Thinking Through Decolonial Pedagogies

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This essay was born out of the *Decolonization and the Study of Religion Workshop Series*, an inter-institutional collaboration between McGill University and Concordia University, chaired by Lucie Robathan (McGill) and Jordan Molot (Concordia). This series covered a number of decolonial topics from a wide range of speakers, presenters, and workshop facilitators, and, in April of 2023, I was privileged enough to be invited to facilitate a workshop on Decolonial Pedagogies. This paper will explore a few of the insights that I have had in the last decade experimenting and thinking through the notions of decolonization and pedagogy, while also building on some of the workshop discussions.

The first thing I would like to note is that there is a wealth of interesting and important scholarship engaged in questions about decolonization and pedagogy, both explicitly and also by extension in talking about decolonial theory in general. A major touchstone for the field is Linda Tuhiwai Smith's *Decolonizing Methodologies*.[1] This text aims to Indigenize methodology and re-frame methodological questions with decolonial ways of thinking. Noteworthy is Chapter Eight, which provides twenty-five Indigenous projects with twenty-five methodological perspectives that can help inspire peoples' own research and methodology.

1. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books, 2012).

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Other works of note that help speak explicitly to the question of decolonization and pedagogy include Achille Mbembe's "Decolonizing the University,"[2] which attempts to speak to the decolonial subject in neoliberal capital (which we can easily conceive of as (neo-)colonial) in relation to the structures of the university. Mbembe has many interesting insights in this piece, but two I would like to highlight are 1) his emphasis the necessity of the decolonial as a means of addressing the material and structural elements of coloniality[3] that shape the university, and 2) his insistence that coloniality is relevant for everyone and that decolonization is the shared task of all subjects. This accords with much of the literature of decolonization in general. Another work that speaks explicitly to decolonization and pedagogy is Eve Tuck and Ruben A. Gaztambide-Fernandez' "Curriculum, Replacement, and Setter Futurity."[4] In this work we see Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernández continue the critical questions that Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang opened up in "Decolonization is not a Metaphor,"[5] but in a way that is more specifically related to pedagogy. In this work, Tuck and Gaztambide-

2. Achille Joseph Mbembe, "Decolonizing the university: New directions," *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* 15, no. 1 (2016): 29–45, https://doi.org/10.1177/1474022215618513.

3. Anabal Quijano makes the distinction between colonialism and coloniality. While colonialism is the formal political colonization of a people, coloniality refers to the epistemic and institutional ways of knowing and being that have helped reify colonialism. The insight here is that even after formal colonization ends, coloniality remains, ordering neo-colonialism. See Anibal Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality," *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2–3 (2007): 171, https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380601164353.

4. Eve Tuck and Rubén A. Gaztambide-Fernández, "Curriculum, Replacement, and Settler Futurity," *Journal of Critical Theorizing* 29, no. 1 (2013): 72–89, https://journal.jctonline.org/index.php/jct/article/view/411.

5. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor" *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1–40, https://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/des/article/view/18630.

Fernández emphasize that curriculum construction and pedagogy must refuse to center settler futurity and focus on centering Indigenous futurity in the production of pedagogical knowledge. Further, a main thrust of their critical inquiry is to note that decolonial pedagogy should unsettle the curriculum and challenge settler colonialism. The goal of much of the thinking on decolonization and pedagogy is thus to address the colonial and rethink how to produce decolonial knowledge.

Other works I've found helpful for my own pedagogical understanding include Paulette Regan's *Unsettling the Settler Within*[6] and Walter Mignolo and Catherine Walsh's *On Decoloniality*.[7] Regan's work is helpful in thinking through how settlers, who make up a predominant portion of the student body at many institutions, can be pedagogically approached in ways that open them up to accepting decolonial critiques. She provides some insights into what we might call the hermeneutics of the settler self, and how to provide tools for settlers to uncover and feel good about challenging the coloniality that tends to shape settler subjectivities. Another helpful insight Regan provides for settlers is her emphasis on the positive development of a space of not knowing, a space where the decolonial unknown becomes a space of opportunity instead of threat. More of a theoretical text, Mignolo and Walsh's work offers an excellent discussion of Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*,[8] one that provides a levelled take on its benefits but also its limitations. I found *On Decoloniality* quite helpful in providing a critical decolonial framework for approaching important questions related to the

6. Paullette Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010).
7. Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018).
8. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Continuum, 2005).

relationship between the politics of decoloniality and pedagogy. One reason I wanted to use this text as a touchstone was to include the decolonial thinking of South American thinkers like Walter Mignolo and Anabal Quijano in thinking about decolonial pedagogies. This text offers a nice sounding board for thinking through the ethico-political stakes of decoloniality in relation to how we produce knowledge and disseminate it pedagogically. I think it even adds to the discussion of the import of traditional knowledges and ways of knowing beyond Empire. Especially powerful was Walsh's description of her time being educated in a Zapatista camp and how the materiality of de/coloniality can produce powerful pedagogies from the margins.

