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Decolonizing Race and Gender Intersectionality in Education: A Collaborative Critical Autoethnography of Hope, Healing and Justice

Lyric Harris ¹, Marcia J. Watson-Vandiver ^{1*}

¹ *Towson University*, USA

*Corresponding Author: mjwatson@towson.edu

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ABSTRACT

This article provides a collaborative critical autoethnography of the educational experiences of two women of African descent, from the perspectives of an undergraduate student and university professor. Using decolonial intersectionality as the theoretical framework, the authors interpret their schooling experiences through a decolonial epistemological lens and identify ways in which education serves as both a divider and equalizer for students. Whereas existing research suggests that transformative education is made possible through expanded and engaged pedagogy, our autoethnographic narratives submit that curricula are central to this discussion as well. Results of this study posit that critical education can provide opportunities for gleaning into diverse perspectives and oppositional histories. Additionally, when implemented with a critical lens, educational disciplines such as history and social science can provide hope, healing, and justice.

Keywords: autoethnography, Black education, decoloniality, qualitative research, intersectionality

Authors' Note: Due to the U.S. contextualization of this article, the terms “African American” and “Black” are used interchangeably. We acknowledge the potential ethnic inconsistencies between (and within) these two terms. Additionally, because of our own ethnic distinctions, we use the term Women of African Descent to describe our collective experience. The term “African descent” describes historical and diasporic relations to Africa via race and ethnicity, not necessarily native birth or citizenship.

INTRODUCTION

The notion that we are living through ‘post-racial’ times is asinine (Coates, 2015). The recent racially motivated deaths of Walter Wallace, Jr. [Philadelphia, Pennsylvania], George Floyd [Minneapolis, Minnesota], Breonna Taylor [Louisville, Kentucky], Ahmaud Arbery [Brunswick, Georgia], and Tony McDade [Tallahassee, Florida] prove that even in 2020, the complicated milieu of American racism calls for our attention (Costello & Duvall, 2020; Deliso, 2020; McLaughlin, 2020; Murphy, 2020). Whereas schools would seem like optimal spaces for critical inquiry, most classrooms have been standardized to circumvent critical race discussions (Dei, 2003, 2012; Flaherty, 2014; George & Puente, 2015; Moulthorp, 2015). Education settings rooted in critical discourse can provide insight into the ways in which the U.S. is structured by race and racism. The recent shooting deaths of unarmed Black citizens by police have made this even more apparent in the 21st century. Yet, the capacity to examine these structures is denied by education policies and directives. Thus, the transformative power of education is restricted when conversations about *real* issues in society are avoided (Baker, 2020; Dei, 2003, 2012; Thurber, Harbin, & Brandy, 2020). This article honors the countless lives that have been impacted by racial injustice, bigotry, discrimination, and

xenophobia and interrogates ways that curricula can further explore the topic of race and gender. Using an autoethnography as mode of inquiry, this article uplifts shared narratives of two *Women of African Descent*¹ to explore the critical role of education for facilitating meaningful conversations about racial understandings and identity.

In our exploration, we rely on *collaborative critical autoethnography* to examine the collective experiences of professor and student with similar intersectional identities as Women of African Descent in a Predominately-White university [PWI]² setting. According to Moore et al. (2013), collaborative autoethnographies that include both faculty and students are transformative mechanisms used to more broadly understand experience and identity. To that end, we agree with Anderson's (2015) definition of collaborative ethnographies that uses a dual analysis to sensitize the individual nature of participant experiences and needs. Anderson (2015) notes, "building research around the crafting of stories about personal experiences provides an insider's view that enriches our outsider perspectives when probing the experiences of others and interpreting results from studies using other methods" (para. 3). Thus, the remainder of the article will explore the following: a) theoretical framework of decolonial intersectionality, b) collaborative critical autoethnography, c) preliminary decolonial understandings, d) self-actualizations of colonialism and decoloniality, e) colonialism's role in race and gender divides, f) decolonial education as a force of activism, and g) a discussion on critical thinking and education's role as an equalizer for change.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: DECOLONIAL INTERSECTIONALITY

This work is framed by the framework of decolonial intersectionality. Many contend that concepts of "intersectionality" must begin with the Combahee River Statement of 1977³ and later Crenshaw's (1991) analysis of structural and political dimensions of intersectional oppression. Crenshaw's ground-breaking claims problematized monolithic assertions of race and gender and instead surfaced the "simultaneity" within modes of difference (Ferguson, 2012). Whereas Crenshaw's research focused on Black women's experiences within the legal field, more contemporary studies on intersectionality provide an expanded milieu for research inquiry. Lorde (1984/2007) and Collins (2000) also note the compounding complexities of navigating White patriarchy as Black women. In addition to race and gender specifically, Collins (2000) coins the term "matrix of domination" to describe additional layers of oppression such as class, sexuality, age and ability. Likewise, Grzanka (2014) comprehensively disentangles topics of intersectionality within the topics of law, epistemology, identity, culture and representation, space and community, resistance and activism, migration, politics and justice, science, and research methods. Grzanka's research anthology builds upon Crenshaw's assertions and provides a number of notable studies that examine intersectionality in the 21st century.

Despite these efforts, Salem (2014) asserts that dominant narratives on gender and race persist, "thus allowing certain ideas and moments to gain currency" (p. 3). This is seen in education, as select White narratives are propagated in the curriculum, while marginalizing non-White perspectives. Thus, decolonial intersectionality more narrowly seeks "compelling, complex analyses" of how insidious issues like colonialism, sexism, nationalism, and neoliberal capitalism, "either singularly or in combination" inform realities (Collins, 2019, p. 5). This often requires the dismissal of arbitrary binaries for group experiences. It is important to note that we purposefully considered this when selecting our identity terminology for this article. Using the term *Women of African Descent*, versus the proverbial term "African American," was intentional and mirrored the very concept of decolonial intersectionality.

Shohat and Stam (1994) suggest the need for resistance through polycentrism while debunking the arbitrariness of standard categories of identity that are "categorically hybrid" (p. 13). By decentering Western terminologies for race and gender, we put forward this article as a form of academic resistance both in diction and methodological approach. Similar to Crenshaw's (1991) research on Black women's experiences, this research examines concepts of layered discrimination in relation to decolonial awareness and framing. However, while Crenshaw focused on political and legal experiences, this research examines lived educational experiences. Additionally, Collins' (2019) research on intersectionality suggests that we must critically reflect on assumptions, epistemologies, and methods.

¹ Because of our own ethnic distinctions, we use the term Women of African Descent to describe our collective experience. The term "African descent" describes historical and diasporic relations to Africa via race and ethnicity, not necessarily native birth or citizenship.

² We distinguish the term PWI [Predominately-White Institutions] to describe university settings where students of color represent the minority population. In U.S. contexts, there are distinctions between predominately White institutions and Historically Black Colleges and Universities [HBCUs]. Since this paper investigates concepts of race in a university setting, the racial context of a PWI is much different from HBCUs where Black students would represent the majority.

³ The Combahee River Statement is an essay written by Black feminists formed out of Boston, Massachusetts. This group criticized other activist movements, such as White feminism and the Civil Rights Movement in failing to adequately address the needs of Black women and Black Queer women. Today, it is regarded as one of the foremost collections of intersectional thought.

As such, this article focuses on a newly-expanded autoethnographic methodological framing to disentangle the lived education experiences of *Women of African Descent* in the U.S.

COLLABORATIVE CRITICAL AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Autoethnography is a qualitative method of inquiry that relies on self-introspection and first-person representation within the ethnographic experience (Adams, Jones, & Ellis, 2014; Chang, 2008). The purpose of autoethnography is to translate lived experiences for outside readers to understand. This relies on a myriad of interconnected research methods, such as narrative inquiry, ethnography, and phenomenology (Marx, Pennington, & Chang, 2017). However, the increased popularity of autoethnographic research stems from the understanding that *self* is an appropriate space for exploration and investigation. In this way, autoethnographies serve as a repositioning tool for narrative inquiry that also allows the author to be involved in, not separate from, their cultural experiences. It is important to mention that autoethnographies are not without critique. For example, autoethnography's "boundaries, foundations, formatting, and purpose can seem nebulous and untrustworthy," especially since this is a newly evolving research method (Marx, Pennington, & Chang, 2017, p. 3). In that same vein, *critical autoethnographies* are not widely studied. Rather intuitively, critical autoethnographies imbue autoethnographic research methods with a critical lens (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014; Marx, Pennington, & Chang, 2017). They allow the author to explore personal accounts of lived experiences involving identity and culture. They also allow the author to explore experiences of marginalization, power, and privilege (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014).

Collaborative critical autoethnographies provide collective agency within the autoethnographic experience (Chang, Ngunjiri, & Hernandez, 2013). The term *critical collaborative ethnography* refers to, "... a practice of ethnography that is invested in questioning the boundaries of power relations between the researcher and the researched for the specific purpose of bringing about social change" (Bhattacharya, 2008, p. 306). In this sense, collaborative autoethnographies provide "a form of narrative inquiry further legitimizing the personal stories and experiences we shared" (Gleiman et al., 2015, p. 3). As such, professor and student autoethnographies facilitate a "process of writing and reflection" (Moore et al., 2013, p. 2). According to Wolfe, Nelson, and Seamster (2018), the data collection process in collaborative autoethnographies involves individual introspective reflections that highlight poignant and memorable learning experiences. These individual reflections can be arranged by age group, learning level, or using any categorical or topical theme determined by the researcher(s). Data to be included in autoethnographic are narrative in nature, such as remembered experiences, poignant memories, feelings or sensory information, or general retrospective thoughts. For the sake of this study, our autoethnographic snapshots provide memorable vignettes, organized by conceptual topic. Both members of the research team provided autoethnographic accounts ranging from elementary school through postsecondary education. After the autoethnographic narratives were collected, the researchers met to share and make initial meaning of the narratives at hand.

Using collaborative critical autoethnography as the mode of inquiry, this paper explores the following question: *From your experience, in what ways has education served as a divider and/or equalizer in terms of race, gender, and/or class?* Throughout our interrogation of colonialism and education, we provide autoethnographic narratives of racial and identity awareness. We use narrative snapshots to describe experiential evidences of curricular inequity and education's role in social control (Freire, 1970/2000, 1973; Giroux, 1997). As suggested, these narratives work in tandem and serve as a *collaborative critical autoethnography* that provides a collective snapshot of professor and student experience. (For the sake of consistency, we have bracketed our names throughout the article as [Undergraduate Student] and [University Professor]).

Participants: Undergraduate Student and University Professor

We are both affiliated with the same university and share similar experiences in relation to navigating a Predominately-White Institution [PWI] as Women of African Descent. Our respective identities are important to highlight: [the undergraduate student] is a Moorish Muslim woman, whereas [the university professor] describes identifies as Black,⁴ or African American. The term *Women of African Descent* is the decided term that encapsulates both of our identities. Through office hours and frequent conversation, we realized we shared a common understanding of pre-colonial African history and its relation to our own educational understandings. Pre-colonial, in this sense, refers to history before transatlantic slavery. To that end, we collectively understand how "Blackness" and the history of the African Diaspora have been misconstrued in schools. Thus, one of the many common bonds

⁴ We agree with the *American Psychological Association's* (APA) assertion that racial and ethnic groups are designated by proper nouns and should be capitalized. Therefore, this manuscript uses "Black" and "White" instead of "black" and "white" to describe racial groups.

shared between us resides in the understanding that *corrective history* has helped in our own self-liberation processes. We collectively acknowledge that most of history frameworks in K-16⁵ education glorify European history, while marginalizing non-White perspectives. We also understand the undeniable historical underpinnings that have contributed to systemic injustice. To that end, in our current space, we have navigated the academy with an “awareness” that can be both liberating and oppressive.

PRELIMINARY PRE-COLONIAL UNDERSTANDINGS

[Undergraduate Student]: *Colonialism, war between the native people and European settlers, slavery, religion, and that Christopher Columbus was not the first to discover America, like textbooks would claim, was taught to me at an early age. This fostered my interest to learn more and to question what I have learned.*

[University Professor]: *It was not until my graduate studies where I fully understood the importance of pre-colonial Black History. I participated in Black History programs as a child and taking Africana Studies classes in undergrad, but my self-indulgence for Black issues and “wokeness” did not come until graduate school.*

Critical perspectives maintain that the role of education in the United States has been a tool of empire and colonialism (Wiggin, Scott, Watson, & Reynolds, 2014). Considering that the United States was a settler colony, religious resistance and academic freedom often worked in tandem as tools for synchronous liberation and oppression (ibid.). Further, knowledge in the United States has always been skewed to align with White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant values. Women, racial minorities, and the poor have historically been underserved in education. As such, cultural knowledge is often considered a “specialized” topic that is inaccessible and unavailable in mainstream schools (Loewen, 1995). Since both researchers had access to cultural curricula during their formative years, this autoethnography allows for more nuanced explorations of our retrospective educational experiences.

African history has been largely misconstrued by mainstream Western thought (Asante, 1990; Diop, 1987). While recognizing education’s role in social control (Freire, 1970/2000, 1973; Giroux, 1997), we acknowledge that history, specifically, has been disrupted for people of color. As such, we agree with Giroux’s (1997) assertions that historical illiteracy is both an engrained and intentional phenomenon that is a by-product of knowledge control. As such, we both attest to engagement with pre-colonial history being transformative in our own self-actualization experiences. Here, we align self-actualization with hooks’ (1994) concept of “engaged pedagogy,” which encourages students to connect the “will to know with the will to become” (p. 19). hooks suggests that the role of instruction is to incorporate narratives and personal experiences of both the teacher and students to decenter instructors as experts, or silent interrogators. Instead, according to hooks (1994), education must embrace the challenge of self-actualization, which in turn is central to making their teaching a site of resistance. Thus, it is important to highlight certain historical moments that are most crucial to our understandings of identity. Much of this historical information is not taught in schools and was only acquired through intensive critical engagements with historical texts and primary documents. For [the undergraduate student], it came through historically conscious parents who instilled corrective history at a young age. For [the university professor], it came through graduate school and independent research with a decolonial historian and scholar. There are a couple of historical moments to highlight, which resonate with our personal understandings of the world.

To start, we acknowledge that the history of North America omits significant portions of indigenous histories and African influences. In the 15th and 16th centuries, Ancient Egyptian artifacts were found in the Americas (Wiener, 1922; Van Sertima, 1976/2003). Additionally, Wiercinski (1972) discovered African skulls at Olmec sites in Tlatilco, Cerro de las Mesas, and Monte Alban (Borders, 2010). In an analysis of these skulls, Borders (2010) and Wiercinski (1972) contend that pre-colonial African presence had been evident throughout the world. In relation to North America specifically, Van Sertima’s (1976/2003) *They Came Before Columbus* also confirms these findings. Van Sertima confirms that Spain observed African presence in the “New World” when Vasco Balboa stood on the summit of Quarequa (1976/2003). In 1513, Balboa and his companions continued south of the Southern Sea and stumbled upon an encounter between Indians and African captives. The Spaniards shortly discovered that the Africans had a settlement nearby and the native people and Africans were at war. Moreover, Peter Martyr d’Anghiera [ca. 1504-1526] reported this incident to the Spanish and described “finding negroes” in this province, and “they were fierce” (1912).

