Pluriversal and Relational Pedagogies for Peace(s)

Daniela Lehner

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to recognize and re-envision strategies for peace education that encourage pluriversal and relational ways of knowing and being, and support the creation of a collective imagination of interdependence. One presumption is, that to realize cultures of peace it is crucial to transform the violences of modernity that encompasses a particular ontology and our mode of being in the world. The paradigm of modernity has universalized experience, grounding it in unitary ontologies and imperialist epistemologies that hinder certain systems of knowing and being. These epistemologies have heavily colonized our thinking and feeling, and consequently our educational systems. Embodied and holistic forms of learning and knowledge are marginalized in our current educational institutions. The paradigm of modernity traps us within a certain way of thinking about the world. How can peace education work with the unitary mode of thinking and the violences of modernity? I will try to frame a teaching and learning approach that enhances learners' ability to think, feel and act critically, interdependently, and pluriversally, allowing for the coexistence of different worlds and realities. Pluriversality, the Zapatistas' decolonial political vision, refers to a world in which many worlds coexist and various systems of knowing and being are

given equal acknowledgement. The pluriverse tries to go beyond the dualistic, separatist ontology that focuses on human/nonhumans, mind/body, global south/global north, and developed/underdeveloped. The pluriverse calls for an ontoepistemological turn towards radical relationality and interdependence and this is especial crucial for peace (education).

Keywords: Interconnectedness, Pluriversality, Interdependence, Relationality, Care.

1. The Violent Universality of Modernity

'The fact is that we all live within the Earth as pluriverse;
we weave the pluriverse together with every existing being
through our daily practices. We are all summoned
to the task of repairing the Earth and the pluriverse,
one stitch at a time, one design at a time,
one loop at a time, so to speak.'
(Escobar, 2018)

More than ever, societies are experiencing vulnerability and transition across many different aspects of life (wars, climate change, social inequality, social polarization, racism, pandemics, species extinction, poverty and societal transformation through digitalisation). We live in a world that faces increasing fragmentation and vulnerability while technologies and global infrastructures continue to proliferate (Perry, 2020, p. 293). Decolonial authors (e.g. Escobar, 2007; Escobar, 2020; Quijano, 2007; Hall, 1992; Mignolo, 2011; Maldonado-Torres, 2008) argue that we are facing a crisis of modernity that encompasses a particular ontology and our mode of being in the world. The paradigm of modernity has universalized experience, grounding it in unitary ontologies and imperialist epistemologies that hinder certain systems of knowing and being. Global capitalism and extractivism have granted themselves the right to assimilate all other worlds, building on a modern epistemology that is based on the separation between entities, between humans and nonhumans and between mind and body. And at the same time what we call modernity is home to us. We want to make sense of the world but we 'seek to meet the

world by conquering it'(Akomolafe, 2017, p. 2). The paradigm of modernity has generated a universalization that hinders the various systems of knowing and being that constitute the pluriverse. Universal conceptions of the world are grounded in unitary ontologies and imperialist epistemologies that assume there is only one world, which is knowable on a global scale within unique modes of thought, and therefore manageable and governable in those terms (Conway & Singh, 2011, p. 701). The rhetoric of the universality of culture also always means that cultural productions are closely interwoven with political and ideological agendas. The 'de-universalisation' of imperial culture is thus an important political goal; it can be achieved through contextualisation and educational processes that are as concrete as possible. The contextualisation of any cultural production undermines the unquestioned assumption that it is universal in character (Said, 1993). Modernity centres mostly on one universal human template based on enlightenment and rationality and applies it to everywhere and to everything. This leads to the assumption that other systems of knowing and being are inferior and seeks to erase them. Existence becomes fragmented and individuals are separated from other living beings and the natural world (Conway & Singh, 2011; Esteva & Prakash, 1998; Escobar, 2020; Quijano, 2007).

The global world structure is based on an ontology of separation and fragmentation; this leads to extractivism and the exploitation of the natural world (Williams & Bermeo, 2020; Escobar, 2020). Extractivism and other such practices 'manifest the contemporary colonial ontological occupation of territories' (de la Cadena, & Blaser, 2018, p. 3). The one-world world is 'a world that has granted itself the right to assimilate all other worlds and, by presenting itself as exclusive, cancels possibilities for what lies beyond its limits' (de la Cadena, & Blaser, 2018, p. 3; Law, 2015). Coloniality and modernity are inevitably linked to each other. According to Quijano (2007), the Western concept of modernity, which was established by the Enlightenment, was first brought about by colonialism, enslavement and exploitation. Modernity and coloniality pervade life on a global scale, whether through control of the economy, educational systems or the widespread exploitation of other humans and the natural world. Modernity and coloniality have a binary logic, dividing phenomena into categories such as colonising/colonised and hierarchies such as high culture/low culture. This makes it difficult to introduce postcolonial continuity within today's structures (Mbembe, 2021; Hall, 1992).