While there is a lot of other important and powerful work that speaks to decolonization and pedagogy – much of which also influences this essay and my own pedagogy – I wanted to highlight this small handful of works in particular, as these works shaped my framing of the workshop and provide a nice sense of the foundational insights I wanted to bring to the workshop. What was so fun about the workshop format was that we had such a wonderful and engaged discussion that I was barely able to make a dent into the material I prepared. So, I want to bring that material here (as well as some of the insights shared in the workshop) so that others can take inspiration for their own decolonial thought and praxis towards teaching and learning. I make no claims to be an expert or to have privileged knowledge about the subject, but I have been working hard at attempting to understand and implement a wide range of decolonial insights in my own research and teaching. My only hope is that some readers might find something useful for their own decolonial journey.

Opening Remarks

In discussion with Lucie Robathan and Jordan Molot, it was decided that we would assign Chapter Four of Mignolo and Walsh's *On Decoloniality*, as well as Mbembe's "Decolonizing the University," as foundational readings. To give the reader a sense of the kind of discussion that was had in the workshop, I want to include my opening remarks, presented below. I think these remarks also provide a nice introduction to some of the stakes guiding this essay on the question of decoloniality and pedagogy:

> I wanted to open by speaking to the readings a bit. Mbembe's reading is in the context of a student-led movement in South Africa, called *Rhodes Must Fall*, where, like in North America, people were pulling down statues—in this case of Cecil Rhodes.[9] The call here was for decolonization of the university. This article is Mbembe's discussion of the question of that decolonization. It may be worth noting that Mbembe is well-known for his interrogation and updating of Michel Foucault's notion of biopolitics in the context of colonialism as necropolitics. The article starts from the import of the statues and moves into a discussion of the epistemic task of decolonization, with questions about: the critique of Canon, moving away from Eurocentric universalism, and how to imagine a multivocal university. He ends, however, with some far more structural questions. He wants to speak to the contemporary colonial, where the political economies of global capital flows and the needs of the global bourgeoisie shape the role of the university, no matter where we are. Much of his discussion about African universities could speak very easily to what's happening at Concordia. Some of the fundamental questions he is asking are about the material structures of the university: how do we think beyond Eurocentric structures when the global capitalist system is incentivizing these? How do we move beyond hegemony in the structure of the university? These are the broad questions, but the more

9. Mbembe, "Decolonizing the University," 32.

on-the-ground questions are related: what does a decolonial future look like where universalization (the task of scholarly knowledge, broadly conceived) isn't the attempt to make Euro-American norms the universal, but instead allowing for a plurality of knowledge formations? How do we make space for a non-capitalistic, non-instrumental sense of the liberatory potential of transnational knowledge flows?

Walsh asks similar questions about the critique of colonial capital and how we can think our way into revolutionary praxis. For Walsh, the question of decoloniality is grounded in the struggles of real folks on the front lines against colonial capital. The issues here are the stakes of knowledge production: at its very root, pedagogy is about lifeworlds inside and outside the classroom, and about the struggle against the forces that want to dominate us. I like Walsh's chapter here for its discussion and critique of Paulo Freire, the well-known author of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and for her emphasis on the question of how theory and praxis are interrelated.

I chose these readings because they touch on a number of theoretical concerns that shape the way I think about pedagogy in the on-the-ground context of the classroom. They touch on questions of unsettling, discussions of alternatives to hegemonic knowledges, notions of power and relationality in the classroom, the politics of knowledge production, and the more existential question of the role of the university in producing ways of being. I think, secretly, the main reason I brought these two readings is that they radically challenge our comfortability in our locations within the global political economy. I tend to imagine a decolonial pedagogy where one must be radical and must not shy away from laying bare the structures of global colonial capital.

Structural Critiques, Materiality and the University

What I was touching on in my opening remarks is something I struggle with myself in relation to the question of decolonization: Regardless of how much we might change our ways of knowing, if

we cannot transform the structures in which we live, then how much can we really decolonize? Mallory Nye talks about this in his "Decolonizing the Study of Religion"[10] when he makes a distinction between soft and hard decolonization. Soft decolonization, while still preferrable to no decolonization, is limited in its affect. EDI initiatives are useful and helpful, but don't do much to change the structures that produce inequalities in the first place – for me, most notably, how the colonial capital of Empire shapes university outcomes and decision-making. Hard decolonization, on the other hand, challenges and aims to transform the structures that shape us, as it identifies that the negative outcomes of those structures are most often remnants of coloniality. In many ways this also connects to Tuck and Yang's "Decolonization is not a Metaphor," where they argue that 'freeing our mind' is not enough.[11] Even if we free our mind from the epistemic force of coloniality, that doesn't give the land back to Indigenous peoples. They argue we must start by giving the land back!