Another evidence of African world presence in the Americas was a detailed encounter in Columbia, in an island off Cartagena. Fray Gregoria Garcia, a Dominican priest, documented the account and notes, “here were found slaves, of the lord–Negroes—who were the first our people saw in the Indies” (Sertima, 2003, p. 24). Many of these findings can also be confirmed in primary sources. For example, Greek historian Herodotus (440 B.C.E./2014) confirms these findings in the book *Histories*, when he mentions the exquisite maritime skills of ancient Egyptians under the leadership of Sesostris [Egyptian]:

⁵ K-16 describes kindergarten through postsecondary education [typically ages 5-22 years old].

[Sesostris] first of all set out with ships of war from the Arabian gulf and subdued those who dwelt by the shores of the Erythraian Sea, until as he sailed he came to a sea which could not further be navigated by reason of shoals: then secondly, after he had returned to Egypt... He [Sesostris] traversed the continent, until at last he passed over to Europe from Asia and subdued the Scythians and also the Thracians. These, I am of the opinion, were the furthest people to which the Egyptian army came. (p. 103)

Herodotus wrote of King Ramses III moving alongside a group of Africans at sea claiming the Africans had astonishing navigational skills (Chengu, 2014). Additionally, historians have discovered evidence that suggests Africans were master shipbuilders and posed maritime expertise, prior to European colonization (Barton, 2001; Law, 1989; Whitewright, 2018). Aside from their geographical savvy, additional praise of pre-colonial Africans is found in several primary sources from Greek philosophers, including: Herodotus' *Histories* (440 B.C.E./2014), Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (350 B.C.E./1966), and Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* (75 C.E./2012). Yet, it is conspicuous that this information is not found in mainstream U.S. curricula (Dei, 2012; Loewen, 1995). Whereas widespread racial representation can be empowering, the historical role of racism in the U.S. subjugates, or more accurately – omits, non-White perspectives. As such, K-16 history is misconstrued and falsified. Whereas, Black history is often limited to slavery and the Civil Rights Movement, we found collective liberation in discovering triumphant and venerating historical stories like these.

SELF-ACTUALIZATION OF COLONIALISM AND DECOLONIALITY

[Undergraduate Student]: *There was a ceremony conducted by my (second) elementary school during Black History Month, in which I played as an African dancer. That experience made me feel like I belonged and proud to be Black. Afterwards, I asked my father what African country we originated from. He never gave a direct answer but overtime told me stories of our history and what being Black meant.*

[University Professor]: *In elementary and middle school, there was probably no assignment more traumatic for me than “family trees.” It was always a take-home project and always a big deal for the social studies or literature unit that we were studying. As an African American woman whose parents were from the Jim Crow South and whose grandparents were descendants of sharecroppers, I had no earthly idea where my ancestors came from. We had just been given the family tree assignment on Friday and it was due the following Monday. I will never forget asking my parents, “What should I put on my tree?” My parents proudly told me to put “Africa.” So that’s what I did.*

It is important to note that due to our geographical proxy, our autoethnographic accounts focus on decolonialism in the United States, specifically. Interestingly, in both of our narratives, we highlighted memories of racial actualizations that focused on slavery. These moments yielded increased personalized awareness of U.S. slavery and its tangible impact on family dynamics and identity from a young age. As such, psychologists Kurtis and Adams (2017) note there are two strategies for decolonizing awareness. First, decolonization normalizes patterns of experience in diverse Majority-World settings that hegemonic discourses portray as abnormal or suboptimal. The second decolonizing strategy involves denaturalizing patterns of hegemonic standardization in discourse. Here, rather than portray Western understandings as the “vanguard” of liberation, this analysis instead deploys diverse perspectives to illuminate concepts of privilege that undermine its “liberatory potential” (p. 46).

Decoloniality questions and problematizes Eurocentric approaches to history. It is important to briefly note that Shohat and Stam (1994) assert that colonialism pre-existed European colonialism, since it was practiced in Greece and Rome, and by the Aztecs, Incas, and other cultural groups. This notwithstanding, the term describes decolonial thinking, knowing, and doing (Mignolo, 2011). It involves an active exploration of power structures involved with knowledge distortion (Mignolo, 2007). Mignolo and Walsh (2018) describe a *matrix of power* and assert the necessity to delink from the colonial matrix and Western “universals.” One of the most dangerous components of Western, mainstream approaches are their universal adoption as truth (Semali & Kincheloe, 1999). Semali and Kincheloe (1999) contend:

Modernist science produces universal histories, defines civilization, and determines reality: such capabilities legitimate particular ways of seeing and, concurrently, delegitimize others. Such an ability is imperialistic; as it operates to characterize indigenous knowledge as inadequate and inferior. (p. 29)

In U.S. contexts, the role of colonialism via land acquisition and genocide laid a structural foundation to Eurocentric capitalism. In this sense, race and capitalism served as primary conduits of social control (Williams, 1994). In that same vein, with the rise of capitalism and colonialism in North America came equal resistance. Decolonial thought derives from this resistance.

Decoloniality works in tandem with other anti-oppressive educational movements, such as gender studies and ethnic studies programs. Several grassroots movements, such as Freedom Schools in Mississippi, the Black Panther

Party in California, and La Raza Studies in Arizona, have worked continuously to counteract Eurocentric epistemologies. In a decolonial sense, the denigration of indigenous knowledge, "...cannot be separated from the oppression of indigenous peoples" (Semali & Kincheloe, 1999, p. 29). Thus, decolonial epistemologies acknowledge the marginalization of indigenous thought and seek to recentralize it. Decoloniality seeks to, "...make visible, open up, and advance radically distinct perspectives and positionalities that displace Western rationality as the only framework and possibility of existence, analysis, and thought" (Mignolog & Walsh, 2018, p. 17). To accomplish this frame of thinking involves praxis: critical questioning, reflection, and reformation. In this sense, praxis is a critical pathway that leads to ongoing and intentional action. Since colonialism and capitalism are active mechanisms, so too is the ongoing resistance of decoloniality.

COLONIALISM AND THE RISE OF RACE AND GENDER DIVIDES

The role of U.S. colonialism and its impact on student development is imperative to discuss. It is important to understand the purpose of education in America and interrogate how educational systems have played a role in encouraging disparity and inequality. To that end, it is important to consider the history of societies in order to uncover historical underpinnings of discrimination and inequality. In modern contexts, O'Neil (2015) and O'Neil and Rogowski (2013) examine the history of contemporary society and highlight critical issues in relation to colonialism. European colonialism and imperialism are major drivers that created systems of privilege for White male domination, leading to inequality and the marginalization of others (Napolitano, 2009; O'Neil, 2015). This is especially true in the United States, which has been involved in both colonial and imperial expansion. Whereas colonialism is the physical occupation of a foreign territory through military force, businesses, or settlers, imperialism involves a state extending its reach beyond its borders (O'Neil, 2015). American colonialism, which is undergirded by slavery and genocide, has reshaped and defined national and ethnic identities in three distinct ways. First, the notion of race and its corresponding negative views [i.e. racism] were created to reify existing social structures (Marks, 2008; Sanders, 1969; Smedley, 1999). Second, gender and gender roles were introduced to decrease women's autonomy (Boserup, 1970). Third, the replacement of agricultural societies with industrialism reinforced capitalism and exploited the working class (O'Neil, 2015). As such, the lingering effects of social stratification impact minorities in America today. This is evidenced through several contemporary issues, including: housing disparities, gender inequity, educational access, criminal justice, etc. (Alexander, 2012; DuBois, 1899; Williamson, Rhodes, & Dunson, 2007).

We value the transformative power of critical education and yet many students today lack a mastery of historical knowledge. We believe it is important to identify systemic and deep-rooted explanations for modern societal problems, as historical knowledge helps to contextualize contemporary social issues. To that end, the following sections provide a more in-depth look into colonialism's role in gender and racial stratification and how we navigated moments of self-actualization as Women of African Descent.

Colonialism and Gender in the U.S.

[Undergraduate Student]: *Without enrolling in my Women's Perspectives and History Post-Civil War classes, I would not have support or even concluded that there was an issue or disparity between women and men in the work place and education.*

[University Professor]: *I was always told to work twice as hard, because I am a Black woman. Growing up, I was told that nothing in life would be given to me, to never expect handouts, and do my absolute best – because that would be the only way I could succeed in life. All of those pieces of advice were given to me as an attribution to my identity. I have always lived with those expectations. Even as a professor today, I live with the mantra: "Work twice as hard, for half the credit." I've always considered it unfair, but I have not known life to be any other way. In a way, it has prepared me for the ills of academy. You see gender disparities in a multitude of ways.*

Our self-actualization of gender stems from deeply embedded beliefs about inequity. Zakaria (2007) posits the concept of "liberty" in the West derived from early Christian influences (i.e. the Roman Empire). Whereas European immigrants flocked to America to obtain religious freedom and to gain economic power, their resistance to monarchical government replaced religious piety with individualism. Thus, the push for capitalism eliminated the powers of monarchies and replaced it with a system based on individual and property rights (O'Neil, 2015). The concept of property rights and citizenship, in turn, also intersected with gender beliefs. In fact, politicians of the 16th and 17th centuries thought, "women's political identity should be restricted because their presence in politics was immoral, corruptive, and potentially disruptive, and the women should be represented by fathers, husbands, or brothers." (Shaw and Lee, 2012, p. 613). The separation of gender in early U.S. schools was a 17th century impetus for gender divides in education. As a note, this concept of liberty or religious freedom was even a source of contention in the creation of the *Pledge of Allegiance of the United States* [1892], which is typically recited every morning in most schools today (Zinn & Steffoff, 2009). The author, Francis Bellamy, was advised not to include the term "equality" in the lyrics of the pledge as a mode to exclude women. Although this seems like rudimentary

history, many contend that the *Pledge of Allegiance* is a fundamental experience in U.S. schools that, at its core, is exclusionary towards women.

Aside from these historical implications, gender disparities are learned and reinforced in educational institutions even today (Smyk, 2017). For example, Smyk (2017) found girls are taught to believe that boys are better in math and science. Additionally, the *Institute of Physics* (2013) also found that most girls avoid S.T.E.M. fields. Thus, the hidden curriculum in many schools, along with reinforced parent stereotypes at home, reinforce gender inferiorities (Smyk, 2017). Shohat and Stam (1994) contend that these gendered categories are by-products of colonial programming and idealized programmings of the West. Here, “science and technology, for example, are often seen as ‘Western’” (Shohat & Stan, 1994, p. 14). This ignores the interdependence of diverse worlds, such as Africa, Asia, Latin America, and indigenous knowledge that foregrounded Western “discoveries” in science and technology.

As a quintessential example, American suffragist Alice Paul expressed how she did not know about political science and economic classes before she attended college (Conversations with Alice Paul, 2015). In the 1970s, Paul later mentions that most women majored in English or Latin, and men majored in economics and political science. These historical disparities help to explain why 85% of education, English, and liberal arts degrees are awarded to women undergraduates majors, in comparison to engineering and computer science degrees, which are comprised of 83.2% and 82.4% men, respectively (Goudreau, 2010). Notwithstanding, White women were often allowed to progress much further than their Black women contemporaries. To that end, the racial implications of colonialism are discussed in the next section.

Colonialism and Race in the U.S.

[Undergraduate Student]: *The first elementary school I attended, a girl made fun of me at recess saying, “you aren’t even Black, your mom is White and she has jungle fever.” I did not see my mother as Black or White, I saw her as my mother, nor did I understand what jungle fever was but I knew it was an insult because others laughed at me. On the way back inside, I pushed her into a muddy puddle, very silently but aggressively, and hid for the rest of the day after that. Since then I began to question my identity: what is Black, what is White, and who am I?*

[University Professor]: *I was the only Black girl in most of my classes. I also remember those unforgettable “n-word” moments in school. Not people actually calling me an n-word, per se, but literature teachers cavalierly using the word when teaching about Jim Crow or segregation. These moments were distinct, because as an African American child I was always taught never to use that word. There was one particular time when I was the only Black child in my literature class and the teacher asked me my opinions about the word. I was in 4th grade!*

Our experiences with racial awareness in school are categorized by feelings of *identity negotiation* and *isolation*. It is important to mention that in relation to other social stratification mechanisms, we were aware of race and racial differences at a much younger age – elementary school. Within U.S. contexts, race is most notably associated with transatlantic slavery and the palpable divide between White and Black Americans. The evidence of racial trauma has led researchers like DeGury (2017) to posit the notion of *Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome* [PTSS]. DeGury’s (2017) research asserts that U.S. slavery has an observable and traumatic effect on the human body and likewise has had perpetual effects in the African American community. Here, PTSS describes the etiology of the adaptive survival behaviors in African American communities that are conduits of colonialism and slavery.

According to Degruy, PTSS is generally produced in two ways. First, multigenerational trauma is often coupled with continued oppression. Second, the absence of opportunity to heal or access the benefits available in the society is another compounding factor. Both of these conditions generally lead to *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome*. To that end, there are several signs of PTSS in the human body, including but not limited to: feelings of hopelessness, depression, a general self-destructive outlook, extreme feelings of suspicion towards the perceived negative motivations of others, and violence against self or others. Noteworthy symptoms of PTSS include learned helplessness, literacy deprivation, distorted self-concept, and aversion to the following: members of one’s own identified cultural/ethnic group; the mores and customs associated one’s own identified cultural/ethnic heritage; and the physical characteristics of one’s own identified cultural/ethnic group (Degruy, 2017). However, PTSS is not without critique. Kendi (2016) asserts that the effects of slavery do not necessarily undermine the mental or physical condition of Blacks today; rather, slavery helps to embolden our resiliency and quest for freedom. In this regard, slavery has made opportunities presented to Blacks, not Black behavior, inferior (Kendi, 2016). Notwithstanding, Degruy (2017) and Kendi (2016) agree there is an undeniable relationship between the bigotry of slavery and racist policies today.

Breathe, Baby, Breathe: Clearing the Way for the Emotional Emancipation of Black People documents the visceral responses to the frequent police killings of unarmed Black people and other injustices deriving from racism. The authors contend that African American protesters march, petition, and legislate, but until they confront and diligently work to overcome the lie of Black inferiority, they will not change society or the systems within (Grills, Aird, & Rowe, 2016). Grills, Aird, and Rowe (2016) recommend that in order to promote racial justice, the Black

community must address the root cause of racial injustice and the psychological impact on people within and outside of the Black community. Furthermore, they argue that the fallacy of Black inferiority often motivates biases against African Americans. This leads to discrimination in almost every facet of life, including but not limited to: criminal justice, housing access, job placements, healthcare, and even self-determination. The self-actualization process of being Black, often referred to as *nigrescence*, comes with preexisting negative connotations (Cross, 1971, 1991).