Such diametric segmentation, and so-called Enlightment rationality, are among others based on René Descartes' division of the world into *res cogita* (things of the mind) and *res extensa* (substance or matter), a dichotomy that created a hierarchy of mind, body and spirit as well as humans and non-humans (Wynter, 2003; Maldonado-Torres, 2007). In this worldview, living beings become machines, and understanding is achieved by means of division, separation, compartmentalisation, atomism and reductionism. The organic interconnectedness of the world is broken down into small components. These epistemologies have heavily colonized our thinking and feeling, and consequently our educational systems. In educational institutions, embodied and holistic forms of learning and knowledge are marginalized and disconnected from our senses and our lifeworld. (Selby, 2002, p. 78; Akomolafe, 2017, p. 172).

The paradigm of modernity traps us within a certain way of thinking about the world. How can educational strategies work with the unitary mode of thinking and the violences of modernity? (Mignolo, 2011). What are the limits on what we are able to sense, want and imagine? 'How has being been reduced to knowing?' (Andreotti, 2011). This colonization of being has created intergenerational injuries that require humans to be re-subjectified and being to be decolonized (Fanon, 1963). We need educational approaches and institutions that can facilitate this shift (Williams & Bermeo, 2020). Lordes' famous axiom that 'the Master's tools will never dismantle the Master's house' is central (Lorde, 2007). In order to deconstruct and unlearn these colonial power structures, existing hegemonic power structures over the economy, politics, the body and knowledge production have to be questioned. Revealing the entanglements of colonialism and the unequal distribution of power without reproducing them is one of the central challenges of decolonisation (Hall, 1992; Mignolo, 2014; Spivak, 1999; Quijano, 2000). This calls for processes of decoupling, delinking and unlearning the violent structures of modernity. 'Decoloniality, as I am posing it here, does not imply the absence of coloniality but rather the ongoing serpentine movement toward possibilities of other modes of being, thinking, knowing, sensing, and living; that is, an otherwise in plural' (Walsh, 2018, p. 81). We need to develop plural ontoepistemologies of thinking and being to create an otherwise in plural: 'Thinking in/on our own terms is crucial, for you cannot tear down the fiction with the same concepts with which the fiction was constructed' (Mignolo, 2014, p. 11). Every act of refusing to think or behave according to the hegemonic discourse is an opportunity to explore new ways of being and doing that are radically different.

2. Pluriversal and Relational Pedagogies for Peace(s)

How can we imagine that another world, a world that is more social, just, ecological and peaceful is possible? How can we develop multiple ways of knowing and being rather than just a single story? The pluriverse tries to disrupt the idea that all worlds should be fitted into a single one, in contrast to modernity, in which the globalized capitalist world system became the universal world in which all worlds should fit into. The pluriverse is the search for a world into which many worlds can fit; it implies multiple ontologies, not simply multiple perspectives on one world (Escobar 2020; de la Cadena, & Blaser, 2018). 'As in the Zapatista declaration, the concept of a world of many worlds, or what we call a pluriverse, entails heterogeneous worldings coming together as a political ecology of practices, negotiating their difficulties within heterogeneity' (de la Cadena, & Blaser, 2018, 4). Realities are plural and always in the making and therefore the possible realities are also multiple: 'another world is possible because another reality – and other possibilities – are possible' (Escobar, 2020, p. ix). The pluriverse attempts to go beyond dualistic and divisive ontologies of human/non humans, mind/body, global south/global north, developed/underdeveloped. Our shared world, or *Mitwelt*, is seen as a living entity and politics is focused on the ethics of care and interdependence. This involves critical thought but at the same time, it goes beyond the concepts of critical thought and language. It is a reality always in making and therefore relational (Escobar, 2020; de la Cadena, & Blaser, 2015; Akomolafe, 2017).