I often think about this epistemic and material distinction in my research and pedagogy. For me, part of the question of unsettling myself is to stay focused on the question of materiality. It is too easy, especially in a university setting, to remain solely in the epistemic realm. But I do think that instructors (especially non-tenured) are limited in our capacity to implement material transformations in curriculum. We can do it, but it remains limited to our classes and pedagogies. This being said, I believe that centering materiality in our decolonial critique can really help us move towards creating unsettling pedagogies.

10. Mallory Nye, "Decolonizing the Study of Religion," *Open Library of Humanities* 5, no. 1 (2019): https://doi.org/10.16995/olh.421.
11. Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor," 19–22.

A big part of this unsettling, to my mind, is the analysis of how colonialism in the past and still today is shaped by the global political economy. Tuck and Yang speak to how the Trans-Atlantic Slave trade produced the settler-native-slave triad,[12] and Sylvia Wynter[13] unravels a complex history in showing how the concept of race itself is born out of Iberian economic and theological concerns. Including a critical assessment of the global political economy and its history, I think, is helpful in grounding the unsettling questions of decoloniality for the material conditions that support contemporary coloniality. Put bluntly, the centrality of land back for the Indigenous of Turtle Island[14] and the Americas in general can only be fully understood when we understand the history of colonial theft and how that informs the possibilities of even thinking of land back. An equivalent call to action here is thinking about Black futurity in decolonial futures independent from inclusion into the settler colonial state.[15] Wynter's analysis shows that the materiality of race is born

12. Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor," ff. 7, 17–18.
13. See Sylvia Wynter, "1492: A New World View," in *Race, Discourse, and the Origins of the Americas*, ed. Vera Lawrence Hyatt and Rex Nettleford (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995): 5–57; and Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 257–337, https://www.jstor.org/stable/41949874.
14. Some Indigenous peoples have an ambivalent relationship to calling what we now call North America "Turtle Island," noting, for example, that it is not a universal creation myth among Indigenous groups, and may be a problematic attempt at universalizing what are diverse Indigenous understandings of the continent. However, there is some benefit to using it strategically to unsettle the settler naming. The same may be said for the South American equivalent, "Abya Yala." The question is not yet settled.
15. Tapji Garba and Sara-Maria Sorentino, "Slavery is a Metaphor: A Critical Commentary on Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang's 'Decolonization is Not a Metaphor'" *Antipode* 52, no. 3 (2020): 775–776, https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12615.

out of the beginnings of the economic necessities of colonial capital. How do we leverage these material histories to speak to the contemporary decolonial concerns that inspire students today? Unsettling necessitates thinking through the materiality of the settler colonial state and its central position in global capital.

If we have to concede that the classroom is more amenable to epistemic critique, then the centrality of coloniality (conceived of as the epistemic support for colonialism) for decolonial pedagogy seems assured. For me, this means that unpacking questions of Eurocentrism, Orientalism, colonial discourse, settler moves to innocence, and postcolonial critiques are all important levers in the process of becoming aware of the materiality that shapes contemporary colonialism and neocolonial exploitation. Drawing the links between settler colonialism and neocolonialism, for me, seems like a natural step in uncovering the kinds of global solidarities that can shape a decolonial, anti-colonial, or postcolonial response to colonialism, neocolonialism, and coloniality.

Thinking through how to incorporate this hard decolonization critique into one's pedagogy is important if we want to move it beyond liberal platitudes. It is through understanding this material component of the decolonial critique that we are able to understand our pedagogies, not just as optimizing the learning process in some abstract instrumentalized way, but rather as reflecting the inherently political and ethical stakes within which we find ourselves. In other words, the material component of the decolonial critique helps us understand that we are all subjects in subjectivizing processes. In this light, I imagine that pedagogies are also moments of activism. Walsh reflects this in quite earnest ways:

> It is here in Abya Yala's South, and most particularly through collaborative work with Afro-descendant and Indigenous social movements and communities at their request, that I began to more

> profoundly comprehend the colonial and the decolonial, but also my own responsibility with respect to political-epistemic insurgence and decolonial praxis. That is a responsibility to think *with and from* the insurgent constructions, creations, practices, and subject-actors that, from the outside, the borders, edges, and cracks challenge and defy modernity/coloniality. This means disobeying the dominant domain that locates academic theory above and over praxis, and it means taking serious what was argued in the introduction to this book: theorizing from and with praxis. It is a responsibility to open, widen, intercede in, and act from the decolonial fissures and cracks, and to make cracks within the spaces, places, institutions, and structures from the inside.[16]

Regardless of how much we accept the particular ways that Walsh is expressing this activist bent, I think it important to note that decolonial pedagogy, by being decolonial, must necessarily be invested in ethico-political stakes. I appreciate the radical call to action that Walsh is engaging with here. Part of the fundamental structure of decolonial critique, then, it seems to me, is the way it helps us, not only to critically unlearn the ways in which colonialism and coloniality shape us, but also to relearn other ways.