DECOLONIAL EDUCATION AS A FORCE OF ACTIVISM

[Undergraduate Student]: *In elementary school, we had an assembly where presenters would come in with a huge Banana Snake and the teachers told us all to yell "I'm Black and I'm proud." Every time we had that assembly, all of us would be excited to experience those two things but at the time it did not occur to most why that was so important. For me however, I knew it gave me a sense of belonging and self-love.*

[University Professor]: *I distinctly remember being on a Transformative Black Education course where I was exposed to pre-colonial history and it changed my life. It was the first time that I studied about Black achievements in contradistinction to colonization. I felt so much pride knowing about Black history unrelated to Whiteness, colonialism, and slavery.*

Our own decolonial self-actualizations were created through moments of empowerment and pride. It is evident in both of our narrative snapshots that these were also moments of transformation. To that end, education and schooling have the power to transform citizenry (Freire, 1970/2000). Critical education is generated by a collective effort as a site of resistance. This notwithstanding, hooks (1994) asserts that this is only possible when teachers and students seek self-actualization by way of delving into our personal histories and introspective identities (Sarma, 2019). This is especially true for decolonial educational frameworks found in history and social science disciplines. History and social science [sociology, gender studies, criminal justice, anthropology, political science, geography, psychology, etc.] address controversial issues in society, from “climate change and migration, to access to education and healthcare, to big data, and much more” (Campaign for Social Sciences, 2016, p. 4). Yet, whereas these critical subjects foster critical thinking and solicit a variety of perspectives (Olsen, 2005), the K-16 educational system typically places more value mathematics and science classes. This is due, in part, to the marketization and standardization of U.S. curricula. Additionally, this can also be confirmed via pay disparities among university faculty (Jaschik, 2016), high-stakes assessments in K-12⁶ schools (Kennedy & Clark, 2015), and the 21st century focus on S.T.E.M. sciences and careers (*ibid.*).

While we advocate for decolonial education as a mode of praxis and self-actualization, many K-12 school districts avoid controversial issues and subjects. For example, the 2014 shooting death of Michael “Mike” Brown in Ferguson, Missouri serves as an exigent example when local schools banned classroom conversations about racial injustice, police brutality, and the *Black Lives Matter* protestors (Crouch, 2014). More recently, in 2018, a Wisconsin school district banned classroom conversations on “White privilege” (Johnson, 2018). These conversations are likely avoided due to illogical theories of colorblindness – meaning the avoidance of racial difference, administrative pressures, and today’s widespread political division. This avoidance of debate serves to protect White fragility and ignores the needs of students of color. With the most recent 2020 uprising in over the deaths of Walter Wallace, Jr. (Chavez, 2020), George Floyd (Murphy, 2020), Ahmaud Arbery (McLaughlin, 2020), Breonna Taylor (Costello & Duvall, 2020), and Tony McDade (Deliso, 2020), these global protests showcase a tremendous need for critical conversations in classroom spaces. Thus, this article has relevance for U.S. schools as the wounds of the country’s racialized past are re-emerging. As we just recently ushered in the 400th year since U.S. slavery in Virginia in 1619, there is much to explore in the context of decolonial education frameworks (Wiggin, 2018). Considering that the perils of American slavery and racism are still evident in the U.S. over 400 years later, the relevance of this article is especially timely considering the recent resurgence in the media’s reporting of racial injustice in the U.S.

We maintain that critical approaches in education need to address historical inaccuracies and assimilationist narratives in curricula. Irrefutably, educational discourse in the U.S. propagates inaccurate histories (Loewen, 1995; Nieto & Bode, 2008). European hegemony found in textbooks often limits access to multicultural perspectives (Gramsci, 1999; Dei, 2003, 2012; Nieto & Bode, 2008). To that end, many of today’s students fail to make important historical connections (PennLive Editorial Board, 2011). For example, according to the *National Assessment of Education Progress* [NAEP], only 18% of U.S. eighth graders are proficient in history (Nation’s Report Card, 2014). One of the most startling results from a 2011 poll revealed that only 2% of U.S. twelfth graders could identify the social issue surrounding the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, which was the landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision that banned racially segregated schooling (PennLive Editorial Board, 2011). Historical incompetence is a foundational limitation when discussing contemporary issues.

⁶ K-12 describes kindergarten through high school education [typically ages 5-18 years old].

Across U.S. schools, African American contributions are often limited to slavery and the Civil Rights Movement. While these are notable moments in U.S. history, this widely ignores triumphant moments in Black history, such as pre-colonial African history, the Harlem Renaissance, Rosewood, Tulsa's Black Wall Street of the 1920s, etc. The thwarted misconceptions regarding the contributors and malingers of history have unequivocally shaped systems of power in the U.S. Unfortunately, this has been heightened by the standardization and marketization of curricula in the 20th and 21st centuries. According to Listyna, Lavadenz, and Nelson (2004):

As a direct consequence of this political climate, public schools are being inundated with pre-packaged and teacher-proof curricula, standardized tests, and accountability schemes...many of them have been proven in the past to be unsuccessful. (p. 5)

Considering that today's academic climate is situated within a "post-truth era" (American Educational Research Association, 2019), education is important in disentangling cultural and oppositional truths from engrained social, religious, and political ideologies. Much of the curricula is sentimentalized and ignores the inextricable impacts of race and bigotry in American history (Zinn & Steffoff, 2009).

Research shows that children form diverse opinions about the world starting in early childhood (Zeece, 1997). It is also consistently confirmed in research that teaching multiculturalism can provide many benefits for children, including both students of color and White students (Martin, 2013). To that end, Chapman-Hilliard and Adams-Bass (2016) suggest that providing people of color with a historical and comprehensive view of history can aid in psychological liberation and facilitate mental health. And whereas statues and monuments are being pulled down around the world amidst the recent *Black Lives Matter* protests of 2020 (Ebrahimji & Moshtagian, 2020), there is still much work to do in relation to disentangling systems of power in classroom pedagogy.

According to UNESCO, education should be a means to empower children and adults alike to become active participants in the transformation of their societies (Role of Education, 2017). Foshay (1991) similarly notes, "the one continuing purpose of education, since ancient times, has been to bring people to as full a realization as possible of what it is to be a human being" (p. 227). Moreover, critical theorists such as Dei (2003, 2012) and Freire (1970/2000, 1973) have also highlighted the humanistic power of critical pedagogy in transforming citizenry. As such, in the discussion that follows, we disentangle two concepts that inform decolonial educational frameworks: critical thinking and praxis, and education as a tool of empowerment and force of change.

DISCUSSION

We engage in research that explores educational equity and inequity from a critical lens. As two Women of African Descent in different roles in the academy, this autoethnography explores our own intersectional identities in relation to retrospective educational experiences (Crenshaw, 1991). By doing so, we utilize collaborative critical autoethnography as a form of resistance by recasting our own K-16 educational experiences. More specifically, we highlight our epistemological pathways of *knowing* and *understanding* through the lens of decoloniality. To embrace decolonial learning, education should be marked by self-directed learning and egalitarian democratic participation in a pedagogical environment. One precursor to this is the importance of critical thinking and praxis, which are discussed in the following subsection.

Critical Thinking and Praxis

[Undergraduate Student]: *Taking social science courses, I have been learning and unpacking the origins of U.S history, its laws and economy and how it translates to issues we see today. Most of the people I meet in college are outraged about current issues we see today but cannot gather those thoughts and ideas and put them into action to make change.*

[University Professor]: *I learned about Native Americans in elementary school. I grew up in the Great Plains Midwest, so we always did a specified unit on the LaCroix and Sioux Native American tribes. But we still learned about Christopher Columbus! It was not until I read "Lies My Teacher Told Me" that I had any concept of educational propaganda. This was a required reading in an undergraduate education course, and we had to critically think about the falsification of history. It was then that I realized that my K-12 social studies experience had, in a way, failed me. I realized that my elementary experience provided a failed attempt at multiculturalism. Even with Native American acknowledgment, they still taught us the lie!*

We find decolonial education inextricably helpful in our self-actualization process of race, gender, and identity. Through history and social sciences classes, like Women and Gender Studies, Africana Studies, psychology, sociology, etc., we better understand the role of U.S. colonialism in social stratification. Thus, we are able to self-actualize and reimagine our experiences through decolonial lenses. We attribute this to the one essential component of decolonial education: *critical thinking/inquiry*. Teaching and learning in traditional school contexts is often repressive of critical pedagogy and inquiry (Freire, 1970/2000; hooks, 1994). This has been compounded with the recent marketization of education via standardized assessments. Considering that critical dialogue is the bedrock

for educational praxis, there is a need to examine the relationship between identity and self-actualization for students of color. The insidious ways that education continues to reify gender and racial disparities requires critical thinking and inquiry from both students and teachers. This proves especially important for African American students since many teachers implicitly project deficit ideologies (Irvine, 1990). Yet, Mignolo and Walsh (2018) attribute critical reflecting and analyzing as ongoing and essential practices for decoloniality. While we acknowledge that critical thinking is present in other disciplines, the intersection of history, social science, and identity formation is paramount.

Giroux (1997) critiques the “death of history” phenomenon and suggests that many educational scholars fail to believe historical concepts are insightful for the future. As noted in our autoethnographic narratives above, we observed the tangible relevance of decolonial education in our lives today. Memories from childhood and early education shaped our present understandings of race and identity. As such, Giroux (1997) further asserts, “to ignore history represents an assault on thinking itself” (p. 5). Since education undoubtedly shapes our ideas about race, class, gender and systems of inequality and privilege (Wiggan, 2011), there is much to be discussed in relation to education’s role in shaping citizenry.

Critical thinking is especially important in the current educational climate that celebrates rote memorization, standardization, and rudimentary learning (Smith & Szymanski, 2013). In that same vein, many researchers today fear that critical thinking is a dissipating skill (Willingham, 2007). Katz (2014) describes the toxic culture of education and asserts that the educational system is so focused on grades and rudimentary testing, that students are afraid to learn. In relation to critical thinking, hooks’ (2010) *Teaching Critical Thinking* notes:

Sadly, children’s passion for thinking often ends when they encounter a world that seeks to educate them for conformity and obedience only. Most children are taught early on that thinking is dangerous. (p. 8)

In Katz’ (2014) estimation, since the passage of high-stakes standardized assessments, such as *No Child Left Behind*, *Common Cores State Standards*, and *Race to the Top* federal initiatives, we have perpetuated a false sense of failure in our schools.

Critical thinking is a process that requires analysis and reflection in order to reach conclusions. Only through analysis and self-reflection are we able to analyze the imperative needs of our communities and ourselves. In this sense, critical thinking is less concerned with correctness, rather the process. According to the *Foundation for Critical Thinking* (2017) there are six developmental stages of becoming a critical thinker, including the unreflective, challenged, beginning, practicing, advanced, and master stages. Considering the developmental stages of critical thinking, it is apparent that it requires diligence and practice. Thus, it is important for teachers to embed critical thinking into classroom curricula. In this sense, Freire (1970/2000) posits the value of *critical pedagogy* and *critical dialogue*. According to Freire’s (1973) *Education for Critical Consciousness* and *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970/2000), transformative social change is only possible through dialogue, critical thinking, and critical questioning. Whereas many contemporary societies favor “mutism” or the silence of oppressed groups as a form of social control, critical dialogue and questioning solicits social change. Giroux (1997) likewise supports Freire’s (1970/2000) theories of dialogue and stresses the importance of relationship building through critical thinking and democratized education. Yet, today’s educational system inaccurately elevates positivism and places minimal value on student perspectives and meaning-making (Giroux, 1997). Although this study is exploratory and introspective in nature, many of our autoethnographic accounts of educational praxis required an acute self-awareness that hinged on critical thinking and inquiry. As such, educational praxis is discussed in more detail in the next subsection.

Education as a Tool of Empowerment and Force of Change

[Undergraduate Student]: *Many of my friends have not been through the stage of hurt, anger and confusion until college because of the lack of information given to them in grade school. Because I had that opportunity early on, coupled with what I am learning in college today, I am able to effectively make change in my community. If more elementary, middle and high schools across our nation created or provided a space for critical thinking and exploring, there would be much more progress.*

[University Professor]: *I first learned in-depth about Afrocentricity in college. I read Molefi Asante’s work and being so intrigued by the concept of Blackness, power, and self-liberation. I later took an Education as a Self-Healing Power class in graduate school and became a scholar in Afrocentric theory and education. Within the Black community, however, Afrocentricity is a politicized word. I quickly realized that not everyone who was Black was Afrocentric. I expected White people not to embrace it, but I was not prepared for Black people to distance themselves from the term. This was also one of my first self-actualizations of internalized hatred. I was (and still am) baffled sometimes at people’s disdain for the term “Afrocentricity,” because this term has brought tremendous healing to my life.*

We found hope and healing in acknowledging racial pride and invoking self-love. In both of our narratives, we found sources of healing in transformative educational courses. Yet, for many people dedicated to decolonial and critical framing, the reach of these courses needs to be extended. Freire asserts that this is not coincidence, but rather a quintessential byproduct of education’s initial design.

Freire's (2016) *Pedagogy in Process* contends:

The culture of the colonized was a reflection of their barbaric way of seeing the world. Culture belonged only to the colonizers. The alienating experience of colonial education was only counteracted for the colonized at those moments when, in an urge for independence, they rejected some of its aspects. (p. 8)

Similarly, hooks' (2010) *Teaching Critical Thinking* asserts:

Since there has not been a radical transformation of education at its roots, education as the practice of freedom is still a pedagogy accepted only by individuals who elect to concentrate their efforts in this direction. (p. 27)

This means, as our narratives suggest, that transformative and emancipatory education is often the byproduct of those from oppressed groups who seek alternative ways of knowing. As such, this information is not typically accessible to all students.

While we agree with hooks' (1994), Freire's (1970/2000, 1973), and Giroux's (1997) propositions about critical education and praxis, this autoethnography centers identity and diversity within the learning experience. Since the 21st century has ushered a new milieu for politicized racial oppression, the need for decolonial educational framing is paramount. Interestingly, whereas the framework for this article is centered in decolonial intersectionality, many of our experiences compartmentalized race and gender separately. This supports Grzanka's (2014) notions that intersectionality for Black women is not simply a theory about *identity*, but rather:

... a structural analysis and critique inasmuch as it is primarily concerned with how social inequalities are formed and maintained; accordingly, identities and the policies thereof are the *products* of historically entrenched, institutional systems of domination and violence (p. 10).

