and the Queen of Sheba in Ethiopia (Pankhurst, 1998); hunting, such as the Bushmen of Botswana (Lee, 1979); religion, including the Coptic Christian Church of Egypt in the 4th century (Budge, 1970); and higher education, such as Al-Qarawiyyin, the oldest university in Morocco (UNESCO, 2017). Preservation of Western culture, especially Greek culture, in the Great Library of Alexandria in Egypt during the reign of Ptolemy II (285-246 BCE) is also noteworthy (El-Abbadi, 1990). Contributions of ancient African civilizations are indisputably significant in the evolution of global societies and world cultures.

marginalize earlier contributions of European powers like the Portuguese; but, as yet, to no great extent.[3]

Cultural and Indigenous knowledge systems have long served as vital pillars of shared national understanding in Nigeria and are exemplified by a rich tapestry of cultural materials, including folklore and oral traditions that imbue moral lessons and embed historical narratives (Ogunyemi, 2018); proverbs and idioms that impart wisdom across numerous local languages (Nwagbara, 2012); traditional religious and spiritual practices that shape Indigenous cosmologies (Okeke, 2008); and Indigenous agricultural and healing practices that are deeply rooted in the country's diverse ethnic traditions (Ajayi, 2010). Nonetheless, the prevailing narrative in published Nigerian History, Social Studies, and Civic Education curricula largely ignores Indigenous contributions. Instead, official school curricula reinforce a Eurocentric perspective. As Fafunwa (1986) argues, the imposition of British educational policies established curricula that privileged Western knowledge while sidelining local languages, histories, and pedagogies. Similarly, Okebukola (1993) points out the disconnect between traditional Nigerian educational practices and imposed colonial models of schooling has resulted in systemic inequities in teacher education. The gap between community and school continues to affect the quality and contextual relevance of education in Nigeria. Overly narrow focus on subjects like English, mathematics, and science not only neglects social dimensions of schooling but often initiates serious academic study of these subjects at an age too young to meet criteria of developmentally appropriate practice. (Sulaiman, 2008).

Furthermore, the curriculum tends to use reductive language when describing Indigenous practices. For example, traditional religious beliefs are often referred to as "superstitions" or "primitive," in everyday language and in most Social Studies texts (Nwagbara, 2012). Such pejorative language perpetuates colonial stereotypes that portray Indigenous cultures as inferior to Western scientific and religious canons and Western ways as sane and current while Indigenous ways of knowing are outdated or irrational. This *reductio ad hominem*, little more than a pep rally for colonialists, not only distorts historical narratives but also contributes to ongoing challenges in teacher education. Teachers often face crises of cultural dissonance when what the curriculum says denies validity to local knowledge and custom. Limited local relevance persists as a legacy of colonial education. Reorienting teacher education to focus on practice at aligning curriculum study with community life would go a long way towards decolonizing the curriculum, making it more accessible to traditionally marginalized students. Reorientation of teacher education towards pedagogical use of indigeneity is crucial for addressing systemic inequities and for constructing a more balanced and equitable society. Decolonizing curriculum involves challenging dominant narratives and advocating for integration of diverse knowledge systems. This approach is essential for promoting global equity, and racial and social justice. By reclaiming agency over educational narratives, we can honor the richness of Indigenous cultures and ensure every learner accesses education that is both relevant and liberating.

[3] Nigerian curricula have perpetuated a skewed understanding of the country's educational heritage. Often noticed is the superficial inclusion of Indigenous knowledge systems within the curriculum. While Nigerian folktales or proverbs may occasionally be included in language or literature classes, they are often treated as isolated cultural artifacts rather than integrated into a broader framework of knowledge that informs every aspect of life (Emeagwali, 2014). I see a typical example of this marginalization in Nigeria's language curriculum. For instance, Nigeria boasts over 500 languages (Bamgbose, 2000); but while some Indigenous languages are taught in schools, their role is often limited to the early years of education (Ngũgĩ, 1986).

Briefly comparing Nigeria with other postcolonial contexts reveals universal challenges in decolonizing education. Historically, many educational curricula have had an exclusionary focus, centering primarily on Eurocentric perspectives and privileging Western knowledge and history over the contributions of Indigenous and racially diverse communities. This exclusion is not coincidental; it is the result of systemic practices rooted in colonialism, segregation, and institutional racism. Take the U.S. as an example.