Un/Learning

I get a sense from the two texts we used for the workshop, Walsh's chapter and Mbembe's essay, that the question of decolonial pedagogies is a question of unmaking and remaking, of imagining new futures, and a radical project of praxis and struggle. I take that to mean something like the idea that decolonial pedagogy is a radical project of unsettling: of unmaking the ways we have been taught and remaking new ways to learn. As Walsh says,

> Unlearning to relearn are, undoubtedly, central components of the pedagogical and decolonial weave, a decolonial pedagogy making

16. Mignolo and Walsh, *Decolonial Pedagogies*, 84 (emphasis original).

> itself and becoming, opening and extending cracks and fissures in the dominant world and, at the same time, contributing to the building of a world—of worlds—*muy otro(s)*.[17]

Here I think an important step is a thorough analysis of the coloniality we are steeped in. In very hermeneutic ways, we are thrown into a world already structured to promote and privilege colonial ways of thinking and being – as well as their responses. Part of the task then is to make sense of, and in many ways bring to light, to uncover, the unspoken coloniality that shapes our subjectivities. Central, then, to the process is challenging ourselves. As instructors, before[18] we can hope to help others learn decolonially, we have to be invested in the project of remaking ourselves and the world around us. Decolonial futures necessitate undoing colonial pasts and presents.

Thus, I think the self-critical challenge of unlearning the settler and colonial ways that we are incentivized to see and act in the world is a fundamental task of decolonial pedagogy. This is a kind of universal task. Regardless of one's positionality, coloniality has undoubtedly shaped one's life. Thus, we are "all in the same boat" though we may start at different places on it. Here, I think it important that the subjectivity of the pedagogue, the one creating and constructing the pedagogies for teaching, be committed to the task of unlearning. This is not a quest for perfection, as mastery can even be

17. Mignolo and Walsh, *Decolonial Pedagogies*, 88.

18. I say "before" here heuristically because I think we are always on this journey, and it seems to me there really isn't an endpoint that can speak to a before and after on a decolonial journey. However, I do think there has to be some self-critical work being done that can help shape the project: this cannot just be a kind of EDI checklist. Rather, there must be a level of investment in doing the work ourselves as much as we are challenging students to do the work.

a kind of colonial trap.[19] As one of the workshop participants noted, students are often seeking certainty, but part of decolonial praxis is that unsettling is often by nature a space of uncertainty.[20] By extension, I imagine that intentionality and growth should be central virtues instead of mastery or certainty. Once we understand how we ourselves must critically self-reflect, must unmake the inner colonial, must unpack the baggage of coloniality, then we can bring ourselves more authentically to the project. That this is a collective project for everyone and one of uncertainty is affirmed by Mbembe, who enjoins us to see that "To be a subject is no longer to act autonomously in front of an objective background, but to share agency with other subjects that have also lost their autonomy. We have to shift away from the dreams of mastery."[21]

It is from that subject position that we can shift to thinking in a much more compassionate way about facilitating that journey in the classroom and in our curriculum. This creates both a kind of modelling for how we might imagine the process goes, but also creates the opportunity to learn from the students as well. Given that we are all, collectively, on this path towards learning how to think beyond coloniality, it is through sharing and connection that we will overcome, not through instrumentalizing knowledge for mastery. Part of the point I want to make here is that the classroom can be an important site for collective co-learning as we try and unlearn and gain inspiration for new ways forward. Teachers, often as specialists in field, have a wealth of knowledge to bring to the subject. However, the pedagogical question is to what that knowledge is directed and how is it produced. And I think decolonial pedagogies wants to

19.See Julietta Singh, *Unthinking Mastery: Dehumanism and Decolonial Entanglements* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018).
20. For privacy reasons I will keep the participants anonymous, but I do want to credit the lively discussion and many insights of the workshop participants.
21. Mbembe, "Decolonizing the University," 42.

challenge us to direct that knowledge towards the future and untangling the past in ways to facilitate this future. But a classroom setting is not an author alone in front of a computer. It is a collective journey – and I think we should embrace that sense of co-learning that can be powerful in the classroom. Even something as simple as hearing the different perspectives of the students about their own journey in thinking decolonially is a place of learning for everyone.

For the workshop, and for this essay, I don't imagine having any answers in the details. I think the subjective nature of our journey through the global history of colonialism means we all have a different perspective on how we think about resisting colonialism/coloniality and how we might imagine moving forward. What I do think is important is thinking about being open to transformation within the classroom itself. Just as we want to challenge students to rethink and relearn, we too as pedagogues should be continually doing the same. Thus, I think an important question is how do we structure this in a curriculum or syllabus?