In relation to education, researchers Ighodaro and Wiggan (2011) coin the term "curriculum violence" to describe the pervasive psychological damages caused by cultural misinformation and Eurocentric standardization. The duplicitous nature of standardized curricula falsely propagates educational equity without sufficiently interrogating the extent of curricular variance and diversity. As two Women of African Descent, we provided experiences of U.S. educational mismanagement across K-16 schooling along with modes of resistance. Inasmuch, our collective autoethnography provides diverse depictions within decolonial intersectionality, as both student and teacher.

Our narratives also provide evidences of renewed hope and healing from decolonial education, which we believe could spur widespread and systemic change. Ginwright (2016) explains that hope is an important form of political and social resistance, while healing alleviates damages from systemic and structural oppression. Within urban communities of color, teachers, activists and community leaders should use both *hope* and *healing* as approaches to counteract student trauma. In relation to education, the dilution and omission of important racial narratives, also known as *curriculum violence*, has negatively influenced both teachers and students.

Beckett (2014), DeGury (2017), Smith and Patton (2016), and Tokuda (2014) contend that the impact of Black criminalization has long-term effects on psychological and physiological health. Researchers find that present-day violence, poverty, and police-inflicted trauma impact mental and physical health (Tokuda, 2014). These compounding issues have inextricable consequences for education and learning outcomes. Yet, effective solutions have often failed to meet the needs of a nation tarnished by racial distortions and bigotry. Policy makers generally tend to focus on individual communities and failing schools, while ignoring the surrounding environments that create trauma and stress. In that same vein, social justice organizers often focus outwardly on temporary fixes in the community, without acknowledging mental health, anxiety, and depression that thwart communities of color. We believe education plays an integral role in mediating collective healing. Ginwright (2016) proposes using a *collective hope approach*, which includes transformative organizing, restorative justice, healing circles, and mindfulness practices. Here, schools play a vital role in facilitating critical conversations that empower and venerate students of color. Whereas state and national curricula are often standardized, we agree with Freire (2016) and hooks (1994) on the role of dialectic teacher-student and student-student interactions that disrupt bigotry and oppression.

Additionally, there is an abundance of existing research on mindfulness and restorative justice in schools (Zenner, Herrnleben-Kurz, & Walach, 2014). Researchers are now beginning to investigate the usefulness of mindfulness with helping communities of color process internal trauma (Seaman, 2015). There needs to be a more concentrated focus on policies that create and *sustain* productive living and learning conditions, as well as the psychological and spiritual mechanisms of positive meditation and mindfulness. Giroux's (1997), Freire's (1973, 2016), and hooks' (1994) research supports these notions. When reflecting on our own autoethnographic narratives, we retrospectively ponder the endless possibilities for healing if our schooling experiences had facilitated these important decolonial conversations much earlier. While we had parents who provided initial guidance and

college classes that further expanded our worldviews on race, gender, and intersectionality, we believe these opportunities are important for younger students as well.

CONCLUSION

In *Teaching to Transgress*, hooks (1994) emphatically asserts that the educational is inextricable from the personal (Sarma, 2019). Our collaborative critical autoethnography highlights the importance of this assertion. In our reflections on past schooling experiences, our collective understandings of race were inseparable from personal moments of “self-actualization” (p. 24). Yet, while hooks (1994) shares insights and critical reflections as an intervention to “counter the devaluation of teaching” (p. 10), we suggest that the U.S. teaching field has maintained enormous power through the ways in which knowledge is subversively controlled in schools. This is most evident in the avoidance of critical discussions and the omission of non-dominant perspectives from curricula (Johnson, 2018; Loewen, 1995). hooks further suggests that transformative education is made possible through expanded and engaged pedagogy; however we suggest that curricula are central to this discussion as well. Thus, in an effort to combat both the standardization of U.S. curricula and sterilization of research discourse, this autoethnography offers evidence for the transformative power of decolonial education through the lens of lived participants.

The above collaborative critical autoethnography provides reflections from an undergraduate student and university professor, both of whom are Women of African Descent. Our use of autoethnography contributes to existing debates on race, education, and social justice by introspectively exploring how institutional racism manifests in personal educational experiences. In this regard, we suggest the requirements for transformative education should expand beyond classroom pedagogy, as hooks (1994) suggests, to also include state and national curricula. In fact, our collaborative critical autoethnography expressively highlights that course material, not necessarily teaching style, has been most transformative in our own educational experiences. This is an important observation to note. We hope this discussion will expand future discourse on transformative education to also include an interrogation of course material and curriculum content.

Our narratives ponder past K-16 schooling experiences and education’s role in being a divider or equalizer in American society. These rich cultural considerations help to inform existing research on decolonial frameworks and educational praxis while offering an expanded milieu for racial awareness in the 21st century U.S. Using decoloniality as our lens, we establish that American society has impelled race and gender disparities in many ways, including education. Considering that education is one of the major institutions that shape American lives, it is important to reconsider effective classes that help students better understand their social conditions. From our experiences, decolonial education has helped us to better understand social inequality and oppression. When taught critically, education fosters critical thinking/inquiry and allows students to begin personal praxis (Olsen, 2006; Freire, 1973). It is important for students to understand the longstanding history of colonial stratification, including but not limited to: slavery, slave codes, vagrancy laws, lynching, Jim Crow laws, restrictive housing, eugenics, mass incarceration, gentrification, the War on Drugs, and police brutality, in order to recognize its compounding effects today. With today’s resurgence of racism and political bigotry, decolonial education and empowerment prove increasingly paramount for African American students.

hooks (1994) argues that the classroom, “with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility” (p. 207). As such, our collaborative critical autoethnography suggests that educational settings provide enormous opportunities to explore institutional systems rooted in race and racism. Yet, these critical opportunities are strategically made less visible through the standardization of school curricula. Whereas many critical courses [such as Women’s and Gender Studies, Africana Studies, etc.] are typically not introduced until college, the topics of culture, gender, race, politics, psychology, sociology, criminal justice, etc. are important for all students, even at the K-12 level. Considering that education has the power to transform citizenry, this is an important area to explore.

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Comment Piece

Creating Sites of Resistance

Tania Cañas ^{1*}

¹ *University of Melbourne, AUSTRALIA*

*Corresponding Author: tania.canas1@gmail.com

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“There is not occupation of territory on the one hand and independence of persons on the other. It is the country as a whole, its history, its daily pulsation that are contested, disfigured, in the hope of a final destruction. Under these conditions, the individual’s breathing is an observed, an occupied breathing. It is a combat breathing. From this point on, the real values of the occupied quickly tend to acquire a clandestine form of existence. In the presence of the occupier, the occupied learns to dissemble, to resort to trickery.” - Franz Fanon, *Dying Colonialism* (1994, p.65)

German playwright Bertolt Brecht writes and was later quoted by Cuban Nueva Trova musician Silvio Rodríguez in the opening to his song *Sueño con serpientes*: “There are men¹ who struggle for a day and they are good. There are men who struggle for a year and they are better. There are men who struggle many years, and they are better still. But there are those who struggle all their lives: these are the indispensable ones.”² Those that struggle all their lives, to borrow Brecht’s phrasing, occupy modes of resistance that largely occur clandestinely in relation to dominant discourse. They do not necessarily fit within dominant understandings of what it means to take public action, initiate interventions or call for social change. Creating sites of resistance means to interrogate the usual markers of resistance in relation to social-structural change. The piece seeks to reframe usual readings on what constitutes social change action, in particular from the perspective of the marginal bodies that by the very nature of their structural marginality, necessitate alternative forms of navigation. These differences might even, in some instances, be read by dominant discourse as complacent. In an article on experiential-based refugee campaigns and the performance of humanitarianism (Cañas, 2016) I argued that advocacy campaigns for social change that reconstructed and restaged isolated incidents for temporary occupation of particular socio-political identities (such as ‘standing in the shoes of refugees’) often relied on the re-centering of the privileged body. These campaigns framed the experience of refugees and others in temporary experiments that actually silenced the voices of those who are really experiencing these conditions on a daily basis. Rather than devaluing (the many communities and peoples with) alternative forms of *change performances*, creating sites of resistance seeks to acknowledge and value the daily, long-term strategic, generational, innovative and resourceful forms of resistance such bodies undertake. This is about how groups must organize and mobilize differently within movements of socio-political change; primarily for the global north resistance struggles of the marginal.

Creating sites of resistance begins with the premise that we exist within historically informed, ongoing unequal sites of representation and interpretation. As Sylvia Wynter (2015) describes, colonialism brought us into a singular, dominant field of representation; crucially however, it didn’t position us all equally. These relations form an ongoing set of unequal power-relations which constitute what Anibal Quijano (2000) and Walter D. Mignolo (2007)

¹ Please note the gendered language of the quote.

² The song “In praise of Fighters”, from the play “The Mother”, 1930

describe as a *colonial matrix of power*³. This dynamic is further located by Aileen Moreton-Robinson, in regards to the invention of Australia as nation-state; along with its associated narratives and mechanisms of control invested in dispossession, domination and a ‘white possessive logic’ (2015: xii). Therefore, any given exchange exists *within* and because of this matrix of power; and any given exchange is a microcosm of this reality. Despite this, there exists at the site of encounter, even within an oppressive structure, a potentiality for navigational creativity, particularly from the position and place of ‘marginality’ (hooks, 1990: 342). It is in the marginal, as Linda Tuhiwai Smith suggests, that we might find ‘spaces of resistance and hope’ (1994: 4).

In *Marginality as a Site of Resistance* (1990) Bell hooks centers lived experience, of those at the margins, as ‘a site radical possibility’ (1990: 341)⁴. Important to note here is the term ‘possibility’. That is to say, though lived experience is essential for a radical possibility in creating sites of resistance, sites of resistance are not created by ontological being alone. Lived experience informs awareness but awareness is not always consciousness⁵. Similarly, not all sites of encounter are sites of resistance. Sites of encounter need to be *made* sites of resistance. They do not happen automatically but consciously, with agency, and in praxis. ‘It is a space I choose’ writes hooks (1990: 343). In this way, sites of resistance are those that exercise an agency and accountability to our collective selves and community. Those taking up these sites refuse to settle on using the diversity discourse for individual entrepreneurial pursuits that – even in difference and often because of⁶ – only serve to validate whiteness. Sites of resistance as a framework, articulates the dangers of limiting discourse to representation and lived-experience, whilst negating fields of interpretation. Sites of resistance assert that there is a difference between not only who can speak, but *how* one can speak. In other words, we can tell our stories, but not theorise about them; we can speak but not translate (to research, stage etc.); we can self-express but not self-determine. “Tell me your story. Only do not speak in the voice of resistance” (hooks, 1990: 343).

Where sites of encounter seek utopian ideals of equal dialogue, sites of resistance are aware that transparent dialogue cannot exist within the matrix of power. “Subordinate people do not have the privilege of explicitness, the luxury of transparency, the presumptive norm of clear and direct communication, free and open debate on a level playing field that the privileged take for granted” (Conquergood, 2013: 34). To understand this is to begin to understand how exchange, as a power-dynamic, must be re-calibrated in order to turn that site of encounter into a site of resistance (Cañas, 2017). In *Relational Aesthetics*, Nicolas Bourriaud writes, “producing a form is to invent possible encounters, receiving a form is to create the conditions for exchange” (2002: 23). He highlights the limitations in receiving pre-determined forms, yet at the same time the potential to challenge the conditions of that very exchange. It is this agency in navigation, which is what Fanon describes as a ‘trickery’ (1994: 65), Aída Huardo as a form of ‘urban guerrilla’ (Hurtado, 1989) and James C. Scott as ‘hidden transcripts’ (1990: xiii).⁷ Interestingly, these descriptors indicate that navigation consists of moments of political activity that, though spoken to power, are not always detectable to dominant consciousness. Trickery, hidden transcripts and urban guerrilla strategies are modalities of resistance that are in continual movement, visible at some points, invisible at others, playful. In this way sites of resistance are not always the most overt or the most obvious. These seemingly smaller, quieter movements mean that such sites do not actively rely or seek validation from dominant consciousness. Sites of resistance offer an understanding of resistance to domination, whilst being implicated within domination. Sites of resistance do not confound adaptability with assimilation nor conflate moments of strategic performative whiteness as internalised whiteness. Code-switching becomes a strategy rather than weakness. As Steve Biko describes, “I think it is possible to adapt to a given situation precisely because you have got to live it, and you have got to live with it every day. But adapting does not mean that you forget” (1987: 114).

Sites of resistance are generative sites. There is no one way to create sites of resistance as there are a multitude of responses in accordance with varying configurations. These changes depending on context, project, time and even shifts in our own socio-positionalities. In the article *Before Dispossession, or Surviving it* Agnie Morill, Eve Tuck and the Super Futures Haunt Collective assert that “resistance is not a consequence to power but simultaneous to power” (2016: 6). They suggest here that resistance does not have to merely be understood as a direct, yet secondary, consequence of existing terms of enunciation; “resistance is not simply bodies or events articulated against power” (2016: 6). Sites of resistance necessitate creativity. They require unconventional approaches, thinking, manoeuvres that speak outside of the terms of enunciation even as we exist within it. Sites of resistance

³ As Patrick Wolfe (2006) describes, “settler colonisers come to stay: invasion is a structure not an event” (p.388)

⁴ Writers such as Gloria Anzaldúa (2012) through *Borderlands theory* and Du Bois (2005) through *dual consciousness* also describe lived-experience as sites in which to develop thinking, writing and creating.

⁵ A consciousness shaped by social positions (Freire, 1996; Du Bois, 2005 & Anzaldúa, 2012).

⁶ Judith Butler and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak articulate in *Who Sings the Nation State?: Language, politics, belonging* (2011) in relation to pluralism and statehood “...pluralism which, as we know, reinstalls homogeneity only after a little complexity is admitted into the fold” (p.184). Moreton-Robinson (2015) also warns of the discursive function of differentiation.

⁷ James Scott (1990) describes ‘hidden transcripts’ as contestations to subordination that are “behind the scenes” as a form of “offstage dissent to the official transcript of power relations” (p. xi).

create and combine in unexpected, sometimes even joyful ways, towards unique manifestations of resistance. Sites of resistance is a framework that values a holistic, daily, struggle⁸ and does not lure one into valuing only those visible to dominant discourse⁹. Furthermore as creative and generative locations, sites of resistance function outside of the entrapments of identity politics as wounded attachments¹⁰ (Brown, 1995). Creativity can dissociate with this dynamic by breaking repetition and seeking alternative configurations with other oppressed, marginalised, and colonised peoples. With every site of encounter comes the simultaneous question, ‘how might this become a site of resistance?’ even if, for that moment, it means inaction as action, or a refusal methodology (Tuck and Yang, 2014). Sites of resistance presents an ongoing struggle that rethinks protest in the context of colonial and western ‘occupied breathing’ yet one in which actuates a continuing “site of creativity and power” (hooks, 1990: 343). The sites of resistance framework encompasses direct and indirect, overt and covert, nuanced navigational acts of resistance as part of historical and continual struggle.

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⁸ I use the term ‘struggle’ within the framework of Latin American and diaporic Latinx discourse of *lucha*. In this sense the term positions itself differently to a passive or fatalistic sense of ‘struggle’.