African American Perspective: Civil Rights Movement events might get covered in high school History, but the broader, systemic issues impacting African Americans are less visible. This creates an incomplete picture for all students and heightens inequalities. Owens (2022) asserts that African American education continues to be shaped by exclusion and resistance today. Textbooks often perpetuate racial biases by omitting or trivializing African American contributions. Moving beyond narratives that reduce African American history to slavery and the Civil Rights Movement, the decolonization approach emphasizes the need to integrate African American experiences and contributions into the curriculum (Lynn, 2006). For instance, studies have shown that U.S. History curricula disproportionately focus on Eurocentric achievements, leaving African American stories underrepresented or mischaracterized (King & Swartz, 2016). A curriculum that not only highlights African American struggles but also celebrates African American resilience and contributions to society speaks for equality.

Hawaiian Perspective: In Hawaii, Indigenous communities have similarly struggled to preserve native knowledge and language within a predominantly Western education system. The Curriculum of Aloha (COA), intended as a progressive, place-based Hawaiian studies curriculum, often presents Hawaiian culture in ways palatable to visitors to the island, rather than as a comprehensive and authentic representation of Native epistemologies and cultural practices. COA tilts towards colonial imagery rather than authentically reflecting the rich and complex history of Native Hawaiians. This undeniably perpetuates colonialist narratives and undermines the true significance of Hawaiian heritage, history, and values. COA underscores the need for a genuinely decolonized curriculum that honors and integrates Indigenous knowledge systems and cultural narratives in a meaningful way. Some innovators in Hawaiian education have sought to integrate Indigenous practices and cultural narratives. For example, Kaomea's (2000) critique of COA highlights how the curriculum has diminished and reduced Native Hawaiian culture to mere vignettes with tourist appeal. Through Kaomea's critique of COA, we begin to see the need to unlearn any genre-specific or white-specific expectations about colonized peoples. Postcolonial approaches aim to create educational spaces that are inclusive, equitable, and reflective of diverse identities of learners. Incorporating postcolonial critiques into curriculum equips students with the ability to analyze and dismantle the lingering impacts of colonialism on Indigenous knowledge.[4]

[4] Again, the history is not part of the scope of this paper, however, colonial histories and nationalist impulses have everywhere shaped educational equity and access, often marginalizing Indigenous and minority groups (Joseph & Matthews, 2014). So it is with Hawaii. The first recorded contact with Europeans was by British explorer Captain James Cook in 1778. Routinized and widespread contact led to overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawaii and establishment of the Republic of Hawaii (1894-1898). Then Hawaii was settler colonized by the United States. The Republic of Hawaii was annexed by the United States as a U.S. territory in 1898, eventually becoming the 50th state in 1959. Development from Kingdom to Republic to Territory to State involved increasingly intense imposition of Western education systems and suppression of Native Hawaiian epistemologies and cultural practices as well as appropriation of Native Hawaiian lands through settler colonial legal strategies such as *terra nullius* in which imperial powers declare Native lands unowned by any state and, therefore, free for the taking (Kame'eleihiwa, 1992, Cavanaugh, 2017; Fitzmaurice, 2007). U.S. occupation of Native Hawaiian lands remains ongoing.

These three geographically disparate but similarly colonized contexts highlight the need for a global approach to decolonizing education, one that integrates diverse knowledge systems and promotes cultural sustainability. This theoretical perspective emphasizes the importance of challenging dominant Western epistemologies and advocating for the inclusion of marginalized voices. By fostering critical consciousness among learners, postcolonial approaches enable them to recognize and resist the pervasive effects of colonialism on education. Decolonized curriculum is essential for promoting global equity, racial justice, and social justice. Conservative curriculum researchers, such as Butcher & Burke (2021), who fear divisive identity formation among students as a result of decolonized curriculum, omit from consideration that curriculum decolonized aims at integration of ideologies rather than promulgation of facts from any one perspective engaged in a multi-lateral, culturally-layered curricular conversation. Researchers like Butcher & Burke who think we are still better off pursuing absolute uniformity in curriculum and instruction seem oblivious to the obvious: Schooling takes place in enculturated contexts. Ladson-Billings & Tate (1995) argued that educational inequities are not incidental but rooted in systemic racial inequalities sustained by policies and resource distribution. Turning a blind eye to considerations of cultural context of curriculum delivery renders Butcher & Burke's approach idealistic and impractical, making it difficult for instructors to reflect realities of actual educational settings and to develop classroom practices actually educative of students from marginalized groups. Butcher & Burke end up only hindering efforts to dismantle racism, restore equity within the curriculum, and make schooling more effective for students from any culture.