In many ways, I wonder if the questions inspired by the concept of un/learning are more important than pinning down some definitive answer. This came out clearly in the workshop: a sense that there is no real endpoint or starting point, but rather an intentionality towards un/learning. What kinds of things do we think about when we think about the unlearning that needs to be done? What kinds of things do we find unsettling, in a good way? Where might we imagine our relearning journey takes us? How do we privilege thinking about futures that aren't centrally focused on colonial futures?

Knowledge Production and Indigenous and African Traditional Knowledges

Central to the question of decolonial pedagogy is the question of knowledge and knowledge production. As we have seen above,

part of the unlearning process is recognizing that coloniality wants to universalize and privilege Western forms of knowing. In Dipesh Chakrabarty's[22] post-colonial terms, decoloniality wants to provincialize Europe, to decenter Western hegemonies of learning. Thus, one of the themes of decolonial thought is the idea of centering and bringing forward marginalized knowledges. Indigenous Traditional Knowledges and African Traditional Knowledges have long been neglected as the subaltern Other (here Masuzawa's[23] critique of the World Religions paradigm eliding Indigenous and African religions as an example of coloniality is apt). Even just thinking about this as non-Western knowledge production is an important kind of shift. Recentering these standpoints and thinking about how to reimagine the "scholarly" through these perspectives is an important task. While I am not saying that we should all become scholars of these traditions, I do think the import of this critique is to move towards hearing the voices of those elided. One aspect of this is trying to find the critical voices of those normally subjected to study,[24] an aspect which necessitates the question of, Whose voices are we privileging and to what effect? Mbembe speaks to this in his essay:

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22. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

23. Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

24. Here we must take some care, given that the question of finding voices becomes as fraught and political as any other issue of representational knowledge. For example, searching for voices about Hinduism necessitates being wary of centering Hindu Nationalist voices, who want to essentialize and homogenize Hinduism. Thus, we must critically balance scholarly and decolonial aims to center the critique of power-relations in searching for other voices.

> This hegemonic notion of knowledge production has generated discursive scientific practices and has set up interpretive frames that make it difficult to think outside of these frames. […] This hegemonic tradition also actively represses anything that actually is articulated, thought and envisioned from outside of these frames.[25]

There is this imperative, then, to move beyond Eurocentric universalism and towards hearing again from those marginalized by colonialism. How do we center their knowledge without appropriating it? Here I think about the many excellent discussions being had about this in various disciplines like anthropology and sociology. In the past these disciplines objectified the folks they studied; this has been dramatically challenged, and I get the sense that these disciplines are moving towards a paradigm of learning *from* those studied, instead of learning *about* them.

As such, I think it important to imagine what this looks like in the classroom. One of the things that we have seen repeatedly expressed in the literature is this sense of the use of Eurocentric scholarly knowledge to "put people in their places." That is, this sense that science and scholarly knowledge are privileged and even those about whom we are speaking should defer to this as Truth. As we know from Michel Foucault,[26] Edward Said[27] and other critics, however, this construction of Truth is not independent from the power structures that can operationalize it as Truth. And unfortunately, there is a long history of scholarly knowledge aligning with colonialism in "dealing with"[28] the non-Western other.

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25. Mbembe, "Decolonizing the University," 33.
26. See for example, Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality vol. 1*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990).
27. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).
28. Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 3.

In response to the question of unravelling this colonial praxis, I think it important to recognize that scholars are not privileged holders of knowledge – despite however much we, as scholars, have done to build a substantial body of knowledge as individuals and as a community. Instead, I think it better to think about how the attempt to recenter Indigenous Traditional Knowledges (ITK) and African Traditional Knowledges (ATK) can transform the structure of the classroom – imagine having Indigenous or African students and structuring a curriculum into an outlet for them to be able to express or even center these perspectives. Now obviously, we shouldn't put that burden on the students, so another way to facilitate this is for our curriculum to include, as much as we can, a variety of voices, prioritizing non-Western critical voices as central (even if, given our topics, we might be teaching about Western things – there is always space for the voices of those who can provide a different perspective than, say, traditional canonical voices).

In my own thinking about this, I have often tied the question of ITK, ATK, and subaltern knowledge to the notion that decolonization is for everyone. While I think it important to learn from the so-called margin, and to learn from those voices, I also think there is something to learn from those in the so-called center who are doing the decolonial work. Whether one is Indigenous or settler, Western or non-Western (or any of the other ways we want to speak to the effects of colonialism on subjectivity) we are all shaped by coloniality and have varying degrees of relationality with colonialism – often in intersectional ways. I believe that it is a strength to help each other learn by sharing our journeys at unlearning and relearning. While we do want to make space for everyone to speak about the decolonial journey, we still want to center the challenge of decolonial

thinking, ITK, ATK, and subaltern knowledges.[29] But, again, this not something that needs to be concretized. Each classroom, discipline, and university is different (i.e., the demographics of each student body is different), and thus I think the pedagogical needs of each course necessitates different strategic thinking by the pedagogue in how they think it best to facilitate this journey for the students.