⁹ And thus not dependent upon dominant discourse validation, even if it manifests as rejection.

¹⁰ Wendy Brown (1995) describes ‘wounded attachments’ as an identity which “presents itself as a self-affirmation [but] now appears as the opposite, as predicated on and requiring its sustained rejection by the ‘hostile external world’” (1995, p.70).

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Comment Piece

COVID-19 and the (Extra)ordinariness of Crisis: Lessons from Homeless Migrants

Charlotte Sanders ^{1*}

¹ *University of Portsmouth*, UNITED KINGDOM

*Corresponding Author: charlotte.sanders@port.ac.uk

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The 16th of March 2020 signalled an abrupt rupture in the rhythms of ordinary life. In the months that have passed since the UK first went into lockdown individuals, families and communities across the country have struggled to remake life in the impasse, navigating the discomfiting and unfamiliar feeling of life being suddenly suspended, unpredictable, and precarious. COVID-19 has imbued everyday life with the visceral experience of crisis, a heightened sense of risk to life itself which the seams of the normal cannot hold. It is precisely this ‘unusual’ sense of precarity and of unpredictability, and its juxtaposition to the security and knowability of the ordinary, that renders COVID-19 a crisis event. Put simply, the crisis lies in the *extraordinariness* of it all.

Yet, scholars working across feminist theory, queer theory and necropolitics (Berlant, 2011; Butler, 2006; Mayblin et al., 2019; Mbembe, 2019; Puar, 2017) have increasingly problematised understandings of crises as staccato, temporary, abnormal and spectacular moments of disjuncture from the everyday. Such work has shifted focus away from privileged experiences of time and of ab/normality, showing how thinking from the positions of marginalised individuals and communities underscores that the everyday itself can be a site of crisis – of perpetual *crisis as normal* (Berlant, 2011). For migrants experiencing homelessness in the UK, I argue, life is always already lived as precarious, unpredictable and suspended. Indeed, in the context of a UK immigration apparatus that is increasingly hostile towards them (JCWI, 2020a; Richmond-Bishop & Bailey, 2020), everyday life for homeless migrants *is always already a threat to life itself*. How, then, might our conceptualisations of COVID-19 as a crisis work to illuminate these realities, both intellectually and politically?

THE HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT & UN/BEARABLE LIFE

Current data as to the number of migrants experiencing homelessness in the UK is both incomplete and unreliable. In part, this is a consequence of the inability of many homeless migrants to access statutory support.¹ In 2012, then Home Secretary Theresa May announced the UK (Conservative)² government’s plan to solve the

¹ Whilst the scope of this paper is limited, it is crucial to note that the category of ‘homeless migrants’ cannot sufficiently bear the multiple experiences of migrancy and homelessness in the UK. Here, a brief introduction to the state’s ‘Hostile Environment’ policies and their impact on non-EEA and EEA migrants provides an initial, if incomplete, in-road into understanding the scale of the crisis already shaping homeless migrant lives at the point of the pandemic.

² It is important to note that whilst this was the first systematic implementation of a ‘Hostile Environment’ strategy, the concept had already been introduced in May 2007 by then New Labour Immigration Minister Liam Byrne (Travis, 2007).

'problem' of immigration by explicitly encouraging the unbearability of life in the UK for migrants; stating: 'The aim is to create, here in Britain, a really hostile environment for illegal immigrants' (JCWI, 2020a). Whilst the state claimed to be targeting 'illegal' immigrants, the Hostile Environment's reach has stretched far beyond that scope, with subsequent government policies broadening each year the number of migrants ineligible for statutory support. Today, all migrants from non-EEA countries who have not secured Indefinite Right to Remain in the UK are subject to what is known as a No Recourse to Public Funds, or NRPF, condition (Migration Observatory, 2020). The NRPF condition effectively forecloses access to welfare support, including Universal Credit (under which housing and jobseekers' benefits are now managed), and even admission to refuges for women fleeing abuse (JCWI, 2020b). For EEA migrants, the politics of in/eligibility is more complex, but from December 2013 the state has implemented various measures with the explicit goal of restricting EEA access to the welfare state (DWP, 2016). For example, whilst EEA migrants in employment are technically able to access the benefits system, the requirement to pass a 'Habitual Residence Test' and to provide proof of tax and National Insurance contributions (note that migrants are more likely to be coerced into uncontracted and exploitative forms of labour) forms an immense barrier that has been amplified further by the recent shift to Universal Credit (Boobis et al., 2019). After Brexit, these barriers are set to increase, leaving many more individuals subject to NRPF conditions.

Tellingly, 67% of the UK homelessness/immigration organisations surveyed by *Crisis* stated that migrant homelessness had risen between 2018 and 2019 (Boobis et al., 2019: 7). Research in London showed that in 2019 around *half* of the capital city's population of rough sleepers were non-UK nationals (ibid.: 21). That non-UK nationals make up around *one tenth* of the British population throws into stark relief the particular vulnerability of migrants to homelessness in contemporary Britain. In cutting off migrants from the support systems they need to survive, the state necessarily produces a racialised politics of precarity, which exposes migrants to harm in ways disproportionate to those constructed as 'natives'. Yet, homelessness also makes resolving one's immigration status – that is organising documentation, keeping track of appointments, and seeking necessary legal advice – extremely difficult (ibid.: 17). Indeed, homelessness organisations across the UK are increasingly challenged by the lack of options available to them in supporting migrants out of homelessness, just as the number of migrants approaching their services increases year-on-year (ibid.: 38). Finally, that Home Office decision-making processes are often excruciatingly long – taking years rather than months (ibid.: 42) – exacerbates the normalisation of crisis in the lives of homeless migrants.

Hostile Environment policies have and continue to mark migrant populations for harm, exposing increasing numbers of migrants to long term homelessness and destitution. In denying access to multiple forms of support, these policies directly target the viability of life in the UK, with the aim of discouraging settled and thriving futures for migrants. Indeed, in May 2020 the High Court found the rigidity of NRPF to be in contravention of Article 3 of the Human Rights Act, namely the prohibition of inhuman or degrading treatment (Shelter Blog, 2020; see also EHRC, 2018). The 'everyday', then, becomes a site of power through which the state manages 'difference', leaving particular individuals vulnerable to crisis in ways that exhaust their capacities to remake life – or even, to *bear* life, in Britain. It is this exhaustion that renders the Hostile Environment a mechanism for 'slow death' – a concept that Lauren Berlant offers for interrogating how the condition of being 'worn out by the activity of life-building' (2011: 44) functions to mark non-normative populations for death through the more subtle and insidious modes of violence which have categorised neoliberal modernity. Indeed, these connections between immigration policy, migrant precarity and population management have been made even more explicit in the government's recent announcement that rough sleeping may soon be considered *grounds for deportation* for some migrants (Grierson, 2020).

FAST DEATH/SLOW DEATH: COVID-19 & THE HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT

So what is at stake for homeless migrants in constructions of 'crisis' as extra/ordinary? In March 2020, at the beginning of 'lockdown', the British government announced the *Everyone In* scheme, which has housed around 29,000 rough sleepers³ in emergency accommodation with the expressed aim of 'protecting some of the most vulnerable people in society from COVID-19' (Gov.uk, 2020). Yet, what this rhetoric of 'protecting' homeless individuals' obscures are the very policies that made those individuals' lives so precarious in the first place, particularly rough sleepers who are also migrants. Letting this go uninterrogated risks our own complicity in the normalisation of suffering prior to COVID-19, and also leaves unquestioned what might happen to marginalised communities 'after' the pandemic has ended. Indeed, thinking of crisis as a complex continuum of experience that 'unfolds' through the ordinary (Berlant, 2011: 10) destabilises the very utility of 'pre', 'during' and 'post' crisis as a temporal taxonomy.

³ This figure also includes some individuals who were being sheltered on a night-by-night basis in hostels, church halls and other venues where isolation was not possible.

Whilst *Everyone In* may be protecting homeless migrants from the immediate death threat of COVID-19 – and in temporarily suspending eligibility criteria for statutory support might even constitute a moment of relief from the ‘crisis ordinary’ (Berlant, 2011: 9) I have described thus far - the extraordinariness of the scheme maintains the status quo that permits the everyday to be a site of slow death, maintained and experienced through the racialised management of access to statutory support, and invisibilised through its very normalisation. Clearly, academic engagement with ‘crisis’ will continue to proliferate as a result of COVID-19, but neglecting to think critically about the assumptions upon which our common-sense (privileged) understandings of crisis rest risks inadvertently obscuring – or even underwriting - state infra/structures of violence. Instead, thinking COVID-19 from the seldom thought positions of those most marginalised in our communities will illuminate the ways that the pandemic crisis is not a break in the normal but rather, as Berlant suggests, ‘an amplification of something [already] in the works’ (ibid.: 10). This is crucial for assuring that our intellectual work remains politically vigilant. More specifically, for homeless migrants this will ensure that combatting the fatal force of COVID-19 does not leave unquestioned the slower risks to life itself that so many face in these hostile times.

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Comment Piece

Living and Working Confined at Home: Boundaries and Platforms during the Lockdown

Elisabetta Risi ^{1*}, Riccardo Pronzato ¹, Guido Di Fraia ¹

¹ IULM University, ITALY

*Corresponding Author: elisabetta.risi@iulm.it

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ABSTRACT

The ubiquity of digital platforms has progressively re-structured everyday life, as individuals are embedded within a structure of permanent connectivity and surveillance. A growing literature is exploring how digital platforms play a fundamental role in consolidating platform capitalism (Srnicek, 2017). Spreading across the production and reproduction of social life, digital platforms have come to significantly re-mediate social relationships and organizational processes. Digital platforms have colonized multiple areas of social life and remodelled social relations. These trends are likely to accelerate due to the COVID-19 emergency. The COVID-19 pandemic constitutes a serious threat to the global economy as containment measures have been imposed to limit human mobility. At the same time, a distinction between essential and non-essential productive activities has been imposed and a new division in labour composition emerged between so called remote working and place-based jobs. In the lockdown context, people experienced the hyper-dependence of sociality on private digital platforms, creating what Van Dijck et al. (2018) call a platform society. Social space, everyday life, and everyday communication have changed. The workplace and the home have converged: the boundaries between leisure time and labour time, the office and the home, have become blurred. For many people, this tendency has meant an increase of their labour time and the necessity to manage multiple social roles at the same time in one location. Indeed, during the coronavirus crisis, many different times, spaces and social roles converged in the home. This period also highlighted again the relevance of digital literacy and of the inequalities connected with the use of digital technologies. Moreover, individuals were forced to act within the affordances of platforms designed and owned by a few private companies.

Keywords: digital platform, COVID19, mediatization

At the beginning of March 2020, Italy was put under lockdown. It was the first country in Europe to implement social distancing and home confinement measures, thereby placing 60 million people in quarantine. To contain the spread of COVID-19, all working activities were shut down aside from essential service industries and citizens were told not to leave their homes other than for non-deferrable and proven health or business motivations. Within a few days, the government obliged most of the people to live 24/7 confined in their houses, either with their families or alone. More than 3 million people had to continue working remotely from home, while another 8 million were not authorised to go to their workplace. Furthermore, for the first time, students, teachers and parents were compelled to deal with e-learning as it was considered the only solution to guarantee the right to education.

Within this scenario, social distancing became a constant feature of everyday life, and home confinement dramatically impacted daily habits and how individuals make sense of their experiences. In particular, social distancing restrictions and the obligation to remain at home affected how individuals perceive their “territories of the self” (Goffman, 1971). As Brooks Gardner and Gronfein (2006) put it, this concept indicates “literal and metaphorical territories that represent defendable personal boundaries”. These “physical and symbolic cultural constructions” (p. 83) act, indeed, as a symbolic threshold that delimit our experiences and perceptions. Given that close physical proximity was allowed only inside the home, while all the other contacts were banned, the physical boundaries of these territories were completely redefined. However, social distancing did not imply the disappearance but a radical transformation and reorganization of social relationships, which were completely mediatized (Fuchs, 2020), with digital platforms that became essential tools to communicate and relate with each other. Following Turkle (2011), individuals were alone (in their homes) together (in and through media platforms).

In the 1970s, Lefebvre (1974) argued that space is not a neutral entity but a social outcome. Lefebvre distinguishes three intertwined levels of space: perceived, conceived and lived, and argues that meaning emerges from the perspectives of the actors in space, as well as from the relations that are situated within the ways in which space is conceived, perceived and lived. Digital platforms - which have been widely used for e-learning, remote work, entertainment, and so forth - have not abolished distances, but rather mediatized them (Couldry and Hepp, 2013). During the lockdown, *deep mediatization* (Hepp, 2019) has permeated almost every aspect of everyday life and even people who had only superficially and partially coped with this process were obliged to deal with the pervasive and ubiquitous technological mediation of their everyday experience.

Digital platforms were necessary for workers that had to continue their profession remotely, as well as for the ones that were confined at home to reconstruct their networks of social relationships. Indeed, human face-to-face communications were transformed in mediated social relationships and the boundaries of the territories of the self were re-imagined and mediatized. Indeed, the otherness could only be reached through digital platforms, while contacts outside the home had to be considered a potential threat.

Thus, social distancing restrictions imposed a sort of *reframing* (Goffman, 1974) of everyday life. Frames are “schemata of interpretation” (Goffman, 1974, p. 21), i.e. the categories through which we interpret our experiences. These categories are used by individuals to reduce the complexity and incertitude of social life, by endowing social order with predictability and providing a background through which everyday activities are rendered readable and meaningful (Misztal, 2001). During the COVID-19 crisis, individuals trespassed the boundaries of their houses by using digital platforms that reshaped social relationships and everyday life. These were required to develop new schemata of interpretations to preserve cognitive order. Digital platforms played a key role in this process as they built new frames within which relational spaces could be perceived, conceived and lived.

Today we live in a platform society (Van Dijck et al., 2018). Indeed, in the last decade, digital platforms have colonised several key areas of social life: from training to communication, from production to logistics, up to institutional practices, and so forth, social relations and organisations processes have been dramatically remodelled. The essential role of these infrastructures clearly emerged during the lockdown, as platforms played a crucial role in performing tasks of public interest. Platform capitalism (Srnicek, 2017) has in fact been certainly reinforced by this period of forced home confinement. As Richard Waters put it in the *Financial Times*: “the forced behavioural change across an entire population is something that Big Tech’s marketing departments couldn’t have dreamt of”.

During the crisis, physical boundaries turned into the ones imposed by social distancing restrictions (the home), while platforms’ affordances emerged as the new boundaries of everyday life. Workers that could continue their activities had to do it through platforms, likewise digital devices were the only means with which students and teachers could continue their activities. Video calls became the main and preferential manner to maintain family relations, while there has been a striking growth in the use of e-commerce platforms (Amazon’s revenues increased by 40% in the April-June period). The “Amazonification of the Planet” (Merchant, 2020) accelerated, as well as the surveillance logics that were already paradigmatic both at the commercial and government level.