Erasure of Colonialism: A Case Study of an American Teacher

As an example of the sort of instructional difficulties Butcher & Burke (2021) ignore, I draw on a qualitative study of a traditionally trained teacher bumbling about with colonial narratives in the curriculum (Masta, 2016). Curricula may be presented in numerous ways, complicating teachers' cultural understandings. This complication is often exacerbated by a lack of experience, a lack of training, and ignorance of Indigenous curriculum knowledge (McCallum & Waller, 2022; Stacey, 2022). No doubt, one significant challenge educators face is creating and implementing school curricula that reflect diverse and critical viewpoints. Traditional school curricula often perpetuate perspectives, values, and knowledge that support colonization. What is missing is the disruption of colonial narratives, which illustrates the importance of decolonial teacher preparation. The evident lack of experience and training on the part of the teacher in Masta's study underscores the necessity of equipping educators with the tools and knowledge to challenge and transform colonial narratives within their teaching practices.

Masta's (2016) study of an eighth-grade Social Studies teacher provides valuable insights into the practical application of how colonialism and race are perpetuated:

> "I collected data over the final quarter of the 2011-2012 school year. I was on-site for 3 to 4 days a week, for 10 weeks, observing for approximately 245 hours, and spent the majority of my time in the classroom of Mr. Hanson: the only eighth-grade social studies teacher in the school. I am using TribalCrit [Tribal Critical Race Theory] because it allows me to contextualize how colonialism manifests itself in educational policies and practices, and because it provides a critical lens with which to evaluate the lessons and discussions held by Mr. Hanson." (571).

Masta homes in on an incident in the classroom where Mr. Hanson, during a lesson on map reading, briefly mentions the renaming of Indian cities, such as Madras becoming Chennai,

Bombay becoming Mumbai, and Calcutta becoming Kolkata. Mr. Hanson explains that these name changes occurred after India gained independence from British rule in the 1960s [instead of 1947, the actual date]. By framing the event as a straightforward historical fact, Mr. Hanson overlooks the deeper implications of the name changes, which were not just administrative but, *just as factually*, symbolic acts of reclaiming identity. These renaming processes were directly tied to India's struggle to shed colonial influence and restore indigenous cultures and histories that had been marginalized and erased during British rule. By neglecting to address why these cities were renamed, Mr. Hanson inadvertently overlooks the imperialist dimension of colonialism, which sought not only to control land and resources but also to reshape the cultural and historical narratives of colonized regions. Masta emphasizes that such omissions in education can perpetuate a colonial mindset by failing to acknowledge local contexts and histories. Hanson's failure to address the full story contributes to ongoing ignorance of Indigenous knowledge. In this way, colonial narratives are reproduced in classrooms, and students are deprived of learning about Indigenous historical contributions.

Mr. Hanson's approach exemplifies the concept of erasure of colonialism, which refers to the omission from educational narratives from historical and cultural contexts critical of the impact of colonialism. According to Masta (2016), erasing colonialism occurs when educators fail to acknowledge in the curriculum the influence of colonialism. Excluding Indigenous perspectives from class discussion perpetuates the half-truths of a chauvinistic colonialism. Hanson's approach, particularly when he discussed the name changes in Indian cities without addressing the colonial history and reasons behind those changes, reveals a significant limitation in how teacher education often operates within a framework that disregards Indigenous knowledge systems and fails to challenge the status quo of Eurocentric narratives. By following Butcher & Burke's (2021) pedagogical advice to just stick to the facts, Hanson deprives his students of the opportunity to consider the *meaning* of those facts and omits from their education as historians understanding of historiography. Hanson's underdeveloped treatment of historical fact highlights a systemic issue of teacher education, namely, study of a curriculum of professional development that neglects consideration of the complexities of decolonizing pedagogy and curricula. In teacher education, this manifests as an inability on the part of teachers to fully address and integrate the diverse epistemologies and cultural contexts necessary for construction of a truly inclusive and equitable framework within which to adequately understand histories of cross-cultural contact.