What could pluriversality mean for peace? Maybe the need to reflect and transform modern and liberal understandings of peace and identify peace as plural. In the liberal model of peace, which Richmond (2005) views as a universal, neo-colonial, state-building and free market model that was applied indiscriminately in post-conflict missions after the Cold War, peace is based on the construction of state mechanisms through the promotion of good governance, the free market, law enforcement institutions, and human rights (Richmond, 2005; Horner, 2013). It is 'the self-evident answer to conflict and fragile States' (Horner, 2013, p. 367). In a plural world, there cannot be a single and universal peace narrative that applies everywhere and to everything. This modern and mechanistic understanding of peace fails to take account of the many other contextual and smaller realities. Williams & Bermeo (2020) and Zembylas (2017) criticize hegemonic discourses on peace and human rights that fail to reflect multiple perspectives and experiences, and call for a decolonialized education 'that helps us reimagine discourses and praxes of

being and relationality, peace, and rights' (Williams & Bermeo, 2020, p. 11). Peace can be redesigned within unique localities and contexts (Dietrich 2012; Richmond et al, 2016, Cruz, 2021; Anderson, 2004). It already exists on a local level and people create peace every day in areas affected by conflict (Mac Ginty, 2021; Fontan, 2012). Also, within peace education we have to listen to the voices of marginalized communities (Shirazi, 2011). A universalist model of peace does not recognize local initiatives, viewing peacebuilding as mechanical and peace as something static that can be achieved. In addition, individuals working in conflict settings and students studying peacebuilding and peace education all need to be able to deconstruct and decolonize the universal peace narrative, in order to become aware that communities are not empty shells (Fontan, 2012, p. 37).

Peace is a relational endeavor that calls for constant negotiation and reflection. Individuals have different experiences of peace and interpret it in different ways; peace is closely related to human and more-than-human needs. The term many 'peaces' refers to a multiplicity of small, specific, often competing and contradictory lived peaces (Dietrich & Stützl, 1997; Dietrich, 2012; Rodriguez Iglesias, 2019; Škof, 2015). These multiple understandings mean that 'perhaps conceptual unity is not as integral as having some shared values across pluriverses' (Williams & Bermeo, 2020, p. 10). Muñoz (2006) refers to the process-driven and contradictory nature of peace as 'imperfect', highlighting local circumstances and actions to promote peace on a smaller scale. Epistemologically, the concept of imperfection moves us away from objective, closed and dogmatic visions of peace and brings us closer to the 'intersubjective' – conflicting and much-needed visions of peace that, like the subjects of perception themselves, are open and debatable (Muñoz, 2006, p. 262- 263). A pluriversal peace vision must also include peace with all living beings and especially nature. The modern attempt to conquer nature and make sense of it by dissecting it needs a relational turn. For this to happen, we have to experience, feel and understand our interconnectivity with all living. There can be no peace if we are in war with nature.

The pluriverse calls for an ontoepistemological turn towards radical relationality and interdependence with all living beings. The notion of radical relationality 'refers to the fact that all entities that make up the world are so deeply interrelated that they have no intrinsic, separate existence in and of themselves' (Escobar, 2020, p. xiii). A deeply relational understanding of life does not view life as mechanical object to be exploited, as is common in modern, patriarchal, capitalist settings. Modern epistemology is built on the

separate existence of entities and in particular the separation between humans and nonhumans (Escobar, 2020, p. xiii). From a relational perspective, the isolated self that modernity gave rise to becomes an I that exists because of a you, (Buber, 2004; Andreotti, 2011; Irigaray, 2008) and life itself is conceived of as emerging rather than fragmented and dissected. The logic of coloniality (Mignolo, 2011), based as it is on domination and hierarchy, does not allow for humans and the world to exist in relation to each other (Escobar, 2018; Maturana & Verden-Zöller, 1993). In order to create peaceful societies, we need new ways of relating to each other, to the world and to all beings that exist within it (Tallbear & Willy, 2019, p. 5). The globalized structures of modernity discouraged the view that life was communal, but the rebuilding of community is essential if we are to live a relational life. 'If we took seriously the premise that all things are radically interdependent, how would we live and make life anew each day? What would we design and create in our world and how?' We might transition 'towards the healing, caring, and sustaining of life' (Escobar, Osterweil & Sharma, 2021, n.p.). To achieve this, we need different cosmologies and ontologies, not just different categories; we need to approach education in a different way. The here and now is not possible without educational processes (Varela, 2007).