As already highlighted, “platforms do not reflect the social: they produce the social structures we live in” (van Dijck, 2018, p. 2), i.e. they intervene in the definition of social relations through forms of connection in which particular cultural norms and sociotechnical logics are embedded and intertwined (van Dijck, 2013), thereby creating symbolic practices and boundaries that delimit specific ways of relating and being together (and of intending them). Thus, platforms are private products that do not merely reproduce pre-existing offline dynamics, but actively shape the construction and management of sociality through their affordances, which constrain the possibilities and forms of relationships between individuals. Affordances can be defined as the “socio-technical architectures” of platforms, which imply their “capacity to shape the agency of human actors” (Caliandro and Gandini, 2017, p. 11). During the lockdown, when citizens had to stay at home and avoid going out, the affordances of the platforms were the boundaries of their territories of the self, i.e. the limits within which sociality could take place and be reconstructed.

An area of social life that has been certainly affected by platforms during the quarantine is work. Apart from workers in the essential service industries, there are two main categories of workers that emerged from this scenario: locked workers - i.e. individuals that were not allowed to work, following sanitary restrictions - and remote workers - i.e. individuals that could continue working from home through digital technologies. The latter category includes those generally defined as “white collar” workers, but also teachers and knowledge workers (e.g. McKercher and Mosco, 2007).

Before the COVID-19 crisis knowledge workers were used to working from different spaces, while most of the white collar workers had to go to their offices. Despite some forms of partial remote working, in fact, at least in the Italian socio-cultural context, the office was considered a necessity for most of the companies. However, since the beginning of the lockdown, it was taken for granted that workers had to immediately adapt to remote working practices, without considering the management and reorganisation of spaces, routines and family relations, which were implied in home confinement restrictions (Fuchs, 2020).

Indeed, in the lockdown life, the home, the workplace and the public spaces have converged in the same space-time continuum. This can be framed within a wider process of flexibilization and digitalisation of capitalist societies that develop an extended and reticular working space (Risi, 2015), and redefine the spheres and boundaries of everyday experience. The ubiquitous presence of platforms, in fact, has progressively re-structured work, entailing an idea of permanent connectivity that has already permeated all the realms of life (Armano et al., 2017)

Today individuals are increasingly understood as self-governing units that can manage themselves and autonomously reach their goals. This is a typical feature of a *performance* society (Boltanski and Chiapello, 1999), i.e. “a society saturated with performances of many and various kinds” (Stark, 2020, p. 2). However, if different performances are generally associated with different places, during the COVID-19 crisis, it appears difficult for remote workers, and especially women, to manage different performances contemporarily, as they have had to remain productive at work, but also to carry out time-consuming activities related to family life.¹ Then, a major concern for remote workers has also been the re-organisation of spaces and the re-compartmentalization of time periods within the same space: the home. During the lockdown, all the realms of social life converged in the same space-time, thus, individuals had to develop new routines and practices to cope with a novel and uncertain scenario. Within this process, platforms surfaced as essential spaces that allowed remote working practices, while modelling and constraining individuals’ activities. Indeed, platforms play a proactive role in the shaping of social life. Platforms intervene (Gillespie, 2015), without being neutral and unbiased, but embedded with specific socio-cultural logics and private interests (e.g. Beer, 2017).

Furthermore, it should be noted that while remote workers had to re-organise their spaces and professional activities, on the other hand, locked workers were obliged not to work. For them, digital platforms meant the possibility to cross the physical boundaries of their territories of self and to re-construct social relations, within the affordances of digital platform, which turned into the new boundaries of everyday life.

To conclude, social spaces and everyday life have dramatically changed in the coronavirus crisis. During the lockdown, the platformization of work and everyday life (Casilli and Posada, 2019) unfolded and the key role of these infrastructures for social life became apparent. The boundaries of the territories of the self were disruptively changed by home confinement restrictions and mediatized by digital technologies, with platforms that allowed individuals to re-construct different realms of social life, although the distinction between different spheres appeared increasingly blurred. Within this scenario, platforms’ affordances became the new boundaries of everyday life.

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¹ This is only one of the gendered components of COVID-19. It should be noted, in fact, that women appear as a category disproportionately affected by the consequences of the pandemic (e.g. Alon et al., 2020): for instance, some commentators consider the coronavirus recession a “pink-collar recession” (e.g. Ribeiro, 2020), as job losses for women have been dramatically higher, while others refers to it as a “shadow pandemic”, given the growth of domestic violence during the lockdown (UN Women, 2020).

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Comment Piece

Gatsby and Stavrogin: The Need for a Modern Saviour

John Carroll ^{1*}

¹ La Trobe University, AUSTRALIA

*Corresponding Author: j.carroll@latrobe.edu.au

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The modern era opens, metaphysically speaking, with *Hamlet* and *Don Quixote*. At the literary frontier, Jesus had already faded from consciousness by the year 1600, and replacements began to appear. Indeed, it is this tectonic shift in focus—in the search for the ideal human being—that best characterises the modern spirit.

Hamlet's first significant encounter is with death, in the form of the ghost of his murdered father. His most powerful love scene takes place in the graveyard reminiscing tenderly to the skull of Yorick, the Court Jester who had played with him as a boy. His one 'felicity', as he calls it, is to die. Hamlet confronts us with the big modern question: 'To be or not to be?' However, his monologue on the subject, the most famous speech in the English language, has nothing to do with the nature of being—of self, or of identity. It is a long meditation on suicide, on whether Hamlet should kill himself.

Hamlet's encounter with death, which has paralysed him, has also emptied him of any capacity for saving illusions. It is apposite that still images of him have tended to portray him pale of face, dressed in black, and holding a human skull. Hamlet illustrates Tolstoy's later dictum that if death becomes meaningless, then so does life.

Don Quixote, who first appeared in public in 1604, two years after *Hamlet*, imagines himself as a knight-errant riding around the world saving damsels in distress, righting wrong, and punishing criminals, and his imagination is so powerful that it drives his life. *I believe, therefore I am!* That his beliefs are delusional does not seem to matter. He takes thirty windmills to be thirty monstrous giants, and attacks them, only to be caught up in one of their sails. His quixotic exploits do not help anybody, and leave him battered and without reward, but undaunted.

Actually, he does help some, and here is the rub of the story. He helps the leisured aristocracy, who stand as proxy for all who dwell in the modern world. They become fascinated by his adventures—and for the very quality in him that they lack, his capacity for life. Don Quixote is the first secular saviour, the first to replace Christ crucified. As Hamlet's shadow self, he is the only man who moves on the threshold of modernity, while the rest of the world looks on, lounging indolently by, lacking passion, cast in the role of decadent tourist. To use the terms of Don Quixote's leading twentieth-century disciple, the great Gatsby, his redeeming quality is an enormous capacity for dreaming.

Don Quixote had posed, at the start of the seventeenth century, the question of whether a modern saviour is possible—the alternative was the chronically depressed Hamlet, in love with death. He posed the further question of how the modern individual may tell the difference between what is true and what illusory. The Don staked his entire way of life on the answer.

Let us consider *Don Quixote* in his modern guise. The scene is set in the summer of 1922 on Long Island, just east of New York City. F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote the story and titled it *The Great Gatsby* (1926). I am most interested in the story's narrator, Nick. What will follow is an exercise in what might be called metaphysical sociology. Nick is a modern type. He strives, suffers, and fails in a singularly modern way.

Nick, like Hamlet, is thirty. The story opens in early summer with him cheerful and optimistic; by the end he is lamenting, ‘Thirty—the promise of a decade of loneliness.’ He had returned from the Great War without aim, drifting east, and drifting through his life. He takes a job selling bonds, for want of anything better to do. Nick can never throw himself whole-heartedly into anything, always finding himself half-engaged, half-detached; half-in, half-out. He plays the role of tourist travelling tepidly through his own life, reflecting whimsically and ruefully as he goes. He admits that he likes to walk up Fifth Avenue and imagine entering the lives of women he passes, for a moment, with them smiling in welcome to him as they enter in through their doors, but he does not follow. He lapses into a half-hearted affair with a female golf champion—he knows she cheats, the one deadly sin in that sport. She dubs him a bad driver.

Everything changes when Nick meets Gatsby, his neighbour on Long Island. Gatsby lives in a magnificent mansion set amidst forty acres of immaculately cut lawn and gardens. He throws extravagant parties to which hundreds flock from all over New York, and further afield, the invited and the uninvited—to be entertained by live musicians through the night, as they feast and carouse as at an ancient Roman saturnalia. There is some parallel with the thousands who flocked to Galilee to hear Jesus teach, and observe his miracles.

Nick is fascinated and infatuated—charmed. Nick, perpetually on edge, within and without, has finally encountered someone who moves. Gatsby, this shadowy Caesar, who attracts rumours like a light-globe attracts moths, is bathed in a magical aura. At one of these parties, Nick finally meets the host, by accident. He does not recognize him. The mysterious stranger has suddenly appeared, as from nowhere, the one who is about to change the world—another Jesus allusion, and they are the same age.

Nick is enchanted by Gatsby’s smile: ‘one of those rare smiles with a quality of eternal reassurance in it’, as if in generous and intimate engagement, making the one he addresses feel singular and important. Mind, Nick quickly adds that Gatsby was just ‘an elegant young rough-neck, a year or two over thirty’, one who chose his words and enunciated them with a formality that verged on the absurd.

Through the course of the story Nick learns the truth about Gatsby. At the age of seventeen, he had changed his name from James Gatz. He invented himself, as if from nothing, filling out the extravagant fantasies of a teenage boy. He had had a Platonic conception of himself—as a perfect form, which he then proceeded to build. Nick is awed by the colossal vitality of the dream, and what he rhapsodizes as Gatsby’s extraordinary gift for hope.

In reality, during the war, Gatsby, as a penniless mid-Westerner in uniform, had met wealthy Daisy and fallen in love with her. She would never marry him, he knew, given his lack of money and background. So, once the war was over, he set about making the money, and fabricating the background. He bought the mansion on the other side of a bay from Daisy’s Long Island house—she was now married to Tom Buchanan. The grand façade (copy of a French *Hôtel de Ville*) hides criminal connections, lies about his past (that he was an Oxford man), and the shady way he made his fortune, bootlegging. There are real books in Gatsby’s imitation Oxford library, but their pages are uncut—the books unread, just there for show.

Gatsby bought the mansion to impress Daisy and threw parties on the off chance she might turn up one night. He himself hardly ever appeared at these parties. When he does finally manage to get Daisy there, with the aid of Nick, he says to her: ‘You always have a green light that burns at the end of your dock.’ This green light is the enchanted symbol that he gazes at across the water, as he stands every evening on the balcony. In this, Gatsby represents everyone, with their all-too-human experience of living in hope rather than fear or despondency.

Nick is enthralled by Gatsby’s capacity to dream—by implication he, Nick, is just a nonentity with little imagination. He surmises that the teenage Gatsby’s teeming reveries provided ‘a promise that the rock of the world was founded securely on a fairy’s wing.’ It is unclear whether this image comes from Nick or Gatsby. The fairy turns into Daisy, whose maiden name was Fay—a derivative from fairy. The fairy may also be Gatsby’s charm, his capacity to create himself out of nothing, extravagantly, magically, until he hits the rock.

Nick learns the depths of fraudulence hidden behind the gorgeous Gatsby mask, but forgives it, for the strength and purity of the dream. Gatsby confesses to Nick that he fears that he is some *nobody*. Tom Buchanan taunts him: ‘Mr Nobody from Nowhere.’ To continue the dynamic ambivalences, in reality Gatsby the Romantic dreamer took Daisy ‘unscrupulously and ravenously’. But Mr Nobody from Nowhere needed to win and possess his dream totally, and forever.

Gatsby lacks any sense of a reality principle. The moment the chill breath of truth hits, the fairy fades away. The most shocking reality in the story is that Daisy is shallow, insipid, and self-centred, more insect than fairy. The emblem of Daisy’s vacuity is that the one time she weeps is at the sight of Gatsby’s shirts, which she finds so beautiful. Later, she carelessly, ruthlessly, and without shedding a tear, lets him take the blame for her bad driving, which has caused an accident that kills her husband’s mistress. Soon after, the mistress’s own unhinged husband, in a fit of mistaken revenge, kills Gatsby.

Nick, who soaks himself in illusion, is clear-sighted about Daisy. It is her voice, he suspects, that is captivating. He refers to her ‘deathless song’—the association with the Sirens, eternally enchanting but deadly for those who are seduced. Gatsby describes the voice as ‘full of money’, with Daisy as the king’s daughter, the princess lounging

inaccessibly high in her castle. Nick speculates: 'I think that voice held him most, with its fluctuating, feverish warmth, because it couldn't be over-dreamed.' At the hub of this story is the desperate need for a dream that is real, or at least not so overblown as to be obviously improbable. Mind, Daisy's 'feverish warmth' weeps over a wardrobe full of shirts.

There are hints that Gatsby is more in love with the fantasy of Daisy than with Daisy herself. Once he shows her the green light on the other side of the bay, that light loses its lustre for him. He wants to fix everything as it used to be, when he first met her, when they spent an intoxicated month together. The scale of unreality is revealed here in this childhood regression. Viewed rationally, Gatsby's dream is pathological, a compensation for what is not, a means for stepping outside adult reality into a fairy-tale fantasy world that can never be. The immensity of his over-dreaming of Daisy projects the parallel immensity of his creation of himself out of nothing.

It is no surprise then that once Gatsby's dream pops, so does he, or as the narrator puts it, at the end: '*Jay Gatsby* had broken up like glass against Tom's hard malice.' The fairy is crushed by the rock. A pitiful empty ruin is all that remains. Virtually no one turns up at Gatsby's funeral.

Let me switch back to Nick himself. He is driven by moods that alternate between angry disgust and gorgeous dreams. For Nick, all the other characters in the story, apart from Gatsby, are horrible—cheats, crooks, the rich who are idle and callous, the poor who are mean and bitter, all alike men and women who have never dreamed, or whose dreams have failed.

Every time the party ends at Gatsby's a sudden emptiness flows from the house. The mansion packed with people having fun points forward to Citizen Kane's Xanadu, a parody of the modern dream of the luxury home—the suburban palace which every man and woman can actually build, to house a fairy-tale life of enchanted meaning made real. The discomfiting implication is that Gatsby is a slightly larger-than-life incarnation of everyone; with a larger capacity to make teenage dreams come true.

The story, as Nick tells it, is a collage of nostalgic inflation and fantasy, strung to a loose thread of what might have actually happened. Dazzled by this gossamer canopy of half-lies—another role for the fairy—the reader is left with little idea of what is true. The narrator is desperate to remain loyal to his own fantasy Gatsby, what Joseph Conrad's Marlow would call 'the nightmare of his choice'. Although: 'I disliked him so much by this time (after the death of Tom's mistress).' Nick, like his predecessor Marlow, has shot the dream down, but he continues to cling to it in spite of his knowledge. For without Gatsby, without the eternal reassurance of his smile, there would be nothing.