I like to frame some of this as thinking hermeneutically about the question of learning. Both instructors and students are "thrown" into a world that has already established colonial structures and ways of thinking. We are all subject to the discursive, governmental, and bio/necropolitical forces that shape us. Part of the unlearning that must be done involves providing tools for students to be able to get some handle on and parse these forces – including discussion about how to resist them. Part of this, I think, is to cultivate a sense of agency in the students to take control of their own decolonial journey. I find myself enjoying the process of modelling this critical hermeneutics in the classroom by aligning it with the critique that wants to center ITK, ATK, and subaltern knowledges. What that means for me is accepting that, as much as students are learning from me and how I am facilitating the course, I am also learning from them. Students from various backgrounds have unique perspectives that can be a powerful place of co-learning both among students as peers, but also for us as teachers. Even thinking of it as another generation's knowledge can be important in redressing this sense of "top-down" learning into a more co-constitutive learning.

One of the ways to bring non-hegemonic forms of knowledge into the classroom – beyond the readings or course material – is to

29. For example, we do not want a situation that recenters the settler as the locus of learning in a classroom where Indigenous students then may not feel comfortable speaking. The classroom dynamics of taking and holding space are an important topic of praxis that others may be better able to speak to than I can in this essay.

structure outlets that allow for that non-hegemonic knowledge to come from the students themselves. Another thing that inspires me about pedagogy is how it can facilitate learning, from other teachers as well as from insightful students, about how to make the classroom more amenable to co-constitutive and decolonial modes of knowledge production. I think an important process is the praxis of sharing and collective teaching action instead of the hoarding of intellectual curricular capital.

Power, the Classroom, and Curriculum

Implicit in these questions is the question of power. I think this runs not just through the structure of the teaching practice (i.e., teachers and students), but also through scholarship itself. Of deep concern in decoloniality is the question of sovereignty and power relations. Questions about who controls and contributes to how knowledge is produced about people are important decolonial questions. Who gets to say what? Who speaks for? With? Who has access to what kinds of knowledge? These questions have been long posed by postcolonial thinkers. Gayatri Spivak's[30] discussion about the subaltern is exactly about the question of knowledge production within a global capitalist political economy that privileges the Western Subject as the source of speaking.[31] Thus, centering non-Western voices and subjectivities becomes an important part of, not just recentering non-Western knowledge, but of directly counter-

30. Giyatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1988), 271–313; reproduced in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Routledge, 2015): 66–111.
31. Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak," 69 or 87–89.

acting the power-relations that center Western subjects as the dominant subjectivities from which agency emanates.[32]

One question I ask myself is how to redress this power relation in the classroom. As I noted above, I try to find spaces where students can become the loci of learning. But I think this reflects a more structural change about the question of power in the classroom. I think it necessary to interrogate how one is using the institutional structure of power to one's advantage for pedagogical thinking, or to mitigate those structures when necessary. If we think of decoloniality as unlearning and relearning, as redressing hegemony, and as reasserting decolonial knowledge, how does the way we think about the relationship of teaching reflect this? Put another way, if colonial capital wants to structure the way we think into corporatized models of top-down productive structures – which frames us as masters delivering knowledge to waiting recipients and students as paying consumers – how do we disrupt this and create tools of resistance in restructuring the classroom? Can the classroom be reorganized to reflect decolonial ideals? What would that look like?

Again, I think this is a question for each pedagogue. However, I do think that sharing our strategies becomes an important part of thinking through, and acting on, this question of how curricular structure can be mobilized to reflect decolonial pedagogies. I think we all have different techniques as teachers, and much of the discussion at the workshop itself reflected trying to think about this question. I will share some of my own thoughts, and some of the reflections we had in the workshop.

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32. Here I also think of Sarah Ahmed's "phenomenology of whiteness" as a powerful instantiation of this critique from the other side of the coin: the coloniality of individual privilege. See Sarah Ahmed, "A Phenomenology of Whiteness" *Feminist Theory* 8, no. 2 (2007): 149–168, https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700107078139.

One thing that has been critiqued about the University is the way in which it structures academic knowledge as a tool of Empire; the way in which it is complicit with global colonial capital. Mbembe, for example, says "to decolonize implies breaking *the cycle that tends to turn students into customers and consumers.*"[33] To use Walsh's language, we should then ask how to point out or create fissures in Empire itself. I might reframe this as asking the question: how do we reimagine ourselves as instructors, but not as imparting Imperial knowledge or embodying that role?