From Bad to Worse: Normalizing Colonialism for Students

Masta (2016) finds another, even more insidious illustration of colonialism in the curriculum in Mr. Hanson's lesson titled "*Important Countries of the World*." Students were asked to label a world map with 40 countries selected by Mr. Hanson. What ensued during teaching and learning about the map labelled with important countries depicts not only little acknowledgment of the problems of colonialism; but reinforcement of a colonialist mindset. Masta goes through Mr. Hanson's lecture with a fine-toothed, decolonialist comb:

> In the first group of "Important Countries of the World" discussed, Mr. Hanson included China, India, Russia, Brazil, and Germany. The comments Mr. Hanson made regarding these countries were generally positive and focused on the benefits these countries provided the United States. For example, he described China as "the second world power and a large producer of goods we need to function in America." India was a country with "a large population, but has democracy which we like, and

> provides workers for jobs that Americans shouldn't have to do." Mr. Hanson described Russia as an important ally to the United States and "our good friend" (576).

Germany was mentioned for its role as a leading global economy, while Brazil was noted as significant because it was hosting the [2016 Summer] Olympics.

In his discussion of the Middle East, Mr. Hanson listed Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Syria, focusing primarily on the military and political conflicts in the area. He said both Syria and Egypt were countries that had ongoing "revolutions that they need our help with, otherwise, they won't become democracies." He described Iraq as "*the country we're at war with*." [Emphasis in original. Note: The U.S. had withdrawn from military operations in Iraq five years previously in December, 2011.] Mr. Hanson went on to state that Iran "refuses to listen to the U.S. and is made up of fundamentalist people who do what they want and hurt us" By "us," Mr. Hanson demarcates the United States as the nation of paramount importance in world affairs and its citizenry as a distinct and cohesive group whose identity, interests, and values are shared by all. Hanson's perspective on the world as expressed in this discussion implicitly positions other countries as part of an "out-group" who do not understand the centrality and superiority of American interests, a sentiment common in nationalist discourse (Masta, 2016, 578).

When referring to Asia, Hanson talked about Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, the Philippines, Vietnam, Myanmar, North Korea, and Japan. He depicted Indonesia as unconcerned with U.S. interests and tolerant of Muslim fundamentalists, described Pakistan as a former ally that betrayed the U.S. over issues related to Osama Bin Laden and attacks on the World Trade Towers, portrayed Bangladesh and Vietnam as impoverished nations with considerable financial obligations to the United States, and labeled Myanmar a problematic communist state. North Korea was briefly mentioned with an emphasis on its nuclear ambitions against the U.S. Only two countries were spoken of in a positive light: Japan and the Philippines. Japan for its strong economy and production of electronic goods in demand in the United States, and the Philippines as a reliable ally that played a protective role in Asia for U.S. interests. Importantly, Mr. Hanson again permeates his remarks with the language of "we" when referring to the United States. The language of "we" applied only to the U.S. implies an associated language of "they/them" for other nations. Mr. Hanson's colonialist *Weltanschauung* tends to pit US against them.

Mr. Hanson also described countries in Africa, South America, and North America. However, in the African group, he only mentioned Nigeria and Ethiopia. He described both countries negatively. Nigeria was "too corrupt to function and, unfortunately, they have a lot of oil we need;" and Ethiopia was "in need of famine relief and unable to create an economy of their own, needing to buy things from the U.S. to survive." Hanson's descriptions portray African nations as inherently flawed and dependent on Western intervention for their survival. In the South American group, "Mr. Hanson described Venezuela as being important for producing oil" and "not really our friend," and Colombia as a country "filled with drugs that keep Mexico dependent on the U.S." Lastly, he described Mexico as "very corrupt and problematic to the U.S." Masta (2016, 580) notes Mr. Hanson had several opportunities to do so, but continually failed to point out the complicated nature of the United States in relation to these other countries. His comments indicated a strong preference for a rhetoric of "U.S. as best," a prevalent attitude supporting colonial practices. Additionally, Mr. Hanson's comments focused on the economic, material, and political relationships these countries have with the United States. Students were not encouraged to think about why countries might not align their interests with those of the United States. Thus,

Mr. Hanson presented a simplistic binary — countries that benefit the United States are considered friends, while those that do not are labeled enemies — that drastically reinforces the ideologically colonialist notion that U.S. interests are paramount and inherently superior to all others.