Red lights flash over the story. The first is that there is no reality principle. Over-dreaming is doomed. If the dream is too detached from reality, then everything will revert to the void that was in the beginning. The central persona is smashed to bits on the rock of reality, reverting to Mr Nobody from Nowhere, who soon dies. Yet, to go further, what is unredeemably gloomy in the Fitzgerald vision is less the failed dreaming, than that there is no alternative to the Gatsby way. Gatsby is as good as it gets; there is no better. And, if Gatsby is indeed as good as it gets amidst the human squalor, Nick is justified in clinging on to his dream.

Gatsby is drawn to Daisy, in part, because of her very inaccessibility. He knows he can make the wealth, win the prestige, and become somebody—but he recognises this as a false dream. Likewise, Nick is not fooled by Daisy. That the content of the hoping is so over-dreamed, so false to the ideal, doesn't seem to matter—neither Gatsby nor Nick are interested in the content. It is the capacity of a seventeen-year-old boy to conjure up an identity and a life that makes the difference. The dream is the purer for being patently unrealistic. Dreams are serene and radiant; reality is sordid. This is the gospel according to Don Quixote.

There is more at issue than a hollow dream, than a mask covering over an absurd and horrible reality. Daisy's voice plays as a duet with the lights and music flooding the Gatsby mansion, each serenading the other. Gatsby is concert director, as he stands alone on his balcony gazing out across the water, enchanted by the green light. To what is he attempting to tune in?

It is an eternal rhythm he craves, not Daisy herself. She is the chosen medium for his prayer, no more than a meditative device. Specifically, he hears music in her voice. Gatsby's misfortune may be that what he gets is the Sirens, drawing him hypnotically across the water, only to dash him on the rocks. The story does not explain why he has tuned in to this particular music. It does not explain where he went wrong, if indeed he did go wrong. It tells us simply that this is the Gatsby tragedy.

Nick's story is steeped in Jesus longing. The narrator is in desperate need of a saviour, someone to point the way, or so he thinks. But he chooses the wrong man. And, even if Gatsby were the Second Coming, what could Nick possibly learn from him? As it is, Gatsby isn't the messiah; the green light is just a green light; the Gatsby mansion is just a mausoleum filled with uncut books; and the void echoes eternally over Long Island Sound, untroubled by the passing of a mere mortal like Nick.

This story is not new. The Western canon is repeating itself, as if in fixation, trapped in the essence of disillusion. Post-Jesus the procession begins, and it is led by some of the greatest literary imaginings in the culture. First there were Hamlet and Don Quixote—one man having lost all his dreams, finding himself left with a solitary love, that

of death, the other man the most magnificent over-dreamer in Western fiction. Then there were Dostoevsky's Stavrogin; and Joseph Conrad's dual personality Marlow/Kurtz. Nick/Gatsby borrows heavily from these predecessors. Finally, at the end of the twentieth century, came *Fight Club*, in novel and film form, updating the protagonists, and the character of the saviour, but failing to do anything new with the challenge of finding a way forward.

This *danse macabre* over the last four hundred years serves to illustrate that the story is not a trivial byway. From the moment that Hamlet commands centre-stage, skull in hand, speaking warmly of his long-departed childhood court jester, the governing metaphor becomes the death of God, brooding overhead like a black cloud of pestilence. And if God is dead, does not his saviour son also lose authority?

Gatsby and his metaphysical companions raise the issue of whether Jesus is the only way in the West. Nietzsche's late formulation, as he stared over the brink of his own impending descent into madness, was: 'Dionysus versus the Crucified.' He too, the master diagnostician, identifying himself ludicrously with the Greek god of wine, his alternative saviour, belongs in this procession of despair, a major player, crying out his version of the fateful either-or. Nick refers to Gatsby as a son of god.

If it is Gatsby versus the Crucified, we are left with further questions. The Gatsby parable challenges what would be the role—and in any era—for a charismatic teacher with commanding presence? If the student himself lacks the capacity to dream quixotically, what would be the point, for him, of a saviour? It is telling that when Nick first meets Gatsby, he fails to recognize him. Colossal dreaming cannot be taught. Nick is in awe of Gatsby, drawn to him, precisely because he—Nick—lacks both the dream, and the capacity for forming himself from nothing, and building a life in the dream's image. As Shakespeare mused: 'Nothing's but what is not.'

Those are the preconditions in this story, the metaphysical terms it sets—dreaming and making the dream real. But they are only preconditions. Nick does recognize that it is music that is the ultimate key to Gatsby, and his over-dreaming of Daisy. But Nick himself lacks an equivalent musical talent. Gatsby is saved by his capacity for tuning in to the eternal rhythm, even though that tuning in is fleeting, like the flutter of the fairy's wing—lasting merely for one summer.

It seems that dreaming of an impossible saviour, whether Daisy or Gatsby himself, might be redeemed, by metamorphosis into another realm—that of music.

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To return to first principles, Jesus was the man who found the truth that matters, the key to human existence and its significance; the key to how to live. He delivered that truth through his role as teacher, and by incarnating it—in his own charismatic example. Fyodor Dostoevsky's novel, *The Possessed* (1871), presented a modern saviour more directly in this lineage than Don Quixote or Gatsby.

Nicholas Stavrogin is a Russian aristocrat, around Hamlet's age when we meet him, and also a Prince. He has the aura of the mysterious stranger, arriving from beyond, haunted, solitary, fearless, and living outside all normal social bounds and conventions. He carries direct Christ allusions, *stavros* meaning 'cross' in Greek. Everybody from his own generation is in love with him, male and female. A few years earlier, adoring disciples travelled the world with him—one says, Stavrogin brought him back from the dead. He taught them, for instance, that if it could be mathematically proved that the truth excludes Christ, he would choose Christ. But Stavrogin lost his faith, and thereafter plunged into a life of violence and debauchery—seducing a number of women in the town, and even, it is rumoured, a twelve-year-old girl. Without faith, he is equally without passion. Having lost the one indispensable thing, he kills himself.

Gatsby and Stavrogin make a contrasting pair, as did their literary precursors, Don Quixote and Hamlet. Gatsby is extroverted, simple, vital, and is driven by commanding belief. Stavrogin is introverted, complex, tormented, steeped in inner mystery, and has had access to the truth. The truth—what Jesus had referred to as the 'mystery'—contrasts with belief and dream.

There is more to this contrast. It points to a dichotomy in transcendental reference points—a dichotomy between God and Jesus. These two supernatural beings that have commanded the Western imagination have quite different distinguishing traits. Gatsby, like Don Quixote, is more god than son of god. This is God in the sense of the unyielding presence, the omnipotent one who creates the universe, giving meaning to the whole. God stands as the Archimedean fixed point in an ever-turning world, an anchor against the heaving seas of chaos and absurdity. Gatsby, as god associate, is not personal saviour; nor does he forgive. In the eyes of others, he is invincible power rather than bearer of truth, quite unlike Jesus, who wrestles as best he can along the human path laid out for him, and who is, at least in part, one of us.

Shakespeare himself wrestled with the saviour problem. Hamlet is preceded by Prince Hal, a wild, head-strong, near delinquent youth who metamorphoses, on inheriting the English crown, into Henry V, the ideal king—good, worldly, shrewdly intelligent, a master tactician, just, and courageous. In this coming of age story, King Henry

represents the composite English hero and saviour—the exemplary person. He wins an impossible victory over the French at Agincourt. Yet, Shakespeare appears restless in his upbeat nationalist optimism. His mood darkens a mere year or so later, when he writes *Hamlet*. Dostoevsky saw the connection: having some of his *Possessed* characters liken Stavrogin to Prince Hal, those hoping that transgressive youth would transform into mature and wise adulthood. But the Russian Prince is rather a malevolent, yet metaphysically inspired *Hamlet*. *Hamlet* and Stavrogin both fail their initiation into adulthood.

The young men and women in *The Possessed* seek the one who has the truth and might transform their lives. They seek a plausible contemporary Jesus. But no one in the modern secular world can provide them with what they want. They look in the wrong place, as did Gatsby's Nick. Further, teaching and influence do not work in the way they hope.

Stavrogin prefigures the twentieth century's commanding literary allegory, Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1952). That play projected the modern problem in stark simplicity. Two tramps tepidly clown through their days, bereft of purpose, ambition, or desire. They stumble around and fall into ditches, hardly bothering to stand up again. They talk of suicide but lack the energy to carry it out. Days pass in a blur; nothing happens. One of them lives in hope that a stranger called Godot will soon arrive, to 'save' them—this tramp is a modest, fitful version of Gatsby, in his occasional dreaming. It is unclear whether Godot actually exists or is a desperate attempt at redemptive illusion. Life is absurd.

Beckett takes his cue from the story with which Luke ends his *Life of Jesus*. The *Road to Emmaus* reports two unnamed men leaving Jerusalem on the Sunday, two days after the crucifixion. A stranger appears from nowhere and accompanies them on the twelve-kilometre dirt path to the village of Emmaus, shattering their composure. In the evening, he joins them for dinner in a local tavern. As he breaks bread, it becomes clear that he is Jesus, who disappears on the instant.

Stavrogin provides flesh for what Godot might be like, if he existed, and it is a charismatic Satan, not the phantasmal Jesus who manifested in Emmaus. Dostoevsky's bleak message is that, in the modern world, there is either the devil, or nothing. Beckett's allegory moves on from this point, beyond *The Possessed*, and its chaotic, demented setting. The possibility has gone for heroic grandeur or a knightly quest for some holy grail. The stranger has become merely a figure of the imagination, the day is just like any other day, and the track is just another rutted way, which could be anywhere, and nowhere. The tramps are historical nobodies fleeing in dread from they know not what, continuing, in the words of Mark's Gospel, 'to fear the great fear'. For them, the ordeal of unbelief intensifies. There is no saviour; there is no transfiguration; and there is nowhere to go. There hasn't been any progress: *Waiting for Godot* ends in exactly the same despairing way as its trinity of powerful modern precursors—*The Possessed*, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, and *The Great Gatsby*.

A variant on the Stavrogin/Godot theme comes in the yearning for another with saving vitality. Stavrogin had killed himself out of disgust at his own debilitating aimlessness and lack of passion. *Hamlet*, preoccupied by his own lack of drive, had the same problem. Likewise, Nietzsche's identification with Dionysus, as Christ replacement, was a grasping for redemptive vitality.

Akira Kurosawa's 1952 film *Ikiru* focuses on a public servant with thirty years of service, flattened by the news that he is dying of stomach cancer. His whole life, past, present, and future is, on the instant, emptied of sense. In a desperate final move to experience the life he fears he has missed, he attaches himself to an effervescent younger woman. He feels that being with her may give him the capacity for living he lacks. However, she makes him see the futility of this tactic, and in response he changes mode, devoting his final weeks to relentless campaigning to turn a disease-infested piece of urban wasteland into a children's playground. He succeeds, and dies a happy man, spending his last night swinging in the playground, singing the haunting song, 'Life is Brief'.

Marilyn Monroe, in her final film *The Misfits* (1961), screams at three men who have been clinging to her: 'You're three dead men!' She cannot save them from death. In their different ways, these men are drawn by her vitality, by what one calls her magical capacity for life. Mimicking Kurosawa's dying public servant, they hope to gain the quality she embodies—that of being truly alive—by just spending time in her vicinity. They call it an honour to know her. But the hoped-for osmosis never occurs. The three men remain uprooted, bewildered, and inwardly void. They are like Beckett's tramps. The *Misfits* screenplay was written by Arthur Miller, Marilyn's deeply suffering husband at the time, as an idealisation of her character, which is childlike; it continues the dead-man theme at the core of his seminal work, *Death of a Salesman*.

Aristotle had noted the variability of *energy* amongst humans, and its importance to their wellbeing. Henri Bergson conceptualised this, in his 1907 notion of *élan vital*, borrowed from Nietzsche, who sometimes called it *frenzy*. The popular belief was held by intellectuals at the time that the key to human fulfilment was the possession of a type of vibrant inner energy. In the wake of declining Christian faith, and Nietzsche's declaration of the 'death of God', individuals were now left on their mortal own. They were, at best, driven by an egomaniacal, if unconscious, will-to-power; or, in the more benign version, a vital *élan* such as later possessed by misfit Marilyn.

The appeal of saving vitality is illustrated in a number of noteworthy modern films. The list would include *My Fair Lady* (1964), *The Sound of Music* (1965), *Sabrina* (1954, 1995), and *Pretty Woman* (1992). Significantly, in all these examples the redeeming presence is a woman, who brings a grumpy, tired, cold, or world-weary man back to life. These saviours succeed, whereas misfit Marilyn fails.

Even in *Waiting for Godot* there is a drop of nostalgia, tinged with hope. Early in the story, the leading tramp, Vladimir, muses about 'our Saviour', and, in particular, the vignette in the Gospels about the two thieves who were crucified alongside Jesus. Vladimir is troubled that although the four evangelists, or gospel-writers, were in attendance at the crucifixion, only one of them reported a thief being saved. The other writer who mentions the thieves merely says that they both abused the Saviour, and for not 'saving' them. Vladimir adds his own interpretation: the thieves sought to be saved, not from eternal damnation and Hell, but from death.

Beckett pares the modern condition back to its bare bones. There is no spare flesh, no distraction, just the skeletal truth. That truth may be translated into a sequence of simple equations. The one commanding reality about the human condition is the need to be saved from death. For this, there has to be a saviour, or belief in a saving God. The tramps echo Hamlet, who was spiritually flattened by his encounter with death, and whose mind turned to suicide as the only answer to the dreary meaninglessness that his life, on the instant, had turned into. They end their story in rumination on tomorrow, when either Godot will arrive, and they will be saved, or they will hang themselves. Stavrogin did hang himself.

Gatsby, *Stavrogin*, and *Godot* demonstrate that the saviour is the key to the modern condition. They set the terms for the post-Christian life challenge.

Book Review

Race and the Undeserving Poor: From Abolition to Brexit

Stuart Scrase ^{1*}

¹ *University of Exeter*, UNITED KINGDOM

*Corresponding Author: s.scrase@exeter.ac.uk

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Shilliam, R. (2018). *Race and the Undeserving Poor: From Abolition to Brexit*. Newcastle-Upon-Tyne: Agenda Publishing.

Within the field of Critical Race Studies, questions regarding the relation between race and class, race and nationalism, and, relatedly, how best to define the concept of race, have a long and tortuous history. While not attempting to address these complex analytical questions directly, nonetheless Robbie Shilliam's *Race and the Undeserving Poor* provides a valuable contribution to the field and may remind some of Hall et al.'s formulation that race 'serves to "reproduce" [the] working class in a racially stratified and internally antagonistic form' (2013: 340). Nevertheless, Shilliam's claim goes further: 'there is not a politics of class that is not already racialized' (2018: 180).