Beyond the question of subjectivization that makes us educational consumers and providers, for my own pedagogical thinking, I like to think about resisting Imperial power as attempting to horizontalize power in the classroom in other ways. Global capital thrives in hierarchies of class, race, gender, religion, culture and so on, even while assuming a veneer that capital levels the playing field. In this light, I think it important to note that our own subjectivities as instructors become central factors. Horizontalizing the classroom may not be as easy for instructors who are women and/or racialized folks (or other marginalized positionalities). Studies have shown that instructors who are women, for example, face significant gender bias from students – including about their authority in the classroom.[34] In

33. Mbembe, "Decolonizing the University," 31 (emphasis original).
34. See, for example, Lillian MacNell, Adam Driscoll, and Andrea N. Hunt "What's in a Name: Exposing Gender Bias in Student Ratings of Teaching," *Innovative Higher Education* (December 5, 2014): https://www.utstat.toronto.edu/reid/sta2201s/gender-teaching.pdf; Maria Minor, "Are Female Professors Held to a Different Standard than Their Male Counterparts?" *Forbes*, March 19, 2021, https://www.forbes.com/sites/mariaminor/2021/03/19/are-female-professors-held-to-a-different-standard-than-their-male-counterparts/?sh=7fcc28 fd79fe; Ryan Quinn, "Faculty Gender Imbalances Yield Biased Student Ratings," *Inside Higher Ed*, January 24, 2023, https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2023/01/25/study-student-evaluation-bias-gender-lopsided-departments.

this way, perhaps it is more decolonial to recenter women's authority instead of horizontalizing it. Here, we must make space for the question of effective strategy. Having an Indigenous Elder be an instructor, I imagine, might likewise reassert the question of authority – while also deconstructing assumptions about what learning and knowledge production should look like. Thus, decoloniality is not a one-size fits all kind of pedagogy.

This question of the horizontalization of knowledge should also be tempered by the real structural limits placed on instructors. We need to submit grades, we need to have a productive classroom, we are beholden to institutional oversight (for better or worse). One of the ways that I think about grades is to think about doctors and engineers – in those professions where mistakes can potentially cost lives, we do think of evaluation as an important oversight that leads to the capacity to be trusted in the world at large. So, evaluation can be a useful tool. But I think it is important to think about what evaluation is in a decolonial sense. One way I think about this is that colonial capital wants us to instrumentalize knowledge for the benefit of the flows of global capital. How do we thread a line between evaluation and instrumentalization? Can we use the tools of the Master to dismantle the Master's house? What are we evaluating, and by what authority and standards should evaluation in the humanities and social sciences be undertaken if we are thinking decolonially?

I want to leave this as an open question for further exploration and thought by the reader, but I think opening the question can provide a place of creative and innovative insight about, for example, assignment construction. In the workshop, there was much time spent sharing stories of the relative success of various forms of assignment and grading. Subtly, the question of power is not removed from the question of deciding the criteria for evaluation, and subsequently grades. This has real effects on students lives, many of whom, for example, rely on GPA compliance for scholarships. Traditionally, I

think there is a stereotype of evaluation that asks students to conform to Imperial standards of knowledge mastery, and to merely reproduce "just so" thinking about the world that comes from a place of coloniality. How should we restructure this? I have heard from many students that they feel pressure to perform, and are incentivised not to focus on their own learning, but rather to strategically attempt to instrumentalize their learning to optimize grades. This leads to a lot of anxiety and pressure, as well as a sense of looking for "right" answers and leaning on rote memorization. Further, the broader structures of global capital labour markets, as another workshop participant noted, prioritize questions of instrumentalization like "what job will I get after university?" If decoloniality centers the critical practice of un/learning, then I find this instrumentalization to work against decolonial goals. It is important to prioritize the creation of a space where mistakes and risks (on the part of students and instructors) aren't avoided, but rather are seen as necessary occurrences on the path to unsettling colonial and neoliberal epistemes. Neoliberal ideological pressures to focus on efficiency, instrumentalization, and end-products miss the essential creative step of learning. In my mind, not only do students learn better with less pressure and more creative space, but the main goals of decolonial pedagogy necessitate rethinking the underlying incentive structures of evaluation. Further, the reality is that even if we prioritize outcomes, in the long-term students do better in terms of grades when they take the time to creatively explore the material in ways that cohere with their own understandings. In my teaching, I am still experimenting and thinking through these questions, like much of the field.

Because of my positionality and performative persona in classroom discussions and in how I relate to students, even structurally, I have tried hard to implement a more horizontal sense of power relationality. While this may not work for everyone, I do

this by imagining myself as a facilitator for the student's own self-learning. I imagine myself as a resource for students on their own decolonial journey. Thus, instead of being an instructor downloading knowledge to student's minds I reimagine my role as knowledge-sharing, curation, and facilitation. Thus, I think about curriculum as: what discussions and voices do I think best serve unpacking the decolonial questions that are present in the field that the course is about? What are the most significant tension points in the field that can serve as interesting points of learning and in-class discussion? How do I encourage students to think about their own agency and empowerment regarding the question of decolonization? Thus, I am not centering my own knowledge – however much I can mobilize it to assist a student's journey – but trying to put at the forefront the student's own journey and imagining the space as a co-learning environment.