Our current educational approaches are strongly based on the premises of modernity, anthropocentrism, individualism and the separation of body and mind. This is no longer appropriate to the challenges we are facing today. Education is a process of learning and unlearning and we need a pedagogy that can dismantle the violences of coloniality and modernity and at the same time re-arrange 'uncoercive re-arrangement of desires' that orient us towards ethical responsibility towards the other (Spivak, 2004; Andreotti, 2011; Wintersteiner, 1999). At the same time, it is crucial for peace education to dismantle structures of colonialization and Enlightenment's moralistic and normative values that has also shaped the philosophical grounding of peace education (Zembylas, 2018, p. 2–4). People involved in peace education 'need to account for the complex historical and political contexts of peace education efforts' and start to decenter 'Eurocentric narratives of peace education' (Zembylas, 2018, p. 5). We have to take the time and afford to realize the structural and epistemic violence of our colonial histories (Williams, 2013). In the Latin American context, a pedagogy of resistance developed out of the practices that challenged colonialism, capitalism, neo-liberalism and epistemic violence. Educational processes are linked to social movements to create a good life for all (Bajaj, 2015, p. 157).

We also have to ask ourselves if a non-violent educational strategy is possible and how we can create it? (Varela, 2007). Justice-focused healing practices as described by Bautista (2018) and Gibbs (2020) include skills for healing, nonviolent communication, conflict transformation and a variety of forms of reparations for individuals and communities. Abolitionist teaching and the pursuit of educational freedom aims to delink, feel, think and act systemically. Teachers understand the colonial and hegemonic history of the context they operate in and acknowledge how educational institutions and societies are shaped by their histories. This sets learning processes in motion that resist the disciplining of the mind, and teaching instead becomes a practice of freedom that encourages engagement and participation (hooks, 1994; love, 2019). To achieve this, we also need to create peaceful and pluriversal visions of the future. In education in particular, it is crucial to create new narratives that enhance relationality and interdependence; a new political imagination; and strategies and practices to promote social change (Williams & Bermeo, 2020).

The contribution of postcolonial studies to education is the realization of inequalities and the possibility to meet the so called Other through dialogue. It is the questioning of modernity and Enlightenment humanism that might 'prevent a noncoercive relationship or dialogue among different ways of being in the world' (Andreotti, 2011, p. 1). The modern universal form of reasoning is rational and dialectical striving for unanimity and consensus. It becomes difficult to disagree or express oneself in 'other forms of thinking, knowing, being, and communicating' (Andreotti, 2011, p. 2). A pluriversal pedagogy needs to sensitize for difference and encourage learners to listen and relate to the Other beyond once projections and presumptions. How can we learn to engage in solidarity even if there is no consensus or a common identity? How can we learn to recognize the other as equal and different at the same time? (Andreotti, 2011, p. 6).

> How can one theorize learners, teaching, and learning in ways that take account of power relations, of the complexity of the construction of the self and of alterity, and of the situatedness and the limits of one's own constructions and theorizations? What if we could create the conditions for a configuration where relationality could explicitly and purposefully bypass language and knowledge (and the need for consensus)? I suggest that this possibility could rest in a configuration that is not grounded on ideas of individuation and autonomy, but on ideas of interdependence consisting of two indivisible dimensions: a sense of self- worth located in one's unique, nonpredetermined and

always partial contribution to a collectivity, and a sense of self- in sufficiency conceptualized not as inadequacy, but as dependency on the uniqueness and indispensability of the Other. (Andreotti, 2011, p. 177–178)

If we can realize difference as something creative and inspiring then interdependency becomes something beautiful. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that education is embedded within the violent, patriarchal and neoliberal structures of society. Pluriversal pedagogies for peace(s) might start from epistemic agency and the unlearning of the universal. Rather than teaching learners theories, it could impart the ability to question knowledge and the awareness that it is never universal or inconsequential (Spivak, 1995). Andreotti (2011) asks an important question: 'How can a pedagogy of self- reflexivity, self- implication, dissensus, and discomfort support people to go beyond feelings of shame, guilt, or deceit?' (Andreotti, 2011, p. 177). The conditions of being modernity created based on individuation and autonomy determined by rational thought are our preconditions for relationality. We have to realize our interdependence including our self-worth and our uniqueness, and at the same time, our dependency related to the uniqueness of the other. This is not only based on rational thought and language but on the affective and embodied aspect of being (Andreotti, 2011, p. 178). In education, it is important to critically reflect our doing but we need to experience unconditional value and acceptance on our being. Only then becoming with others is possible (Maturana & Poerksen, 2004).