On what grounds does Mr. Hanson assert such negative views about these countries? What does it mean to say "*not really our friend?"* when said of other countries? How do we interpret this teacher's nationalist language? Certainly, Hanson's statements reflect a perspective rooted in colonialist and racist ideologies. But; does it find its source in a kind of colorblindness intent on minimization of cultural differences (ala Butcher & Burke, 2021) or is it more accurately indicative of an intentional bias rooted in a curriculum that erases cross-cultural knowledge and a pedagogy that removes from consideration decolonialist criticality (Masta, 2016)? Answer to this question is crucial because it challenges us to examine underlying assumptions in traditional teacher education, especially problems posed by normalizing colonialism.

Freire's (1970) Critical Pedagogy challenges traditional education systems on precisely this point, particularly the "banking model" of education, where students are seen as passive recipients of knowledge. The banking model often ignores the social, historical, and cultural contexts from which knowledge emerges, potentially perpetuating colonialist perspectives. When teachers present colonialism as a natural and beneficial process, students get inculcated into the normalization of colonialist ideologies (Masta, 2016). This approach fails to acknowledge negative impacts of colonialism, such as exploitation and cultural erasure. To counteract this uncritical acceptance of the correctness of colonialist practices, we can apply to classroom instruction Freire's principles of critical pedagogy by encouraging students to question and challenge presented material. This means fostering a classroom environment where students can explore and discuss the historical and cultural contexts of the curriculum they are studying, promoting a more inclusive and critical understanding of the world. Freirean classrooms require reorientation of teacher education away from reiteration of canned, colonialist curriculum towards critical, decolonialist questioning about the meaning of historical events. Teachers educated on a Freirean model become adept at posing and pursuing questions critical of curriculum content.

Decolonizing Teacher Education: Integrating Diverse Epistemologies as a Way Forward

Addressing the issues of erasure and normalization of colonialism is a key impetus for rethinking how we prepare educators. By decolonizing our curricula and integrating diverse epistemologies, including Indigenous pedagogies, schooling can better respond to the challenges of global equity, race, and social justice (Smith, 2019; Lee, 2021). For instance, framing international relationships in terms of debt, alliance, and compliance, and implicitly suggesting that other nations exist to serve U.S. interests is embarrassing because dehumanizing. Colonialist thinking strips other countries of their national identities and threatens their existential status. Such a reductionist portrayal of sovereign nations not only limits critical inquiry into why some countries may choose divergent paths but also fails to acknowledge the broader, sometimes quite negative impact of U.S. practices on global communities. Mr. Hanson's narrow perspective underscores the urgent need to decolonize teacher education by developing curricula that challenge outdated colonial narratives and prepare educators to foster a more nuanced, inclusive approach to understanding the world (Smith, 2019).

Because traditional teacher education systems predominantly draw on Western epistemologies, they can inadvertently reproduce a worldview that marginalizes non-Western nations and Indigenous ways of knowing, constraining educators to address complex challenges of

the 21st century, such as global equity, race, and social justice, with a 19th-century mindset (Datta, 2020). Critically examining traditional teacher education models helps identify how their foundations may implicitly reinforce nationalistic and exclusionary narratives. But critical examination of traditional teacher training also tells us how to improve teacher education. Teachers are better positioned as educators as they become increasingly adept at asking key questions rather than providing prerecorded answers. Integrating Indigenous pedagogies and diverse epistemologies into the curriculum offers a transformative alternative to traditional colonialist curriculum. Taking seriously into account perspectives other than one's own generates just the sort of questions decolonial theory wants asked of curriculum. Curriculum theorists, curriculum developers, teachers, and students, one and all, need to analyze how traditional teacher education frameworks perpetuate Western-centric, neoliberal, culturally homogeneous colonial ideologies through simplified, exclusionary narratives. Then curriculum developers and, especially, curriculum deliverers need to synthesize links between local and global educational goals to pave the way for a teacher education paradigm capable of advancing global equity, social justice, and cultural sustainability. If we are to consider and select wisely from all possible educational futures, then we are required to recognize and repatriate all actual educational pasts. Integrating Indigenous pedagogy and cultural point of view into our very definitions of excellent teaching and high-quality education presents a clear way forward by promoting self-reflection and critical dialogue among curriculum theorists and curriculum developers and inculcating decolonial perspectives among teachers and students.

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