Decolonial discussions sometimes talk about decolonization as healing and caretaking in relation. Perhaps we can imagine a classroom, at least in part, as a kind of therapeutic space for group healing from colonialism. In some ways, I often think of my own version of decolonial pedagogy as a kind of invitation to a new way of living in the world, a kind of unsettled but ethico-politically centered phenomenology of care. A significant portion of the workshop discussion was about how students seem to want a certain kind of knowledge, a phenomenology of knowledge retention we might say – one that centers concrete operationalized knowledge. I posit that a decolonial pedagogy should challenge this desire as a colonial and neoliberal objectification of knowledge. One participant in the workshop noted that even the old trope of "learning for learning's sake" could be a helpful tool in rethinking how to transform our assumptions about the use of knowledge. I am interested in seeing how we can explore finding other kinds of phenomenologies of learning that accord with decolonial aims. In

practice, this might look like using my own institutional relational power as an instructor to allow students to center their own relationship to how they know and come to knowledge – and this goes back to the hermeneutic questions of subaltern knowledge talked about in the last section. The intent is to allow students from any background and positionality to feel a sense of collective care and solidarity in the tricky work of rethinking what it means to be in relation with each other. I also feel like it makes me more receptive to learn from students themselves. The space begins to feel more dialogical than a top-down, less instrumentalized and more about growth.

Conclusion

While in the classroom, and for each department, educator, and institution, the attempt to decolonize pedagogies will look different, we can think more broadly about and come to some general picture of what decolonial pedagogies might be speaking to. Again, I claim no privileged knowledge here, but am rather synthesizing what I have taken from the field, discussions with other educators and students, and my own observations in attempting to implement a more decolonial way of teaching.

Important to the process I think is understanding that to decolonize is to understand the impact of colonialism and coloniality, and to facilitate ways for students and instructors to learn more about the ways that these colonial forces still shape us today. Decolonial analysis, then, is also about strategizing tools and techniques for better understanding how to unlearn coloniality and move instead in different or new directions. Central to this is allowing other voices into the curriculum – not just ITK, ATK, or subaltern knowledges, but the voices of students; to allow students to share their relation to this process in a way that can serve as another learning vector for the

collective process of moving beyond coloniality. As many decolonial thinkers say, decolonization is for everyone.

Thinking about hard decolonization becomes an important part of this process of analytically unravelling the extensive reach of colonialism (both settler colonialism and neocolonialism), but we should not just end there. Important is to center Indigenous futures, Black futures, subaltern futures. However, we cannot ignore that colonialism and the alienation and exploitation of global capital affects everyone. The futures of all (settlers, white folks, and other dominant groups included) who are impacted by it must be considered, because it is only in solidarity against these global colonial neoliberal structures that we can redress the materiality of colonialism. And in this way, part of our goal as educators, I think, is to lean into the epistemic focus of the university setting to help put at the forefront varied and critical perspectives that help us think further about decolonial futures.

Rethinking classroom structures, like assignments or institutional hierarchies, can be an important step in this process. Whether it is to horizontalize power relations, or to reaffirm lost authority structures, a major focus of decoloniality is thinking about the kinds of power relations colonialism wants to assert. While every case will be different, it is worth also thinking about how students and instructors are shaped by these relationalities.

Finally, the more phenomenological or existential questions about decolonial pedagogies are central; so, questions about the processes of subjectivization, internalizing coloniality, resources of resistance, and insurgent forms of learning all become central strategic concerns. How do we allow a space for students and teachers to unsettle themselves, unlearn coloniality, and relearn new futurities? How can we make the quest for knowledge a place that holds within it the space of unsettling uncertainty? Here, I think is the more immediate pedagogical focus on relationality that becomes

central. How can we relate to each other to get the most out of this process and to move together with healing towards a collective decolonial future, instantiated and modeled in curricular decisions, course construction, or classroom performance?

We are in new territory at the beginning of this millennia, where more and more space is being made for the marginalized to speak to power, and where power is finding more and more subtle methods of control. But, change is necessary, and one fundamental place for this change to occur is in the university. Decolonial pedagogy, I think, starts with bold courage to begin the process – no matter how stilted or fraught – and to challenge ourselves to make the most of this opportunity we see ahead of us. And yet, because this is such new ground there is much room for exploration. One of the last discussions by the participants in the workshop became a (paraphrased as a rhetorical) question: "Well, what is decolonization anyway? What's the difference between decolonial pedagogy and just good pedagogy?" In thinking about decolonial pedagogy as an unsettled space of uncertainty, perhaps that is an excellent place to end this essay and signal the desire for further dialogue as these questions can potentially open more reflection and exploration for future thought and praxis.

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