bell hooks, inspired by Paulo Freire's (1990) pedagogy of the oppressed and especially his critique on the banking model of education, wrote various books on violent educational structures. She invites us to build our pedagogical praxis on the questioning of authoritative knowledge and to claim our own place in the shaping of knowledge and move from individual to collective meaning-making. To quote bell hooks, '(…) the academy is not paradise. But learning is a place where paradise can be created. The classroom with all its limitations remains a location of possibility' (hooks, 1994, p. 207). Education and teaching, both formal and non-formal, can create spaces and practices that promote peace(s) and a good life for all. At its best, education as the practice of freedom means '(…) to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries (…)' (hooks, 1994, p. 207). For this we have to find ways toward alternative ontologies and epistemologies. Our pedagogies need to encourage forms of knowing that are

affective and embodied (Koppensteiner, 2018; Brantmeier & McKenna, 2020). Brantmeier describes it, as 'a desire to connect across differences, to speak from the heart and to add an emotional and spiritual dimension to the learning experience that honours interdependence and deep differences' (Brantmeier & McKenna, 2020, p. 4). Creating an ethics of caring, we need spaces where people are allowed to show their vulnerabilities, not randomly, but grounded in experience, without being judged or taken advantage of. Deep and transformative learning includes personal transformation, straddling fragmented ways of knowing and 'finding the courage to engage with and learn from the other and otherness, not least in ourselves' (Formenti & West, 2018, p. viii). One path to becoming aware of ourselves, others and the structures we are embedded in is through mindfulness. 'Mindful cultural engagement requires deeply understanding one's own conditioning and context while appreciating the conditioning and context of others' (Brantmeier & Brantmeier, 2020, p. 2.). The realization of once own and others cultural conditioning allows us to open up for the pluriverse and the many worlds that exist. Through mindfulness we can get a greater awareness of your surroundings and therefore we have the possibility to create caring actions. This means that if we are aware of ourselves, our thoughts and feelings we might act less likely from our individual wounds or conditioning but from a greater collective awareness that leads us towards interconnectedness and compassion (Hạnh, 2004). 'If we do not go back to ourselves in the present moment, we cannot be in touch with life' (Hạnh, 1992, p. 12). The present moment is also the place where we can experience connection and healing. Deep healing occurs when 'the self ''mutualizes'' with body, mind, and spirit' (Cajete, 2010, p. 1130).

Active hope as framed by Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone (2021) is reconnection with other humans, land and spirit, and acknowledges the grief and pain of violence and destruction. The body's interdependent condition with the living world becomes visible through the reciprocity of our senses with the sensuous earth which also means that our emotional and embodied disconnection is related to the social and environmental disconnection (Abram, 1996; Macy & Brown, 2014; Manning, 2007; Weber, 2016). Huaman (2011) highlights the need to include indigenous knowledges in (peace) education. Relating to place, the land and the earth not only means observing nature but also participating as a sensory being in intimate expressions of care for the earth (Cajete, 2000; Yunkaporta, 2019; Dumont, 2002). We have to include moments of belonging in educational institutions. A belonging that is connected to once own body, the community, the earth/land. Macy's work

would be a constant pedagogical recognition of our entanglement with this earth and that all lives depend on each other. Thus, we need the experience of belonging to this world like it would be our larger self. This so-called ecological self is the realization that all life is related and connected (Macy, 2020).

3. Concluding Remarks

In this paper I tried to formulate thoughts on the universalist epistemology of modernity, and how we can pedagogically move from universal to pluriversal understandings of the world. One of the main challenges I addressed is that our current educational approaches are still built on the idea of a separated self, separated from once own body, from others and the world. If we base your learnings on these understandings we will rarely create experiences of interconnectedness. At the same time there is a need to realize the violences of educational institutions and how they are embedded within historical, societal, economical and epistemological forms of violence. Especially the violences of modernity that created a hierarchy of knowledge and being. As pedagogues or educators, I do believe that we can create spaces, where violences can be reflected and transformed, and at the same time visions of pluriversal coexistence can be created. This involves critical thought but at the same time, it goes beyond the concept of critical thought and sometimes even language. Realizing various forms of expressions and that we do not always have to agree with each other, to live solidary and peacefully is crucial. Especially in times of digital transformation it is important to experience embodied connections (with people and nature) in physical spaces. Only embodied we can experience the collective wisdom of communities and the interconnectedness of all living beyond thought and language.

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