This book explores the contexts, antagonisms, and reformulations of 'the undeserving' (Shilliam, 2018: 4) in the context of the distribution of social goods. The category, Shilliam argues, is not simply rooted in class, but instead constituted through folk notions of race and class together.

The racialization of class is by no means new, a point Shilliam makes and contextualises by way of a remarkably accessible survey of British history from the Poor Laws of the Eighteenth Century through to Brexit and the present day. Today's "white working class" is neither an indigenous or natural constituency, but one (re)constituted in multiple forms as an artefact of political domination, operationalized in multiple contexts and struggles throughout modern British history in order to construct 'the undeserving poor' and maintain the position of the elite. Indeed, the un/deserving distinction operates in relation to the concept of the 'English genus', which, through a hereditary logic, functions to naturalise the moral and normative values of the elite order.

Shilliam introduces his analysis with the return of the language of class as a racialized phenomenon following the 2008 financial crisis. In the decade prior to this event, he argues, the language of "social exclusion" had predominated. Post-crisis, however, the pathology of "white working-class" re-enters public and political discourse as a means for morally constructing as 'undeserving', those left behind by neoliberalisation. For Shilliam, this occurs primarily through racial analogy, a point he makes with reference to the like of historian David Starkey's infamous comments wherein he alleged that 'whites have become the new Blacks' (2018: 132).

While initially, this constitution racialises the 'white working class' as undeserving in order to legitimise neoliberal reform, Shilliam notes that with and around Brexit, the political emphasis shifts to the neglected but deserving white, working class male, ignored in education and employment. For Shilliam, the 'white working class' enters and is constituted within discourse 'as a forgotten indigenous constituency, independent of colonial pasts, and unfairly displaced by multi-coloured newcomers.' (2018: 6). The shift re-frames the 'white working class' as the victim, in turn, mobilising this 'group' against the immigrant and ethnic 'threat' to their already minimal privilege.

Having introduced the central arguments of the book, Shilliam turns to reconstructing the history of the un/deserving through an examination of the 'English poor' alongside the 'African slave' in the Eighteenth Century. Under English common law, the English poor could, at least in principle, be regarded as a minor patriarch through the allowance of private property, inheritance, and paternalistic guidance by elites. Economic and political shifts tied up with emerging capitalism, such as the use of enclosures to consolidate landholdings of the elite, ultimately severed such paternalistic links between elite and poor. 'The slave', on the other hand, under commercial law, was already removed from such forms of acculturation into the dominant economic regime, generating concern and fear amongst the elites which manifested in the 'anarchic' and ungovernable nature of the African slave.

In essence, Shilliam's point is that not only did severing the means by which the elites were able to inculcate the dominated English poor create the moral concern over 'masterless men', but further enabled the analogy with 'the slave'. Constructed notions of the deserving poor, or the 'good servant', were those with the characteristics of 'industriousness, prudence and patriarchy'. Put simply, the 'deserving' were those with the capacity to enrich their proprietors and a willingness to accept paternalistic moral guidance according to the values of the propertied elite. Simultaneously, the undeserving poor, through likening to the characteristics of 'the undeserving' slaves, became 'blackened' and positioned outside the English genus, associated with 'idleness, licentiousness and anarchy' (Shilliam, 2018: 10).

With the core concern developed, *Race and the Undeserving Poor* continues to trace the changing form of the un/deserving distinction in a similar and digestible vein. Shilliam charts the reconstitution of the undeserving through the shifting contexts of abolition and colonial rebellion in chapter 3, before turning his attention to eugenics, welfare, organised labour and commonwealth migration in chapters 4 and 5. In chapter 6, the focus is on Thatcher and New Labour's paternalistic social conservatism and the arrival of the 'underclass', chapter 7 concerns Brexit and the re-constituted and deserving 'white working class', before Shilliam concludes with Grenfell Tower.

The empirical and historical subject matter of *Race and the Undeserving Poor* is employed to skilfully and forcefully reposition race at the centre of the formation of England, Englishness, and class. Yet, I would argue, that perhaps the book's most insightful contribution is found in Shilliam's artful mapping of the intersection of race and class through the un/deserving distinction, both moving beyond and countering reifications of these analytical categories. The concept of un/deserving develops beyond notions of racial inferiorisation, emphasising the ideological necessity of the unwanted residuum for the legitimisation of privilege.

At the core of Shilliam's argument is the notion that race and class operate together in the political and cultural imaginary, emerging in and reproducing the political and economic organisation of the day. In the on-going, non-linear negotiation of social organisation, its privileges and hierarchies, the un/deserving distinction operates as a tool of power and legitimisation, drawing on and re-constituting groups and categories in order to shore up and reproduce the social order. Such negotiation does not simply occur through 'race' or 'class', nor can any grouping be simply posited as a formation of race or class alone. Rather, for Shilliam, these groupings are capitalism's unwanted and excluded which may be homogenised or divided, and constructed as deserving or not, through the mobilisation of racialised logics.

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Book Review

Ascent to Glory: How One Hundred Years of Solitude Was Written and Became a Global Classic

Dominik Želinský^{1*}

¹ *Institute for Sociology, Slovak Academy of Sciences, SLOVAK REPUBLIC*

*Corresponding Author: dominik.zelinsky@savba.sk

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Santana-Acuña, Á. (2020). *Ascent to Glory: How One Hundred Years of Solitude Was Written and Became a Global Classic*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Álvaro Santana-Acuña's *Ascent to Glory* is a careful and thoroughly researched analysis of how Gabriel García Márquez's novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, first published in 1967, was imagined, became an international sensation, and, eventually, a classic text in the global literary canon. It therefore contributes to ongoing debates in the sociology of art and literature concerning the nature of cultural consecration and the role of networks in the processes of art production as well as reputation building. More than this, however, the book constitutes an enjoyable narrative that can be read by specialists and non-specialists alike. While the former group will find a detailed and theoretically nuanced analysis of a globally consecrated text, the latter will relish an account of how an artwork comes about and to be 'great'. Finally, there is a third group of readers to whom the book will appeal – hard core Márquez fans. They, however, might find the book upsetting, because it dispels some of the most beloved myths of Márquez's genius.

The book is organised into two fundamental parts and an appendix, which is meant for specialists. The first part, *From the Idea To the Book* analyses the structure of Gabriel García Márquez's literary imagination. Santana-Acuña explores how it was possible for Márquez to actually imagine a work of literature that came to be the *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. The gist of the argument here is that although the novel famously, and demonstratively, thematises solitude, it was conceived and written in anything but seclusion. To the contrary, Márquez imagined and wrote it while participating in several exclusive networks of literary professionals in several countries across the globe who consistently gave him feedback and inspiration to write the novel, which was taking shape in his mind for more than two decades. At the same time, as Santana-Acuña explains, Márquez was lucky in terms of timing – his novel appeared just at the right moment, as the book market in Latin America became consolidated and the idea of Latin American literature was taking root in the global landscape of literary imagination.

The second part of the book, entitled *Becoming a Global Classic*, concerns the process by which Márquez's already bestselling book became disentangled or 'disembedded' from its local and temporal contexts and elevated into the global canon of literary classics. Santana-Acuña explores how, paradoxically, conflicts within the network that originally enabled Márquez to produce the novel, contributed to the novel's independence as a 'landmark... no longer controlled by a single publisher' (p. 199) or former collaborators who once co-created it. Moreover, Santana-Acuña investigates the role of myths to rise up around the production of the novel and its author, as well as the ways in which some key symbols of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* acquired a memetic quality – they became

‘indexicals’ in Santana-Acuña’s parlance – and continue to be used relatively independently of the novel itself. It is worth noting that the chapter also contains a section on counterfactuals, or books which, compared to *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, failed to make the canon and leave a mark as lasting as Márquez’s novel. Santana-Acuña uses the example of these counterfactuals to demonstrate the strength of his approach.

Finally, the appendix *Why and How to Study Classics* clarifies the book’s contribution to the sociology of literature. Santana-Acuña explains in detail the conceptual resources deployed in his research, such as ‘imagination’, ‘niche’, ‘disembedding’, ‘indexicals’, and ‘counterfactual cases’. I think that, in particular, it is the foregrounding of the imaginative process, and the way in which imagination is shaped by collaborations within particular social niche/s, that will go on to be most influential in the sociology of literature, as well as in the sociology of knowledge more generally. Moreover, Santana-Acuña’s method of researching impact and resonance of cultural objects through indexicals, which he has already explored in-depth in previous work (2014), is both sophisticated and analytically illuminating.

All in all, *Ascent to Glory* is a very solid contribution to the landscape of the sociology of literature. What stands out most about the book is the complexity with which the author addresses the conundrum of the global classic status of Márquez’s novel. Santana-Acuña effectively dovetails different perspectives – from textual analysis of the novel and biographical exploration of the author’s life to macro-level foci of institutions and the wider zeitgeist – to deliver a persuasive and highly readable account of literary consecration. Moreover, the author offers innovative theoretical and methodological resources that will be of great utility for future researchers of literary reputation and cultural objects.

The book is not entirely without issue, however. One concern that could be raised is the nature of a number of the ‘counterfactuals’, or books that failed to succeed on the scale of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Santana-Acuña’s explanatory accounts of these counterfactuals are not always entirely persuasive – for example, in the case of Lezama Lima’s *Paradiso*, the author notes that its ‘innovative language and narrative style’ (p. 266) precluded its success. But if language and complexity were an issue, how and why would stylistically complex, labyrinthine tomes such as Joyce’s *Ulysses* achieve the status of classics? That said, there are few books that do not raise questions – and tend not to be very good. Álvaro Santana-Acuña’s *Ascent to Glory* is the opposite case, and well-worth taking the time to read.

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Book Review

The Art of Communication in a Polarized World

Joshua Young ^{1*}

¹ *Divine Word College*, UNITED STATES

*Corresponding Author: joyoung@dwci.edu

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Conway, K. (2020). *The Art of Communication in a Polarized World*. Edmonton, AB: Athabasca University Press.

For many people, the world is now more politically divided than ever. The impacts of rising populist and nationalist movements are being felt all around the world. Set against the backdrop of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, many people yearn for practical guidance as to how to address divisions at the same time as creating the conditions for civil conversation. This is the context in which Kyle Conway's *The Art of Communication in a Polarized World* breaks into the world. While Conway does not pretend to have a magic solution for resolving an increasingly divided world, nevertheless, his proposed method for reaching a solution is understandable and practical, drawing upon the interdisciplinary field of communication studies and its related disciplines.

Conway's book provides a technical yet plain speaking account of the basic tenets of communication theory, a style of delivery increasingly common in texts intended to be used for teaching as much as they are pitched at wider scholarly debate. Rather than using terms like 'co-creation', 'epistemic construction', and 'poetic meaning-making', Conway's book approaches the discipline of communication from a practical standpoint, grounding communication processes, perceptions, and outcomes in cultural translation. Most readers will be familiar with trying to negotiate meaning in an increasingly culturally diverse world. Conway uses this common experience as a window onto exploring the relationship between and notion of communication theory as cultural translation.

The connection Conway makes between communication theory and translation draws on ideas and perspectives from a range of intellectual traditions including semiotics, critical/cultural perspectives, linguistics, and rhetoric, to name only the most prominent. While each of these traditions, or sub-fields, is characterized by the distinctiveness of its perspective, Conway points out points of collaboration and crossover between them. He does this in order to develop his three axioms of communication: to use a sign is to transform it; to transform a sign is to translate it; and communication is translation.

Conway's book adopts a logically coherent and orderly structure. The book begins by outlining the problem Conway wishes to address: the problem of understanding the role of communication and theory for his students. He then turns to provides a potential solution in the form of his meta-theory and explains some of the positive and negative implications of adopting his solution. The introduction of the book lays out Conway's claim that translation comprises 'a semiotic economy where signs are exchanged for other signs on a basis of negotiation rather than equivalence' (p. 5). Theory is a way of translating our experiences in the world at the same time as it imbues our experiences with meaning. Conway claims all people do theory implicitly; his book encourages us to become explicitly aware of and observe the ways in which we do theory, in order that we might arrive at deeper understanding of this.

Chapter one outlines the basic elements of Conway's meta-theory. Here, he outlines three axioms: 1) to use a sign is to transform it; 2) to transform a sign is translate it; and 3) communication is translation. As argued by Conway, negotiation presupposes translation because communication is negotiation of meaning. More importantly, Conway argues negotiation creates space in meaning, or a gap as he conceptualizes it, one in which meaning can be invented. Chapter 2 provides a reading using Conway's approach of Orwell's *1984* and the terms associated with its themes of social manipulation.

Chapter 3 comprises an analysis of rhetorical invention and forms the foundation of Conway's central argument. In identifying the available means of persuasion, Aristotle's definition of rhetoric, rhetoricians create mental understandings of the world for audiences; this requires inventing these linguistic realities. Invention is a negotiation between what audiences understand about their lived experiences and what might otherwise be. Translation utilizes lived experiences to frame rhetorical alternatives and substitutions in understandable terms. This, as Conway points out, is an act of invention: constructing and choosing the right frame so that others may agree with, or at least understand, one's own perspective. The final chapters of the book present myriad rich examples of cultural translation and invention.

The conclusion of the book encourages readers to embrace the consequences of translation and invention. One such vital consequence involves recognizing that the reader may be wrong in their interpretation and translation of meanings, or communication perspectives. Through acknowledgement of this possibility, Conway argues, an ethics of humaneness begins to emerge because a better inventional translation of meaning hopefully corrects a poor one. This is not a magical solution to polarization; recognizing our flaws in understanding requires humility, and that can be problematic. Nevertheless, Conway's claim does enable the reader to understand that theory is inherently flawed. Though theory tries to generalize experience, experience also has a way of disrupting our generalizations. Invention and translation help us to negotiate those disruptions in communication theory.

This book is a useful and practical one for those seeking to understand basic elements of communication theory; not least because it demonstrates the translational process it is describing. That said, however, it was written primarily for use in the classroom context. Its primary audience is graduate communication theory students, whom it seeks to guide through the process of translation in communication. The appendix also has resources and examples of how Conway uses his meta-theory in his classroom. As such, the book is an invaluable one both for instructors and students of communication theory. The book would also be useful as guided reading for advanced undergraduate communication students considering graduate school.

But Conway's book may well appeal to a wider scholarly audience. Conway's invitation to invention in communication theory welcomes new and seasoned scholars alike to a conversation about the utility of a meta-theoretical approach to communication theory that takes contingency, created by a gap in meaning, seriously. Scholars from other disciplines will find it orients them to some of the foundational issues in communication. For these reasons, Conway's greatest contribution with this book is his pragmatic approach to theory.

The Art of Communication in a Polarized World is a practical guide to thinking through the work communication does in our communities. Communication theory should reflect the ongoing need to reevaluate theory as meaning changes through invention and translation.

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